

daughter of an English artist herself and wrote a most flattering article on us for the *Sunday Press* newspaper which was accompanied by a photograph of the two of us standing in the entrance to St Stephen's Green.

We were also interviewed for *IT* magazine by Noelle Campbell Sharp, and had her photographer husband call to our home one afternoon to take some interesting pictures. This may have been partly because we were relatively young art collectors and this was seen as novel and trend-setting at that time. Rosc and the Presidency of the Irish Exporters Association had given me platforms from which to make periodic comments on business and the arts. We began to receive invitations to the Cairnduff's First Friday Drinks Parties at their home on Waterloo Road. This was a novel salon style of party devised by Maureen and her husband, Ian Cairnduff. Fashionable people and people who were in the news were invited by personal phone calls from Maureen. There was no gatecrashing. The gatherings took place from 6 pm to 8 pm on the first Friday of every month. You only attended when you were asked. An invitation in one month did not necessarily mean that you would be invited during the next. Many people who were never invited gave out about it as snobbish and pretentious. However, their evenings were always crowded with 'the beautiful people' and when we got the call we went to see what it was like, and we enjoyed it. You might meet a number of Ambassadors, and most certainly our friend the artist Cecil King, who was one of the most sociable people in Ireland. You would invariably meet some actors from the Gate and Abbey Theatres, a poet and novelist or two, a playwright currently in the news, and a visiting celebrity or two who might be about to be interviewed by Gay Byrne on *The Late Late Show*. Guests were expected to bring a suitable small gift for the hosts, and some were ingeniously witty and appropriate. Homan Potterton of the National Gallery was a regular, and so was distinguished pianist John O'Connor and his wife, Mary. Guests circulated and made polite conversation, before departing, and as Cecil King once remarked 'you knew everything that was happening in fashionable Dublin if you listened carefully and asked the right questions.'

Antoinette and I were amused to be sought out both for interview for the national newspapers, and as guests at Dublin's glittering soirées. Word had

spread about town that we had exceptional judgement in art and were building up an important collection. Prior to that we had been plodding along quietly doing our own thing. Now our relations read about us in the newspapers and were surprised and impressed. It was also public endorsement of our purchasing activities, and that, admittedly, was satisfying.

Bríd Dukes, a Dubliner married to Jerry Dukes, the brother of Alan Dukes, and a lecturer in English at the Limerick College of Art, telephoned Antoinette and myself in early 1981 to inquire if we would lend works from our collection to the Belltable Arts Centre in Limerick for its formal opening on 21st April. She had heard about us from the Arts Council and had read about us in the newspapers. She explained that the Belltable would be a combined theatre and visual arts centre. Brian Friel had agreed that his play *Translations* would be performed on the opening night, so our pictures would be in very good company if we decided to lend them. We did, and were informed that the Arts Council would pay for the wrapping and transportation. We invited Bríd to our home to choose the works, but she insisted that we should do so ourselves. We talked about how and when they were acquired and she said ‘that’s it. Put all that down in a catalogue which we will print to complement the exhibition’.

Antoinette and I then spent some time selecting items for the exhibition and concluded that it would be best and most cohesive to confine it to contemporary Irish art. I searched for a suitable title and came up with ‘Towards the World’s Edge’, which was a line from a book of poetry by the Caribbean art critic and poet Edward Lucy-Smith, who was then living in England. It seemed appropriate, as Ireland was on the edge of Europe and Limerick was on the western edge of Ireland.

It was a novel experience for us to lend eighty paintings to Limerick for public exhibition. Antoinette and I carefully weighed up all of the options before making our final choices. Again it was very flattering for us to be twinned with the playwright Brian Friel, who I considered was the best living Irish playwright. I was very conscious that our collection was strong in certain areas but weak in others. For example, we had no painting by Roderic O’Conor at that time, nor had we an oil by Jack B. Yeats. The latter would have to be represented by small but high quality watercolours. We did,



Colin Middleton RHA, RUA (1901–1984), *The Catalan Mousetrap*, 1974, oil on canvas, 61 x 61 cm, signed Colin M.

however, have excellent Swanzys, Colin Middletons, Patrick Collins, Nano Reids, Camille Souters and Brian Bourkes and would have to stake our reputations on those. I was conscious at the private view that wealthy art collectors such as Tony Ryan of Guinness Peat Aviation might sneer at the collection because it did not contain expensive Yeats oils, but decided that I did not really care if he did. I consoled myself by thinking that it was more of a challenge to put together a good collection of art on limited money, than if one had unlimited funds. Tony Ryan was actually present to learn about modern Irish art, in the final analysis. Antoinette and I were momentarily shocked, however, when Councillor Jim Kemmy TD thanked us for ‘giving’ the collection to Limerick. My heart leapt into my mouth.

‘What in God’s name had we walked into here?’ flashed through my mind. The pictures were too recent and too precious to us both to consider parting with them so soon. I quickly gathered my wits about me, and corrected Jim Kemmy, interrupting him to say that they were only on loan to Limerick for a limited period. The assembled crowd burst into laughter at my intervention, and I could then safely assume that it had been a slip of his tongue. Still, it did give me a rush of blood to the head for those worrying few seconds!

It all turned out well in the end, and the Limerick people appeared to really appreciate the exhibition. Hilary Pyle travelled down and reviewed the show afterwards for *The Irish Times*, pointing out that many of the Brian Bourkes had been seen and purchased recently at the Taylor Galleries, as had the six Patrick Collins oils at the Caldwell and the six Nano Reid canvases at the Dawson/Taylor Galleries, but that nevertheless the collection contained many treasures, not least of which was the wonderful late painting *Henrietta in a Pink Hat* by Mary Swanzy which was not to be missed.

I had agreed to launch a portfolio of eight small limited edition prints by a group of young artists based in Enniskerry. The artists, then practically unknown, were Stephen O’Reilly, Peter Knuttel, Graham Knuttel, Brian Vahey, Anna McLeod, Richard Gorman, Owen McCarthy and Gráinne Cuffe. It was a rainy day in beautiful Enniskerry and only a moderate audience gathered for the occasion. I recall that what they had on display and for sale was a portfolio of the eight unframed small etchings for £60. They were very good value and I said so to everyone in the audience, urging them all to buy a set like myself. At the least, they would make suitable gifts for children or grandchildren, if the purchaser did not wish to keep them all. The whole edition sold out immediately afterwards. I used to frame one up later from time to time and give them to my children and nephews and nieces for special occasions. Bryan got Graham Knuttel’s *Birdmen*, humans with bird’s heads and beaks, because he liked it and found it amusing. It was Bryan particularly who took a special interest in the art collection in our home from his earliest years. He was the child in particular who followed me about the house offering to help hang pictures, and place sculptures and ceramics. He would quiz me about why I had purchased a recent work, and showed a keen interest in hearing about the artists and their ways. He played