

Paintings by 'Ooloo'

M Lesley Simpson

During the last few years the museum has acquired eight watercolour paintings by Richard Douglas Perceval (1858-1944), or 'Ooloo', as he signed himself. Mr Perceval lived at Kary Hill, overlooking the Quoile river in Downpatrick. He had been a railway engineer in India but seems to have retired early, possibly due to a serious hearing problem. He did paint in India and after his return home to County Down he joined a "sketching club". The manuscript notes on the reverse of some of these paintings seem to associate them with this club, perhaps in his earlier period of membership, around 1910.¹

Initially it was thought that the critical notes on the back of some of these watercolours may have been written by Joseph William Carey (1859-1937), the well known Ulster painter of landscapes and seascapes. However, on comparing the writing with that in letters by Carey in the Ulster Museum this now seems unlikely. All of the paintings in our collection are of views around Strangford Lough and the Mourne Mountains, within comparatively short distances from Perceval's home. They are important in our collection, in terms of art and social history, not only providing us with topographical illustrations typical of the period, but also reminding us of the contemporary fashion for rambling and sketching clubs.



'Sketrick Castle'.

160 x 252 mm. Provenance: unknown. DCM1992-73. Purchase

Catalogue

Note: All measurements in mms, height before width, without mount or frame.

I. 'A cloudy day in the Mourne Mountains'. 170 x 120 mm.
Handwritten critical notes pasted on the back of the mount,
as follows:

I am carefully watching the progress towards freshness and breadth in Ooloo's work and like this little sketch very much. The colour is pleasant and the successive receding planes are well marked. Still firmer drawing of the edges of the masses would help and I think there are just too many touches in the foreground. The grass and rock in the left bottom corner might be more simply treated and the shadow under the latter is too forced. The blue reflection of the sky in the water is too dark. A colour may be more brilliant than its surroundings but not necessarily darker. The two qualities are not identical.

Provenance: Purchased by the donor's family from the artist. DCM1992-50.

Gift of Mrs M E McCord, Ardglass.

2. 'Slieve Bignian from the slope of Slievenagore'. 235 x 150 mm.
Handwritten critical notes pasted on the back of the mount, as follows:
This is, I think, the broadest, freshest and most expressive sketch I have seen from this contributor & I welcome it. It is very well arranged, the cottage being in exactly the right place. The scheme of colour is subtle and has considerable charm.
A slight suppression or diminution in size of the cloud over the highest peak would I think help, and there is a white light at the edge of the gorse by the cottage which is out of true. Otherwise I am little disposed to criticise. [This last criticism seems to have resulted in the overpainting! of the cottage.]
Provenance: Purchased by the donor's family from the artist. DCM1992-51.
Gift of Mrs M E McCord, Ardglass.

3. 'In the Mourne Mountains above Annalong'. 146 x 228 mm.
Provenance: Purchased by the donor's family from the artist. DCM1992-52.
Gift of Mrs M E McCord, Ardglass.

4. 'Quoile Creek, from Ringmore to Delamont'. 160 x 252 mm.
Provenance: unknown. DCM 1992-72. Purchase

5. 'Sketrick Castle'.
160 x 252 mm. (See above)
Provenance: unknown. DCM1992-73. Purchase

6. 'Near Strangford'. 243 x 155 mm.
With handwritten critical notes pasted on the back of the mount, as follows:

There is much tender and agreeable colour in the sky, which is pleasantly and suggestively handled. All through the handling is direct and the tones pure. Although the subject is well and broadly seen, there is nevertheless a certain lack of unity which for a time puzzled me. Thinking it over I am of (the opinion that this (is due to a competition of interest, particularly between the objects of the middle distance and of the foreground. If the attention is directed to the objects of the middle distance (sufficiently be it noted to observe the windows of the house) the same degree of attention can not be given, at the same time to the detail of the tree trunk in the foreground. One of these two aspects should be adopted, either to see the near objects at the expense of detail in the middle distance - or vice versa. Otherwise a sense of confused vision arises - whence lack of unity both of appearance and purpose.
Provenance: Purchased by the donor's family from the artist. DCM 1999-372
Gift of Mrs E Hastings, Larne (formerly of Downpatrick).

7. 'Shooter's Island on the Quoile'. 182 x 295 mm.
Provenance: purchased by the donor in London. DCM 1999-245.
Gift of Mr Brendan Breen, Downpatrick.

8. 'At Ringdufferin'. 250 x 160 mm.
This is the only painting in this group to be signed 'R D Perceval'. There are handwritten critical notes pasted on the back of the original frame, as follows;
A quite good drawing, fresh and broad in its treatment of the trees. I have little criticism to make except to ask for greater simplicity of drawing and treatment in the distance, and a more definite massing of the shadow thrown by the trees in the foreground. This shadow is too coloured to tell as such.
Provenance: Purchased by the donor's family from the artist. DCM1999-373 Gift of Mrs E Hastings, Larne.

Lesley Simpson is the museum's Keeper of Collections.

Reference

1. Mrs Betty McCord (nee Clements), whose family lived near R D Perceval,

thinks it was 'The 1910 Sketching Club'.

Acknowledgements

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