

OFF THE DONEGAL COAST Jack B. Yeats (1871-1957)

Jack Butler Yeats was born in England but spent most of his childhood in Sligo with his grandparents. He was the son of the painter John B. Yeats and brother of poet and playwright William B. Yeats. Ireland, and in particular the West of Ireland and the people of the West, was his favoured subject. He painted fishermen and horse dealers using these subjects to deal with larger issues of nationality and humanity. Over the years his strong drawing-style and watercolours developed into a more loose painterly style. His later paintings were a riot of expressive colour slashed on with a palette knife, with the subject emerging from the shimmering surface of the canvas.



Off the Donegal Coast is based on one of Yeats' favourite subjects, the West Coast. The sailors in their little currach are being rocked by giant waves, the fear clearly showing in their eyes. The unusual diagonal composition gives a sensation of displacement, and places the viewer on the side or above the rescue ship. The painting style is vigorous with strong outline drawing in the boat and the figures. The figures are painted in muted tones. Yeats uses energetic brushstrokes, and blues and purples to capture the movement and texture of the sea. One of his great talents is to capture the moment of greatest tension, and here, Yeats takes us immediately to the heart of the story.

DISCUSSION

- Off the Donegal Coast; Does Yeats capture the tension of the moment? How does he do this?
- The colours used are generally harmonious, what contrasting colours can you find? What do they do in the painting?
- If this image were a photograph, where would the photographer have to be? What sensation do you get from the angle at which this was painted?
- Diagonals in a composition add movement and energy to a painting, what else do you find interesting about the composition?
- Look at the brush marks that make up the stormy sea, how do you think they were made? How are they different to the painting of the figures? Why do you think they are painted in different ways?

IN THE GALLERY



Find the paintings, *The Small Ring* and *Returning From The Bathe, Mid-Day*. what changes in the way the artist uses paint and colour?

There is a very strong atmosphere in this painting; how has Yeats created this?

Describe the character of the crowd watching the fight, what do you think they will do next?

The Small Ring (1930)

In this painting *Returning From the Bathe, Mid-Day*, Yeats has used colour straight from the tube and mixed directly on the canvas using a palette knife.

Would you describe this painting as sentimental? What feeling do you get from this painting?



Returning From the Bathe, Mid-Day (1948)

HANDS ON

Take the sea as a theme, then brainstorm to decide on three “stories” you want to tell about the sea. Using the three styles shown here by Yeats as a guide, plan your three sketches. Consider various viewpoints to make an exciting composition. (Use a viewfinder to change the framing of your sketches, or cut and paste elements of the composition to find one you like.) Try different painting techniques; try painting with a palette knife or a strip of cardboard. Paint with dry brush and thick paint, use colour mixed or straight from the tube to create different surface textures in each of the three images.

Pick a character you think typically irish, then draw, paint or collage a scene that shows them at their best.