

Basic Detail Report



Low Tide

Date

1935

Primary Maker

Jack B Yeats

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

58.4 x 66 cm

Description

'Low Tide' has been identified by Yeats's friend and critic, Thomas MacGreevy as a view of the Lee River in Cork city, where the quay meets Shandon Street. Yeats usually drew his inspiration from the Mid-West of Ireland, in Sligo and Galway; but he knew the South West from his peregrinations in search of coastal landscape in his early days as a landscape painter, and during the thirties was reacquainting himself with this area, approaching it through Cork city, the southern capital of Ireland. The river water has gone down to its lowest ebb, yet there is still a boat afloat with two figures in it. The reflection of light on the buildings and the buoyant colouring also suggest that the state of the tide is part of the ebb and flow of a vibrant life, rather than a passive time. The inclusion of O'Keefe's sweet shop on the street corner, the name clearly detailed on the fascia board, is a reminder of the reliance that Yeats placed on youth in his mature paintings, as a symbol of the permanence of life. Despite the directness of its subject matter, the light touch with the paint and its floating texture place it among the reminiscent paintings of the thirties, such as 'Donnelly's Hollow' (1936) and 'A Race in Hy Brazil' (1937), where memory plays with fantasy in enriching an experience. Yeats was fascinated by tides, recording tidal times at an early stage, and noting in titles of his first period realistic landscapes the state of the water. In his final pictures, when sea and river had attained metaphorical proportions, the tide (e.g. 'With the Ebb' (1949); 'The Top of the Tide' (1955)) even defined elements of spiritual resources. Already here, in mid-career, Yeats suggests that low water is a time for active contemplation and inner resuscitation before the tide turns to creep upward again. (Catalogue Entry [33]: A Century of Irish Painting - Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, 1997, p. 152)