

Hickey, Patrick

by Rebecca Minch

Hickey, Patrick (1927–98), printmaker, painter, and architect, was born 27 April 1927 in India (in what later formed part of Pakistan), son of Lt-col. H. W. Hickey. The family subsequently returned to England, living in Bedford. He was educated at Ampleforth College, Yorkshire (1939–45). Despite there being no artistic interests in his family background, as a young man he was determined to become an artist. He felt, however, that he should first acquire training in a discipline that would give him a measure of security; hence he came to Ireland in 1948 to study architecture at UCD, where he graduated (1954). Shortly afterwards he began to work for the architect Michael Scott (qv). At this time he began to paint in earnest. He first exhibited his Wicklow landscapes at the Irish Exhibition of Living Art (1955), to a favourable reception. He is, however, best known as a printmaker and he embarked on this enterprise when in 1957, having been awarded an Italian government scholarship, he spent eight months learning the techniques of etching and lithography at the *Scuola del Libro* in Urbino.

This time spent in Italy was in many ways the defining moment of his career. He could not have gained such technical expertise in Ireland, as facilities then were practically non-existent and the art education system made no provision for printmaking. It was this situation that he set out to address when he founded the Graphic Studio in 1961. Fellow founder members included Elizabeth Rivers and Anne Yeats (qv). Though the premises at 18 Upper Mount St., Dublin, were cramped, it was the catalyst for the emergence of modern graphic art in Ireland, a development for which Hickey must take considerable credit. He remained the moving figure behind the studio till 1970, a role subsequently taken by Mary Farl Powers (1948–92). Notable among his prints of the 1960s is the 'Stations of the Cross' (1965), an edition of which is in the Archives Nationales, Paris, and a set of illustrations (1965) of Dante's *Divine comedy*, with which he won second prize in an Italian government competition that marked the 700th anniversary of Dante's birth.

In the early 1970s he pursued his concerns with the reform and development of art education through his association with the National College of Art and Design, which was undergoing major restructuring at the time. He was appointed a member of the college board in May 1972, though he did not always enjoy an easy relationship with his fellow members. His support for the grievances of part-time staff in the college, which stemmed from his socialist sympathies, prompted a motion of censure by the board (October 1973), which was later withdrawn. He also took an active role in the organisation of the Rosc exhibitions; in 1971 he was responsible for the exhibition of eighteenth-century blue-and-white delftware held at Castletown House, Co. Kildare, which included examples from his own collection.

A year spent in Corfu in 1975 was followed by the production of one of his best-known works, a series of etchings of the 'Months'. The exploitation of the decorative linear qualities of the forms and the emphasis on empty space within the compositions invite comparison with Japanese art. He found himself working in this way prior to his exposure to this art, though he later became an ardent and knowledgeable admirer of it and a collector of Japanese carvings. His 'Alphabet' series (1988) and 'Aesop's fables' (1990) show the refinement of his concern with elegant line and careful observation of natural forms. He also continued to paint landscape, with Wicklow – and especially Glenmalure – being an enduring source of inspiration. He was of the opinion that the outstanding Irish art of the twentieth century was in landscape, specifically the work of Patrick Collins (qv) and Camille Souter.

Despite being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease (1973), he continued to accept new challenges. He taught part-time in the school of architecture at UCD for many years. Between 1980 and 1984 he took a degree in history of art and Italian at UCD. In 1986 he was appointed head of painting at the National College of Art and Design. He also served on the cultural relations committee of the Department of Foreign Affairs. In 1989 he was made an honorary member of the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland. Though he could be forthright in the expression of his opinions, his manner was gentle and reflective. His self-portrait (National Self-Portrait Collection, University of Limerick) conveys the depth with which he considered issues such as the role of the artist and the nature of the artistic process. It symbolises the distance artists must maintain in order to express themselves, and how his career followed the two different paths of art and architecture. It also refers to his ideas on defining the nature of drawing, an issue he felt was of key importance. On architecture he was similarly passionate and insisted on the moral duty of architects to be true to their own vision and not to allow rigid theories to constrain the sensitive exploitation of the naturally occurring qualities of a site. Ultimately, he saw artistic expression as something akin to religious experience, in that it was a celebration of the natural world and the privileged place of the artist within it. Despite the continued deterioration of his health in the 1990s, which forced his retirement from teaching, he continued to work and held his last exhibition in 1997. He died 16 October 1998 at his home in Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. With his wife Elizabeth ('Bizzie'; née Hallinan) he had three children, two of whom were adopted.

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*Irish Bank collection: twentieth century Irish art* (1986); Sarah Finlay, *The National Self-Portrait Collection of Ireland*, i (1989); 'Patrick Hickey, citation', *Irish Architect*, no. 73 (July/Aug. 1989), 39–40; John O'Regan (ed.), *Patrick Hickey* (1991); Brian Fallon, 'Patrick Hickey, Graphic Studio Gallery', *Ir. Times*, 20 May 1995, p. 14; Graphic Studio Gallery, *Patrick Hickey: new prints* (1995); John Turpin, *An art school in Dublin since the eighteenth century: a history of the National College of Art and Design* (1995); Dorothy Walker, *Modern art in Ireland* (1997); *Ir. Times*, 17 Oct. 1998, p. 31; D. W., 'Patrick Hickey, an appreciation', *Ir. Times*, 6 Nov. 1998, p. 15; *Ampleforth Journal*, civ, pt 1 (1999), 79–80; information from Fr Francis Dobson, OSB