



The Maggie Man

Date

1912

Primary Maker

Jack B Yeats

Medium

Oil on panel

Dimensions

35.5 x 22.9 cm

Description

The maggie man who gathered the batons shied at the maggie (Irish 'gléas magaidh' or 'object of ridicule') as a fair-time sport was in danger of being a target himself. The short twisting strokes of the thickly worked pigment capture the unease of the nervous young man in a controlled illustrative fashion, while the red waistcoat links him instantly with the red drape of the maggie. The whole

aspect of the situation is dealt with in a masterly way, the proprietor lurking in the background, the billowing tent, and the lively sky which casts a shadow beneath the man. Yeats published a coloured drawing of the same young man in 'Life in the West of Ireland' (1912, 'Maggie', p. 19), in a more frantic scene, where the proprietor is a woman, waving the batons that have been gathered, drunken with the power to inflict fear and pain. (Catalogue Entry [36], Hilliary Pyle, Jack B. Yeats: A catalogue raisonné of the oil painting, Volume I, André Deutsch, London, 1992, p. 34) The word maggie is derived from the Irish 'gleas magaidh' or 'object of ridicule'. The job of the barefooted maggie man is to collect the thrown batons and return them to the next customer. The strong red of the maggie itself and the man's waistcoat stand out against the canvas material of the shy, creating visual connection between the worker and his sideshow. The expression on the maggie man's face hints at an underlying tension, giving the image a compelling psychological dimension. The maggie man appears to be as much a victim as the maggie itself. (Excerpt from catalogue accompanying Oskar Kokoschka and Jack B. Yeats exhibition at Compton Verney, late 2008.)