

Sir Claude Francis Barry, Bart.
(1883-1970)
PRESS RELEASE

1) Royal Cornwall Museum Exhibition: 4 February to 4 June 2011

(Courtesy of Sue Bradbury, SBPR Limited and the Royal Cornwall Museum)

Described by one national critic as 'the greatest artist you never heard of', Barry (1883-1970) was a prolific painter and etcher who spent years working alongside Newlyn School greats like Stanhope Forbes, Henry Scott Tuke and Norman Garstin at the beginning of the last century. An early narrative approach to painting gave way to more abstract themes as he experimented with a range of styles - including the very different schools of Pointillism and Vorticism. The result is an exciting, very varied portfolio of work that is as memorable as it is striking.

Had it not been for the passion and determination of one man, however, Barry would, in all likelihood, have remained an unknown. Independently wealthy, he didn't need to sell his art during his lifetime and, when he died in 1970; he left the bulk of it to his pupil, an impoverished fellow artist. When solicitor David Capps came across it by chance four years later, he couldn't believe his eyes.

"I'd answered a newspaper advertisement and ended up buying "Glamorous Night", one of Barry's nudes," he explains. "I thought it was stunning and very tasteful and wanted to find out more about the artist. My research led to an introduction to Tom Skinner, Barry's pupil and executor, who was living in a cold, damp garret at the time. Propped up against his wall was a pile of Barry's etchings with condensation pouring down them. I knew I had to buy them - not for commercial reasons because no-one was buying art as a serious investment in 1974 - but because I loved them."

David's collection has grown to the extent that he now lends some of it to offices, institutions and schools so that more people can see it. Much of the work on display at the Royal Cornwall Museum is his and, judging by the number of visitors coming to see the exhibition and the favourable comment it is attracting from specialists, Barry's name is fast gaining recognition. Even Charles Saatchi, Jeffery Archer and some very significant galleries are reported to be fans.

On 4 February 2011, David Capps formally opened "A Master Revealed" at a private view held at the Royal Cornwall Museum. The exhibition runs until 4 June and entry is free. A lunchtime talk being given by fine art specialist and BBC Antiques Road show contributor Michael Newman on 10 March was sold out. The book on Barry entitled 'Moon Behind Clouds' by Katie Campbell is on sale in the museum foyer for just £10.

2) General overview of Barry's life

(Courtesy of Cindy Lawson)

Born in 1883 Sir Claude Francis Barry was the oldest son of an aristocratic, industrial family. Defying his parents' wishes he became a painter, training first as a realist in Newlyn, tutored by Alfred East, then later moving to St Ives where he became an active member of the

St Ives Art Club. Barry was embraced by the artistic establishment and by the age of 23 was exhibiting with London's prestigious Royal Academy. Over the next decade he showed with the R.A., the Royal Society of British Artists, the Royal Society of Scottish Artists and the Salon des Artistes.

Barry was forced into the studio at the outbreak of World War I and his painting style evolved as he became less inclined to realism and more involved in colour and form. His family background in design and engineering provided him with a good grounding in exploring French pointillism and especially British vorticism.

In the 1920s he left England for Europe where he remained until the outbreak of the Second World War. During this time he honed the skills as an etcher that he learned under the tutelage of Sir Frank Brangwyn, making images both precise and atmospheric, which were well received in the Paris Salon. He was awarded gold, silver and bronze medals for his work in both France and Italy and amongst his diverse patrons were Queen Mary, Neville Chamberlain and Mussolini.

As well as producing etchings from the early 1900s until the Second World War, Barry continued to paint, approaching colour with what was essentially divisionist philosophy, separating colour and using clear, unmixed colours to maximise luminosity.

Moving around Europe in the '20s and '30s, he painted and etched prolifically and became inspired by the technical challenges of depicting dusk and darkness. This, in addition to his keen interest in astrology is evident in many of his night-time works. On the outbreak of war in 1939 Barry returned to St Ives and, giving up etching, concentrated on oils. Later, having moved to Jersey, his work continued with more emphasis on figurative paintings and working with a minimalist style to produce blocks of colour and sinuous, pared-down shapes.

There, he became part of the "Phoenix Group"; comprising the well known Jersey artist Edmund Blampied; John More; Barry's pupil Tom Skinner and his twin brother Jean Jacques.

A constantly evolving style over six decades has made Barry, despite his reticence about promoting his work, a feature in many of the finest shows of his time.

At the end of the Second World War, Barry held a final exhibition at his studio and stated that he was leaving St Ives. It was misreported that he intended to move to Paris, but it was Jersey in the Channel Islands that ended up being his destination. Barry had become relatively poor since leaving his first wife and family and virtually cutting himself off from his wealthy father. Jersey's location and climate seemed perfect for such a talented artist.

Having settled in St Helier Barry and his wife Violet lived in various guest houses and private hotels. By now Barry was concentrating his efforts on simpler works that could be described as "naive" art, or work in the style of Clarice Cliff, consisting of large blocks of colour and dark outlines. An obvious lover of women, much of his work consisted of nudes.

Barry had always been a loner, yet he did spend a lot of time in bars and music halls, which is where he met Jersey artist Tom Skinner. They soon became fast friends and Skinner became Barry's pupil. Before long the Skinners invited Barry to live with them and provided him with

studio space allowing him to continue his work. Barry lived with the Skinners for the next seven years, and ultimately bequeathed all of his works and his estate to Tom Skinner. Barry continued painting until his late eighties when, no longer capable of taking care of himself, he was moved to a Nursing home in Kent to be near his family and died in 1970 after a Sunday outing with his Son.

3) Exhibitions of Sir Claude Francis Barry's Work:

a) An exhibition of his work was held at the Barreau Art Gallery in Jersey following Barry's death, and the bulk of his works went into storage, where they have largely remained until now.

Barry's style of work evolved throughout his life, but never failed to be striking and impressive. Sadly, as is so often the case with great artists, it is only since his death that his work has become so popular and is now exhibited in various museums and art galleries, as well as appearing in various private art collections.

b) The Jersey Arts Centre 2004

c) The Collyer Bristow Gallery London 2005

d) Entent Cordiale Exhibition London 2005

e) The Mitchell Studio Gallery Addlestone, Surrey, 2006

f) LAPADA London 2008

g) LAPADA London 2009

h) The Watercolour Exhibition, the Science Museum London 2010

i) LAPADA London 2010

j) Penlee Museum, Penzance – Peace Night Trafalgar Square – 2010

k) The Royal Cornwall Museum 2011

4) Loans of Sir Claude Francis Barry's work

Over the past ten years works have been loaned to banks and professional firms in Jersey and in London, and to a school and the local hospice in Jersey.

5) Early history of Barry

(Courtesy of David Tovey)

Barry was a pacifist and spent the early part of the War near his family's home in Windsor. The six months that he was forced to spend digging potatoes, he recalled as the worst time of his life. In 1917, however, he settled in St Ives again, taking over from the mentally ill Dorothy Robinson, the large property, 'Belliers Croft', which she and her husband, Harry, had built at the turn of the century. He rented initially one of the Porthmeor Studios, but

moved shortly thereafter to a studio in Porthmeor Square, which he named 'St Leonard's Studio' and in which he held exhibitions with his wife, Doris, in the summer of each of the years 1918, 1919 and 1920. During this period, he produced work of great variety, but he imbued all with his own poetic vision. Borlase Smart commented, "He feels the mystery of twilight, the romance in a moonrise, or the happiness of a spring day".

Whilst based in Windsor, Barry was particularly attracted by the local woods. "Trees", he proclaimed, "are the glory of landscape", and in his treatise on painting, he told students to beware of thinking of them as green, for they were "very often blue, and can be crimson, orange-yellow, grey or black; anyhow almost anything except green". The large painting (46" x 67"), *A Glade in Windsor Park* (illustrated on page 209 of the book), is a fine example of his woodland scenes of this period, whilst his painting, *The Merry Woods of Windsor*, was highly complimented when it was hung at the Paris Salon in 1919. Other well-regarded woodland subjects were *Monarchs of Windsor Forest* (Show Day 1920) and *Autumn Glory* (RBA 1920). However, Barry's new-found interest in both pointillism and symbolist subjects suggests the possible influence of Emile Fabry, although it is hard to be certain, as very few of Barry's paintings in this style have come to light, despite the acclaim that they received at the time.

The first mention of Barry's work, after his return to St Ives, was a note that his Royal Academy exhibit of 1917, *The Serenity of the Night*, had been rendered poetic by "the division of tones", the manner in which the pointillist technique was often referred to at the time. However, no indication is given as to its subject or of any symbolism. However, his next major work, *The Twilight of the World*, did have symbolic intent, and when it was exhibited at the Cornish Artists exhibition in Plymouth in November 1917, it was hailed "as a landscape that stands in a class by itself, and is bound to arrest attention and to give rise to sharp controversy". It is believed that the scene featured many grave markers. Certainly, this was the case with a work that he exhibited at Lanham's that December, entitled *The Glory that is France*. It was a theme to which Barry returned in works such as *We Shall Remember Them* (illustrated on page 77 of the book).

Barry's pointillist style made a particular impression when he turned his hand to searchlight paintings - the works for which he eventually became best known. Feeling that Peace Night at the end of the War would make a good subject, he spent months in London waiting for peace to be declared and then his wife and himself spent the evening making notes to work up into big pictures. *Peace Night in Trafalgar Square* showed joyous crowds "madly jazzing under the shadow of Nelson's monument", with the scene illuminated by a magnificent firework display, whereas *The Grand Fleet on Peace Night*, an illustration of which was reproduced in *Naval and Military Record* in March 1920, showed the Fleet outlined by criss-crossing searchlights. Pointillist-painted searchlights also featured in his 1919 Royal Academy exhibit *London and War Time*, which received numerous favourable reviews for its combination of realism and decorative effect. "On this canvas, showing a dim vision of Westminster from the Surrey side of the river, the searchlight rays criss-cross each other, covering the heavens with a curious pattern of geometrical figures; yellow spots of light on the bridge cast twinkling reflections in waters already alive beneath the moonlight. The impression is clever and well sustained." In 1920, he used this technique in a Cornish nocturne, *The Hills of Home*, which, for boldness of conception and originality of outlook, was considered to be the leading work in the RBA exhibition that year and was hung in the place of honour. "In the weird light of a young moon, the country stretches away - the whole seen through a 'snow-storm' of variously coloured dots." Accordingly, Barry's experiments in pointillism were highly regarded at the time, but, sadly, the only example located is a small painting of a Cornish tin mine, owned by the Royal Cornwall Museum.