

Mainie Jellett was born in Dublin at the end of the 19th century. She was the pioneer of the modern art movement in Ireland. Her early training was at the Metropolitan School in Dublin and with Walter Sickert at the Westminster School of Art. Sickert had trained in Paris and worked with Degas and the French Impressionists. Jellett's early style echoed her tutor's particular style of impressionism. Jellett met the artist Evie Hone when studying at Westminster, and the two artists were to remain lifelong friends. Sickert encouraged both women to visit Andre Lhote's studio in Paris. Lhote was an advocate of a form of Cubism that was based not on rejecting what had gone before, but on extending the Western European tradition of painting. His pupils were encouraged to study the paintings in the Louvre and it was here, Jellett later claimed, that she discovered her love for the Old Masters.

Jellett met the artist Albert Gleizes in 1921. Gleizes was the author of "Du Cubism" which was an important theoretical book on Cubism. Gleizes' theories about the symbolic power of colour were of great interest to Jellett. His argument that pure colour had a magical quality re-enforced her own belief in the ability of abstract colour and form to transcend language and culture, and have a universal significance. Gleizes used a system of echoed colours and rhythms to create his painted compositions. His two Irish pupils, Evie Hone and Mainie Jellett, developed an original and elegant interpretation of his principles that was less rigid and academic than that of their tutor. Jellett's studies led her to believe fervently in the power of abstraction. She worked through a process in her painting, where she made detailed studies of her subject and then searched for what she considered the inner rhythms and ordered movements of the image. She transposed these elements in a systematic manner, producing an abstract image that retained some of the primary study, whilst seeking to create a work of harmony complete in itself. Her belief in the spiritual value of colour was the driving force in her work and through colour harmony and tonal balance she created works of extraordinary force and beauty. Jellett spent several months of each year studying with Gleizes. She continued to do so for over a decade.

When Mainie Jellett exhibited at the Dublin Painters' Exhibition in 1923, she was described by George Russell as a victim of the "artistic malaria" that was abstract art. If you consider that realist, figurative works such as those by Sean Keating and William Orpen were most popular at the time, it is easy to imagine the shock that the paintings of Jellett and her colleague Evie Hone might have caused. This was the first time that cubist work had been seen in Ireland. Jellett had exhibited abroad and her exhibitions in Paris, Versailles and Brussels in 1925 were a critical success. In 1926, she published works and held lectures on Cubism and, through her international success, Jellett eventually achieved acceptance as an artist of standing in her native country. Her painting *Homage to Fra Angelico* in 1928 was her first work to be favourably reviewed. In 1930, she exhibited at the Irish Exhibition in Brussels, and alongside Sean Keating she represented Ireland at the 1939 Worlds Fair in New York. She was one of the founding members of the dynamic group known as 'The Dublin Painters' which included Harry Clarke, Mary Swanzy, Clare Marsh, Paul and Grace Henry amongst others. In 1943, *The Irish Exhibition of Living Art* was founded with Jellett as chairman. (She died the following February, aged 47). The exhibition was created to counter what the members perceived was the sterile nature of art in Ireland, which the artists felt was apparent internationally. Throughout the years of the Living Art exhibitions, works by Picasso, Matisse and other European artists were seen in Dublin, these exhibitions were viewed as avant-garde compared with the more staid exhibitions of the Royal Hibernian Academy.