

Basic Detail Report



Empty Creels

Date

1913

Primary Maker

Jack B Yeats

Medium

Oil on panel

Dimensions

23 x 36 cm

Description

Ireland in 1913 was hopeful that Home Rule would at last be achieved. In Dublin itself the mood had shown itself for a decade in the foundation of the National Theatre, later the Abbey Theatre, and in the coming together of younger virile urban poets and artists, yearning for political independence, and prepared to fight for it. Yeats's Irish subject matter, of a new and contemporary kind, appealed to the literati who thronged the exhibitions he showed in Dublin on his annual visits from Devon. After his return to Ireland, he maintained his links abroad, exhibiting with the Salon des Indépendants in Paris in 1910 and 1913 being invited to contribute to the 'International Exhibition of Modern Art' at the Armory in New York. He continued to exhibit with the modernist Allied Artists' Association in London, where he had come under the influence of Sickert who admired his painting. In 'Empty Creels' the combination of earthy scene, low tones and opaque paint throws an interesting light on this Sickert influence, because while Yeats was struck by the everyday subjects painted by the Frenchified British artist, he never sacrificed his individuality nor his commitment to paint life as he knew it. The boy must be a character remembered from his youth. He has emptied the creels, or baskets, fastened to the ass's back, and lad and donkey gallop away down the street of the western town free of all burdens. The theme indicates how important metaphor was already in Yeats's work. There seems to be a deep implication behind the lightened scene. Home Rule was nearing reality, and the prospect of freedom from seven hundred years of foreign domination was uppermost in people's minds. The donkey, like the boy and the horse, are frequent symbols of freedom for Yeats in later paintings. The boy, and the donkey's head, are silhouetted against the sky, an idiom Yeats derived from the West of Ireland landscape, where the walls lining the small roads that join outlying houses to the few towns are low. The dominant colour is a lively blue grey, stretching up to a similarly coloured sky lightened with yellow and pink tones which reflect on the ground, binding the image together. The brushstrokes, while tight, are vivacious, extending in the sky. (Catalogue Entry [31], 'A Century of Irish Painting: Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin', The Yomiuri Shimbun, The Japan Association of Art Museums, 1997, p. 151)