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Mary Swanzy (1882–1978): A Futurist Painter from Ireland

Abstract: Mary Swanzy was an important Irish avant-garde painter of the early twentieth century. She studied in Paris for a time and is noted for her paintings inspired by Cubism. However, her œuvre also shows influences of Futurism, which she experienced first-hand in Italy prior to the First World War. This side of her career has received much less attention than the Cubist influences. This paper traces and analyses Swanzy's relationship with Futurism, and highlights the influences of Futurism on her work. In addition, I shall situate Swanzy's relationship with Futurism within the context of the reception of the Italian movement in Ireland. Avant-garde art was not particularly prominent in Ireland, a country more concerned with political than artistic issues during the early twentieth century. Unlike Cubism, Futurism never made any significant inroads into Irish society. Cubist paintings were exhibited in Dublin in 1911 and 1912, but there was never a similar Futurist exhibition. Nonetheless, Futurism received a moderate amount of coverage in the Irish press, the characteristics of which will be analysed in this essay.

Keywords: Futurism and Cubism, Modernist art in Ireland

Introduction

In André Breton's "Le Monde au temps des surrealists" (1929), on which most of Western Europe has been obliterated, the island of Ireland is magnified into an enormous piece of land, completely dwarfing the dot beside it, which represents Great Britain.[1] Breton's decision to accord Ireland such a prominent position on the map was certainly motivated by his admiration for Irish Modernist literature, and famous Irish writers such as William Butler Yeats, Jonathan Swift and, of course, James Joyce. Ireland is much less recognized and renowned, however, for the contributions of its people to the history of European Modernism in the field of the visual arts. Recently, there has been an attempt to address the scholarly neglect of Ireland's contribution to avant-garde art. The exhibition *Analysing Cubism*, held at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin in 2013 highlighted

1 Breton: "Le Monde au temps des surréalistes," pp. 26–27.

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the links between modern Irish artists and the avant-garde currents in Paris in the first half of the twentieth century. As the title of the exhibition indicates, the focus was on the relationship of Irish artists with Cubism; the influence of other historical avant-garde movements on the cultural life of Ireland has not received similar attention.

This essay examines the connections between Ireland and Futurism in the early decades of the twentieth century (1910s–1930s) by examining the reactions of the Irish cultural establishment to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's rowdy movement, and particularly by focussing on the figure of Mary Swanzy (1882–1978). She was an important Irish female painter of the twentieth century, whose contribution to Irish modern art has long been underestimated and neglected, partially because she travelled widely and was frequently absent from Ireland, and partially because she experimented with many different artistic styles during her long career, which makes her output (for the most part undated) hard to categorize. Swanzy is most noted for her experiments with a Cubist-inspired style in the 1910s and 1920s, which have led some critics to identify her as the first Irish Cubist. However, others, such as art historian S.B. Kennedy have argued that although Swanzy "was certainly one of the first Irish artists to be familiar with Cubism it is unlikely, as is occasionally suggested, that she was the first Irish artist to adopt that manner, the latter distinction almost certainly belonging to Mainie Jellett".[2] Indeed, given their long presence in Ireland and promotion of Cubism, the female artists Mainie Jellett (1987–1944) and Evie Hone (1894–1955) are more readily associated with Cubism in Ireland. Whatever her status in relation to Cubism, Mary Swanzy was without a doubt the first, and only, Irish Futurist painter, a status that has thus far been denied to her. However, it is important to bear in mind the words of Seán Kissane, curator of the 2013 *Analysing Cubism* show, who felt that although "Cubism, Futurism and Fauvism are all of equal interest to [Swanzy], [...] she is beholden to no single style or school".[3]

A biographical sketch of Mary Swanzy

Mary Swanzy was born in 1882 to a professional, Protestant family in Dublin. She attended private schools in Dublin, Versailles and Freiburg, and was fluent in French and German. She painted from an early age and, in 1897, began attending classes at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, where she continued until

2 Kennedy: *Irish Art and Modernism*, p. 35.
3 Kissane: "Analysing Cubism", p. 16.

1912. From 1900, she also studied at the studio of May Manning, where John Butler Yeats, brother of William and arguably Ireland's most famous twentieth-century painter, was an occasional teacher. She specialized in portraiture in these early years, and when she was twenty-four, she exhibited a portrait of her father at the Royal Hibernian Academy.

In 1908, she set up a studio in Dublin with painter Clare Marsh (1875–1923) with the intention of continuing her work in traditional portraiture and teaching. She found herself to be unsuited to this line of work, commenting many years later that "in general ladies to not wish to be painted by ladies, and gentlemen do not wish to be painted by ladies, ladies have to paint doggie-woggies and pussy-wusseys".[4] On the death of her father in 1913, Swanzy came into an inheritance, and thereafter, enjoyed more freedom to pursue her career in painting as she wished. As she herself commented, this was not only due to her financial circumstances but also her gender. Although she may have felt curtailed by her gender in 1908, ultimately it afforded her the freedom she desired to travel internationally and to paint. She remarked that "if I had been born a Henry and not a Mary, my life would have been very different".[5]

After spending time in both France and Italy before the First World War (see below), she returned to Ireland for a time. Following the Armistice, she travelled to Czechoslovakia and to the Balkans to assist in the aid programmes there. Subsequently, in the 1920s, she spent a number of years travelling around the Pacific Islands, including Samoa and Hawaii, where she had relatives. She painted numerous landscapes during these years, which were reminiscent of Paul Gauguin's Tahiti paintings. Swanzy relocated to London in 1926, where she would remain until her death in 1978 (save for the years of the Second World War, which she spent in Dublin). This self-imposed, quasi exile from Ireland for most of her adult life partially explains Swanzy's absence from the canon of modern Irish art. She said in the 1970s, to longtime collector of her work Patrick Murphy, "I deeply love Ireland and have thought very seriously of going back to live and die in it, but I couldn't stand the narrowness of my life there".[6] By the 1930s, she had left behind her Cubo-Futurist experimentation and painted in a variety of eclectic styles tending towards the allegorical. She continued to exhibit in both London and Dublin, and travelled frequently to mainland Europe.

4 Interview with Anthony O'Mahony on RTÉ Radio 1, 5 May 1977.
5 Quoted in Brennan: *Mary Swanzy*, n.p.
6 Quoted in Brennan: *Mary Swanzy*, n.p.

The fortunes of avant-garde art in Ireland

Ireland is unusual in its relationship to avant-garde art because its most famous proponents of European-inspired modern art were in fact women, primarily Jellett, Hone and Swanzy.[7] These three women, and many more besides them, spent periods of time studying on the continent, and France in particular exerted an enormous influence on the development of Irish art in the early twentieth century. Since the mid-1800s, many Irish artists had taken up residence in Paris in order to study at one of the many academies there, and from the last decades of the nineteenth century, Irish women also followed this tradition. Like Swanzy, these young women were usually Protestant with independent means. Various reasons have been put forward for this unusual association of female painters and avant-garde experimentation in Ireland. Alan and Mary Hobart suggested: "At a time when the national school demanded symbolic images of 'men of the west' – a kind of 'free state' realism – artists like Mary Swanzy, Evie Hone and Mainie Jellett were less constrained by convention [... and] were alive to the most innovative forms of European painting."[8]

Anne Crookshank related this state of affairs to the Irish art scene, rather than national politics, writing:

> It was the women, not the mainly very conservative male artists of the 1920s and 30s who brought Ireland into the 20th century. Always free of the shackles which men had made for themselves in their academies and in their attitude to life, women – now that they could go out and earn a living – were able to experiment with excitement and verve.[9]

However, in spite of the fact that many Irish painters were being exposed to the latest trends in post-Impressionist art while in Paris, it would be an extremely slow process for these Modernist trends to be accepted either by other artists in Ireland or the general public. The principal reason behind the wariness in Ireland towards modern art is to be found in the country's particular political and cultural history. The partition of Ireland and the founding of the Irish Free State in the early 1920s "created a political climate that was suspicious, inward-looking and xenophobic".[10] The Gaelic Revival movement began in the late nineteenth century as a literary phenomenon but soon spread to other artistic fields. The

7 Marshall: "Women and the Visual Arts in Ireland", p. 28.
8 Alan and Mary Hobart: "Mary Swanzy", p. 4.
9 Crookshank: "Introduction", p. 6.
10 Kissane: "Analysing Cubism", p. 15.

nationalist aims of this movement appeared at odds with the international and forward-looking spirit of Modernism. Robert O'Bryne commented:

> Within Ireland, opposition to the introduction of non-national influences habitually sprang from an understandable fear that the consequence of this cultural invasion would be the engulfing of indigenous traditions. Modernism was thus regularly contested on the basis that it was not Irish.[11]

Terry Eagleton has also noted that there was "little or no avant-garde" in Ireland, continuing that "there could be no exhilarating encounter between art and technology in such an industrially backward nation".[12] He argued that it was the Anglo-Irish population (i.e. Protestants) who embraced Modernism. Because they were politically marginalized from the struggle for Irish independence from Britain, they turned to Modernism as "an ersatz kind of identity and belonging, a community of sorts [... and] were remarkably well-placed to provide the country with a modern vanguard, as a displaced coterie with elitist instincts and cosmopolitan sympathies".[13]

In spite of these challenging conditions for modern artists in Ireland, the avant-garde did succeed in penetrating the Irish cultural landscape in the 1910s. In 1911, Ellen Duncan (later curator of the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin) organized at the United Arts Club in Dublin an exhibition entitled *Works by Post-Impressionist Painters*, featuring paintings by André Derain, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Vincent Van Gogh, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso. The following year, she held an exhibition of Cubist paintings at the same gallery, showing works by Picasso and Juan Gris. This exhibition, *Modern French Pictures*, held from 29 March to 4 May 1912, was the first to show Cubist paintings in Ireland. Cubist paintings would not be on display again in Ireland until 1923, when Mainie Jellett organized a group exhibition for the Society of Dublin Painters at the St. Stephen's Green Gallery (20 October 1923 to 17 November 1923). Her work was met with incomprehension and criticism.[14]

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11 O'Byrne: "Irish Modernism", p. 13.
12 Eagleton: *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, p. 299.
13 Eagleton: *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, p. 200.
14 See Coulter: "Mainie Jellett", pp. 98–100.

Futurism and Ireland

Marinetti's movement did not enjoy a similar level of attention as Cubism in Irish society.[15] There was never an exhibition of Futurist painting in Ireland during Marinetti's lifetime (nor, indeed since), and Marinetti never travelled to Dublin.[16] Any direct contact that Irish writers and artists had with Futurism occurred either in Great Britain or on mainland Europe. Ireland's most famous author, James Joyce, encountered Futurism while he was living in Trieste in the 1910s, and Futurist influences in his work have been traced by a number of scholars.[17] Ireland did also feature on Marinetti's cultural horizon. In his pre-Futurist, Symbolist phase, he was acquainted with the poetry of Irish poet William Butler Yeats, and he published extracts from Yeat's play *Deirdre* in his magazine *Poesia* in 1907. The two also met on at least two occasions between March 1912 and June 1914, when Marinetti made trips to London.[18]

Once he had launched Futurism in 1909, Marinetti included Ireland in his projected sphere of influence. As is well known, Marinetti was famous for sending out announcements and copies of his publications to critics and newspapers all over the world, in order to promote Futurism. Luca Somigli has observed that "even in countries where there was not an active futurist artistic practice, the publication of manifestoes in the popular press became a way to establish a presence, to get the public interested and involved in the futurist project".[19] This was the case in Ireland, where Futurism received a moderate amount of coverage. It seems likely that Mary Swanzy, who was resident in Ireland for most of the period between 1909 and 1914, would have read these newspaper reports and would have been kept up-to-date with Futurist activities in Italy, London and beyond.

For the most part, Futurism in Ireland received a similar treatment in the press as it had in Great Britain, and was generally greeted with a mixture of disdain and dismissive bemusement. One point which does set Irish press reaction apart from

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15 For a more detailed discussion of Futurism and Ireland, see my entry in the *Handbook of International Futurism*, ed. by Günter Berghaus, forthcoming 2015.

16 An anonymous art critic in the *Irish Times* suggested that in the wake of the Post-Impressionist and Cubist exhibitions in Dublin in 1911 and 1912 "there is talk of the Arts Club Committee affording us later on in the year the opportunity of seeing some of the Futurists' productions", but this did not come to pass (Anonymous: "Post-Impressionists and Cubeists [sic]", *Irish Times*, 29 March 1912).

17 See McCourt: "James Joyce: Triestine Futurist?" and Del Greco Lobner: "James Joyce and Italian Futurism".

18 Vinall: "English Contributors to 'Poesia'", p. 558.

19 Somigli: *Legitimizing the Artist*, p. 165.

its British counterparts is the relative attention paid to Marinetti's political activities, hyper-nationalist outlook and revolutionary goals. Luca Somigli has noted that "the political dimension of futurism was almost completely erased from the reports in the British press",[20] and that only one British newspaper journalist mentioned Marinetti's involvement in Italy's campaign in Tripoli, Libya in 1912. The same was not true in Ireland. In fact, in an *Irish Times* article of August 1912 about Futurist literature, the anonymous writer was confident of a familiarity with Marinetti among the newspaper's readership precisely because of his links to the Tripoli campaign, writing: "Signor Marinetti's name is, no doubt, known to many of our readers; his championship of the Italian attack upon Tripoli gave him a wider notoriety than he could ever have won with his philosophy of art" (24 August 1912). The reason for the different response in Ireland may be that aspects of the Futurist programme were deemed to have particular resonance and relevance for the country's political circumstances. In the first *Irish Times* article dedicated to Futurism, dated 5 May 1909, the commentary concluded by relating the content of the first manifesto to the Irish context, stating:

> If the 'Futurists' do in the next ten years a tenth part of what they propose to do, they will have warmed their hands to some purpose. [...] The younger generation in Ireland will follow with interest, and possibly with some sympathy, the developments of this fiery Italian movement against the cramping tendencies of a socialistic age. These young men may not be destined to go far, but they manifestly intend to go fast.

Mary Swanzy in France and Italy

Through coverage in newspapers such as *The Irish Times*, and through her exposure to avant-garde circles in Paris, Mary Swanzy would surely have been aware of Futurism from its inception or shortly thereafter. However, direct engagement with Futurism was only possible for those artists, like Swanzy, who had the opportunity to travel beyond the island of Ireland. In 1905, Swanzy spent time in Paris studying under Auguste Joseph Delécluse in his studio for women and practicing her technique. The following year, she returned to Paris and worked at the academies of Antonio de la Gándara (a well-known portrait painter), Filippo Colarossi (also known as 'Académie de la Rose') and at La Grande Chaumière (home of the 'Art Indépendant'[21]). She possibly spent time also in Matisse's atelier and visited

20 Somigli: *Legitimizing the Artist*, p. 173.

21 It was 'independent' of the 'official', State-sponsored style of painting promoted by the École des Beaux-Arts.

Gertrude Stein's monthly salon, where she saw unframed paintings by Picasso.[22] These encounters exposed her to the work of the Fauves and the proto-Cubists, but she did not immediately adopt a Cubist style in her paintings.

As stated above, Swanzy came into an inheritance when her father died in 1913. At this point, as she remembered in a 1977 interview, "I went away from here [Dublin] for just a change of air, to settle my life and see what I would do and I went to Italy".[23] According to this interview, she had planned to stay in Italy for at least five or six years, developing and extending her artistic education by visiting the galleries and museums there. However, the First World War broke out and she was forced to return to Ireland. Notoriously vague about her movements, it is unclear whether she returned to Ireland in summer 1914 when war in Europe broke out, or in May 1915 when Italy abandoned her neutral stance and entered the conflict. Swanzy did not remain in Ireland for long. She made trips to the Continent and spent eighteen months in Saint Tropez.[24]

Little is known about Swanzy's time in Italy prior to the First World War, although it is almost certain that she encountered Futurism first-hand. We know that she based herself in Florence during this time. 1913 was one of the most active years for Futurism in the Tuscan capital and Florence was animated by *Lacerba* and its editors Giovanni Papini and Ardegno Soffici. In late 1913, when Swanzy was residing in Florence, the *lacerbiani* staged an exhibition of Futurist artworks at the Libreria Gonnelli (13 November 1913 – 18 January 1914). *Lacerba* dubbed it "the most important, the most modern, and the newest [exhibition] that has ever been mounted in this medieval town"[25] and, apparently, over 6,000 paying visitors attended. Was Swanzy one of them? It is entirely possible. Among the works exhibited were four works by Giacomo Balla, all dated 1913; Umberto Boccioni's *Stati d'animo* (States of Mind, 1911) and *Costruzione orizzontale* (Horizontal Construction, 1912, a portrait of his mother); Luigi Russolo's *Automobile in corsa* (Racing Motor-car, 1912–13) and *Volumi dinamici* (Dynamic Volumes, 1913) as well as works by Gino Severini and Carlo Carrà. [26] She may also have attended the *grande serata futurista*, dubbed the 'Battle of Florence', held at the Teatro Verdi on 12 December 1913, at which Marinetti, Boccioni, and Carrà all spoke.[27] The performance was a riotous affair with the audience estimated at between 5,000

22 Campbell: "Art Students and Lady Travellers", p. 20.

23 Interview with Anthony O'Mahony on RTÉ Radio 1, 5 May 1977.

24 Brennan: *Mary Swanzy*, n.p.

25 "[...] la più importante, la più moderna, e la più nuova [esposizione] che sia stata mai fatta in questa medioevale città." *Lacerba*: "Esposizione futurista di Lacerba", p. 9.

26 Del Puppo: *Lacerba*, pp. 167–171.

27 Berghaus: *Italian Futurist Theatre*, pp. 122–128.

and 7,000, according to *Lacerba* and *Corriere della sera*, respectively.[28] Given her interest in avant-garde art, her presence in Florence at this time, and the discernible Futurist influences in her paintings, it seems highly likely that she directly encountered Futurism during this period.

Futurist elements in works by Mary Swanzy

Attention will now be given to paintings by Mary Swanzy that display a particular relationship to the ideas and concepts of Futurist painting. In 1923, Swanzy identified herself as a landscape painter when she travelled to Honolulu,[29] and much of her Futurist-inspired work focusses on natural landscapes (see Fig. 2). Although she entitled one of her works *Oil Painting à la mode d'André Lhote* (undated), in recognition of the influence of this Cubist painter on her work, these landscape paintings, usually described as 'cubist', actually have far more in common with Futurist principles of painting. Most of Swanzy's paintings were not named by the artist herself; thus the 'Cubist' designation attached to many of her landscapes is an external identification and not indicative of Swanzy's declared influences. The curved lines, which distort and fragment the pictorial surface of Swanzy's landscapes are a feature not present in landscapes by Cubist painters, such as *Maisons à l'Estaque* (Houses at L'Estaque, 1908) by Georges Braque or *Paysage* (Landscape, 1911) by Albert Gleizes. Swanzy's landscapes indicate a familiarity with the tenets of Futurist painting, and are particularly similar to the compositional style of many of Giacomo Balla's works, which also show landscapes and natural subjects.

One of the central aims of Futurist painting was to "render the invisible",[30] and this was a feature of the work of Boccioni, Russolo and Balla. In an article in *Lacerba* in March 1913, Boccioni explained:

> For me atmosphere is a materiality that exists between objects, distorting plastic values. Instead of making it float overhead like a puff of air (because culture has taught me that atmosphere is intangible or made of gas, etc.), I feel it, seek it, seize hold of it and emphasize it by using all the various effects which light, shadows, and streams of energy have on it. Hence, I create the atmosphere![31]

Boccioni continued that this empty space between objects was represented by "endless lines and currents emanat[ing] from our objects, making them live in

28 See Berghaus: *Italian Futurist Theatre*, p. 122.
29 Cullinane: *Mary Swanzy*, p. 33.
30 Boccioni et al: "The Exhibitors to the Public", p. 107.
31 Boccioni: "The Plastic Foundations", p. 140.

the environment which has been created by their vibrations".[32] This interaction between the subject and the surrounding environment was also achieved by the "Futurist interpenetration of planes".[33]

The Futurist desire to impart solidity to the atmosphere and to represent the distortion of vision due to the presence of atmospheric strata is particularly evident in the work of Luigi Russolo, for example *Solidità della nebbia* (Solidity of Fog, 1912), and Giacomo Balla's studies of swifts in flight, which he began in 1913 and continued with for much of the following decade. His painting, *Paesaggio* (Landscape, 1913), is also emblematic in this regard. Both Balla and Russolo employed curved lines and concentric circles in their representations of air and atmosphere, a technique with which Swanzy would appear to have been familiar. Like the works of Balla from the late 1910s and early 1920s, the colours change in Swanzy's paintings each time two lines intersect and form a shape.

Fig. 1. *Canal Embankment* (undated).

32 Boccioni: "The Plastic Foundations", p. 141.

33 Boccioni: "Futurist Sculpture", p. 114. Róisín Kennedy mentions in passing a link between Boccioni's ideas and Swanzy's experiments with a Cubo-Futurist aesthetic but does not develop this point further (Róisín Kennedy: "Cubism, a Feminist Aesthetic", p. 77).

Fig. 2. *White Tower* (c.1926).

White Tower is Swanzy's most overtly Futurist-style painting. According to Swanzy herself, it was painted while she was in Italy. However, like most of her work, the painting is undated and she only recalled to Patrick Murphy (the painting's current owner) in a conversation in 1971 that it had been painted "many years before".[34] After Swanzy's death, Murphy suggested the date range 1925–1927, which has been widely adopted as definitive. However, in a recent interview with me in August 2013, he revealed that he now believed it possible that this painting (and her other Cubo-Futurist works) could have been completed earlier, perhaps during the years 1914–1920. Such a date appears convincing to me. Having been exposed to Futurist artworks and writings, it is plausible that she was first inspired to experiment in that style at that stage in her career, rather than more than ten years later.

The influence of Futurist ideas on *White Tower* is unmistakable. Indeed, in his memoir, Patrick Murphy recalled an anecdote, according to which Beth Straus, then Vice-President of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, mistook the paint-

34 Murphy: *A Passion for Collecting*, p. 78.

ing for a Futurist masterpiece.[35] The tower of the title is one of the many structures in the Tuscan town of San Gimignano; yet, in Swanzy's painting it resembles not so much a medieval tower, as an urban skyscraper. The smooth façade and grey colour of the tower suggest a concrete construction, and the low vantage point of the viewer makes it even appear taller. It rises up out of the earth with an energy and dynamism similar to that evoked in many Futurist paintings. In addition, the clean lines and bulk of the tower also bring to mind the architectural sketches of Antonio Sant'Elia. The predominantly green and blue tones set this painting apart from the more traditionally 'Cubist' palette Swanzy employed in paintings such as *Canal Embankment* (undated; see Fig. 1).

Fig. 3. *Propellors* (1942).

Although best known for her Cubo-Futurist and Samoan landscapes, Swanzy did not neglect other subjects in her work. Two quite similar paintings, *Propellors* (1942; see Fig. 3) and *Futuristic Study with Skyscrapers and Propellors*[36]

35 Murphy: *A Passion for Collecting*, p. 267.

36 This painting was not named by Swanzy herself but was given to it later. Hence the term 'Futuristic' rather than 'Futurist'.

(undated), show evidence of the influence of Futurist ideas in both their composition and their subject matter. These paintings also confirm the difficulty in accurately dating Swanzy's paintings given that she explored similar styles at different times and returned to Futurist-inspired subjects in the 1940s, after a gap of twenty years or more. The composition of both paintings is almost identical. Propellors on long poles shoot out from the bottom-right-hand corner of the canvas, creating an energetic sense of forward motion. The paintings are more abstract than many of Swanzy's works but demonstrate a clear interest in objects associated with modernity and speed. While not concerned with the depiction of movement itself, as the Futurists were, these paintings do seem to have drawn inspiration "from the tangible miracles of contemporary life, from the iron network of speed which winds around the earth, from the transatlantic liners, the dreadnoughts, the marvelous flights that plow the skies, the shadowy audaciousness of submarine navigators".[37]

Fig. 4. *Woman with White Bonnet* (c.1920).

37 Boccioni et al: "Manifesto of Futurist Painters", p. 62.

Like most of her work, Swanzy's portrait *Woman with White Bonnet* (Fig. 4) is undated. It is generally accepted to have been painted before 1920 in Paris as a photograph exists of it, taken in a studio at No. 229 Boulevard Raspail in that year.[38] *Woman with White Bonnet* is a three-quarter-length portrait of a young woman sitting indoors in front of a small easel, paintbrush in hand. The bonnet of the title appears to be a cloche hat, of the kind fashionable in the immediate post-war period. A curl of black hair peeps out from under the bonnet onto the woman's tilted cheek. The face has expressionless black eyes, small lips, and pinched but plump features. The style is similar to that of the landscapes discussed above, in which the surrounding atmosphere is made visible and in which the borders between objects are not fixed and intersect with one another. Swanzy's portrait has been compared to Pablo Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein (1905–06),[39] which Swanzy saw in Stein's house, although this link seems to me to be, at best, tenuous. Picasso portrayed Stein, sitting in an armchair with her face turned sideways, in a monumental, 'Primitivist' manner. Swanzy's portrait, on the other hand, features the dissecting lines of Cubo-Futurism, of which there is no trace in Picasso's portrait.

A more convincing influence on Swanzy's portrait is Umberto Boccioni's *Costruzione orizzontale* (1912), which has not before been identified as a possible influence on this work. It was exhibited at the *Lacerba* show in Florence in 1913, and Swanzy may have encountered it there. Once more, in terms of subject matter and basic composition, there are obvious similarities between the two works. *Costruzione orizzontale* is a portrait of the artist's mother, sitting at home in front of a balcony window. However, the brushwork is much simpler and less dense than that of his more famous painting *Materia* (Matter, 1912). In accordance with the tenets of Futurist painting, there are multiple intersecting planes in Boccioni's portrait. Swanzy employs a similar technique in her portrait. Pushing up past the figure's right shoulder and almost plunging into her eye is a thick pillar, which could be a tower or a chimney stack. Plants sprout from the woman's left shoulder and right hip, revealing no separation between the subject and the background. The woman's body appears transparent at times, as the brown wood of her chair and easel can be seen overlapping with and penetrating her body. As the Futurist painters declared in *La pittura futurista: Manifesto tecnico* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting, 1910): "Our bodies penetrate the sofas upon which we sit, and the sofas penetrate our bodies".[40] While Boccioni's *Costruzione orizzontale*

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38 Campbell: "Art Students and Lady Travellers", p. 143.

39 Kennedy: "Squaring up to Mary Swanzy", n.p.

40 Boccioni et al: "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto", p. 65.

represents a more sophisticated application of Futurist principles, Swanzy's portrait is nonetheless a striking interpretation of these proclamations.

Conclusion

In his well-known 1991 study on *Irish Art and Modernism*, art historian S.B. Kennedy claimed that "as soon as one begins to examine specific details of the period and the work of a number of artists it becomes clear that there was in Ireland a substantial knowledge and understanding of Modernism in many quarters".[41] There is some truth to Kennedy's claim, to which the coverage of Futurism in the Irish press can attest. However, it must always be remembered that artists gained exposure to the latest artistic trends on their travels to France and Italy, and often struggled to gain acceptance for their work from the conservative Irish art establishment.

Mary Swanzy has not had a solo exhibition in Ireland since the last two in Dublin (1982) and Sligo (1987), neither of which constituted a comprehensive examination of her œuvre. As the first Irish artist to apply not only Cubist but also Futurist principles to her paintings, a re-evaluation of her place in the canon of modern Irish art is long overdue.

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41 Kennedy: *Irish Art and Modernism*, p. 1.

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