

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. 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 of 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, can be seen as an interpretation of the holy family. Jellett was deeply religious and spiritual, and much of her work was inspired by religious themes. The shapes and colours suggest three figures rising from a central base. The golden arcs around the figures, and the use of colour is reminiscent of 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

- First, the artist painted objects and people, then she looked for shapes and colours that she liked in her painting. Then she started a new painting where she just used the shapes and colours but she used them all over the painting. What shapes mostly make up the painting? Do the shapes help to create the mood?
- What colours mostly make up the painting? Do the colours help create the mood?
- What do you think this painting is about?
- Have you ever seen gold paint used in paintings before? Where? What type of painting?
- Gold paint is found most often in paintings about religion, gold was used to make the paintings more special. Do you think the gold in this painting makes it more special for you?
- The colours are darker at the bottom of the painting and get lighter as they get towards the top. Do you think this was done for a reason, what could that be?
- When strong colours are placed beside light colours, our eye jumps over and back from one to the other. When very different colours such as yellow and purple are side by side the

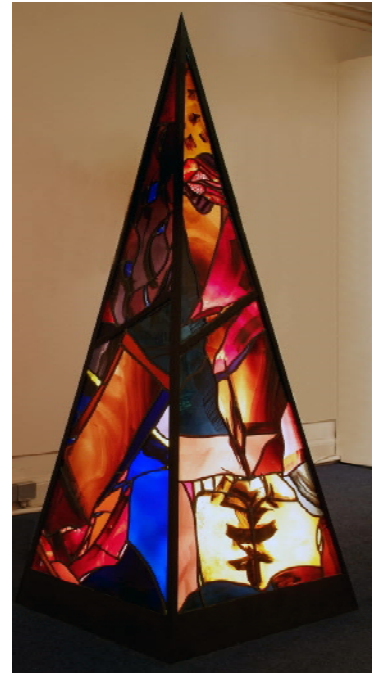
colours seem to dance too. This gives the painting a sense of movement, Can you see this happening in this painting?

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.

This artist also works in an abstract way, and she has decorated the glass with lots of marks, colours and shapes.



HANDS ON

Close your eyes and imagine the colours that go with being happy, then imagine the colours that mean 'sad' to you. Try to remember one really special day that meant a lot to you and decide what colours could show how you felt then. Think of how you might draw a picture of this. Use shapes instead of realistic people and objects in your drawing and try different ways to arrange them so that you get the mood of your special day. When you have created your picture, ask your friends if they can tell what your day was like.

Make two abstract collages on the same page. For the first, choose colours that are dark and sad, cut or tear these into shapes that go with that mood and arrange them. For the second artwork, choose colours that feel bright and happy, arrange these and glue them down. Compare your two works.