

The Trinity College Dublin Art Collections

Artist: Myra Kathleen Hughes A. R. E.
Series: Five views of Trinity College:
Title: *Botany Bay (V)*
Medium: etching

b. 1877, Wexford d. 1918, Dublin

Little information can be sourced on the life of Miss Hughes, most documents where she appears are society exhibition reviews. It is worth noting that in these, her engravings are singled out amongst the many other exhibited artists for their quality, whether it be the Royal Academy of the Arts (1907, 1911), the Watercolour Society of Ireland (1991), the Royal Society of Painter-Etchers (1912), to which she was elected associate fellow in 1911, or the Royal Hibernian Academy (1913). Such attention was given not just by the Irish, but also the English press of the time, and this is found too in the accounts of her 1919 posthumous exhibitions in both countries.

Her love for townscapes and their history is clear in her exhibited etchings of *Old Dublin and London* (1909-10), and those that appeared as illustrations of William Andrews' *Old English Towns* (1909-12; it is of note that nine of the fourteen plates in the second part are by her hand). Her etching of the Parliament House, College Green appears as the frontispiece in journalist Padraic Colum's *My Irish Year* (1912), and she is among artists such as Paul Henry, George Russell (better known as AE) and Jack B. Yeats he thanks for permitting the inclusion of their work. Newspaper reviews tell us that in Dublin her work "was well and honourably known", and that she also exhibited in the Paris Salon. Posthumous reviews note her work is dominated by the "charm of quaint old-world life", and that throughout there is an appreciation for detail and sentiment, and is praised for its originality.

Her work finds particular complement for characterful renderings of buildings; the rich *chiaroscuro* of Parliament House (which became the Bank of Ireland in Miss Hughes' own time), the massing of Lincoln Cathedral and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for its strong and firm handling. Also highlighted is a considerable contrast in tone between much of her work, coming from apt treatment of each individual subject; seen in the variety of monochromatic urban scenes, individual buildings, field-women harvesting, or noteworthy individual figures such as *Bethany* (unfinished at her death) in pen, colour and ink, an instance of her coloured work, which is praised for vivid colour. Her accurate 1916 reproduction of Sackville Street just prior to the Easter Rising is also of some historical interest. An Irish Times article on her posthumous exhibition in the Raspail Gallery (1919; which travelled that year to the Walker Gallery, London) describes "a pathetic interest" attached to the exhibited works, where some "wanted only a few final touches from the artist when death claimed her".

Other works by the artist can be found in the Collection of the British Museum, and illustrating the aforementioned texts above, which can be freely viewed in digital format on the Internet Archive (www.archive.org).