

# Postgraduate English

[www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english](http://www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english)

ISSN 1756-9761

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Issue 20

September 2009

Editors: Amy Jordan and Eleanor Chatburn

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## *Strange Openings: the Second World War in paintings by Colin Middleton*

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Postgraduate English, Issue 20, September 2009

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*This is an adapted extract from a chapter of my PhD Thesis, which has a provisional title of 'Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland and the Second World War'. The chapter from which it is taken is about the effects of the war on visual art in the province, specifically painting and drawing. Whilst it is important to remember the traumatic effect of the war on the province – we must think of the human cost of the Belfast Blitz and that of the many people who fought and died of course – I think that culturally and socially there is considerable evidence that the war encouraged many positive, if perhaps temporary, developments. In terms of the province's twentieth century history, Louis MacNeice's idea of the Second World War as an "interregnum" is certainly applicable to the place of his birth. Here I want to talk about the effect of the Belfast Blitz of 1941 on one artist living and working in the city – Colin Middleton – and look at how this is manifested in some of his paintings.*

The wide range of cultural responses, both official and unofficial, to the blitzkrieg on cities in Britain and Northern Ireland shows how the patterns, sensations and incongruous juxtapositions resulting from unprecedented and specifically urban scenes of destruction proved both inspirational and troubling for artists and writers at the time. In a Picture Post article published in 1941 Louis MacNeice, describing damage caused by bombing in London as "a spectacle," compares resulting patterns of water and smoke with an Impressionist painting, and writes that: "When the All Clear went I began a tour of London, half appalled and half enlivened by this fantasy of destruction. For it was – if I am to be candid – enlivening".<sup>[1]</sup> In an essay published a few months later he contrasts the experience of seeing the rich West End the morning after a bombing, which he

describes as “almost exhilarating,” with his impressions of the destruction of a poor area the same night, which he calls “heart breaking”.<sup>[2]</sup> The enlivening sensual effect of such symbolic destruction on the spectator is also described in Brian Moore’s novel of Belfast during the Blitz, *The Emperor of Ice Cream* (1965), where the young protagonist’s feelings of exhilaration when the bombs first begin to fall on City Hall, Queen’s University and the Harland and Wolff shipyard, symbols of patriarchal and political authority in the city, are similarly swiftly undercut when the terrible human cost of the raid is revealed the following morning.<sup>[3]</sup> Artists and writers had to be mindful of treading a difficult line between excitement and pity, as the visual spectacle of the Blitz was accompanied by an inescapably brutal loss of civilian life. In an interview in 1971 Graham Sutherland remembered this dilemma in relation to his *Devastation* series of paintings of bomb damage in Swansea and London, executed throughout 1940 and 1941:

The City was more exciting than anywhere else mainly because the buildings were bigger, and the variety of ways in which they fell more interesting. But very soon the raids began in the East End – in the dock areas – and immediately the atmosphere became much more tragic. In the City one didn’t think of the destruction of life. All the destroyed buildings were office buildings and people weren’t in them at night. But in the East End one did think of the hurt to people and there was every evidence of it.<sup>[4]</sup>

London based artists and writers were particularly stimulated by these intense feelings, and Elizabeth Bowen, T.S. Eliot, Moore, Sutherland and Dylan Thomas are among those who responded to the Blitz in their works.

Perceived resemblances between the forms discernible in blitzed cityscapes during the Second World War and the stylistic modes of early twentieth century artistic movements have encouraged some artists and cultural historians to make bold attempts to link the two. The painter and art critic Adrian Stokes, for

example, claimed that the patterns of cubism had indeed anticipated the scenes of destruction thrown up by the heavy bombing of urban areas, writing that:

A collapsed room displays many more facets than a room intact: after a bombing in the last war, we were able to look at elongated, piled-up displays of what had been exterior, mingled with what had been interior, materializations of the serene Analytic Cubism that Picasso and Braque invented before the first war; and usually, as in some of these paintings, we saw the poignant key provided by some untouched, undamaged object that had miraculously escaped.[\[5\]](#)

The war also saw Surrealism materialised, in the unusual shapes, situations, and unexpected juxtapositions of everyday objects all too visible in the aftermath of air attack. Many of Belfast artist Colin Middleton's wartime paintings incorporate such imagery of the Blitz into the psychological world of surrealist art, the mode in which he frequently worked. My aim here is to set some of these works in an historical context that enables an appreciation of the complex combination of cultural forces at work on artists in Northern Ireland during the Second World War. I believe that an examination of his wartime paintings disproves Catherine Marshall's assessment that time "had little place in Middleton's philosophy" and her assertion that "In his search for the essential and enduring, he ruthlessly eliminated contemporary references".[\[6\]](#) In particular, I will look at the place of buildings and their destruction in Middleton's paintings. The Belfast Blitz of April 1941 altered the complexion of his surrealist paintings and drove him to work for a time within a localised vision which manifested itself in a preoccupation with buildings and structures.

Detecting resemblances between the figures and tropes of artistic styles and wartime scenes is an engrossing if potentially anachronistic pursuit, but similarities were evidently noted contemporaneously. Patrick Maybin, a close friend of John Hewitt (they had met through the poetry circle at Queen's University), was a doctor who joined the Royal Army Medical Corps on the

outbreak of war. Posted initially in Northern Ireland and Britain, and subsequently to North Africa and Italy, he wrote numerous detailed letters to his friend during the war, discussing works of art, literature and philosophy. It is worth quoting at length from one startling letter written in late 1943:

Tunisia is a much richer and more friendly country than Algeria. The battlefields have been nearly all cleared up. Some of the towns have been bombed and bombarded till hardly a house is habitable. Here and there one comes on a huge salvage dump of several acres – burnt out trucks and tanks and cars, and demolished guns. At places – a level crossing, or a road junction – in the shade of a group of cactus plants, a small group of white wooden crosses. One scene stays in my mind: a flat coastal plain, brown in the lit sunlight; a road along the margin of a wide beach, sweeping around to the edge of a small port, so much bombed that not a living person was to be seen; at the sea's edge a crashed bomber, one huge wing with its black Nazi cross angled across the sky. Behind it the pier, with the cranes twisted and tilted across the dock; a wide expanse of purple blue sky, and a low bar of cloud across the horizon. The scene was familiar, not in detail but in mood; I remembered why – it is the mood of Colin Middleton, 1940.[\[7\]](#)

Maybin's vivid and dreamlike description, which constitutes a composition in itself, identifies many elements familiar from Middleton's wartime surrealism: the sense of traumatic aftermath, the apprehension of conflict, the juxtaposition of recognisable material objects in an alien landscape seemingly devoid of human presence. It also demonstrates the psychological effect on the individual of the complex interplay between artistic style and wartime reality: Middleton had never travelled to Tunisia and never experienced desert warfare, but here, one and a half thousand miles from Belfast, Maybin is struck by the resemblance between the scene before him and a Middleton painting, and feels the need to record this in detail a letter home.

Colin Middleton was born in 1910, grew up in the Belfast suburb of Cavehill and was educated at the nearby Royal Academy Grammar school. His father was a damask designer in the linen industry and had studied painting at the Manchester School of Art, and unlike many of his artistic contemporaries in the city Middleton grew up surrounded by artists, painters and designers. After leaving school he entered the family firm as an apprentice and attended the Belfast College of Art as a part time student.<sup>[8]</sup> Paintings were a scarce commodity in Belfast in the early twentieth century and Middleton depended on occasional trips to London and Europe to satisfy his interest in art during the 1930s: it was at this time that he discovered the work of Salvador Dali and British surrealists such as Tristram Hillier and Edward Wadsworth. Surrealism proved to be a liberating discovery for Middleton, and was to have a profound impact on his work over the rest of his career.<sup>[9]</sup> When his father died in 1935 he took over the family business, a responsibility which prevented him from leaving Belfast and settling in London or Paris.<sup>[10]</sup> Over a career which spanned more than fifty years until his death in 1983, he produced an astonishingly varied body of work: in addition to the surrealist pieces his oeuvre includes post impressionist landscapes, expressionist pieces, and abstract homages to Kandinsky. In addition, his skills as a draughtsman were particularly acute: John Hewitt observes that his trade as a damask designer had honed this talent for precision, so evident in the surrealist pieces.<sup>[11]</sup> Catherine Marshall writes that his “chameleon-like changes of style” constitute “an art historian’s nightmare,”<sup>[12]</sup> and of the sheer variousness of Middleton’s first one man show in 1943, John Hewitt recalled that “an immediate reaction ... was that the artist was hypersensitive to influence”.<sup>[13]</sup> His predilection for experimentation has remained a source of critical confusion and speculation - despite his evident technical versatility the lack of a single recognisable Middleton style arguably prevented him achieving greater international fame. For Hewitt he epitomises “the puzzle and the problem of the artist now,” and was a victim of a fragmented age: Hewitt wrote of his friend in an unpublished autobiography, “A North Light” that “Too honest, too open-minded, he has refused to drive or goad his genius along a single avenue”.<sup>[14]</sup> It may be that

finding himself assailed by manifold artistic styles in a new age of photography and cheap commercial reproduction, where no single school of painting could dominate, Middleton simply felt unable to limit himself to a single mode, or perhaps his deployment of a multiplicity of styles constituted a more considered strategy of self expression. Dickon Hall has suggested that in creating an anthological body of work Middleton was trying to address the problem of the provincial painter by being genuinely contemporary, and certainly the artist's (possibly ironic) self proclamation as "the only surrealist painter working in Ireland"[\[15\]](#) conveys a keen desire to differentiate himself from his peers and his national and cultural background. Questions about his stylistic variations can easily descend into mere conjecture, and I do not intend to attempt to resolve them here, but rather to suggest that comparisons of Middleton's wartime works allow us to approach shifts between styles from a historical as well as a personal perspective. An untitled autobiographical poem written in October 1941 reveals a profound emotional restlessness in Middleton at this time. He describes himself as:

The youth who left his father's grave, a man  
possessed of new possessions to possess,  
an endless quest for equilibrium...[\[16\]](#)

October 1941 marked six months since the Easter Tuesday raid on Belfast, the most serious of the Blitz. The bombings seem to have had a severe effect on Middleton, though accounts of this effect differ: according to Kenneth Jamison he had found himself unable to paint at all for these six months following the raid,[\[17\]](#) though in a letter written in July of that year Hewitt tells Maybin of a period of concerted activity on Middleton's part.[\[18\]](#) The idea of a "quest for equilibrium," followed in the poem by an ellipsis, is significant. Although on a personal level the loss of his father in 1935 was clearly deeply painful, Middleton's reading of his subsequent career as a search for balance in the face of opposing forces may also refer to the unsteady position of the artist in relation to the war, and specifically the Blitz, as expressed by other artists and writers I

mentioned earlier. Stepping back and assessing himself in the third person in such a consciously poetic soliloquy as this implies a reflective self questioning of the value of artistic pursuits, and Middleton's ellipsis suggests that he too feels that as an artist he is in a problematic position, stretched like his London counterparts between excitement and pity. If stylistic appropriation and variation allowed Middleton to negotiate his provincial situation, and to avoid being bound by his cultural and national background, it also offered a strategy for responding to complex and conflicting stimuli thrown up by the Second World War. Middleton's variousness was not just a feature of the war years and continued over his entire career, but his technical versatility certainly allowed him to produce a variety of nuanced responses to the war which tend to refute ideas of him as a stylistic magpie or purveyor of pastiche.

The Dark Tower ([Fig.1](#)), painted after the Belfast Blitz of 1941, is a surrealist scene played out on the type of anonymous, undulating plain familiar from the works of Salvador Dali. Two spindly towers dominate the middle distance of the painting, asymmetrical and eccentric structures that stretch a resemblance to recognisable buildings with their irregular dimensions and planes. Hewitt went so far as to claim one tower as "now a monstrous air-machine plunged in the sand, and now a great blind fish or eel-creature". [\[19\]](#) These towers are echoed by two similar constructions on the horizon. In the foreground can be seen the heavily stylised figure of a woman in a dress dancing beneath a stylised human eye situated on a two dimensional quadrilateral, that looks away to the right. The towers are missing pieces gouged from their sides, as though damaged by bomb blasts, and bricks litter the ground on which the woman dances. Notwithstanding Hewitt's lyrical view of the painting, putting the overtly surrealist imagery of the woman and the eye to one side the towers can be seen in the context of British romantic depictions of urban bomb damage such as John Piper's 1942 Bath series ([Fig.2](#)) or Graham Sutherland's 1941 Devastation series, and also, given the monochromatic reproduction used in *Now in Ulster* seen here, of photographs of bomb damage (*Now in Ulster* was a one off anthology edited by Arthur and



George Campbell and published in Belfast in 1944, which carried short stories, essays and verse by many of the emerging younger generation of writers in Northern Ireland at the time and, in a move that distinguished the publication from other contemporaneous literary publications such as Northern Harvest (1944) or Lagan, monochrome reproductions of paintings by the Campbell brothers, Gerard Dillon, John Luke and Colin Middleton amongst others). A clear parallel can be seen, for example, with a photograph showing Trinity Street Church on 12 July 1941, having been decapitated and lost its spire in the Easter Tuesday raid ([Fig. 3](#)). In the background of another of Middleton's 1941 surrealist paintings, The Fortune Teller ([Fig. 4](#)) can be seen a church with a markedly similar truncated tower. Further afield we might also compare the towers with British surrealist John Armstrong's Coggeshall Church, Essex (1940, [Fig. 5](#)), which depicts a church tower ripped open by a bomb blast and shows how surrealist techniques could be recruited without difficulty for official war art. [\[20\]](#) It is also worth remembering that surrealism was also deployed in a striking advertising campaign for the British Government at this time. Abram Games's extraordinary Your Britain. Fight For It Now (1942, [Fig. 6](#)) shows a bright, clean, two dimensional image of the iconic modernist London Finsbury Health Centre (designed by Berthold Lubetkin, dating from 1938, and a symbol at the time of the war modern health and progress. Islington Primary Care Trust are currently trying to sell it off) forming a wall which half covers a ruined structure, a bomb damaged building in which a bandy legged boy with rickets stands, joylessly trailing a small pink toy boat through a puddle. [\[21\]](#) A tombstone looms against the rear wall of the ruin, and the words 'neglect' and 'disease' are daubed on the cracked and stained walls. As is pointed out by Darracott and Loftus in their survey of wartime posters, the symbolic deployment of colour and the fusion of modern architecture with dilapidated ruin in a single image "show Games's familiarity with surrealist work by artists such as Dali and de Chirico". [\[22\]](#) Games's poster shows how the Second World War allowed the grammar of surrealism, the use of incongruous juxtaposition and realist technique (significantly used here to depict a bomb

damaged building), to be recruited with relative ease to cultural forms intended for a mass audience, and for political ends.

Returning to the landscape of *The Dark Tower*, the neutral undulation on which the towers stand, and the complex symbolism of the woman and the eye are all fairly standard products of the psychological surrealist dreamworld (or, more cynically, the results of Middleton's encounters with earlier surrealist artworks), but the damaged towers themselves and the debris in the foreground for me root this work in the year and place of its composition, and the inclusion of a reproduction of this work alongside two other more conventional representations of the Belfast Blitz by George Campbell and Gerard Dillon in *Now in Ulster* reinforces this contextual reading. The war, and specifically the Blitz, has made psychological detachment impossible for the surrealist and forced Middleton, the self-proclaimed "only surrealist painter working in Ireland"<sup>[23]</sup> to work within the new wartime boundaries of a localised vision in which scenes of actual destruction are recast in the surrealist mode. The meaning of the woman and the eye is unclear: more cynical readings of Middleton's surrealist works have seen the use of such imagery as little more than mischief making, poses and knowing attempts to shock and confuse the Belfast public. In *The Fortune Teller*, Hall detects "a sense of showing off" and accuses Middleton of employing "impenetrable imagery" in a mischievous attempt to do just that.<sup>[24]</sup> *The Fortune Teller* would seem to be free from references to the Blitz or the ongoing conflict. Here another mysterious woman (perhaps a topless flamenco dancer) appears in an anonymous and barren landscape, surrounded by seemingly random objects and birds, comprising a faceless grandfather clock, a ladder, two cockatiels and another, smaller yellow bird housed in an open-fronted cabinet on the ground. In the background a church on a hill appears to have a vast door opening from its tower. The discordance of the scene is amplified by the sheets of paper or fabric blowing across the landscape: one larger sheet is loosely caught on the woman's head and one sheet above the cabinet, although completely blank, definitely apes an open newspaper, as though held by an invisible reader. The sheets do not offer

an explanation for this particular assembly of objects, or their juxtaposition with the dancer and the birds, but they do form an unexpected link between *The Fortune Teller* and another of Middleton's wartime paintings.

The title of *The Holy Lands* (1945, [Fig.7](#)) would seem to refer to the eponymous area of inner city south Belfast to the east of Queen's University, and although it depicts rows of terraced houses similar to those which make up this part of the city, the painting offers a vague and heavily stylised representation. Semi vortocist rows of houses fan out across the middle and far distance, and the hillside in the foreground seems to have been introduced to aid the composition. However, it is a convincing portrayal of urban Belfast at play, perhaps demonstrative of a sense of affection and affiliation with one's home city as a defence against the uncertainties of the war. Amongst the figures on the hillside are a courting couple, an elderly man sitting alone with his walking stick, and a man in a bowler hat reading a newspaper: in the foreground some boys play football. The threat of war would appear to be absent (and by 1945 the threat of air attack had all but disappeared for the residents of the city), and like Middleton's 1941 *Annadale* paintings the scene seems to endorse a conventional, cosy, and above all reassuring view of civilian life. However, across the scene blow blank sheets of newspaper, similar to those blowing across the desert in *The Fortune Teller* which threaten to envelope the woman in the flamenco skirt. In *The Holy Lands* the sheets are more organised: spines aligned in the same direction towards the horizon, as they flutter from the hillside across the skyline from right to left the shapes echo a flock of birds. Against the vortocist backdrop of the terraces the airborne papers are eerie, even ghostly: none of the figures on the hillside has noticed them. The sheets also appear in a post war painting, *Elijah* (1948), where seven fly in a circle around a woman and two Blakeian images of the eponymous prophet, the larger of which crouches on a pile of books, the smaller of which squats on one of the airborne loose sheets. Without entering at length into the allegorical and symbolic implications of this later work, it is worth remembering in the context of the Blitz that the biblical prophet Elijah calls down fire from the

sky whilst conducting his test to ascertain the relative powers of the false god Baal and Yahweh the God of Israel. [25] Considering The Holy Lands alongside its surrealist counterparts, the loose sheets can be seen to hint at undisclosed chaos, and form a link between the recognisable and named world of urban Belfast to the troubled world of the unconscious that Middleton calls up in the earlier and later works.

Middleton himself associated his surrealist work with war and violence: in an interview in 1973 he said that the flaring of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s had “re-activated the old surrealist bug, and its coming up, this strong colour, that emotional colour,” [26] and the decade would see a return to dreamscapes populated by idealised female forms, where again houses and more random built structures appear. Ríann Coulter uses her assertion that “One explanation for the coincidence between Middleton’s surreal works and periods of international and regional unrest, may be that during these years ... the landscape and people of Ulster were physically and psychologically scarred by violence” [27] as a springboard for a discussion about Middleton’s search for symbols to represent this trauma. I do not deny that Middleton dealt in symbols, but I believe that the representations and allusions to destruction and disruption of the built fabric of the city evident within his paintings are a more direct way of responding to the trauma.

Siren over Belfast (1944, [Fig.8](#)) is one such simultaneously symbolic and literal response to the Belfast Blitz and the pain of its aftermath. This apocalyptic painting depicts a scattering of buildings dwarfed by a huge, red-lipped, vaguely sphinx like demon or monster with a mane of flames, which looms in the sky above. Here are three factory chimneys and a church tower, almost certainly another allusion to the industrial and religious Belfast cityscape – also visible in paintings such as The Refugee (1944, [Fig.9](#)) and Allotments on Annadale Embankment (1941, [Fig.10](#)). Apart from the church and the factories though, the buildings are rough, windowless, single storey and humble – the eye is drawn to the craters and the bright flames emanating from the head of the siren. The

punning title links the siren used to warn of an imminent air raid with the mythological female siren, and the combination of the open screaming mouth of the monster with the bright red lips and flames cause the painting to emit a palpable sense of very loud noise. In addition, some kind of guitar like instrument is being played in the foreground, either by the Siren itself or by a pair of disembodied hands - this is unclear. The sound hole of the guitar echoes the cyclonic pattern that must be taken as the eye of the siren, and its neck recalls both the barrel of a gun or a factory chimney such as those in the background, but laid horizontal. Here creativity, destruction and violence are fused in the heavily symbolic image of the siren. However, the human and animal elements in the composition, small figures of a girl in a green dress with a red ribbon in her hair in the middle distance, seemingly carried off her feet by the blast, and a red animal (perhaps a fox or a dog) running beside her counter this awesome symbolism, and are reminders of the human cost of the destruction. The paint has been more thickly applied in this painting: in contrast with the smoothness of *The Dark Tower* and *The Fortune Teller* we see a more expressionist surrealism closer to that of Max Ernst during the 1930s than to Dali. Indeed, Ernst's *The Angel of the Hearth* series (1937, [Fig.11](#)) are arguably important antecedents for *Siren Over Belfast*. Produced following the defeat of the Republican forces in Spain, Ernst's paintings show a monstrous, many limbed bird-like demon, dancing and raging over an anonymous, flat landscape. In an interview the German artist said "This is of course an ironic title for a kind of juggernaut which crushes and destroys all that comes in its path. That was my impression of what would happen in the world, and I was probably right".<sup>[28]</sup> In 1938 Ernst briefly gave the work an alternate title *The Triumph of Surrealism*, a despairing and ironic comment on the failure of communism and surrealism successfully to resist fascism. What distinguishes Middleton's siren from its continental antecedent is the presence of buildings in the composition.

Middleton's *Strange Openings* (ca. 1942, [Fig.12](#)) offers a more detached representation of the Belfast urban landscape following the Blitz. The title refers

to the startling holes that appeared across the city after the air attacks, and the painting depicts, in heavily stylised fashion, doorless and windowless rows of terraced houses, and, looming larger, presumably industrial buildings with large, similarly perfectly rectangular openings in their sides. The style adopted by Middleton here, which recall de Chirico's arcades and piazzas of his *pittura metafisica* period in the theatrical intensity of flat, stylised surfaces and depth of shadow (see Giorgio de Chirico, *The Enigma of a Day* (1914, [Fig.13](#)), avoids any reference to the chaotic effects of the Blitz, the irregular patterns of destruction and disruption or the fragmentation that proved so stimulating to many artists and writers. It is a far remove from the sound and fury of *Siren Over Belfast*, and the haunting title of *Strange Openings* echoes its eeriness of tone: no human or animal intrudes on this deserted urban landscape, and the composition is entirely made up of straight lines: the holes in the side of the building appear as part of the design rather than damage occasioned by bomb blasts, in contrast with the chunks bitten out of the sides of the towers in *The Dark Tower*. Where *Siren over Belfast* emits noise and pain, this composition is a deserted stage set, dominated by a portentous silence. Despite the appropriation of de Chirico's style, *Strange Openings* retains a fidelity to the closely packed terraced backstreets, the outside lavatories and brick walled back yards of Middleton's home city: once again the recognisable and the knowable in Belfast is rendered in a distinctly foreign style.

For Middleton, it seems, the importance of place was heightened by its destruction: in an interview with Michael Longley in 1967 he articulated a mysterious and mystical identification with places using a kind of mantra: "Place is everything. Place is terribly important. Places, places, places. I just can't go out for a day's sketching – that's meaningless, utterly horrible, terrifying". [\[29\]](#) Writing on Middleton in 1976, John Hewitt observed that Northern Ireland's wartime isolation had forced artists and writers to till their own gardens, resulting in an "an unusually vigorous phase in the creative arts". This was certainly the case for Middleton: the works I have discussed show him stating emphatically in paint his fidelity to place by turning to his home town as subject matter, whilst

retaining his predilection for experimentation with continental styles. Though Middleton engages with differing effects of the Blitz in these works, a concern for the built environment is common to his non-expressionist pieces: his war paintings show that the impact of the Blitz on art in the province went beyond representational depictions of the damage. Middleton's paintings show the blitzed cityscape as the site of a complex dialogue between representational and non-representational artistic modes, initiated by the traumatic collision between the local and the international.

Guy Woodward is supported by the IRCHSS Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme.



Figures

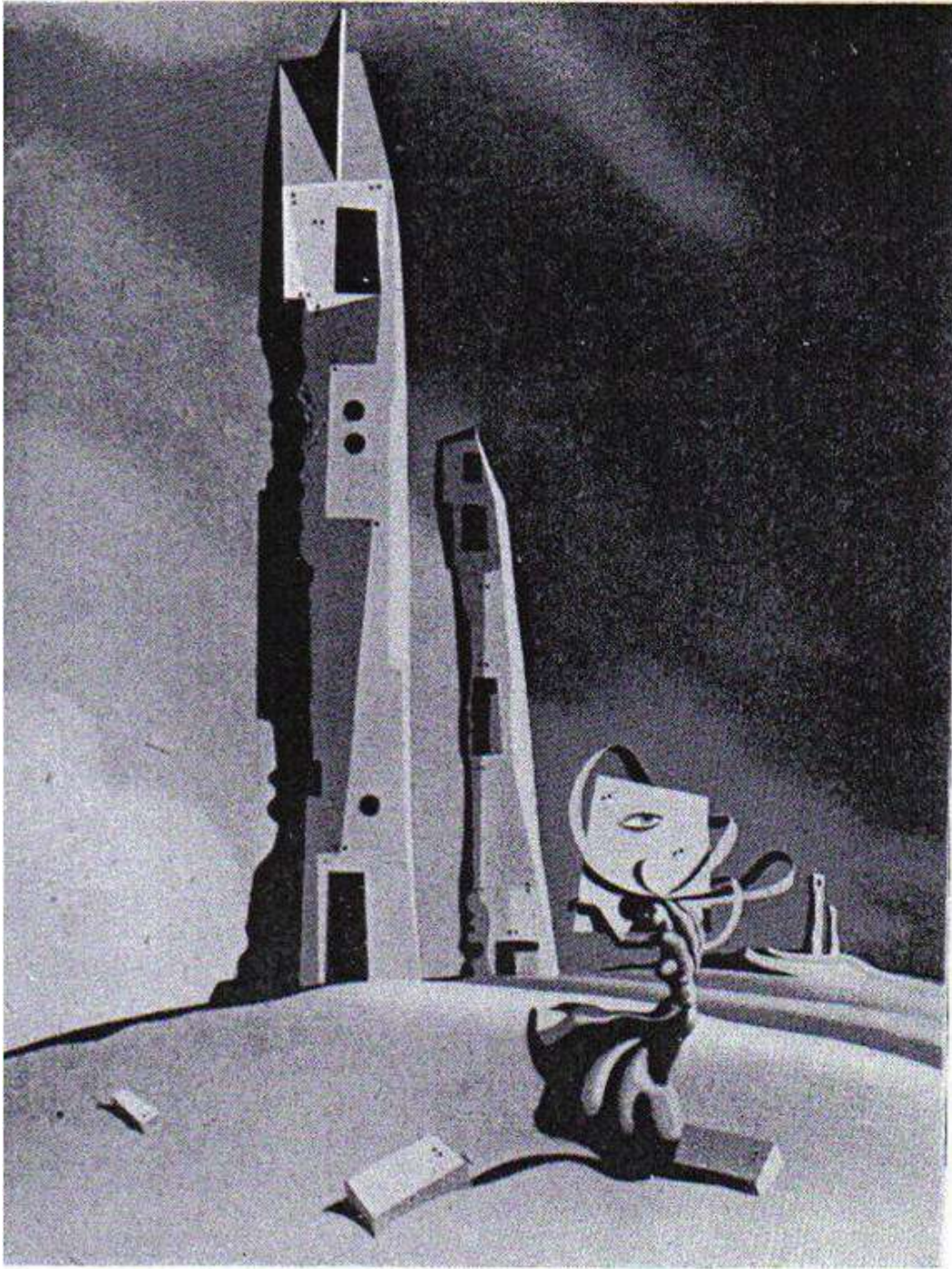


Figure 1





Figure 2



Figure 3

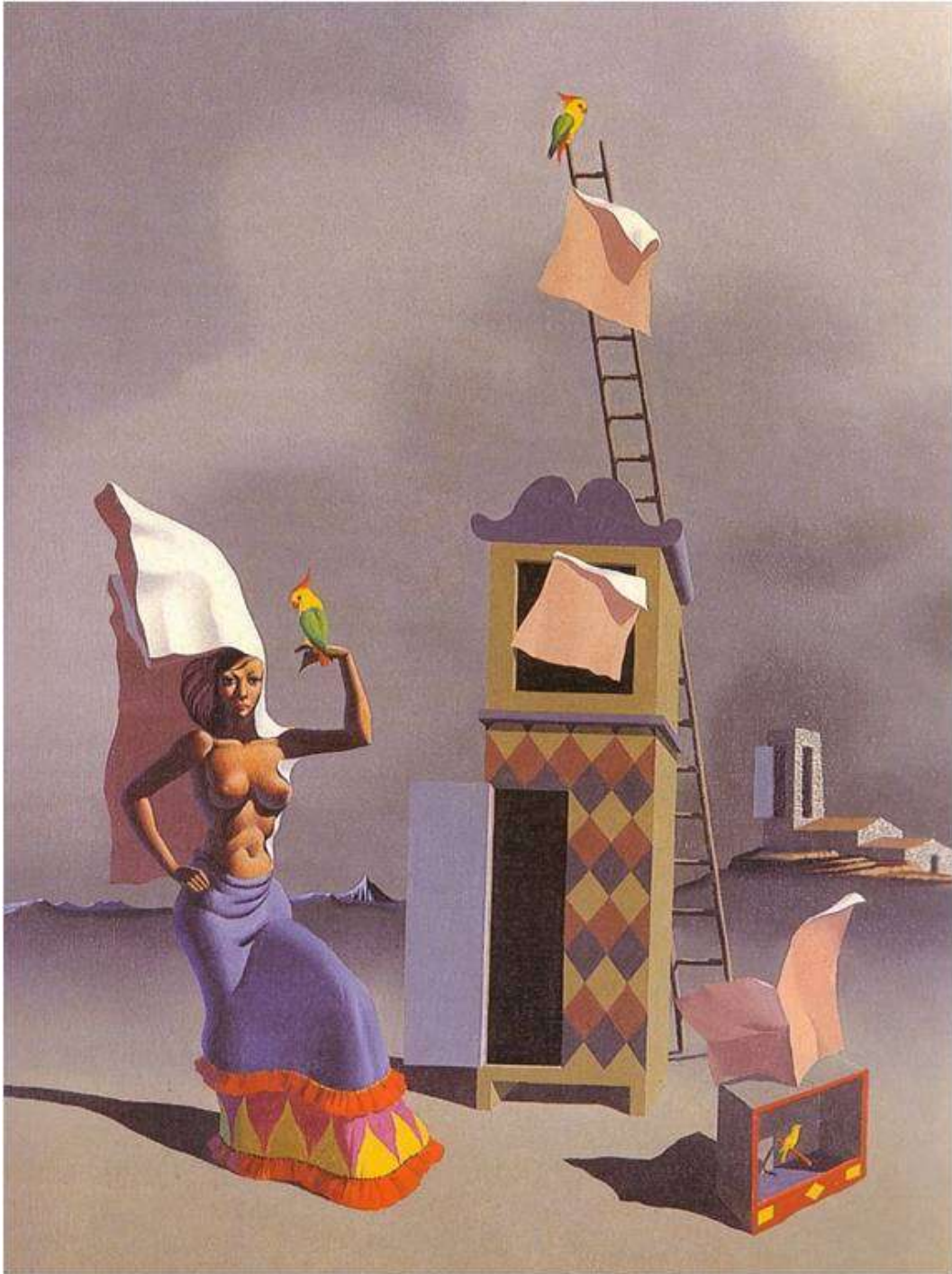


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6





Figure 7



Figure 8

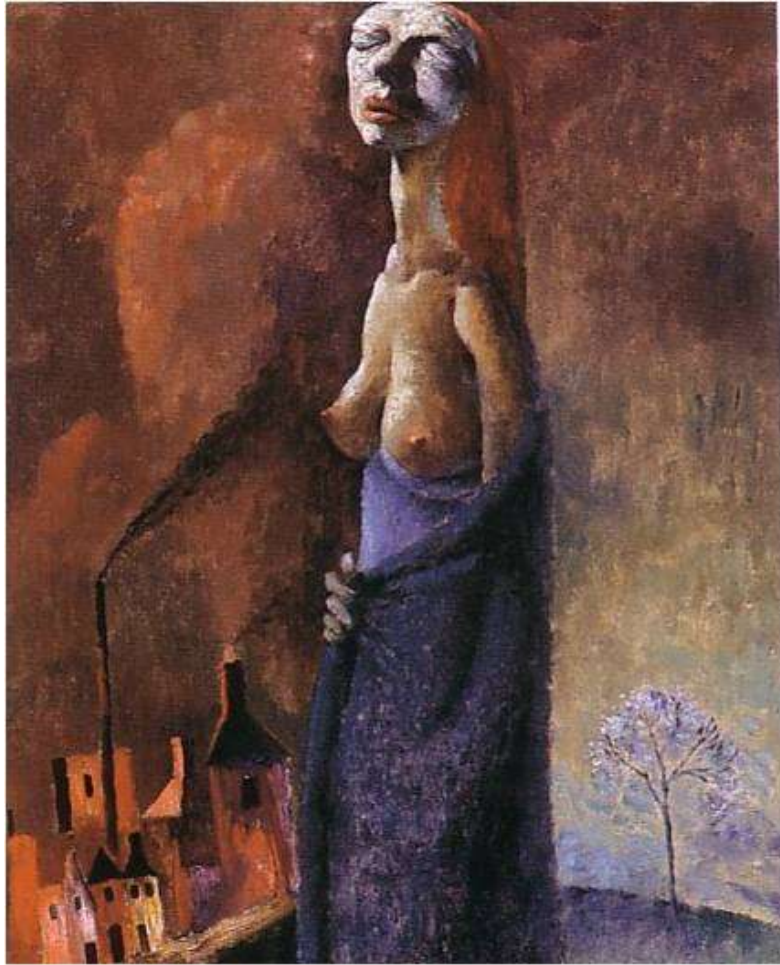


Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12





Figure 13

### Endnotes

[1] Louis MacNeice, “The Morning After The Blitz,” *Picture Post* 2:5, 3 May 1941: 9+. See *Selected Prose of Louis MacNeice*. Ed. Alan Heuser (Oxford: OUP 1990) 118-19.

[2] Louis MacNeice, “London Letter 5,” *Common Sense* 10:7, July 1941: 206-7. See *Selected Prose of Louis MacNeice* 131-2.

[3] Brian Moore, *The Emperor of Ice Cream* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965) 203.

[4] Graham Sutherland, “Images Wrought From Destruction,” *The Sunday Telegraph Magazine*, 10 Sept. 1971: 27-28. See Martin Hammer,

*Graham Sutherland: Landscapes, War Scenes, Portraits 1924-1950* (London: Scala and Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2005) 102.

[5] Adrian Stokes, “The Painting of Our Time Part One: The Luxury & Necessity of Painting,” *The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978) 145-160, 155.

[6] Catherine Marshall, “Colin Middleton,” *The Hunter Gatherer, the Collection of George and Maura McClelland at the Irish Museum of Modern Art*, ed. Catherine Marshall (Dublin: I.M.M.A., 2004) 50. Arguably Marshall disproves her own conclusion with earlier and well founded claims that *Strange Openings*, *Magpie Delivery* and *Siren Over Belfast* were inspired by the wartime blackout (48).

[7] Patrick Maybin, letter to John Hewitt, 6 Nov. 1943, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland Hewitt Archive, D3838/3/10.

[8] Dickon Hall, *Colin Middleton: A Study* (Unknown: Joga Press, 2001) 4.

[9] Hall 7.

[10] John Hewitt, “A North Light: Twenty-five years in a Municipal Art Gallery” (unpublished autobiography, John Hewitt Collection, University of Ulster Coleraine) 62.

[11] Hewitt “North Light” 63.

[12] Marshall 47.

[13] Hewitt “North Light” 100.

[14] Hewitt “North Light” 101.

[15] Hall 13, 18.

[16] John Hewitt, *Colin Middleton* (Belfast: Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1976) 14.



[17] Kenneth Jamison, *The Art of Colin Middleton* (Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1965) exhibition catalogue, unpaginated.

[18] John Hewitt, letter to Patrick Maybin, 22 Jul. 1941, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland Hewitt Archive, D/3838/3/12.

[19] John Hewitt, "Under Forty: Some Ulster Artists," *Now in Ulster* 1944: 13-35, 15.

[20] John Armstrong (1893-1973), an English painter whose work became increasingly surrealist in character following the Spanish Civil War, and, notably, increasingly dominated by visions of the destruction of buildings (Fig. 5.). Unsurprisingly, his war art produced under the auspices of the WAAC then included a number of similar depictions of bomb damage. See Mark Glazebrook "Introduction" in *John Armstrong 1893-1973* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975) unpaginated exhibition catalogue.

[21] On the personal orders of Winston Churchill, the bandy legged child was removed from the publicly displayed version of the poster. Joseph Darracott and Belinda Loftus, *Second World War Posters* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1972) 31.

[22] Darracott and Loftus 31.

[23] Hall 13, 18.

[24] Hall 8.

[25] 1 Kings 18:38.

[26] Marshall 50.

[27] Ríann Coulter, "Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism: Cultural Identity in Irish Art, 1943-1960," PhD thesis, Courthauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2006, 105.

[28] Uwe M. Schneede, *The Essential Max Ernst* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972) 154.

[29] Carlo Eastwood, ed., *Colin Middleton: A Millennium Appreciation* (Belfast: Eastwood Galleries 2000) 14.

### **First Response**

This will be a valuable addition to PG English, being a lucid and convincing account of an artist who should be better known. Links might perhaps be made to arguments of the origins of surrealism more generally in WW 1 (e/g Alina Clej's article in MLN 1989). HD's "The Walls do not Fall" also came in mind in relation to this essay's descriptions of the imaginatively liberating effects of the blitz.