

Born in Derry, Norah McGuinness first studied life-drawing at Derry Technical School before going to study at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin (now the National College of Art and Design). She studied painting under the artist Patrick Tuohy and design with stained glass artist Harry Clarke. In fact, she got her first commission from Clarke, this was the illustration of Sterne's book, *A Sentimental Journey*. Throughout her working life she was known for her constant artistic output. McGuinness studied for a year in the Chelsea Polytechnic before returning to Ireland where she immediately became involved in the Dublin art scene. She set up a studio and her work included costume design and sets for the Abbey and Peacock theatres in Dublin. As well as her landscape and figurative painting work she was commissioned by W.B. Yeats to illustrate his *Stories of Red Hanrahan* and *The Red Rose*.

In Dublin, McGuinness was part of the circle of artists that included women painters Evie Hone, Mainie Jellett, Mary Swanzy and May Guinness. Each of these was determined to progress the development of art in Ireland in their individual way. In 1929, with the encouragement of Mainie Jellett, McGuinness went to Paris to study with Lhote. Lhote had been a great influence on Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone, his approach was essentially that of an academic painter with a love of Cubism. McGuinness embraced cubist elements in her landscape painting: fragmentation, multiple viewpoints and sharp geometric elements appeared in her work. She remained fundamentally a representational painter but was open to the influences she encountered in Paris. In terms of colour, her palette was influenced by the work of the Fauves and her paintings took on an exuberant child-like quality that was similar in style to Raul Dufy. The colour intensity in her painting was further enhanced by a trip to India and from this time the use of sharply contrasting primary colours became a feature of her work.

McGuinness travelled when she could and based herself in London's Hammersmith in 1932. She was a member of the infamous 'Twenties Group' and staged her first solo exhibition at the Weirtheim Gallery in 1933. She was to live in New York for two years, painting and working in window design. She returned to live and paint in Ireland in 1939, and continued her work in theatre and costume design; she designed the windows for Brown Thomas on Grafton Street in Dublin for three decades. She illustrated, amongst other works, Elizabeth Bowen's novel *The Shelbourne* in 1951. In the late 30's she was painting in a stark, flattened graphic style, her subject matter urban, constructed and geometric example of work. This changed in the late 40's into a more semi-abstract style that emerged with the more intimate subject matter of still life example of work. The lighter palette and looser, softer lines associated with organic forms, different to street scenes and buildings, gave a more fluid quality to her work. The variations in tone and colour and carefully balanced contrasts show the influence of Picasso and Matisse. Her semi-abstract style was a very individual and personal response to her environment. The Irish landscape re-appears in her later work. Her Dublin Bay landscapes featured the docks and their inhabitants, (The gulls on the mud flats, the ships and dockland machines.) Outlined shapes, very gracious languid forms, repeated motifs and recurring patterns can be seen in her work; a kind of personal shorthand developed for the subjects and areas she knew so well.

Along with Mainie Jellett, Louis Le Brocquy and others, McGuinness was one of the founding members of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, which was set up to showcase modern art in the country and to act as an alternative to the more conservative R.H.A. exhibitions. On the death of Mainie Jellett she became chairman, and upheld the position for almost twenty years. In 1950, alongside Nano Reid, she represented Ireland in the Venice Biennale. She was elected an honorary member of the R.H.A. in 1957 and received an honorary doctorate from Trinity College in 1973.