

## ALICE BERGER HAMMERSCHLAG

Vienna 1917 - Belfast 1969



Alice Berger Hammerschlag

Photo taken from *Baptism by Fire* by the late, much regretted, Sam McCready

I have wanted for a long time (a very long time) to write about the Painter Alice Berger Hammerschlag who had a big influence on me in my teenage years in Belfast in the 1960s. What has prevented me has been a lack of material. Alice was engaged in a research which could be called 'religious', 'spiritual' or 'intellectual'. Her friend Mercy Hunter says she had a 'complicated philosophy.' Her husband, Heinz Hammerschlag, tells us that she 'was an

ardent collector of books, mainly on art and philosophy.<sup>1</sup> But it is a long time since I've lived in Belfast and although I have had useful conversations with her friends - the dancer and choreographer Helen Lewis, the painter Neil Shawcross, the actors Sam and Joan McCready - I never felt I was getting a grasp on the development of her thought. The man who could have done most to help me, Heinz, died in 1998 while I was still living in France. The Ulster Museum has a collection of her paintings, many donated from the collection of her sister Trudi Berger, and a small archive of documents which I was able to see back in 2015 during an all too brief visit to Belfast<sup>2</sup>. But on the whole this essay will have to rely more than I would have liked on my own subjective impressions.<sup>3</sup>

## IN VIENNA

Alice was born in Vienna in 1917. Her family was Jewish but apart from that I know nothing about them. What was their profession? Were they religious? I think we can assume from the good education both she and her sister, Trudi, received that they were reasonably well off. Trudi was a teacher of languages in York University. In an interview given in 2015 her student, Salvador Ortiz-Carboneres, says of her:

*'Look, she was qualified to teach five languages at the university level. She was shorthand in five languages. She came from Vienna, you know, during the ... because she was from a Jewish family and she came in '39. And she knew the von Trapp family. I got letters from the von Trapp family, the son talked to me when she died, you know, they were friends. So she just ... was incredible lady.'*<sup>4</sup>

He says she died at the age of 87. A letter from Brian Ferran, then Chief Executive of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, to Ortiz-Carboneres dated 1998 refers to 'the will of Dr Trudy Berger ... in the gifting of twelve paintings to the collection of the Ulster Museum', so we can conclude that Trudi was the older of the two sisters, by at least six years.

Alice herself as a child was taught by Franz Cizek, well known as a pioneer in the teaching and appreciation of children's art. He had established a *Jugendkunstklasse* - 'juvenile art

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<sup>1</sup> Mercy Hunter in an article in the *Irish Times*, 2/11/1968; Heinz Hammerschlag in a note written for the retrospective exhibition, I think the one that took place in the Ulster Museum in 2000. I have both of these from the archive held by the Ulster Museum.

<sup>2</sup> For this I am grateful for the help received from Anne Stewart, Senior Curator with responsibility for the Fine Arts in the National Museums of Northern Ireland as well as to her colleague at the time Dr Vivienne Pollock. I've just learned of Vivienne's death in 2019. I'd also like to record my gratitude to Robin Lewis, Leslie Stevenson and Sam and Joan McCready for giving me access to their collections of Alice's work. Also to Neil Shawcross who passed on to me relevant material from the legacy of Joy Hammerschlag, Heinz's second wife who fought, together with Heinz and Helen Lewis, to keep Alice's memory alive. I think this material included the invaluable tape of Alice's conversations in 1964 with a group of schoolgirls, organised by their teacher, Mercy Hunter.

<sup>3</sup> I think of this essay as a work in progress. If anyone reading it has any relevant information to add I'd be very grateful to receive it.

<sup>4</sup> Ortiz-Carboneres taught Spanish in Warwick university and the interview was part of a project entitled 'Voices of the University - Memories of Warwick, 1965-2015' recorded for the Warwick Digital Collections. Accessible at <https://wdc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/warwick/id/325/>

Class' - as a private venture in 1897. In 1904<sup>5</sup> it was incorporated into the Viennese *Kunstgewerbeschule* (School of applied arts). His work excited the interest of members of the Viennese Secession. When a group led by Gustav Klimt, who had broken away from the Secession in 1905 'to level the boundary between fine and applied arts, acting on their conviction that the arts formed an integrated and unified whole' organised an exhibition in 1908, the *Kunstschau*, it featured a room devoted to the work of children in Cizek's class.<sup>6</sup> This was at the beginning of interest in the creative capacity of children considered independently of their ability to imitate the work of adults. Cizek saw himself, especially with younger children, not so much as a teacher as rather a facilitator, providing the environment, materials, and encouragement to enable children to express themselves.



Cizek with a class of older pupils. Note the little loom. He encouraged the use of a wide variety of different media, including linocut which he may have invented as a cheaper alternative to woodcuts.

The fact of attending Cizek's classes doesn't necessarily suggest a comfortably off, or cultured background. According to Viola:<sup>7</sup>

*'Professor Cizek finds that children from the poorer sections of the city are generally more creative than the children of wealthy parents. A richer environment is as a rule destructive to what is creative in the child. Too many books, pictures, visits to theatres, cinemas etc are bad for the child. The child is so rich in his own imaginative world that he needs little else.'*

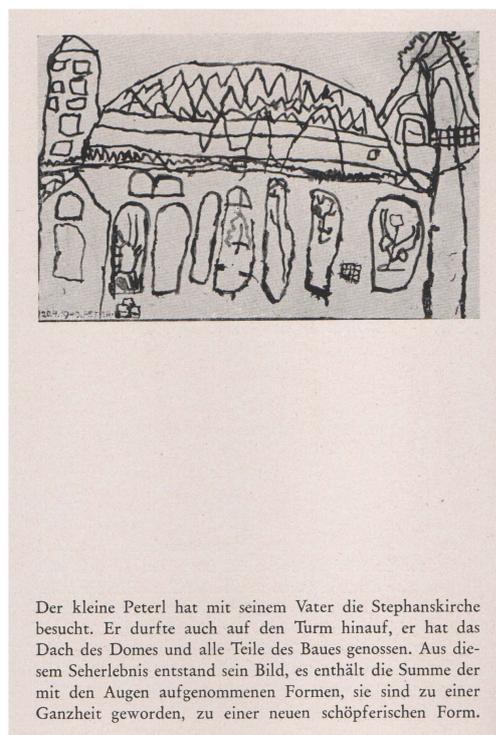
<sup>5</sup> This is following the account by Wilhelm Viola: *Child art and Franz Cizek*, Vienna, Austrian Junior Red Cross, 1936 (in English). According to a brief biography published online by the Austria-Forum 'His school was officially recognized in 1897, incorporated into the School of Applied Arts as an experimental school in 1906 (appointment as professor), and from 1910 as a special course for youth art. Cizek had a strong influence on the development of art education and gained many followers, especially in England and America. In 1914 he founded the association "Art and School" and the magazine of the same name, which was incorporated into the magazine "Die Quelle" in 1922.'

<sup>6</sup> Megan Brandow-Faller: 'An Artist in Every Child—A Child in Every Artist': Artistic Toys and Art for the Child at the *Kunstschau 1908*' *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Fall-Winter 2013), pp. 195-225

<sup>7</sup> The pages in Viola's book are unnumbered.

The fabric designer Patricia Kalmar Wilson was part of Cizek's juvenile class from 1926. She was born in 1916 so she would have been there aged 10 to 14 and we can assume she would have been contemporary with Alice. She says that:

*'There were about 50 students in my class ... Every once in a while something was printed in the paper about Cizek's class, and anyone could apply; hundreds did apply, and it was very difficult to get in ... You had to submit work that he would look through, and, with Cizek's knowledge, he could see if there was potential there or not. If children had already begun to imitate work they had seen, he would not bother with them.'*<sup>8</sup> Viola quotes Cizek as saying *'I reject school children who are admired for their skill. Skill can be a hindrance to the creative in art.'* Alice, apparently, won a prize at the age of nine<sup>9</sup> so we might wonder how she got in!



Two pages from L.W.Rochowanski: *Die Wiener Jugendkunst - Franz Cizek und seine Pflegestätte, Vienna, Wilhelm Frick Verlag, 1946*. The captions read: (Left) *'This leaf indicates the stage of origin. The child, who is perhaps five years old, has a pencil, a chalk or a brush dipped in paint and is surprised to see that this instrument leaves traces on the paper when it is moved back and forth. These traces of movement are recorded with great joy. The hand is now slow and observant, now passionate. These emerging structures are not yet given an expression.'* (Right): *Little Peter visited St. Stephen's Church with his father. He was also allowed to go up the tower, he enjoyed the roof of the cathedral and all parts of the building. His picture emerged from this visual experience, it contains the sum of the forms captured with the eyes, they have become a whole, a new creative form.*

In Belfast, Alice often helped out in the little art gallery run by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts in a basement in Chichester Street. She herself had two solo exhibitions there, in 1958 and 1962. Sometimes children would wander into the

<sup>8</sup> Interview in Peter Smith: 'Franz Cizek, The Patriarch', *Art Education*, March, 1985, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 28-31

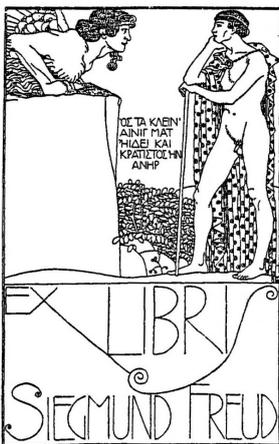
<sup>9</sup> According to a brief account of her life in *Die Uns Verliessen - Osterreichische maler und bildhauer der Emigration und Verfolgung*, catalogue of an exhibition given in the Austrian Gallery of the Upper Belvedere in Vienna, May-July 1980.

gallery off the street and Alice always kept a stock of paper and drawing materials for them to use while they were there. When she launched the New Gallery in 1963 she brought in the painter Neil Shawcross to run a children's art class. Though art class' may not be the right word. Neil himself was deeply influenced in his own work by children's art and like Cizek he saw himself as a facilitator rather than a teacher. In 1968 the New Gallery held an exhibition of children's art under the title 'Child Art'. 'Child Art' is the title of Viola's book.

Alice went on to study at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* (School of applied arts). In an article in the catalogue of her solo show held in Belfast in 1966, Kenneth Jamison<sup>10</sup>, after talking about her period with Cizek, says:

*'The professors encountered later at the Academy and the Kunstgewerbeschule were mainly conservative academics with the important exception of Professor Loeffler<sup>11</sup> who valued highly the creative imagination already emancipated by Cizek. This period of training is summarised by the phrase "Studied Vienna Academy of Arts and Kunstgewerbeschule". Biographical notes have a way of being thus brief and inscrutable and in the next phrase we are told that the artist "now lives and works in Belfast". Between these two dates nothing is recorded, but I know that between Vienna and Belfast lies a period of intense personal experience.'*

This suggests that Jamison knew things from Alice which she didn't want him to pass on. As he also says in the article, she was reticent about her past experience while, he argues, expressing it powerfully in her painting. Cizek himself also taught adults in the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, running a course in the 'General Principles of Form (*Allgemeine Formlehre*)'<sup>12</sup> and he was behind an art movement called 'Viennese kinetism' or 'kineticism' which, in the little I've seen of it, rather resembles Italian Futurism. I shall be returning to his thinking shortly.



Bookplate designed by Alice's teacher Berthold Löffler for a well-known Viennese citizen (misspelling his name)

<sup>10</sup> Jamison had been art critic of the *Belfast Telegraph*. In 1962 he became exhibitions officer for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland when it took over from CEMA. He was director of the ACNI from 1968 to 1991. I worked under him for a while in the 1970s. He died in 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Berthold Löffler, 1874-1960, ceramist (I suppose that's something other than a potter) and graphic designer associated with the Vienna Secession. He was in charge of the 'Fachklasse für Zeichnen und Malen' (Specialized class for drawing and painting) in the *Kunstgewerbeschule* from 1907 to 1935.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Smith: 'Lowenfeld in a Viennese Perspective: Formative Influences for the American Art Educator'. *Studies in Art Education*, Winter, 1989, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter, 1989), p. 110.

## OUT OF VIENNA

Alice and Trudi escaped the Nazi takeover in Austria, Alice in 1938 and, if Ortiz-Carboneres has it right, Trudi in 1939. I have no idea what happened to their parents or any other friends and relatives they may have left behind. As regards Cizek, according to Rolf Laven<sup>13</sup>, he continued his reforming work 'until the corporative state and the Nazi regime brought his work to a complete standstill. He died in 1946 at the age of 81 - blind, isolated and completely destitute.' Another account, however<sup>14</sup>, says 'After his retirement in 1934, he continued to teach at the arts and crafts school as an unpaid assistant teacher until the youth art class was hived off in 1939. Then the facility was installed as the Institute for Art Education of the City of Vienna and from 1941 as a private art school and he was able to continue his work with the help of his assistant Adelheid Schimitzek (the institute existed as such until 1955).'

By 1938 the British government was worried about receiving too great a flow of immigrants. Visas were only given on condition either that the immigrant had a job to go to or a skill in short supply in Britain. According to an account in the catalogue of a solo exhibition she had in the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol in 1962,<sup>15</sup> she 'came to Northern Ireland in the late thirties on a Government permit as designer and art instructor, this having been her first job.' I never heard of her doing any art teaching. According to Mary O'Malley, whom we shall meet again soon, 'She had come to England during the rise of the Nazi movement on the continent, lived with a Quaker family, and in time became a Quaker.'<sup>16</sup> In the 1960s, when I knew her, she was attending Quaker meetings.

At the risk of adding two and two together and making five I wonder if there is a connection here with Francesca Wilson.<sup>17</sup> She was a Quaker who lived in Vienna after the First World War where she knew and greatly admired Cizek. She wrote about him at some length and in 1920 organised an exhibition of the work of his children which, over the next few years, toured throughout Great Britain and Ireland and, later, the USA, attracting a great deal of attention and raising money for child relief. She met Cizek again in 1933. Through the 1930s she was much concerned with the rise of Fascism and opened her door

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<sup>13</sup> Rolf Laven (Pädagogische Hochschule, Vienna): Franz Cizek and the Viennese Juvenile Art, in C.S.G.Aranha. and R.Javelberg (Eds): *Espaços da Mediação. A arte e suas histórias na educação*, Sao Paulo, 2012, p.183. Laven also says 'In Vienna, the city of his work, this pioneer has now been forgotten.' I seem to have found quite a lot of references to him from Viennese sources.

<sup>14</sup> Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage: Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon ab 1815 (2. überarbeitete Auflage - online): *Cizek (Cizek), Franz (1865–1946), Kunstpädagoge und Maler*. By an amusing coincidence this gives a list of artists who worked with Cizek who include Margarethe Berger-Hammerschlag (no relation so far as I know). She ended up in London and is best known for her sketches of teddy boys and girls in the 1950s.

<sup>15</sup> Consulted in the Ulster Museum archive. The Arnolfini Gallery had only opened in 1961 - above a bookshop in Clifton - so this must have been one of their first exhibitions.

<sup>16</sup> Mary O'Malley: *Never shake hands with the Devil*, Elo publications, Dublin, 1990, p.99.

<sup>17</sup> Sian Lliwen Roberts: *Place, life histories and the politics of relief - episodes in the life of Francesca Wilson, humanitarian, educator, activist*, Ph.D. thesis, School of Education, College of Social Sciences, The University of Birmingham, April 2010

to refugees. By 1938 her attention was focussed on Spain but still, Quaker, intense interest in Cizek and accommodating refugees from Fascism all suggest that there may be a lead there that would be worth following.

What Ken Jamison calls the 'brief and inscrutable' biographical notes continue for the period of the war and its aftermath. A document I saw in the Ulster Museum archive - 'Northern Ireland Letter', dated August 1969, referring to her death - has her designing calendars and children's books. The Arnolfini exhibition catalogue says that since the beginning of the war she had been working free lance producing designs for publishers in Britain, Ireland, the USA, Austria, Portugal and Italy. In a discussion with some schoolgirls, which is the best record I know of of her thinking<sup>18</sup> - we'll come back to it shortly - she refers to someone expressing regret that she was no longer painting '*those beautiful light paintings*'. She comments: '*If I did it now I doubt if I could.*' She had concentrated on the beautiful '*because I could. They were light - not light as if it didn't matter. You just do at the moment what you have to do. If I did something different it wouldn't work.*'

In 1947 she married Heinz Hammerschlag. Heinz was a Czech Jew who had come to Belfast in March 1939.



Heinz Hammerschlag with pupils

According to the online Dictionary of Ulster Biography he was the son of a textile manufacturer and was in charge of a '*large textile concern*' in Northern Ireland. I've so far not been able to find much detail about this. He was also a distinguished musician and teacher of music and this is the side of his activity that has attracted most attention. The DUB also has an entry for Zoltan Lewinter-Frankl, a Hungarian Jew who, with his wife Annie, had established a substantial wool and knitwear factory in Vienna in the 1930s. '*Following Germany's 1938 annexation of Austria, the Lewinter-Frankls, as Jews, were forced to flee the country for London. The family's plan had been to travel on to Australia, where they had many contacts in the wool industry. While in London, however, they were assiduously courted by the Northern Irish government, which had passed the New Industries Development Act in 1937 to encourage rural-based industries. The Lewinter-Frankls were invited to Belfast, to be met on the*

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<sup>18</sup> This is now in my possession. I have it both as the original tape recording and as a CD.

dockside by the personal Rolls-Royce of the Minister for Agriculture, Sir Basil Brooke [no relation to me - PB], and given a carefully managed guided tour of the wonders of Northern Ireland. Brooke's strategy worked and Zoltan and Anny agreed to change their plans. They set up Anny Lewinter Ltd in Newtownards, specialising in machine-knitted haute couture garments for export.' I quote that just wondering if something similar might have brought Heinz to Northern Ireland. Lewinter-Frankl was perhaps the first person to realise that there were artists in Northern Ireland who were worth collecting.

Some further interesting details about Heinz and his background are supplied by Helen Lewis, the dancer and choreographer whose book *A Time to Speak* is a powerful account of her life in the concentration camps during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia:

*'I did meet in Belfast the greatest friend of my life: the painter Alice Berger Hammerschlag, who was from Vienna. She was married to Heinz Hammerschlag whose first wife Hilde Inwald was, strangely enough, also from Trutnov [Helen's home town in the Czech Sudetenland, near the border with Germany - PB]. Hilde's younger brother was in the same school class as me. During the war, I had met Hilde by chance in Prague a few days before she was deported on a punishment transport. I was the last person able to tell Heinz of having spoken with her just before the transport. Heinz had escaped earlier. He and Alice met later in Belfast. Again, strangely enough, Alice's elder sister Trudy had been a girlfriend of Harry's at university in Vienna.'*

'Harry' was Helen's husband, also from Trutnov in Czechoslovakia. They had known each other in the mid-1930s but had drifted apart and Helen had married a man who died in the camps. Harry was also involved in textiles - *'when he returned with a doctorate in commercial science - economics now - he was Dr Lewis. The degree enabled him to obtain higher and better employment, and he soon obtained a managerial job in a hand-kerchief factory.'*

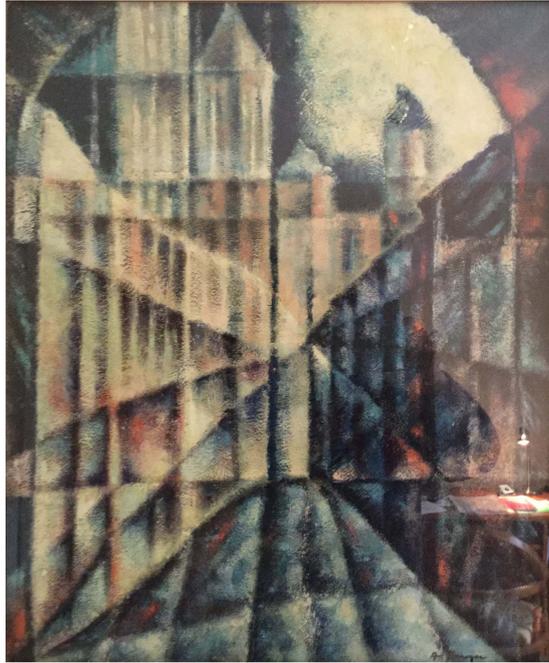
*'Harry had escaped to Britain from Czechoslovakia in 1939. His parents had left first, since they were British citizens. His father had previously emigrated to South Africa and had served in the Boer War, for which he was awarded British citizenship, before returning to Europe. But Harry arrived as a refugee (as British citizenship did not extend to children), joining his parents in Belfast. They had come to the city through some previous connection to the linen industry in the Czech Lands.'*<sup>19</sup>

## BELFAST AND THE LYRIC PLAYERS THEATRE

I have seen nothing of Alice's purely commercial work. The earliest I have seen of what might be called her non-commercial painting dates from 1949-50 and shows the very obvious influence of Lionel Feininger sometimes (in my view) spoiled by the presence of stylised human figures:

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<sup>19</sup> Helen Lewis: 'An Irish Epilogue', *Irish Pages*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Inaugural Issue: Belfast in Europe (Spring, 2002), pp. 25-30



Cathedral, c1950, priv. coll. I don't have details.

In 1956 she had an exhibition in the 'Piccolo Gallery', which was actually a coffee house that accommodated paintings. I would have been eight years old at the time and if I went there with my parents I have no memory of it. I do however have a childhood memory of thinking the Piccolo was the very height of exotic sophistication. A review by Ken Jamison presents the 1956 exhibition as showing work abstracted from a figurative base: *"To abstract" means literally "to take away from" and this is precisely what Mrs Hammerschlag does. She takes away from each experience those elements of colour and texture which seem to her most essential. These abstracted elements she then weaves into a richness of almost prismatic colour and thrilling surface texture.*' This painting, from the McCready collection, might serve as an example:



My childhood lake, 1952, Oil, 22 x 18 "  
Priv coll.

It was about this time that she made contact with the Lyric Players theatre. The brief and inscrutable notes say she designed sets for productions in Belfast and Dublin. Given how little we know about her earlier life it's possible that she had done some work in Dublin but it seems unlikely. According to Mary O'Malley (Never shake hands, p.99) *'First she turned up at the theatre as an audience member. She wrote to me and I finally met her. I got round to the matter of stage design and she seemed interested.'* No mention of any previous experience in the field. Her first set for the theatre was Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie*. In the 1958-9 season. In the 1959-60 season the Lyric Players production of Yeats's play *The Death of Cuchulain*, with a set by Alice was taken to Dublin and I suspect that that, and other Lyric Players performances in Dublin, is what is meant. At any rate, the encounter with the Lyric Players Theatre was an event of huge importance in her life.

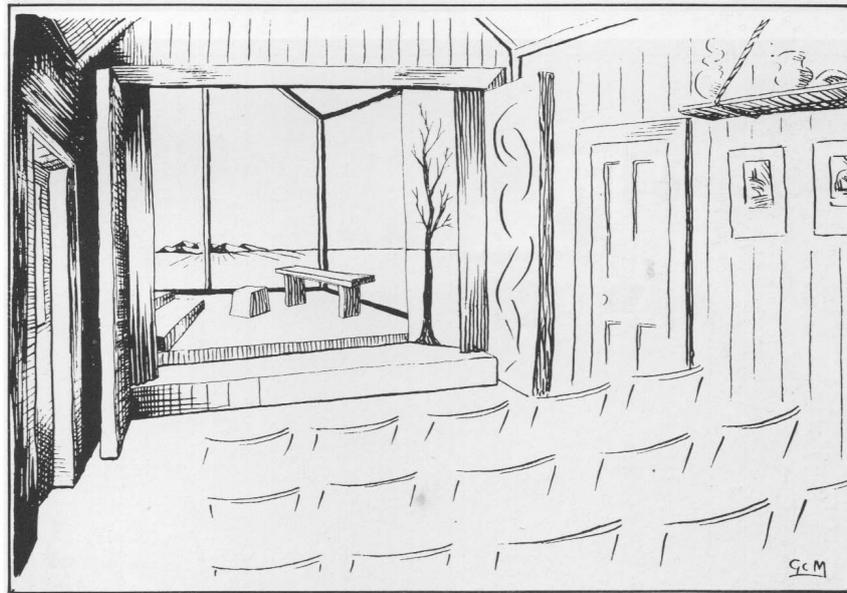
It was an astonishing venture. From 1951 when it started to 1968 when it moved into a large custom built theatre it was based in a private house, initially in the drawing room of Mary and Pearse O'Malley's house on the Lisburn Road, then moving with them in 1952 to Derryvolgie Avenue where a very small theatre space - a stage measuring about 8' by 10' and an auditorium that sat about 40 people - was created. The driving force behind the venture was Mary O'Malley, a real visionary with the determination, indeed ruthlessness, that enables improbable things to happen. Not just the theatre but a music school, a drama school, an art gallery, a shop devoted to 'Irish Handcrafts' and a literary journal (*Threshold*).

Pearse O'Malley was a leading neurologist and psychiatrist - he was immensely helpful to me with certain psycho-physical problems I was having about the age of 20. As his name suggests (evoking the poet, teacher and educational theorist Padraig Pearse, who was one of the leaders of the 1916 rising), the O'Malleys were very much on the nationalist side of Northern Ireland's Irish/British identity division. They therefore got little encouragement from the limited patronage the Unionist government was prepared to give the arts, though I am inclined to see the independence and freedom this gave them as a considerable advantage and the theatre still gathered round it a wide variety of people from different cultural, political and class backgrounds. My father, English in origin, was a senior civil servant in the Northern Ireland government. He acted with the theatre in the 1950s and played an important role in steering it towards the larger theatre through the 1960s. My mother, from a quite solidly Ulster Protestant Unionist background, frequently responded to Mary O'Malley's plea - 'Would you ever do a wee thing for me?' - such as providing meals at short notice for an ad hoc party of about thirty people.

The whole thing was wonderfully informal. You could turn up as part of the audience and find yourself - if someone had fallen ill or some other hitch had occurred - whisked off into the wings, stuck into a costume and pushed out onto the stage. There were often small children draped round the front of the stage if seats couldn't be found for them. Sam McCready describes the experience of the actors:

*'There was a bay window to one side providing wing space, and on the other side was a door leading to the rest of the house. If you exited one side of the stage to come on the other, you had to go downstairs, run through the house and out by the front door, climb the wooden staircase at the back and enter by the bay window - not the most pleasant experience in frosty December in a light tunic*

and tights ... We dressed in one of the back bedrooms and used the family bathroom for makeup, a source of irritation to Pearse who was a cleanliness fanatic, always washing his hands.'<sup>20</sup>



Sketch of the stage in 11, Derryvolgie Avenue and production of Sean O'Casey's *Red roses for me* (1960) with set designed by Alice. Both illustrations taken from Conor O'Malley: *A Poet's theatre*.

In retrospect I think that my childhood with the Lyric Players spoiled me for theatre. After that, other stages always seemed to me to be too big and the actors too far away.

The emphasis - the core of Mary's vision - was on poetic drama, especially Irish poetic drama, and most especially Yeats, with a real effort to present Yeats's plays as he would have wanted them. As Mary herself says (*Never Shake Hands*, p.58): '*I had seen Jack Yeats*

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<sup>20</sup> Sam McCready: *Baptism by fire - My life with Mary O'Malley and the Lyric Players*, Belfast, Lagan Press, 2007, p.46

once assist in a production of *At the Hawk's Well* in the New Theatre Group in Dublin and his explanation of his brother's requirements was to remain indelibly fixed in my mind.'<sup>21</sup> Sam McCready (Baptism, p.70) elaborates: 'Each production she did, not only of Yeats but also of other classic playwrights, was an attempt to get close to the Yeats model, although she would likely deny what I'm saying, insisting, "Sure, for god's sake, I hadn't the room to do anything else."'

Mary O'Malley's son Conor, himself a theatre director, gives a good account of Alice's engagement with the theatre:

*'Expressionistic plays called for an abstract, experimental approach in stage design. It was therefore a natural development to involve the artist in the theatre's work. Many artists worked at the Lyric, over the years, including Basil Blackshaw, Deborah Brown, Marie and Edna Boyd, Terence Flanagan, Rowel Friers, Alice Berger Hammerschlag, Kenneth Jamison, Colin Middleton, George Morrow, Raymond Piper, Neil Shawcross and Clive Wilson. The requirements for the design of a set were outlined:*

*"The designer must first of all know the play intimately, he must then study the director's approach, the technical requirements, the functional aspect of his design in relation to the production, his use of colour to the mood set and the costumes and accessories to be used."*

*'The designer had to adapt his creativity to the needs of the text and in the context of the production as a whole. The artist's creation was incomplete and only when the entire production was ready could the total achievement become apparent.*

*'Fortunately, there are records available which document the theatre's achievement in stage design. A substantial number of slides exist which give a clear picture of the style of production, stage and costume design and use of colour.'<sup>22</sup> The comments of critics on sets are also on record and included in the archives are many tape recordings. The Viennese-born artist Alice Berger Hammerschlag left a permanent written record. She designed sets for most of Yeats's plays and much of her own work on canvas was strongly influenced by her stage work:*

*"I feel engulfed every time by what his particular philosophy says to me. I have to 'paint it out' on canvases, to render essay in paint unlimited by stage considerations - only then do I feel mentally and emotionally released again.*

*'In an interview for radio she described her aesthetic response to Yeats's plays:*

*"The form the set takes comes more from the content of the situation, upward streaming for instance, most of the Yeats plays to me are upward streaming. The colour comes from the reaction of the characters, how they are made and how each character stumbles, gets up again, rises, tries again immediately and fails to the outward eye but probably not to the inward - he reaches probably the highest point he can reach."*

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<sup>21</sup> Jack Yeats himself, best known of course as a painter, was also a playwright, in my view a very remarkable one, a precursor of the Theatre of the Absurd. The only one of his plays produced by the Lyric was *La La Noo*, about a group of women taking refuge in a pub from the rain. The title derives from a discussion between the pub's landlord and a male customer concerning the French word 'nue'.

<sup>22</sup> I am guessing that these would be in the Lyric Players Theatre archive in the National University of Ireland in Galway. I haven't had a chance to consult it.

*'Elsewhere she used the example of The Hour Glass to describe the process of set design in action:*

*'"This play appears to me as a 'brown-blue' one, with subtle green hues; the brown presents itself from the upward-bent struggle within the earth region; blue, for me, is a colour which embodies conscious spiritual values or, differently expressed: knowledge by experience - the Fool in this play and to a lesser degree, the aspirations within each of the other characters. The green-blue colour arises from the desire in each character to attain to a higher level of self-development. Certain shades of toned-down red or orange-red appear in the brown areas, arising from the 'earth-desire-pull' and a doubt in the true abstract values. The form these colours are given is an 'upward streaming, pillar-like one - indicating the search for and the seeking after the truth.'"*

*'Generally, these abstract sets turned out to be simple in conception. Each Yeats play was designed to a narrow colour scheme selected as a result of consultation between the director and the designer and expressive of its particular atmosphere. The King of the Great Clock Tower was in red and black, The Only Jealousy of Emer was in varying shades of green and The Resurrection used austere white and grey panels as a background while the chorus was brilliant in white and gold. The Player Queen was mounted in hot orange, yellow and black and The Dreaming of the Bones in grey, blue and charcoal. The Death of Cuchulain used deep red and purple. Where possible, the design was reduced to a finely painted abstract panel. Lighting too was specially considered and used to emphasise changes of mood and atmosphere. Costume design was approached with much care to ensure that the final shape, texture and colour complemented the play. Simplicity in line and colour was the keynote and the use of heavy non-shiny materials gave an unobtrusive form of draping - substantial, yet flowing, as in the blues, blue greys and black of The King's Threshold. When ornamentation was used it was generally abstract and economical. The tall head-dresses — part masks, used by Cuchulain, Aoife and Conchobhar in the Cuchulain plays, emphasised the long line of the straight costumes with their necklines contrasting with the short leather tunics with gold embellishment of the younger warriors. Hessian, painted and washed, was used to give a sculptured effect for the peasants' apparel, particularly the Fool and Blind Man.'*<sup>23</sup>

## THE PAINTINGS

Conor refers to Alice's feelings about Yeats's play *The Hour Glass*, and her painting *Yeats's Hour Glass* might be a good starting point for a consideration of her work. *The Hour Glass* concerns the fate of a teacher who has persuaded his pupil and the world about him that only what is accessible to the senses can be real. An angel appears and informs him that since he has denied the reality of Heaven and Purgatory the gates of Heaven and Purgatory are closed to him. He replies that since he has also denied the reality of Hell those gates must be closed to him too. The angel replies:

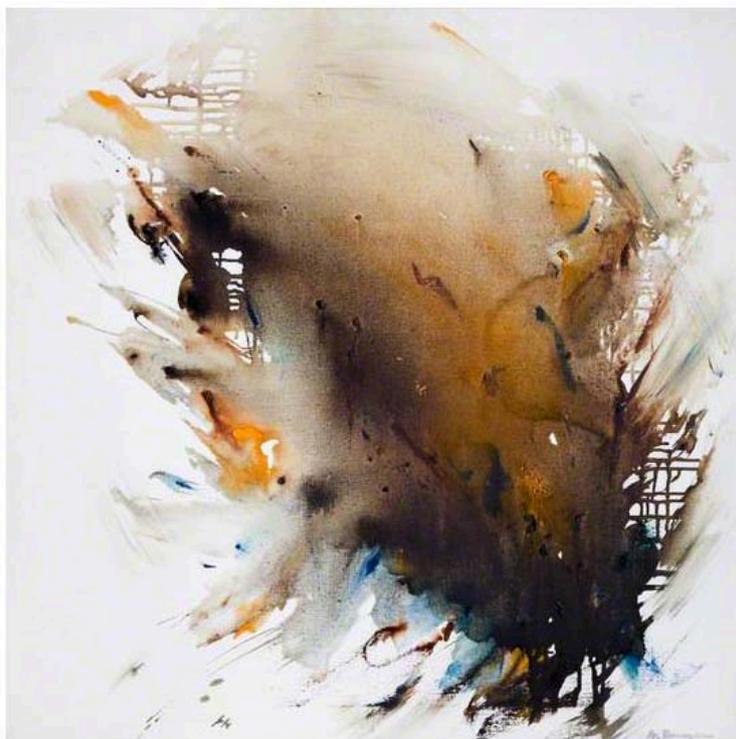
*Hell is the place of those who have denied;  
They find there what they planted and what dug,  
A lake of spaces and a Wood of Nothing*

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<sup>23</sup> Conor O'Malley: *A poets' theatre*, Dublin, Elo Press, 1988, pp.43-5.

*And wander there and drift, and never cease  
Waiting for substance.*

He is told that he can avoid that fate if during the period of the running of sand through an hour glass he can find one person who has resisted his teaching and knows of the existence of the other world. He has by his side a 'fool' who has had experience of the other world, but he refuses to share it.



Yeats's Hour Glass, 1960/61, oil, 91.3 x 91 cm  
Coll. Ulster Museum

In the catalogue of the 1970 retrospective exhibition Alice's painting is dated 1960.<sup>24</sup> 1960 was the year in which she decided to concentrate full time on her painting.<sup>25</sup> I, rightly or wrongly, tend to regard her work of the 1950s as a sort of prehistory and the real story to have taken place through the ten years of the 1960s in three phases marked by three exhibitions in Belfast, the first and second in 1962 and 1966 in the CEMA/ACNI art gallery in Chichester Street, the third in Queen's University in 1968. She died unexpectedly of lung cancer (she was a heavy smoker) in 1969 and a major retrospective was held in the new Arts Council Gallery in Bedford Street - also shown in the Brooke Park Gallery, Londonderry - in 1970. Thereafter her work was badly neglected but there was an exhibition in the Ulster Museum in 2000, to mark the receipt of the Trudi Berger

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<sup>24</sup> In the Ulster Museum's catalogue of holdings it is dated 1961. The Lyric Players production of *The Hour Glass* was in its 1961-2 season.

<sup>25</sup> According to Mercy Hunter in *The Irish Times* article, 2/11/68.

collection.<sup>26</sup> This exhibition was given the title 'Ireland's first Abstract Expressionist.' I would hesitate to call her an 'abstract expressionist' but there may be something in it.<sup>27</sup> According to the Viennese writer and art theorist Leopold Rochowanski, Cizek described his teaching method for adults as having three phases:

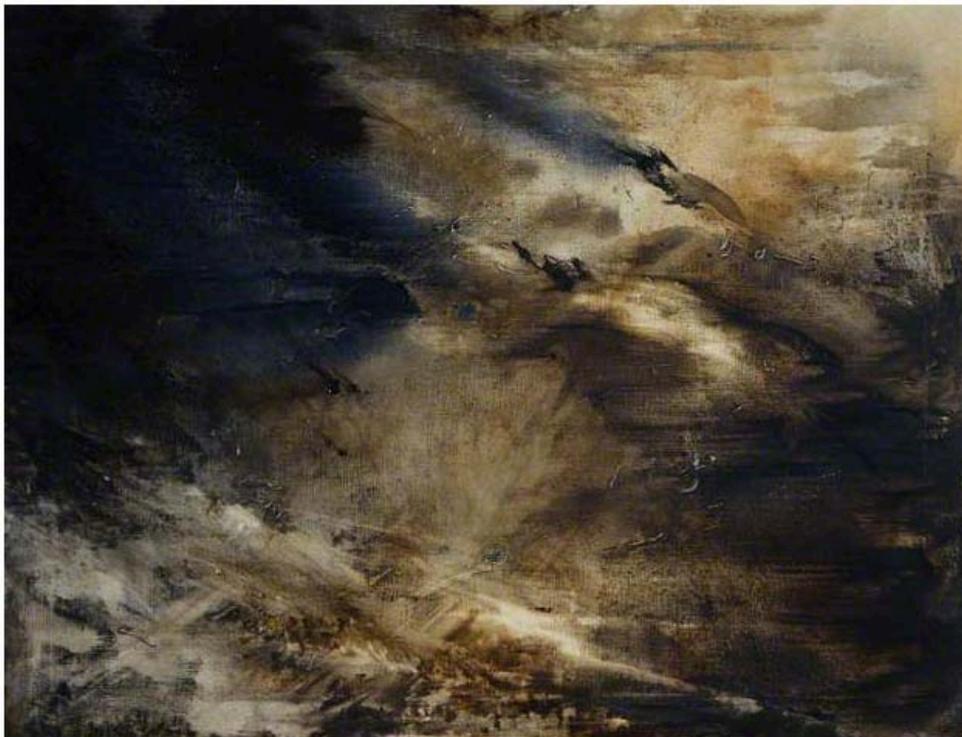
*The awakening of emotions (Expressionism)*

*The awakening of the brain (Cubism)*

*The awakening of the eyes (Kinetism)*

*New feeling, new thinking, new vision*<sup>28</sup>

If we forget about 'cubes' and take the word 'Cubism' as referring to a research into clearly defined form (following the Impressionist/Neo-Impressionist research into colour) it is a curiously apt description of the three phases Alice passed through in the 1960s.



Merging elements, 1961, oil, 71.1 x 91.4 cm  
Coll. Ulster Museum

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<sup>26</sup> There was at the same time a small exhibition in the Lyric Players Theatre accompanying a production of Helen Lewis's ballet *A Time to remember* with music by Raymond Warren. The Ulster Museum archive refers to a 'programme of music, poetry and dance' dedicated to Alice's memory in 1970 under the title *There was a time*, organised by Raymond Warren and Helen Lewis. It says that Alice had suggested that Helen should do a ballet based on that passage in Ecclesiastes. This was well before Helen's book *A Time to speak*, first published in 1992.

<sup>27</sup> In her discussion with schoolgirls in 1964 she was asked who was her favourite contemporary artist and she replied 'Rothko'. Rothko had just had his first solo exhibition in London earlier in the year.

<sup>28</sup> I have this from a brief article on Cizek's 'kinetism' on the website of the designer Via Estela Kali - <https://viaestela.com/2018/01/18/everything-is-moving-capturing-movement-with-kinetism-in-art/> I haven't been able to find another source but my guess is it that it comes from Rochowanski's book *Der Formwille der Zeit in der angewandten Kunst. Mit 93 Abbildungen von Arbeiten der Wiener Kunstgewerbeschule, Abteilung des Regierungsrates Professor Franz Cizek*, Wien, Burgverlag 1922.



Welding in, 1964, oil, 55 x 75 cm  
Priv. coll.



Coiled light structure, 1968, mixed media, 32 x 24"  
Priv.coll

Whether or not the first phase was actually influenced by American Abstract Expressionism - other than through a general feeling that such things were possible - it is certainly, like the rest of her work in the 1960s, non-representational and in its first phase it could be called 'Expressionist' if by that is meant based on a free flowing (ie not obviously structured) expression of feeling.

What sort of feeling? Conor O'Malley's account of her approach to set design gives us some idea. We also get some idea from the discussion with school girls mentioned earlier. This was organised by their teacher, Mercy Hunter, herself an artist though very different from Alice. Mercy, wife of the painter and sculptor George McCann ('Maguire' in Louis MacNeice's poem *Autumn Sequel*) tells us on the tape that in an exam set for Easter 1964 she had asked her pupils who was their favourite painter and several had replied Alice Berger Hammerschlag. One of them had said she would really like to meet Alice so Mercy had arranged it. In an article published in 1969, after Alice's death, Mercy wrote:

*'In spite of her academic upbringing, which she always claimed was a most useful training, her work from 1947 onward became increasingly abstract, and its symbolic content was much influenced by her knowledge of psychology and by her appreciation of Eastern philosophy.*

*'By 1962 she had perfected a fluid and tactile style, full of personal meaning. Of this period I remember a very moving picture by her called Calvary Old and New. It is now in the collection of the Ulster Museum Gallery. This, with its three cross-like shapes symbolised suffering and despair, and yet contained a soaring quality which resolved into the brilliant lighting at the top of the picture, to give the idea of resurrection and hope.'*



Calvary Old and New, 1961, oil, 101.5 x 127 cm  
Coll: Ulster Museum

*'By 1966 she had gradually turned away from this fluid technique, and her work resolved into solid and significant shapes, shapes significant in themselves but also depending on colour for their interpretation: for colour was always vitally important to her on a mystical plane - reds and the earth colours signified to her life and energy; greens had a suggestion of growth; blues fulfilled the abstract values of life in the very best and aspiring sense; dull browns and blacks were the negation of life.'*<sup>29</sup>

This interest in colour - not so much colour symbolism as the emotional experience of colour - comes up in the discussion with Mercy's pupils. Alice talks about red and orange as colours that pull you up, ambition that can be good (bright red) or bad (dull red), the force that drives people on. Blue she refers to as *'Spiritual - a word I have to use for want of a better one.'* At the beginning of the discussion she toys with the words 'psychology' and 'spiritual', finding them unsatisfactory, preferring 'philosophy' but still not happy with it. Asked by one of the girls what has influenced her in Yeats's poetry she replies *'His philosophy - I don't share it, but it's immensely fascinating ...'* The message, she says, is *'Look at yourself, you're just the same, do something about it.'* The essential theme she finds in Yeats is that things just repeat themselves. We think every war is going to be the last war, is going to resolve something, but they just go on. *'An effort is always needed.'* We're surrounded by people but to make a unity *'You have to work ... need a philosophy. It's a huge word which I don't like really.'* Talking about her painting *Calvary* she says that Calvary isn't an event that happened once a couple of thousand years ago, it is always with us. This is the *'essence of learning in life ... we don't learn from history ... but we could.'*

#### EXCURSUS ON THE POSSIBLE INFLUENCE OF GURDJIEFF AND OUSPENSKY

I have picked these passages out because they relate to my own notion of what she was trying to do. She says in the discussion that she read a lot of philosophy and Heinz, as we have seen, said she had many books on the subject. Since I have no means of knowing much about this I have to go on what has come my way, without being absolutely sure of how important it was to her. But it was through Alice that I was introduced to the school, or schools, of P.D.Ouspensky and G.I.Gurdjieff, beginning with Ouspensky's book *The Psychology of man's possible evolution*. As I remember it, she initially lent this to Neil Shawcross but Neil was never much of a one for that sort of thing and passed it on to me. It made a big impression on me and had me wanting to know more. I subsequently read Ouspensky's account of his time with Gurdjieff - *In search of the miraculous* - and Fritz Peters' *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* which, together with its sequel *Gurdjieff remembered*, are among my all-time favourite books. Alice herself lent me her copy of the first volume of Maurice Nicoll's *Psychological commentaries on the teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*. She died before I could return it and I still have it in my possession.

At the risk of attaching too much importance to something that might only have been marginal to Alice (but I don't think it was) I will say a few words about Gurdjieff and Ouspensky.

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<sup>29</sup> *Outlines*, October 1969, reproduced in the catalogue of the 1970 retrospective.

Peter Demianovich Ouspensky (1878 - 1947) already had a reputation in Russian circles interested in the interface between science and religion prior to his meeting Gurdjieff. In 1912 he had published his book *Tertium Organum*. This argued for consciousness of a 'fourth dimension' which (to quote the account by his biographer J.H.Reyner) '*must not be considered as merely an additional aspect of conventional space. It should be regarded as applying to a realm which embraces the phenomenal world but which cannot be comprehended by the logic of the senses.*'<sup>30</sup> *Tertium Organum* had a considerable influence in Russian 'avant garde' circles. Malevich and his friend, the composer and art theorist Mikhail Matyushin, both conceived of their art as a means of gaining consciousness of Ouspensky's fourth dimension.<sup>31</sup>

After some time wandering in search of a philosophy that would make sense of the world (a search that produced his major study, more or less independent of Gurdjieff, *A new model of the Universe*) Ouspensky met Gurdjieff in 1915 and felt that he had at last come into contact with a solid and reliable body of knowledge. Gurdjieff (1872? - 1949), with an Armenian mother and a Greek father, came from a part of the world where Greek, Turkish, Armenian, Georgian, Persian cultures all interacted with each other. He recorded his own wanderings through this world and further east in not always quite believable form in his book *Meetings with remarkable men*. A somewhat toned down version is given in the film of that name by my near namesake Peter Brook. Ouspensky was not the only person with an already well established reputation to be won over by Gurdjieff. There was Alfred Richard Orage, founder editor of the influential early twentieth century journal *The New Age*; Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, founder editors of the US based 'avant-garde' *Little Review*, the first to publish extracts from James Joyce's *Ulysses*; Maurice Nicoll had been a pupil of Carl Jung and a pioneer in the treatment of shell shock; and there was the already well established Russian or Ukrainian composer, Thomas de Hartmann, friend and ally of Kandinsky. De Hartmann's music has been largely responsible for keeping my own interest in Gurdjieff alive.

Ouspensky however separated from Gurdjieff in 1924 believing that, although his own teaching was still based on what he had learned from Gurdjieff, Gurdjieff himself had gone wrong. The two schools - Ouspensky and Gurdjieff - continued with very little mutual contact for the next twenty years. It was only towards the end of his own life that Ouspensky allowed *In search of the miraculous* to be published.

Put very crudely the difference between them is that while Ouspensky's teaching was highly systematic and intellectually interesting, Gurdjieff's teaching was wantonly chaotic. Ouspensky only took pupils whom he judged capable of advancing to higher states of consciousness (a concept that has nothing to do with drugs!); Gurdjieff was willing to take anyone, regarding, or pretending to regard, all Western Europeans or Americans as being on much the same generally low level of potential for development. Both had the same explicit intention, and here we can evoke what Alice had to say about Yeats ('*Look at*

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<sup>30</sup> J.H.Reyner: *Ouspensky - the unsung genius*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1981, p.20.

<sup>31</sup> I discuss this in my essay on Malevich - <http://www.peterbrooke.org.uk/a%26r/othertxts/malevich> The classic study is Linda Dalrymple Henderson: *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983. A revised edition was published by the MIT Press in 2018.

*yourself, you're just the same, do something about it*'). They both taught that modern humanity was in a state that could be likened to sleep, operating like automatons on the basis of well-ingrained habits of mind that condemned them (condemned *us*) to constantly repeat the same patterns of behaviour. Hence for example the constant recurrence of wars. Both taught a course of 'work' that aimed to break these habits. In the case of Ouspensky this was accompanied by an intellectual argument, originally taught by Gurdjieff, aimed at understanding the structure of the mind/body relationship, seen in terms of four 'centres' - intellectual, emotional, moving, instinctual.

This is largely the subject of Ouspensky's *Psychology of man's possible evolution* and Nicoll's *Psychological commentaries*. Gurdjieff, however, had come to see Ouspensky's very methodical presentation as a trap - mastery of the ideas becoming just another complacency-inducing habit. His own method was a matter of inducing experiences that would prevent the person he was helping from settling into any comfortable habit of mind. He had resolved '*no matter whom the person I met for business or for any other reason, whether I had known them for a long time or not, no matter what their social level, immediately to identify the "most sensitive of the corns on their feet" and to stamp on it without a moment's hesitation.*'<sup>32</sup> It is Gurdjieff's erratic or disconcerting behaviour that makes Peters's books, seen from the viewpoint of a child and then adolescent who just happened to be there with no desire to attain higher levels of being, much more entertaining than anything that could be produced in the circle of Ouspensky.

Gurdjieff did teach a highly structured system of dance (he described himself on occasion as a 'dancing master') - music written in collaboration with de Hartmann. But though difficult it was also extremely impersonal. The dancers all move with clockwork precision - it rather puts me in mind of a Busby Berkeley musical except that everything is slow and no-one is smiling. Again we might be reminded of Yeats, who wanted his actors to be wholly impersonal, with the Japanese Noh theatre as an ideal to be aimed for. The Lyric probably went further than most in attempting this but it was a little difficult in a circle in which everyone knew everyone else.

The Gurdjieff/Ouspensky teaching goes under the broad common title of The Fourth Way. The other ways are the way of the fakir (the ascetic way), the way of the monk and the way of the yogi. These all imply a certain separation from the world. The Fourth Way is the 'way of the householder' and entails an engagement with the world. But the purpose - put in its broadest terms the realisation of higher states of being, greater consciousness of what lies beyond the horizon of the senses - is the same as the other ways. Thus one of Gurdjieff's pupils, J.G.Bennett, developed a lively interest in Sufism and, of particular interest to me, Ouspensky's *Psychology of Man's possible evolution* refers to the classic of Orthodox Christian monastic literature, the *Philokalia*. Ouspensky's secretary, Evgnia Kadloubovsky and another of his followers, G.E.H. Palmer launched the process of translating the *Philokalia* into English, publishing a first volume - *Writings from the Philokalia on the prayer of the heart* (Faber and Faber) in 1951. What I would give to know if Alice possessed a copy!

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<sup>32</sup> G.Gurdjieff: *La vie n'est réelle que lorsque "je suis"*, Eds du rocher, 1983. This is my translation from the French though I think the French is a translation of an English version published in 1975.

## OUSPENSKY AND CIZEK

Both the Ouspensky and the Nicoll books I had from Alice draw a distinction between what is called 'essence' and what is called 'personality.' To quote Nicoll:

*'As was said, a man is born as essence and this constitutes his real part, the part from which he can really grow and develop. But this part in him can only grow in a very small way. It has not the strength to grow by itself any further after, say, the age of three or four or five. Let us call this the first stage of a man ... Now in order for it to grow further something must happen. Something must form itself round essence and this is called personality. Essence must become surrounded by something that is really foreign to itself, acquired from life, which enters through the senses. A little child must cease to be itself and become something different from itself. As you were told, the centre of gravity of itself begins to pass from essence into personality. It learns all sorts of things, it imitates all sorts of things, and so on. This formation of personality around essence which is necessary for the development of essence can be called the second stage of man ... A man finds himself in a good position, able to deal with life through the formation of a rich personality in him. And if he is satisfied, he is, for all life purposes, adequate. But this work, this teaching, is about a further stage of man, and this stage I will call the third stage ... This third stage is all concerned with a possible further development of essence and that is why so many apparently paradoxical or at least strange things are said in the Gospels - such as are contained in the Sermon on the Mount - about man ... Let us suppose that personality is in a particular person very richly developed. He is, then, a rich man, in the sense of the Gospels. He knows about everything, he is an important person, and so on. What is poor in him? What is poor in him is his essence. He is not yet a real man ... He has got the finest house or jewels, he has got a well-known name, he has in some way got the better of everybody else, and yet he feels empty. Such a man is approaching the third possible stage of development. He has now reached a position in which his essence - namely, his real part - can grow, and thus replace his feeling of emptiness by a feeling of meaning. But in order to bring about in man this further development he must begin, as it were, to sacrifice his personality and to go in a sense in the opposite direction to that in which he has gone up to now. In other words, a kind of reversal must take place in him which is well-expressed in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and unless we understand that this third stage is possible and leads to a man's real development we will never understand what the Gospels are speaking about or what this system is speaking about.'*<sup>33</sup>

The job is to establish the domination of essence over personality. And here Cizek might come back into the picture.

According to Ruth Kalmar Wilson Cizek ran two classes for children, one for younger children, 'from three and a half to seven years, I would say. Our group was from eight to fourteen.' According to Viola:

*'Prof. Cizek gives his greatest love to the three to seven year-olds. In a great capital like Vienna, the eight or nine year-old child is according to Cizek influenced by a thousand other things. In the very little ones, the really childlike, Cizek finds a wonderful world of pure creativeness uninfluenced by adults, free from all imitation and lies.'*

He continues:

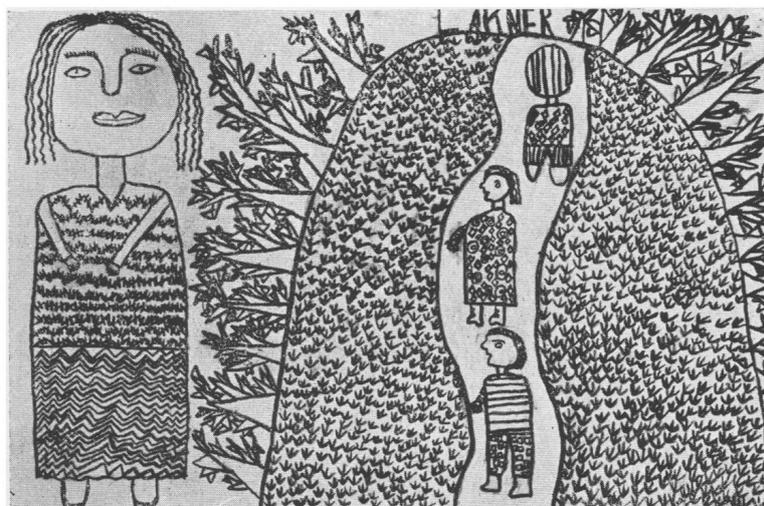
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<sup>33</sup> Maurice Nicoll: *Psychological commentaries on the teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, London, Vincent Stuart, 1957, pp.3-4.

*'Cizek goes so far as to say he regards perspective in the work of a small child as an unfailing sign of the lack of a gift for drawing. Why does the work of primitives appear to us so strong, despite the lack of perspective? Why do the works of the ancient Egyptians appear to us so strong? Because they are created according to the same laws as children's drawings ...'*

Quoting Cizek directly:

*'"Children's work contains in itself eternal laws of form. We have no art that is so direct as that of children. Even the old Egyptians are not stronger. In Egypt no one was allowed to break the laws of art. Everything there was compulsory. But with children art comes naturally. A curse of our intellectual school is the usual loss of this art in adolescence ... Man is an image of God, only when he continues the creative work of God; then and only then, and not when he copies or imitates with inadequate media, because in any case he cannot do it as well as nature can ...'*



Two More illustrations from Rochowanski's *Jugendkunst*, both p.63.

Rochowanski comments: *'On the top: a charcoal drawing. The tree with the birds and their nests grew completely out of the inner imagination. Below: a beautiful example of how children can compose a picture according to their own laws, unhindered by proportion and perspective.'*

It seems to me that that comes close to the Ouspensky/Nicoll view that the very small child is possessed of a 'being' or 'essence' which is capable of development until it is overtaken by the imitative 'personality'. The job of the artist, then, following the direction given by Cizek or by Ouspensky/Nicoll, would be, overcoming the 'buffers' (Nicoll's word) created by the personality, to restore contact with this essence - Cizek's 'eternal laws' inscribed in human nature. Again quoting Cizek: *'With children of ten years of age who come to me from schools, where they have already been trained to copy, one cannot do other than prevent that this condition becomes still worse. One can try to lead some of the children back to themselves. That is one of the foundations of my "method"; to bring the child always back to himself.'* And I think this is one way of understanding what Alice was trying to do - an exploration of the real being - the essence - of an individual mind as a means of exploring universal mind (Cizek's 'eternal laws'). In this respect I would see the first expressionist' phase as a sort of chaos of embryonic forms, a cosmic soup (she was interested in the shapes that could be seen through a microscope) pulsating with forces ready to give rise to the more well-defined forms of her second phase, interacting with each other, rising, falling, finally issuing, in what turned out to be her last phase, in radiant, spiralling Light<sup>34</sup>.



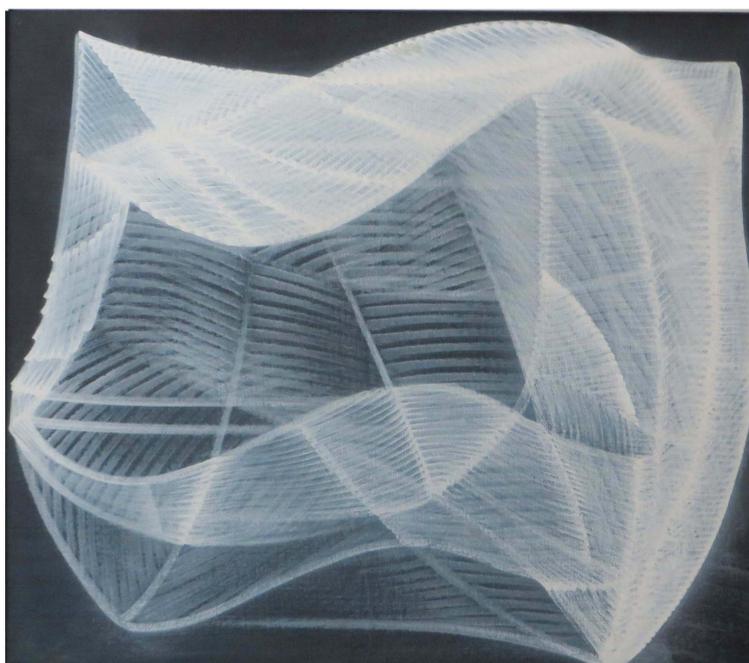
Aquatic Forms, 1960, c24 x 34 cm  
Priv coll

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<sup>34</sup> With regard to this last phase I would love to be able to persuade myself that Alice was aware of 'string theory' which was then, in the late 1960s, in its infancy. It is very unlikely, but she did, I believe, have a lively interest in developments in physics and biology. Yet another reason for regretting the lack of a record of the contents of her library.



Point of Release 2, 1966, 100.8 x 121.2  
Priv coll



Painting, c1968. Priv. coll. I don't have the details.

## THE NEW GALLERY

It must be stressed however that Alice was anything but dogmatic in her approach to art. I remember her telling me that one should be able to recognise real value where it could be

found even in work one didn't like. Being myself of a rather dogmatic disposition I've always had some difficulty with this, one reason why I could never have become an art critic, or an arts administrator. Or run an art gallery.

The New Gallery opened in April 1963 and through the rest of the year plunged Belfast - still somewhat reticent with regard to 'modern art' - into the deep end with exhibitions by:

### Michael Michaelides



Michael Michaelides: Il Cairo, 1961, oil on canvas, 84 x 84 cm

### Joseph Duncan



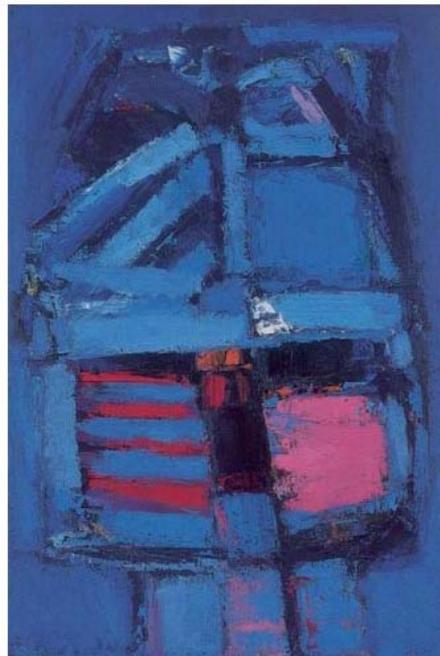
Joseph Duncan: Composition, c1960, oil, 54 x 65 cm

## Noel Sheridan



Noel Sheridan: Green composition, 1959, oil on masonite, 42 by 24cm  
Priv. coll.

## Klaus Friedeberger



Klaus Friedeberger: Child with toy helmet ii, oil on canvas, 30 x 20"  
Priv. coll.

## Gillian Ayres



Gillian Ayres: Brood, 1962, oil and ripolin on canvas, 214 x 315 cm  
Priv. coll.

All these artists, with the exception of Noel Sheridan, were associated with Annely Juda's Molton Gallery, opened in 1960, and, in the case of Klaus Friedeberger, her Hamilton Gallery, opened in 1963. Noel Sheridan was associated with the longer established Dawson Gallery in Dublin. But the New Gallery also showed a good many artists in a wide variety of styles from Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, and it had what I would regard as the extraordinary privilege of hosting the first solo exhibition of the Tory Island painter, James Dixon. And in 1968 it showed what must have been one of the first group exhibitions of the Tory island painters. In this context we have, in the Ulster Museum archive, an interesting note from Alice to Jim Ede of Kettles Yard in Cambridge relating to the St Ives painter Alfred Wallis:

*'I find your remarks comparing Dixon and Wallis most interesting; while I agree that Dixon is "making paintings". not only "picture making", his too stem from living experience - I feel it is essential to live intensely to make a creative talent become art and certainly not necessarily be representational - but to me the best in pure abstract art stems from what the painter concerned has done or is doing with his life - I do NOT mean if he is "good" or "bad" but if he is living consciously and fully; does this make sense?'*

It would be interesting to have Ede's idea of the exchange. Was he criticising abstract art? He was an admirer of Ben Nicholson. But at any rate Alice's insistence on 'living consciously' is very much in line with my argument on Ouspensky and Gurdjieff.

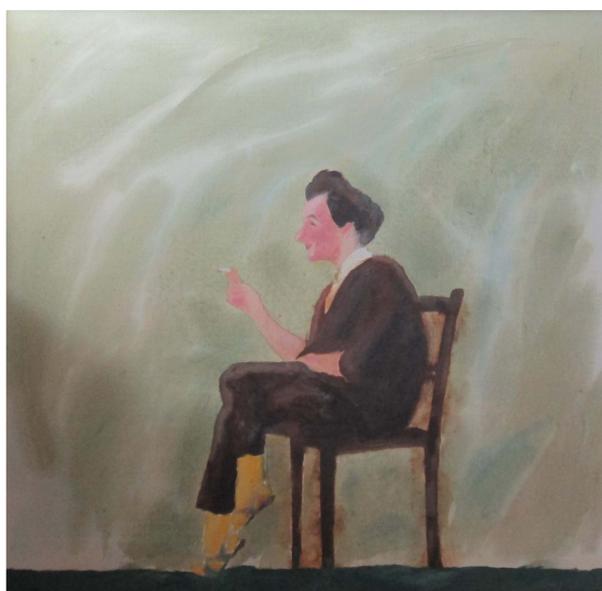


James Dixon: The First Fleetwood Trawler that Ever Fish Back of Tory Island, 1968,  
55 x 75cm, Priv. coll.

Neil Shawcross, whom I've already mentioned for his children's art 'class' and who is now one of the most well respected painters in Ireland, gives some idea of the openness of Alice's approach in an article on the gallery published in 1979:

*'Perhaps I may be allowed a personal note. My own first one-man exhibition took place in 1965 here - to extremely adverse reviews. I quote two sentences to give their flavour: "This work is an insult to the public" and "If Shawcross can draw we will give him the benefit of the doubt." Alice's reaction was characteristic; she immediately offered me another exhibition.'*<sup>35</sup>

Since I can't find any photos of the quite wonderful paintings Neil was doing at that time (my favourite period of his work if my memory doesn't deceive me) this may be a good space to insert his portrait of Alice:



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<sup>35</sup> Neil Shawcross: 'New Gallery, 1963-1969' in *A Needle's eye - the Lyric Players Theatre, Belfast 1979*, published by the theatre to mark the tenth anniversary of its installation in Ridgeway Street.

And here perhaps I may be allowed a personal note of my own. In 1964 I attended a Summer School in France, the Collège Cévenol, where I met the painter Walter Firpo. It was the beginning of my lifelong engagement with the painting and thinking of Albert Gleizes which has such a large part to play on other parts of this website. Alice was about the only person I knew who thought this was interesting. When I suggested that she might put on an exhibition of Firpo's work she agreed immediately and in fact she got it all set up. But this all happened in 1968-9. In October 1968, the Lyric Players had moved to their new new much larger theatre in Ridgeway Street, Stranmillis, overlooking the river. This had necessarily created financial problems. Traditionally, under the management of Mary O'Malley, the theatre had operated on the basis of the Napoleonic principle - *'On s'engage et puis ... on voit'* but now a Board of Trustees had been established to manage its affairs. The Board decided that the wellbeing of the main enterprise (the theatre) required the closure of the premises on Grosvenor Road - the shop specialising in Irish Handcrafts and the gallery. The site has long since disappeared - together with that other, rather different, centre of my activity, 10 Athol Street - into the maw of McCausland's Car Hire business. The Grosvenor Road premises were closed in June 1969 and Alice died in July. To quote Mary O'Malley (Never Shake Hands, pp.237-8): *'It was sad that these events should have clouded Alice's final months. I was profoundly upset by her sudden death. Although I visited her in hospital, I could not accept the fact that this was a terminal illness. Working with Alice had always been a joy although occasionally we did, of course, have our artistic disagreements, but differences were short-lived. Alice had painted the sets for the final performances in Derryvolgie. Many months after her death, I looked at the slides made at this time. The background was dark and ominous and full of foreboding. Granted, the plays, Oedipus at Colonus, Purgatory, Calvary and Resurrection dealt with death, but I hadn't noticed the relevance of her contribution until I saw the slides.'*

The arrangements Alice had made for forthcoming exhibitions were taken over by the Arts Council and the Firpo exhibition was due to be shown as part of the annual festival at Queen's University. In the event, however, the venue originally planned for the exhibition - which I had described to Firpo and which he found suitable - was changed to what was effectively the foyer of one of the University schools and on the basis of my description (I was trying to present it in the most favourable light) Firpo withdrew.

## CONCLUSION

I am left with the job of explaining why, after her death, she has been so badly neglected. The exhibition in 2000 seems (from the correspondence with Joy Hammerschlag I have in my possession) to have been an act of contrition for the casual way in which the donation from the Trudi Berger collection had been received. In my Google searches preparing for this article I learned that the highest recorded price for her work at auction has been US \$300.

In his essay for the 1966 Arts Council exhibition, Ken Jamison had written:

*'When she left Vienna her work, though not strictly representational, was very different from its present abstract aspect, and one might have supposed that the country of her adoption might have exerted some influence upon her. This does not seem to have been the case: her art still retains a mid-European reference and immediate environmental influences are minimal. This, coupled with the evident intensity of feeling in her works leads one to suspect that though she talks little of past experiences, it is of them that she speaks constantly in her painting, and by them that she has come to assess and assimilate new experiences and new relationships with which her art is equally concerned.'*

There are of course Irish artists who are not particularly concerned with Irishry, and Alice's engagement with the work of W.B. Yeats could be seen as an influence exerted by the country of her adoption. Nonetheless I think that Ken was right in principle and that Alice had concerns that were not those of the world about her, even of the world to which she gave space in the New Gallery. She said that though she did not share Yeats's philosophy she found it fascinating. Yeats had declared that in principle his poetry was a search for religious truth.<sup>36</sup> He also said it was a search that was being constantly deflected by his love of poetic imagery. That of course is the theme of his great poem *The Circus animals' desertion*. I think Alice's painting too was an experimental means of searching for religious truth - not in any form of external teaching whether from any of the major religions or from a school such as that of Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, Rudolf Steiner etc (however useful she may have found such things) but from the stuff of her own experience. Ken Jamison, whose short essay is really very perceptive, talks of *'emotion recollected in tranquillity.'* Maurice Nicoll, analysing the different centres of consciousness, talks of the intellectual part of the emotional centre as the mainspring of artistic activity.

Unlike Yeats, however, I don't think she was deflected. There was nothing in her work in the 1960s other than the religious quest which I can only define in the vaguest terms as the desire not just to find a visual expression of the most deeply felt human experience but to make sense of it, to place it in relation to the overall scheme of things - the totality that transcends human experience.

Her art, then, was a means not an end. There was a sense in which she wasn't an 'artist'. And I think this was felt by some of her contemporaries. As the wife of a successful businessman, she did not need to make a living from her art and sometimes she gave the impression that she didn't want to ask payment for her work - that she would rather have given the paintings to anyone she thought capable of profiting from them. My mother for example who said she didn't dare praise any of her paintings since Alice would immediately want to give it to her. It wasn't that my mother wouldn't want it but, as Alice would feel guilty asking for payment, my mother would feel guilty taking it without payment. I, of course, wish she had been less scrupulous! I remember some of her fellow painters complaining that with the prices she charged she was undercutting the market. I also remember the painter Brian Ferran (who was shown in the New Gallery and who replaced Ken Jamison as head of the Arts Council) complaining that Alice used very cheap materials and her paintings wouldn't last. Some time, I think in the 1980s, I visited Anneli

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<sup>36</sup> e.g. W.B. Yeats: *Autobiographies*, Macmillan papermac 1980 ed, pp.115-6 and pp.253-4. Perhaps not the best examples of his saying it but they will have to do for the moment.

Juda to talk about Alice. She expressed great admiration for her and then complained that she had wasted her career by staying in a little backwater like Belfast (not perhaps her exact words). That annoyed me, knowing how much she had loved the immediate circle she had found in Belfast especially the theatre. But from the point of view of an artistic career Annely Juda was probably right. I was however left wondering why Juda herself had never taken her up. The point really is that the last person who would have been worried about not getting the recognition she deserved would have been Alice. She, I'm sure, would have liked to think her paintings could help people who wanted to engage in a religious search similar to her own. That would have been the only thing that mattered to her and in that respect big prices and a good reputation in the art world wouldn't have been of much use.

Perhaps somewhat self-indulgently I finish with a poem I wrote at the time of her death.

Not content with the  
steel grey line of the sea  
we search on land  
colours, where they occur,  
stooping to collect  
shells and stone hands  
turning a sea deformity  
(beams divine). She  
was a wheelwright,  
building her sepias  
and ochres into a  
blue - to return