

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 were his favoured subjects. He painted fishermen and horse dealers using these subjects to deal with larger issues of nationality and humanity. In later years, he developed a more loose painterly style. His late paintings are 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 of Ireland. Here the sailors in their little currach are being rocked by giant waves, the fear clearly showing in the sailors' 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 showing 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

- How many sailors can you see? Might there be more outside the painting?
- The boat they are in is called a currach. It was made in the West of Ireland from a wooden frame covered with animal skin. It is a very strong and seaworthy vessel but do you think it is strong enough for this sea?
- Why do you think there is a rope being thrown to the sailors? Where is the rope coming from?
- What colour is the sea, do you often see this colour at sea, why do you think the artist has painted the sea this colour?
- The brush marks are rough and vigorous; do you think the artist painted very quickly? Do the loose brush marks help make the sea look wilder? How?

IN THE GALLERY



What do you think has just happened in this painting?

Would a boxing match be a quiet place to be? Does the crowd in the painting seem quiet or noisy?

The people in the crowd are painted with just a few strokes of the brush, yet we can still tell a lot about them. Describe one or two of them.

The Small Ring (1930)

Describe what is going on in the painting *Returning From the Bathe, Mid-Day?*

The donkey is looking at the children and this takes our eye to them also, what other lines draw us to them?

In the painting, the artist has applied the paint using a knife, how does this make the surface of the canvas look different?



Returning From the Bathe, Mid-Day (1948)

HANDS ON

Look in books and magazines for photos, artist's impressions, drawings etc...of different images of the sea. Pick the most calm and the most wild sea images. Use paints to get the feeling and movement of the sea. Experiment using paint mixed with lots of water, unmixed paint with a dry brush, paint dabbed on dry paper, paint mixed on the paper. Try using a 2 cm strip of cardboard as a brush. When you are ready, work on the two paintings side by side.