



The Eve of St Agnes

Date

1924

Primary Maker

Harry Clarke

Medium

Stained glass

Dimensions

157.5 x 105 cm

Description

Clarke's achievements in stained glass can be credited with reviving a medium which had suffered serious decline in Ireland. In 1923, Harold Jacob ordered a window, 'out of the usual run of domestic stained glass', depicting Keats' poem *The Eve of St Agnes*. Clarke responded with a work of consummate skill, encompassing every technique

known to the stained glass artist. Fourteen key scenes conveying the drama and magic of the story are illustrated, topped by two decorative lunettes, with a unifying frieze below showing the dramatis personae. Porphyro, forbidden to pursue the hand of Madeline by her father, creeps into the castle during the St Agnes' Eve carousing and is led by Old Angela to Madeline's bedchamber. Madeline, following ancient custom, has retired there fasting to dream of her future lord. Her dreams are fulfilled when Porphyro wakes her, and the two steal away into the gathering storm past fluttering tapestry and the drunken porter. Clarke cleverly disguises the leading in the architectural and decorative features around the scenes. The dazzling colour is achieved using double-layered glass, repeatedly acid-etched to produce diverse tones, with minute detail scratched into the paint layers using a needle. Thus, the window is the result of painstaking work of the utmost complexity, and an extraordinary achievement. For further reading see: Nicola Gordon Bowe, *Harry Clarke: The Life and Work* (Dublin, 2012) Jessica O'Donnell, 'A Gorgeous Gallery of Poetic Pictures' Harry Clarke, Harold Jacob and John Keats's *The Eve of St Agnes*', in *Harry Clarke and Artistic Visions of the New Irish State* (eds. A. Griffith, M. Helmers and R. Kennedy), Irish Academic Press, 2018, 46-71 Jessica O'Donnell, *Harry Clarke: The Eve of St Agnes* (Dublin, 2012) ISBN 978-1-901702-42-2 Lucy Costigan, *Strangest Genius: The Stained Glass of Harry Clarke* (Dublin 2010)