

Collins, Patrick

by Rebecca Minch

Collins, Patrick (1910–94), painter, was born 6 November 1910 at Dromore West, Co. Sligo, second of four children of William Collins, RIC constable, and Mary Collins (née McLaughlin), daughter of a businessman from Dowra, Co. Cavan. William Collins contracted tuberculosis c.1915 and was discharged from the police. They moved to Sligo, where William died in 1923. Patrick Collins was educated at the Mercy convent and the model school at Summerhill College in Sligo. His childhood experiences of the countryside engendered a love of nature which was to be a vital source of inspiration for his painting. In 1925 he was sent as a boarder to St Vincent's orphanage, Glasnevin, Dublin. Soon after leaving St Vincent's he got a job with the Irish Life Assurance Co., where he worked for twenty-two years. During the 1930s his interest in writing gave way to an interest in painting. Though he attended classes at the National College of Art, he was largely self-taught. In the mid 1940s he began to work full-time as a painter.

In 1950 Collins exhibited his work in public for the first time at the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, where it was well received. (He exhibited with the IELA yearly till 1972.) In 1956 his first one-man exhibition, opened by Sir Basil Goulding (qv) at the Hendriks Gallery, achieved great critical acclaim. He received the Guggenheim national section award for Ireland for his painting 'Liffey quaysides' in 1958. His work was first exhibited in the RHA in 1962. He showed regularly at the oireachtas exhibitions from 1964 to 1973, winning the Irish landscape prize in 1971.

It was in the 1960s that Collins came to maturity as an artist; his dark, brooding style of the 1950s gave way to cooler tones of grey and blue, while his brushwork became broader, emphasising the two-dimensional nature of the picture surface. His early work contained a strongly narrative element, drawing on themes from Irish mythology and literature – particularly the writings of James Joyce (qv), whose influence on Collins can be seen at its most direct in his first major work, 'Stephen Hero' (1950). During the following decades the Irish landscape became his major source of inspiration. He consciously resisted international influences, feeling the need to find a uniquely Irish means of visual expression. To this end he created strongly abstracted, atmospheric images where motifs such as fields, bogland, animals, and ancient monuments are veiled in mist. His works were not intended to be topographical; rather, by working from memory he aimed to evoke the layers of meaning he associated with the land, dealing with ideas such as ownership, a connection with the Celtic past, and feelings of nostalgia and isolation.

Though he lived in France from 1971 to 1977, his objective was to achieve a new perspective on Ireland. He continued to gain recognition, receiving the Irish-American Cultural Award in 1976 and being elected HRHA in 1980. In the same year

he received an Arts Council bursary. He became a member of Aosdána in 1981 and was elected 'Saoi' (the highest distinction) in 1987. In 1982 a major retrospective exhibition of his work, organised by the Arts Council of Ireland, was shown in Cork, Dublin, and Belfast. Collins received an honorary D.Litt. (Dubl.) in 1988. A daughter, Penelope, was born to Collins and his partner, Patricia Ryan, in 1957. He died 2 March 1994 in Dublin. His work can be seen in the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery, and the Ulster Museum.

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Frances Ruane, *Patrick Collins* (1982); Julian Campbell, 'Patrick Collins and the sense of place', *Ir. Arts Review*, iv, no. 4 (1987), 48–52; Brian Fallon, 'Powerful presence', *Ir. Times*, 3 Mar. 1994, p. 10; M. Foley, 'Death of painter Patrick Collins', *Ir. Times*, 3 Mar. 1994, p. 5; Dorothy Walker, *Modern art in Ireland* (1997)