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Gerard Dillon (1916-1971)

CURRACHS OFF ROUNDSTONE

oil on board

signed lower left

20 by 24in. (50.80 by 60.96cm)

Provenance:

The Collection of Catherine Walston;

Thence by descent to previous owner;

Whyte's, 29 November 2005, lot 87;

Whence purchased by present owner

Gerard Dillon discovered Connemara in 1939 when, on a break from his job as a decorator in London, he toured the area. Coming from Belfast and living in London, Dillon had a very romantic idea of the West. He considered it 'a great strange land of wonder to the visitor from the red brick city',¹ as he put it, and he took every opportunity to stay there. James White wrote that Dillon's unique approach to the landscape of the West came from the fact that 'he looked away from the mist and the heather and became enraptured with the reality of the people, farming, fishing, drinking and dancing'.²

In 1950-51 Dillon spent a year living on the island of Inishlacken, off the Galway coast. The nearest town on the mainland was Roundstone and he frequently visited and painted there, travelling by boat across the mile of water that separated them. This period on Inishlacken is recounted in James MacIntyre's book, *Three Men on an Island*, (Belfast, 1996) which contains humorous accounts and illustrations of the antics of Dillon and his fellow artists, MacIntyre and George Campbell as they adapted to island life and to the friendships and adventures that beset them.

Currachs off Roundstone depicts a group of currachs drawing up at the quayside of Inishlacken, which is not visible in the painting. Behind them baking in evening sunlight and looking more like a Mediterranean village than an Irish one is Roundstone. The painting evokes the simplicity of life in the West of Ireland in the rudimentary forms of the currachs floating on the surface of the blue-grey sea. In the foremost boat a lobster pot full of catch is visible. From their orange colour the creatures look as if they have already been cooked, a witticism on Dillon's part. An old man holds the oar upright while his companion pulls the boat towards its docking port. The latter's face is painted green suggesting the shadow cast by the quayside wall. Such expressive and exaggerated use of colour also refers to the exotic nature of the islanders' existence. Dillon was strongly influenced by European expressionism and especially the work of the Jewish painter, Marc Chagall which uses strong evocative colours and childlike forms to recreate the magical scenes of his childhood in Russia before anti-Semitic violence destroyed this world and drove the artist into exile in Paris. Through visiting exhibitions in London and by looking at colour reproductions of modernist art Dillon familiarised himself with such modern art. He combines this aesthetic in his work with a style drawn from Irish Early Christian art especially the carvings of monks and biblical scenes found on the High Crosses.

Dillon's work was widely admired in Ireland and in London in the late 1940s and 1950s. He was supported during these years by the art dealer Victor Waddington. This painting belonged to Catherine Walston, a lover of the novelist Graham Greene and a devotee of Irish art. She began staying at Dooagh on Achill Island in 1947 and clearly shared Dillon's veneration for the West of Ireland as presented in this painting.

Dr. Roisin Kennedy

¹ Gerard Dillon, 'The Artist Speaks', *Envoy*, 1950.

² James White, *The Early Paintings of the West*, Dawson Gallery, Dublin, March 1971.

€25,000-€35,000 (£21,010-£29,410 approx.)