

When the writer Borges came to Ireland he described the Irish as charming and intelligent but with an incomprehensible habit, to him, of insisting on being Irish at all times. It is that insistence which is responsible for an on-going tension in Irish art, in Irish literature, even in music. An unresolved tension, which is how to articulate to the outside world the currents of communality, our empire of the colloquial, which almost defies attempts to create fusion with outside art forms and traditions.

Much of the history of our art in the past two hundred years has been the history of artists who have attempted to resolve that tension. In the context of Pierce's work I'm thinking of JM Synge in literature, of Sean O Riada in music, of perhaps Jack B Yeats in painting. All are artists who brought an international sensibility to bear on our own landscapes with their insistence on being *sui generis*, sufficient unto themselves. And I think that this work belongs to that tradition. I think that there is a difficult beauty to these places, the Burren, Kerry, Donegal, an unwillingness to yield themselves up, that insistence on being sufficient to themselves and it takes an artists of considerable depth and quality to unlock it. Pierce Hackett's strategies of paint and line draw, I think, on European contexts in order to open up new aspects of our country.

There are other sides to the work. For instance Winter in Pembroke Road, its solemnity and stillness, and its sense of a thing remembered, of what might even be called nostalgia, in Louis McNeice's meaning of the term, a soul nostalgia, 'homesick', as McNeice says, 'for the hollow heart of the Milky Way.'

But it is his interpretation of landscape that is, in my opinion, the towering achievement of this work. The influences may be nineteenth century, but the results belong to the first decade of this new century, innovative and rigorous, an artist shaping his own sensibility and bringing his audience with him.

by Eoin McNamee