

Mulvany, Thomas James

by Sinéad Sturgeon

Mulvany, Thomas James (1779–1845), painter, was born in Dublin. He studied art under Francis R. West (qv) in the Dublin Society Schools, showing particular aptitude for figure drawing. He worked initially as a miniaturist, and in 1802 sent eight works to the exhibition at Parliament House; however, he soon decided to concentrate on landscapes and portraiture, and contributed to each of the annual Dublin Society exhibitions between 1810 and 1814, and again in 1821. Mulvany's initiative during these years was evident in other ways besides his painting. With his brother John George Mulvany (see below), he was foremost among those campaigning for a chartered institution for Irish artists comparable to the Royal Academy in London. Their ambition was achieved in 1823 with the founding of the Royal Hibernian Academy, of which the Mulvanys were among the fourteen original members. Thomas James Mulvany was appointed keeper of the academy, and his works were shown there consistently from the first exhibition in 1826 until he retired in 1844.

Mulvany spent some time in France, as is evidenced by paintings such as 'View at Dieppe with fish-wagons starting for Paris' (1826). Other notable paintings include 'A blind beggar' (1826) and 'Peasants performing stations at Glendalough' (1829). Two engravings by Mulvany, 'Armagh cathedral' and 'Ruins of St Audoen's church', appeared in *Essay on the origin and progress of Gothic architecture . . . in Ireland* (1829) by Thomas Bell. Though a talented artist with the capacity to work in diverse genres, Mulvany encountered great difficulty in furthering his career in Ireland. In 1831 he observed: 'my present professional prospects are certainly chillingly dispiriting' (Crookshank, 198). He pursued several collateral projects, publishing lengthy articles on Francis West (qv) and Thomas Sautel, in *The Citizen* (which Crookshank dated to October and November 1841), and on Hugh Douglas Hamilton (qv) in the *Dublin Monthly Magazine* (1842). He also edited a biography of the architect James Gandon (qv) in conjunction with Gandon's son; *The life of James Gandon* was published after Mulvany's death, and was favourably reviewed in the *Dublin University Magazine* (1847).

At some point in the early nineteenth century, Mulvany married Mary Field, the daughter of a Dublin doctor. They had several children, including John Skipton Mulvany (qv) RHA, an architect, George F. Mulvany (see below), and the prominent engineer William Thomas Mulvany (qv). Mulvany died 27 February 1845 at his home, Dirker Lodge, Cross Avenue, Booterstown, and was buried at Mount Jerome cemetery, Dublin.

Thomas's brother John George Mulvany (c.1766–1838), landscape painter and teacher, was also born in Dublin and studied in the Dublin Society Schools, where

he distinguished himself, winning medals in 1782 and 1786. He began exhibiting in 1810, and was a regular contributor (chiefly of landscapes) to the RHA exhibitions in 1826–37, as well as being a successful and sought-after teacher. He is chiefly remembered for two large landscapes of Killmallock that were exhibited at the RHA in 1830: 'The medieval street' (National Gallery of Ireland) and 'The Dominican friary outside the old walls' (Hunt Museum, Limerick). He died 28 September 1838 and was buried at St Paul's church, North King Street, Dublin.

George Francis Mulvany (1809–69), painter and art administrator, was one of the three sons of Thomas James Mulvany. He was born in Dublin and studied at the RHA school and in Italy before embarking upon a prolific career as a painter of landscapes and subject pictures, executed chiefly in oils. He first exhibited at the RHA in 1827, where he continued to show paintings until the year of his death. He was made an associate of the RHA in 1830, and a full member in 1835, and succeeded his father as keeper (1845–64). In 1836 and 1839 he contributed canvases to the exhibitions at the Royal Academy, London – respectively, 'Infant Bacchus' and 'Various attractions, a scene in the Louvre'. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the Royal Irish Art Union, founded in 1839, and was instrumental in its campaign to found a national gallery in Dublin. When this was achieved, he was appointed director in 1862, and in this capacity purchased some seventy paintings for the gallery, including many by baroque masters.

Mulvany completed portraits of many distinguished figures of the time, notably the writers John Banim (qv) and Thomas Moore (qv), Daniel O'Connell (qv), and the painter Sir Frederic Burton (qv). In 1847 he published a pamphlet entitled *Thoughts and facts concerning the fine arts in Ireland and schools of design*, intended, he wrote, to support the point that 'perfection in art is the crowning point of civilization' (Mulvany, *Thoughts*, 8). Mulvany died 6 February 1869 at his home, 18 Herbert Place, Dublin, and was buried four days later at Mount Jerome cemetery, Dublin.

---

George Francis Mulvany, 'Architecture in Ireland', *Dublin University Magazine*, xxix (1847), 693–708; George Francis Mulvany, *Thoughts and facts concerning the fine arts in Ireland and schools of design* (1847); *Letters from Professor Thomas J. Mulvany R. H.A. to his eldest son, William T. Mulvany . . . from 1825–1845*, ed. A. C. Mulvany, (1908); John Ryan, 'William Thomas Mulvany', *Studies*, xii (1923), 378–90; Ann Crookshank and the knight of Glin, *Ireland's painters, 1600–1940* (2002)