

MARTIN TINNEY GALLERY
Evelyn Williams

(1929-2012)
7 Sept - 7 Oct



'Over the Sea I' oil on canvas 1993

This exhibition consists of paintings and drawings dating from the 1950's to 2012 and there is a fully illustrated catalogue available with essays by David Alston and Peter Wakelin. The exhibition coincides with the launch of the Evelyn Williams Drawing Award, a biennial £10,000 Award to a selected artist for a drawing project, marking a partnership between The Evelyn Williams Trust and The Jerwood Drawing Prize.

MARTIN TINNEY GALLERY
WWW.ARTWALES.COM

18 ST. ANDREW'S CRESCENT CARDIFF CF10 3DD
Tel: 029 2064 1411 mtg@artwales.com

MARTIN TINNEY GALLERY



'The Sea No II' oil on canvas 2006

Evelyn Williams by Peter Wakelin

It seems to me self-evident that Evelyn Williams should be called a 'great' artist. Her paintings and drawings gleam like water drawn from the deep well of her own self and cast into a mirror pool. The reflections are not personal but universal. So when she reaches into her sensations as a mother it seems she speaks for every mother; when she paints a tree she captures the embodiment of tree-ness; her crowds somehow stand for all the generations that have ever been, setting off the same vertigo of insignificance as the infinite night sky.

So many qualities evidence her mastery: the distinctiveness of her vision (her paintings could not be any other artist's), her constant exploration and discovery, the mesmerising rhythm, balance and textures of her compositions, and perhaps above all the potency with which, like other great painters, poets and film-makers, she offers up a sense of things half-felt, half-thought that could not be stated any other way. Her themes were big ones, though she never made them explicit and left the interpretation of her paintings to her viewers. Among the deep preoccupations to which she returned repeatedly were the conjoined love and fear of motherhood, sexuality, the inevitable passage from life to death, the paradoxical fusion and separateness of marriage, the transcendental moment of being.

Evelyn Williams had real recognition in her lifetime: a place at the Royal College of Art, the John Moores prize in sculpture in 1961, a retrospective at the Whitechapel when she was only 43, and commercially successful exhibitions at Agnews and England & Co in London and the Martin Tinney Gallery. There are three substantial books about her. Examples of her work have been acquired by important collections.

Yet it is a small scandal that Evelyn Williams' art is not represented in public collections even better than it is, and is not on display: public galleries are, after all, where most of us get to see and study artworks and establish our conceptions of the very best. Certainly, there is a power here that might stand out disarmingly, but wouldn't it be instructive, and thrilling, to see Evelyn Williams placed with other major artists who have contemplated the human condition as deeply: Francis Bacon, Louise Bourgeois, Lucian Freud, Ana Maria Pacheco, Paula Rego? Perhaps her proper recognition must await the back-swing of curatorial fashion to figurative painting or the final death of those old but lingering attitudes that underrate the work of women artists.

Posthumous exhibitions like this are critical if we are to re-evaluate artists' reputations. These few well-chosen paintings and drawings amply demonstrate the depth and beauty of Evelyn Williams' work. Painters who, like her, are intimate, quiet, profound, can be lost in the rumpus made by showmen of the art world. But like another great woman artist of Wales, Gwen John, I think in time she will fly higher in reputation than many of her noisier, grander, male contemporaries. Bit by bit, her brilliance will be seen.

Dr Peter Wakelin is a writer and curator. He was formerly Director of Collections at Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales.

MARTIN TINNEY GALLERY
WWW.ARTWALES.COM

18 ST. ANDREW'S CRESCENT CARDIFF CF10 3DD

Tel: 029 2064 1411 mtg@artwales.com