

COMPOSITION Mainie Jellett (1897-1944)

Mainie Jellett studied at the Metropolitan School of Art in her native Dublin and at the Westminster Art School in London, where she studied with the British impressionist Walter Sickert. It was here that she met her life long companion, Evie Hone and together they went to study at the studio of Andre Lhote. The cubist style taught by Lhote encouraged the study, rather than the rejection of the works the Old Masters. Lhote introduced Jellett to the cubist theorist Albert Gleizes and the three artists met to work together and exchange ideas. Jellett's abstract style was greeted with horror in Ireland; she was described as having been infected with the "malaria" of abstract art. Because of her international acclaim she was eventually accepted as a leader of the modern art movement in Ireland. A fervent exponent of abstract art, Jellett wrote, lectured, and taught art throughout Ireland. She exhibited at home and internationally throughout her life. In 1943, she was a founding member of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art.



Composition, painted in 1935, is an interpretation of the holy family. Jellett was deeply religious and spiritual, and much of her work was inspired by religious themes. Here, shape and colour suggest three figures rising from a central base. The golden arcs around the figures and the use of colour suggest medieval icons. Jellett's particular style of cubism did not require the rejection of either nature or representation, but the delving deep into the subject to find its inner rhythm and harmony. She believed the symbolic power of colour and shape to be universal, and to resonate with all. She sought to extract from her original naturalistic drawings the shapes and colours that spoke clearest on the subject and then, by repeating these elements, to create a work of art complete in itself.

DISCUSSION

- What feeling or mood do you get from this painting?
- Mainie Jellett believed in the symbolic and potentially spiritual qualities of colour and shape, does this seem like a spiritual or religious painting? What are the reasons for your answer?
- Symbolically, some colours have very definite qualities, red for example we take to mean stop, or danger. Red also represents passion. We associate black with death. What other symbolic associations with colour can you think of?
- What shapes do we associate with different feelings or qualities?
- With what do we associate the shapes in this painting?
- The colours used are muted with lots of white in them, what effect does this have on the mood of the work?
- The artist has used gold paint, how does the use of gold effect what you feel about the work?

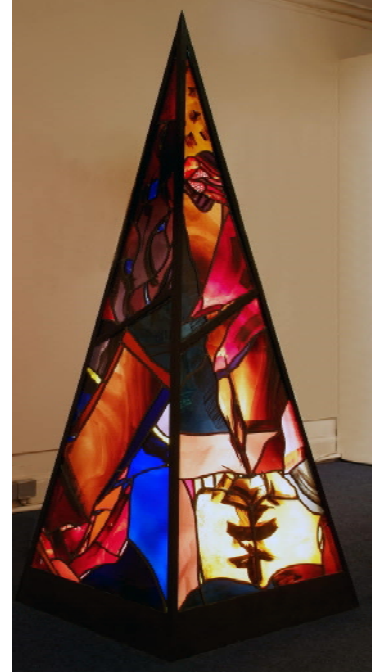
- Do you get a sense of movement from this painting? How do you think the artist has created this?
- The harmony of this painting is created by tones of the same colour being placed close together, where is this harmonious pattern broken, what happens in these areas?

In the gallery, find this abstract, stained glass sculpture by Cork artist Maud Cotter.

The artist enjoys words and poetry, and she gave this work an unusual title. It is called *Straight as Lemons Meet Fish* and was made in 1987.

Stained glass was traditionally used in churches to create a special atmosphere. Here the artist has used stained glass to create a sculpture piece, which is lit from inside.

Maud Cotter has painted, etched and joined the glass to create an abstract composition of expressive marks, colours and shapes.



HANDS ON

Find a photograph or image that has a strong meaning for you. What colours or combinations of colours could you associate with this feeling? Choose rhythms and shapes from the image and repeat them to form a new composition. Introduce the colours and try to balance these colours to enhance the mood.

Rhythm workshop:

The teacher chooses music with a range of rhythms: hip- hop, classical, ballad, reggae etc...The pupils each take an A3 sheet and divide it horizontally into sections. When the first piece of music is played, pupils respond by making 'marks' in the first space.

The next piece of music is 'marked' in the second space and so on.

At the end of the workshop compare sheets. Do the marks and shapes seem to relate to the rhythms? Can you guess what marks went with which piece of music?