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“Emancipated from Provincial Myth” (Herbert Read, *A Letter to a Young Painter*): Irish Modernism and Its European Reception between the Poles of Art and Politics

Still in 1962, forty years after the Irish Independence had been achieved, the British art critic, Herbert Read, characterized modern Irish art as *provincial myth*. He related to a specific Celtic legacy that he had made out in 20th century Irish art and literature. According to Read, only a few Irish artists had been able to free themselves from provincialism, for instance Louis le Brocquy (1916–2012), who managed to reach an independent and even universal pictorial language by his disengagement from the Celtic heritage.

Ireland’s esteem of its art, however, was diametrically opposed to the above described British appraisal. Irish representatives tried to entwine the imagination of a long-standing and autonomous tradition with the idea of the postcolonial state. Already shortly after the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, art critics and politicians had imposed demands on the establishment of a modern national style. Hence, the aim of forming an Irish school was to emerge autochthonous art forms that were eligible to represent the state visually. This objective, however, required a systematic negation of artistic exchange relationships and processes of cultural interdependences. Consequently, Irish art had long been regarded neither as modern nor as international.

Following this discussion and based on selected works of art on theoretical references and exhibition material, the presentation will analyse the attempts to establish a genuine Irish school, as well as its characteristics. By providing an international perspective, it is also important to raise the question of how political processes have influenced the cultural search of identity and how the former *occupying power*, Great Britain, impinged on the process of identity formation using negative connotations and stereotypes. Ultimately, the goal of the presentation is to detach Irish art from solely national analysis criteria and valuation standards, and, as a result, to open it for a widespread, art-theoretical discourse in the context of European modernism.

After receiving her MA degree in art history, sociology and law at the *TU Dresden*, **Elisabeth Ansel** worked as a Research and Teaching Fellow in the Department of History of Art at *TU Dresden* from 2010 until 2016. She also worked as a Degree Programmes Coordinator at the Dean’s office at *TU Dresden* from 2016 until 2017. Currently, she is writing her PhD thesis on the Irish artist Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957). Since 2017 she is in receipt of a doctoral scholarship of the Free State of Saxony. Her main research interests are British and Irish art as well as postcolonial studies. She has given several conference papers and written articles on Irish modernist art.