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Frank McKelvey RHA RUA (1895-1974)

SWANS ON THE LAGAN, COUNTY ANTRIM

oil on canvas

signed lower left;

20 by 27in. (50.80 by 68.58cm)

Provenance:

'Irish Paintings', James Adam Salerooms in association with Bonhams,

Dublin, 1 June 1989, lot 119;

Private collection, Surrey;

Whyte's, 27 April 2004, lot 55;

Whence purchased by the present owner

Exhibited:

RHA, Dublin, 1945, catalogue no. 3 (£52-10-0)

Frank McKelvey was a pragmatic painter, reacting to things as they happened, not bothered by theory or dogma. For him painting represented a sense of discovery, similar to that of the children in this composition, superbly observed and depicted as they play with the swans. Writing in 1925 the English critic J. B. Meehan commented that

McKelvey's views and conversation were "as fresh and bright as his pictures"¹. In the artist's own words, he said, "painting is all great fun"². Both comments are applicable to McKelvey's whole career and ably describe the mood in *Swans on the Lagan*. The picture is similar to a number of others on this theme which McKelvey painted at different times in his career, the setting often being the pond at Woodvale Park, near to where he grew up, the lake at Hillsborough, the pond in St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, or, as here, the river Lagan and its environs. The handling of paint in this work and the slightly dramatic quality of the light, suggest a date of execution of around 1944-1945. It is almost certainly, therefore, the picture of this title that McKelvey exhibited at the RHA in 1945.

¹ Quoted in J. B. Meehan, *Two Ulster Artists*, Colour, December 1925, p. 12 (Meehan's other subject in this article was James Humbert Craig)

² Ibid.

Dr S.B. Kennedy
Belfast, 2004

€20,000-€25,000 (£16,393-£20,491 approx).