

Hone, Eva Sydney ('Evie')

by Diarmaid Ferriter

Hone, Eva Sydney ('Evie') (1894–1955), painter and stained-glass artist, was born 22 April 1894 at Roebuck Grove, Clonskeagh, Co. Dublin, youngest among four daughters of Joseph Hone, prominent maltster and director of the Bank of Ireland, and Eva Hone (née Robinson), who died two days after Evie's birth. Evie came from a family with a long tradition of painting, being related to the eighteenth-century portrait-painter Nathaniel Hone (qv). At the age of 12 she became a victim of poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis), and although she was eventually to regain a certain degree of mobility, she was left a semi-invalid for the rest of her life. Initially educated by a governess, she was sent to see a specialist in Ouchy, Switzerland, where she stayed for six months, and also visited Italy and Spain before moving to London in 1913 to study at the Byam Shaw School of Art and the Central School of Arts and Crafts under Bernard Meninsky. Her early career became inextricably linked to that of her close friend Mainie Jellett (qv). They both studied in London under Walter Sickert and then moved to France, persuading the cubist painter Albert Gleize to take them on as students, and becoming the effective pioneers of the modern movement in Irish painting. When examples of their abstract and cubist work were exhibited by the Dublin Painters Society in Dublin (1924) they were derided by certain art critics, one of whom (quoted in Snoddy) commented that the paintings were 'no better and no worse than the productions of the average uninspired art student in her teens'; although others maintained that while Jellett had the firmer vision, Hone was the purer artist.

While Jellett launched a vigorous campaign to educate Irish people on the subject of modernism, the deeply spiritual Hone found herself drawn towards a religious vocation, and in 1925 joined a community of anglican nuns at Truro, Cornwall. She stayed there for nearly a year, but eventually decided she had no vocation, writing to Jellett that 'I feel quite at peace now about it and as certain as one can be of anything' (Arnold, 127). She returned to Dublin to live with her sister at Lucan and continued to travel each year to the south of France with Jellett, resuming her contact with Gleize, who was instrumental in teaching her about the value of shape and colour in the stimulation of vision. Her cubist-derived abstraction was seen in gouaches such as 'Seated woman' (1928), and she exhibited in London and Paris as well as Dublin.

At the beginning of the 1930s her interest in abstract art began to wane. The work of the French painter Georges Rouault had a deep impact on her, as did her religious convictions, and she began to turn her attention to stained glass, working under A. E. Child of An Túr Gloine as well as studying in London with Wilhelmina Geddes (qv), and the Dutch stained-glass artist Roland Holst. She was a regular exhibitor at the RHA (1931–7) and was also a founder member of the Irish Exhibition of Living

Art. Her close friend Michael Healy (qv) was also a huge influence on her, and in 1933 she joined An Túr Gloine, where she was to remain for ten years. One of her first pieces was 'The annunciation', in Taney church, Dundrum, Co. Dublin. In 1937 she converted to catholicism and was received into the church by John Charles McQuaid (qv). Two years later Hone's 'My four green fields', commissioned by the Irish government, was exhibited at the New York World Fair and won first prize for a work in stained glass; it was later moved to the CIÉ offices in O'Connell St., Dublin. 'St Brigid' in Loughrea cathedral, Co. Galway, followed (1942), and she also executed 'The beatitude' and 'The nativity' for the Jesuit college in Tullabeg, Co. Offaly.

In 1944 An Túr Gloine was dissolved as a co-operative and Hone opened her own studio at Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin. In 1947–8 she was engaged in work for St Mary's church, Kingscourt, Co. Cavan, and also found time to travel to Italy, where she absorbed many new influences. She then commenced work on perhaps her best-known piece, the east window in Eton College chapel, Windsor, completed in 1952, which brought her international fame. It covered an area of 900 square feet (83.6 sq. m) and comprised over 40,000 pieces of glass; there was no studio large enough in Ireland in which to view it, and she had insisted on executing a number of the sections several times. She also executed a five-light window at St Michael's church in Highgate, London. Hone's main influences were the schools of Paris; her glass work was heavily influenced by Rouault as she adopted his dominant black outline, brevity of expression, and religious subject-matter, and her religious conversion undoubtedly gave her added impetus in her church commissions. Her windows were regarded as having a heraldic glow and deep sincerity, and she was able to absorb the abstract influences of her earlier career.

A regular entertainer with a great sense of humour, strong social conscience, and organisational ability, Hone also displayed humility; while she did not see herself as a reformer, many believed she was the finest practitioner of her craft to appear since the seventeenth century. Her insistence on simplification marked all of the figures of her windows, and she disliked sentimentality or excessive embellishment. Unlike Harry Clarke (qv) and Michael Healy, who felt that sacred images needed to be imbued with a degree of nobility and aggrandisement, Hone eschewed all aspects of grandeur or sophistication. Nevertheless, the diversity of her influences ensured her work was complex: one contemporary noted that 'if Evie Hone's spirit of dedication was medieval, her formal approach to work was modern and constructive, while her use of rich and subtle colour was more that of the east than of the west' (Frost, 8). Despite ill health, she continued to produce a huge number of small stained-glass panels as well as oils, watercolours, and gouache landscapes. In 1953 she was represented at the Contemporary Irish Art exhibition at Aberystwyth, Wales, and at the Tate gallery in London, as well as receiving an honorary LLD from TCD, and in 1954 was elected an honorary member of the RHA. Unmarried, she died 13 March 1955 while entering her parish church at Rathfarnham; she was survived by two of

her sisters. Over 20,000 people visited a memorial exhibition of her work at UCD, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin, in 1958.

Ir. Times, 14 Mar. 1955; Stella Frost, *A tribute to Evie Hone and Mainie Jellett* (1958); *WWW*; James White and Michael Wynne, *Irish stained glass* (1963); *Ir. women artists*; Brian Fallon, *Irish art 1830–1990* (1990); Bruce Arnold, *Mainie Jellett and the modern movement in Ireland* (1991); Brian P. Kennedy, *Irish painting* (1993); Snoddy; Ó Céirín, *Women*

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