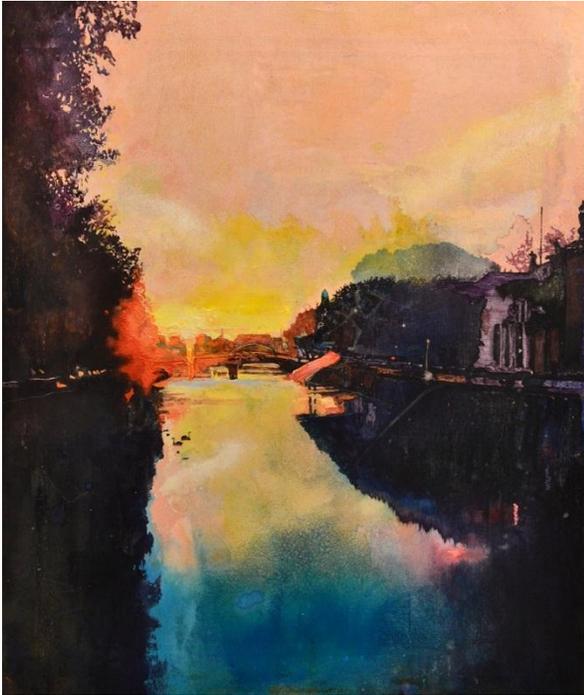


Jumping for Joyce

Contemporary painters revel in the world of James Joyce

3 July – 25 September 2013

Francis Kyle Gallery

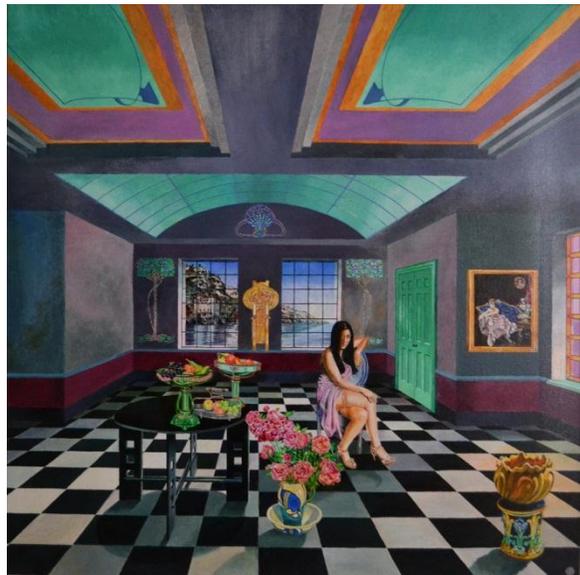


1922, opening year of the roaring 'twenties, was also year one of modernism. There is Josephine Baker and Jay Gatsby, fast cars, fast music and competitive gratification whatever the cost. But there is also Picasso and Kandinsky, Schoenberg and Stravinsky, Kafka, Eliot and Joyce. In the field of the arts much in modernism, driven by an urge to replace traditional values with experiments in style in every direction, coupled with a preoccupation with time and consciousness, has a gloomy, often apocalyptic cast. Not so James Joyce, whose experiments in 'modernism', pursued on a solitary basis rather than as part of a group effort, have a far more positive character. It is this joyful side to Joyce's creativity, the ambition to chronicle comprehensively but sympathetically nothing less than the human condition, which has appealed to the twenty contemporary painters commissioned by Francis Kyle Gallery in 2011 to Jump for Joyce – to share and revel in his world and give this expression however they saw fit.

'All autobiography is fiction,' wrote Bernard Malamud. There is little question that in Joyce all fiction is autobiographic, starting from the writer's early experiences in Dublin experiences which would be broadened and enriched in his European years in, successively, Trieste (1904-13), Zurich (1914-

18) and Paris (1919-38). Only hinted at in the romanticism of his early poetry (Chamber Music), taken further in Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man, in some ways a parody of the traditional coming of age novel, brought then to fullest bloom in the great experiment that is Ulysses and taken to an extreme in the dense artistry of Finnegans Wake, collectively Joyce's writings introduce (in Edmund Wilson's words) 'a new phase of human consciousness' in fiction.

Early in his Trieste years Joyce took an enthusiastic interest in the new medium of film, when he set up Dublin's first cinematograph for a consortium of Italian businessmen. It seems likely that this concentrated exposure to film played a role in shaping his approach to narrative in fiction: multiple time-frames, montage, constant shifts in perspective as an essentially slender narrative thread unfurls, broken by seismic changes in style fitting various situations and circumstances, the whole held precariously together by an ongoing play between the protagonists' external actions and their inner, unshared thoughts, Joyce's famous 'interior monologues', which occur at every level from the ecstatic epiphany to the flagrantly banal. In visual terms, this approach comes closest perhaps to the cubist interpretation of experience.



Appropriately for a writer for whom music was so important (Joyce had ambitions once to be a professional tenor), there is a rhythm in the flow of his narrative, a kind of volcanic energy

which surges tempestuously forward to overcome and absorb every obstacle through a succession of creative digressions, double entendres, innuendos, puns and outrageous neologisms. The flow might well engulf and smother the thin narrative line which it follows were it not for the presence of a broader, overarching structure the writer has imposed: the structure and shape of myth. To parallel the unremarkable meanderings of Leopold Bloom and his wife Molly with episodes that unfold in Homer's account of Odysseus' return to his wife and home on Ithaca is to bring them into a permanent present, as Cervantes did for his two heroes in Don Quixote: they become emblematic of every human folly and frailty.

Just as Joyce, always a rebel, shamelessly plundered world literature and so much else in his writings, believing there to be nothing new, so the artists in *Jumping for Joyce* have not felt obliged to show reverence in shaping their own responses to so many aspects of his work.



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