

# Elizabeth Rivers

1903-1964



MILMO-PENNY FINE ART

# Elizabeth Rivers

1903 – 1964

## *A Second View*

Dominic Milmo-Penny



Source

Dr S. B. Kennedy

1989

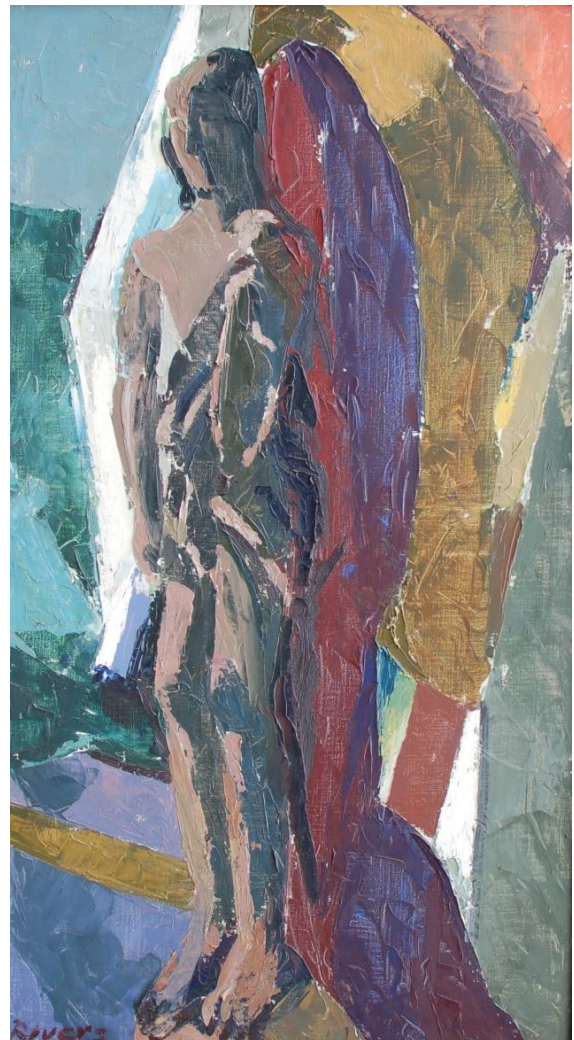
MILMO-PENNY FINE ART

1<sup>st</sup> May – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023

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## Foreword

This exhibition came about following a request from the Court Gallery, Somerset, for inclusion of *The Ark in Storm* in their exhibition of women artists who studied under André Lhote. Traditionally known as ‘Man and Mountain’, the title was a little too obvious and open to question. However, in his 1989 catalogue, Brian Kennedy suggests ‘The Ark in Storm’ as an alternative title for another work in the Ark series of paintings but it now appears that this is not the case. The flash of lightning across the mountain in the current painting indicates a storm and provides a more convincing match to the title. With search engines working overtime, other discoveries followed. Noah and his family are now identified in *The Images*, another work from the Ark series, and a standing figure has been identified as *Christ Draped in Purple*, a scene from the Passion. The artist’s masterpiece, *Our Lady of the Apocalypse*, is explored in detail, panel by panel. Another exceptional work, *Strange Shore*, is presented as a representation of everyday life on Aran and *The Sleepers* is now identified as women waiting for boats on the Aran Islands.



1. *Christ Draped in Purple*

## Acknowledgements

In memory of Dr S. Brian Kennedy, a first-class scholar. I had the pleasure of working with Brian on the original text and I have no doubt that he would have supported the amendments suggested here.

Special thanks to Dickon Hall and to Denys Wilcox, Court Gallery, Somerset.

*Dominic Milmo-Penny, Dublin. December, 2022*





2. *The Second Fall*

## Chronology

- 1903 5 August, born in Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire, England.
- 1914-21 Educated St. Catherine's School, Bramley, Surrey.
- 1921-24 Studied at Goldsmith's College, London.
- 1926-31 Studied at the Royal Academy Schools, London.
- 1931-34 Studied at the Ecole de Fresque and at the Academie Lhote, Paris.
- 1933 First one-woman exhibition, Wertheim Gallery, Manchester.
- 1935 First visit to Ireland in spring. Spent a year on Inis Mór, Aran.
- 1936 Returned to Aran and remained until 1943 when she returned to London.  
Exhibited seven pictures of Aran subjects at the RHA.
- 1939 February. Exhibited pictures from the Aran Islands, Nicholson Galleries, London.  
Published 'This Man', a book of wood engravings, Gyron House Press, London.
- 1940 Elected a member of the Society of Women Artists.
- 1946 Published 'Stranger in Aran', Cuala Press, Dublin.
- 1946-55 Worked with Evie Hone on cartoons for stained glass at An Túr Gloine studios, Dublin.  
Joined the Society of Dublin Painters.
- 1955 Worked briefly in Cornwall, before returning to Dublin.
- 1957 Published 'Out of Bondage', Israel, Peter Owen Press, London.
- 1960 Solo exhibition, Dawson Gallery, Dublin.
- 1964 Died 20<sup>th</sup> July at her home in Dalkey. Buried in St. Mary's Cemetery, Tallaght.
- 1966 March. 'Memorial Exhibition', Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin

## Elizabeth Rivers 1903-1964



3. *The Ark in Storm*

Oil on canvas 27 x 22 inches

Signed by the artist

Provenance:

The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989.

Exhibited:

Dublin Painter's Society, 1948, number 20;

Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Dublin, 1950, number 51;

Society of Women Artists as 'Man and Mountain';

Memorial Exhibition, Dublin, 1966, number 67;

Gorry Gallery, Dublin, 1989, number 7

'Women Artists Who Studied Under André Lhote', Court Gallery,  
Somerset, September 2022.

Literature:

Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View', Dublin, 1989.

Traditionally known as 'Man and Mountain', the title of this work never made much sense. However, in Brian Kennedy's 1989 catalogue, there is a suggestion that *The Ark in Storm* might be an alternative title for another work from the Ark series, *And the ark went upon the face of the waters*. Subsequent research suggests that this is not the case. However, both paintings are closely related. Together, they illustrate the forty-day flood as described in the Book of Genesis. The former is undoubtedly taken from 7:18: '*And the waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters*'. The current work is taken from 7:19. '*And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth; and all the high mountains that are under all the heavens were covered*'. The portrayal of a lightning storm across the top of the mountain is a key factor and a marvellous example of Rivers' unique ability to interpret this ancient text in modern paint.



Elizabeth Rivers

## Biography

Elizabeth (Betty) Joyce Rivers was born at Little Pennys, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1903, one of five children of Thomas Alfred Rivers, FRHS (1863-1915). She came from an affluent background, her family for many years being well-known nurserymen and indeed her great-grandfather, Thomas Rivers (1798-1877), lent his name to the 'Early Rivers' cherry and to other varieties of trees and fruits.<sup>1</sup> Her grandmother was Irish,<sup>2</sup> but the rest of her family were English. Her mother died when Elizabeth was young and so at the age of eleven she was sent to St. Catherine's School, Bramley, in Surrey, a boarding school for girls. Thus during her formative years she did not have a close family life and did not greatly enjoy her school days. But since childhood she had wanted to become an artist and so, on leaving school in 1921, she went to Goldsmith's College in London, where she began her art education.<sup>3</sup>

At Goldsmith's College she studied for three years, from 1921 to 24, under Edmund J. Sullivan (1869-1933), a watercolourist, print maker and illustrator of books and magazines. She studied a wide range of art subjects, but concentrated on life drawing and illustration and, no doubt, it was Sullivan who inspired her to become an illustrator although in these years she was also influenced by the work of Gordon Craig (1872-1966), which she knew from reproductions in books, and in her own time she took lessons from Noel Rooke (1881-1953)<sup>4</sup> who influenced a generation of English wood engravers at that time. On leaving Goldsmith's she went to work in a commercial art studio in London, but soon felt dissatisfied with the work there. In 1926, however, she won a scholarship and, on the recommendation of Frederick Marriott (1860-1941) the headmaster of Goldsmith's College, enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy Schools.<sup>5</sup> There she spent five years studying painting under a number of well-known artists including Charles Sims (1873-1928), Walter Sickert (1860-1942), F. E. Jackson (1872-1945) and Sir Walter Russell (1867-1949). Of her teachers, Sickert was the most influential on her. "I learned everything about painting from him" she said. "He came in like dynamite, and gave us a month's plan of work. For the first week you did drawing, the second week you did tone study, the third week you did a colour study, and the fourth week you'd build up a painting from your three studies." Although much of this approach to composition remained with her throughout her career, the influence of Sickert is hard to detect in her work. While at the Academy, she distinguished herself by winning a number of prizes and medals and exhibited regularly at the summer exhibitions. During these years she helped to support herself by making wood engravings, "a tremendous bread and butter thing" she confessed years later, and illustrated her first books, namely C. S. Calverley's translation (1862) from the Greek of Theocritus's *Second and Seventh Idylls* (1927) and Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *The Day-Dream* (1938). Also, in the latter year, she engraved a number of illustrations of biblical scenes and other subjects for the *Radio Times*, commissioned by its editor, Maurice Gorham. Her illustrations for Walter de la Mare's *On the Edge* appeared in 1930.





4. Keener, *Inis Mór, Aran*

In March 1931, Elizabeth Rivers left the Royal Academy Schools and, with the aid of a legacy of three hundred pounds, went to Paris. There, each year from October to the following May, she continued her studies for another three years under Andre Lhote (1885-1962), Gino Severini (1883-1966) and at the Ecole de Fresque. She was introduced by Lhote to Synthetic Cubism and by Severini to Divisionism<sup>6</sup> although it was the former which most influenced her later work. With Severini she also studied wall painting and learned how to produce cartoons from small sketches, a practice which later stood her in good stead in her work with Evie Hone. While none of the paintings which she did at this time seems to have survived, her *Mural Design*, probably of the mid-thirties and reproduced in Lucy Wertheim's *Adventure in Art*,<sup>7</sup> shows that she had adopted a strongly mannered style reminiscent of the work of her English contemporary William Roberts (1895-1980). In 1933 she held her first one-woman exhibition in the Wertheim Gallery, Manchester but, alas, we have no record of that exhibition or of the kind of works which were included in it. It was probably at about this time that she became a member of Lucy Wertheim's 'Twenties Group', which was first formed in 1930 and consisted solely of avant-garde artists in their twenties. The Irish painter Norah McGuinness was another member of the Group, many of whom, including Barbara Hepworth, Roger Hilton, Victor Pasmore and Christopher Wood, subsequently became well-known.<sup>8</sup>

By the mid-thirties one senses in Elizabeth Rivers a trace of aimlessness: she had spent an unusually long period as a student and by the time she finally returned from Paris was already in her early thirties. Possibly it was this aimlessness that led Alex Reid of the Lefevre Gallery, the London picture dealer to whom she showed her work, to advise her to seek a change of locality in order to develop a style and subject-matter of her own. At about the same time a friend, who had recently returned to London after spending her honeymoon on the Aran Islands, recommended the west of Ireland as a painting ground and so Rivers decided to go there to see the landscape for herself. Thus in the spring of 1935 she first crossed to Ireland and went directly to Inis Mór where, instead of staying three months as planned, she remained for a year, working and gathering material for her book *Stranger in Aran* which was later published by the Cuala Press. Clearly she was excited by Aran, by the rugged landscape and the life of the people, as the drawings in her book illustrate, and there she found, too, that fresh subject-matter which she sought and which led to her first mature work. In the following year, 1936, she returned to Inis Mór and made it her home for the next seven years. During that time she was busy drawing, painting and writing, observing the life around her and soaking up the atmosphere of the place. Her excitement is clearly evident in works such as the splendidly vigorous *Loading the pony-Aran*, which conveys all the excitement of the occasion with great economy of means, or in drawings such as *Connemara Turf Boats Unloading-Aran*, *Unloading the Catch Aran* or *Dance-Aran*. In these last named works, the firmness and assurance of her draftsmanship clearly indicate her sense of contentment at the time. In February 1939 she held an exhibition of pictures of Aran at the Nicholson Galleries in London and, judging by the review of it in the *Irish Times*, a number of these works may have been included.<sup>9</sup> On Inis Mór Rivers lived in a cottage which had been built for Robert J. Flaherty for the making of his film, *Man of Aran* (1934).<sup>10</sup> She was hospitable and, as Clara Vyvyan records,<sup>11</sup> joined in the life of the islands, her cottage becoming a sort of open



5. *The Nativity*

house for those who wished to call. However, out of a sense of duty, she returned to London in about 1943<sup>12</sup> to work as a fire warden during the blitz. This work was hell, she said later, although she would have been sorry if she had not done it. “Besides” she commented, in a manner which illustrates her sense of civic responsibility “I feel that what is happening in the world is one's business. I have no belief that artists are separate people who should sit aside and nourish their own souls.” *Pimlico, London* and *London*, both done in about 1944-45, recall the horror and devastation of the times.

Shortly after the end of the war, Elizabeth Rivers returned to Ireland and, apart from a brief spell in Cornwall in 1955, lived there for the rest of her life. In 1946 she met Evie Hone and began to work with her, enlarging one-inch scale drawings into full-size cartoons for stained glass windows, an occupation in which she continued until Hone's death in 1955. The great eighteen-light window for Eton College chapel, executed 1949-52, was the largest and best-known of these projects on which Elizabeth Rivers worked. “I did the entire Eton window cartoon”, she told Marian Fitzgerald, although this was the only stage of the work in which she was involved. Yet, in passing, one cannot help but notice the almost total absence of references to Elizabeth Rivers by writers on Evie Hone. Her work with Hone may have been “just a question of having an intelligent pair of hands” but it is still worthy of note and, in all probability, accounted for the strong feeling of stained glass in later works such as *At the Foot of the Cross*, and *Our Lady of the Apocalypse*, both painted in the early 1960s.

In tandem with her work with Hone, Rivers exhibited regularly in both solo and group exhibitions and was represented in two important survey exhibitions of Irish art held during the fifties at the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery, Dublin and the National Library of Wales in 1953. She executed an important mural for the Zetland Hotel in Connemara and in the spring of 1960 completed a set of Stations for a new church in Athenry and held her last solo exhibition at the Dawson Gallery in May of that year. In their review of the show, the Irish Times critic mentioned Creation: the Fifth Day, but had little understanding of Rivers’ approach to painting.<sup>13</sup> Apart from her work in oil, this was also a very productive period for her work as an illustrator. On July 20<sup>th</sup> 1964, Elizabeth Rivers dies suddenly at her home in Dalkey.<sup>14</sup> A Memorial Exhibition was held in the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery in 1966.

In character, Rivers was a warm and friendly person and thanks to her dark complexion, was at times taken to be Jewish.<sup>15</sup> She had a deep interest in the Semitic peoples, which led to her book *Out of Bondage, Israel*, based on a visit there in 1951. Nevertheless, she had little interest in nationalities and “only felt English in war time. As James White observed<sup>16</sup> she was totally committed to the people amongst whom she found herself at any time. She was absorbed in her work. “My work is a whole way of life and my life is the food, the material out of which I make paintings and drawings”. She had a reflective personality and a philosophical bent. As is clear from her work, religion played a central role in her life and it is not surprising to find that she entered the Catholic Church in her later years. 6.





6. *Jubilate Agno*

She was well respected in the Dublin art world and was well known for her kindness and for the encouragement she gave to younger artists. In the words of Patrick Pye, written after her death: “She would make the intellectual effort to enter into the vision of another; her greatest encouragement was in the seriousness of her comment.”<sup>17</sup>

### Work as a Painter

Although she is often thought of as having been first and foremost a printmaker and illustrator, Elizabeth Rivers always thought of herself primarily as a painter. “Everything has always led up to painting”, she told Marian Fitzgerald. “Colour to me is absolutely wonderful. I am mesmerised by the play of one colour against another. In a painting it is colour that tells the story. You make colour talk by what you put next to it”. Her method of working was to make drawings out of doors and then to work the finished compositions from these drawings in her studio. Still life was her favourite subject-matter although she also painted figure compositions and religious themes. Her landscapes are usually dominated by people at work or play and, apart from some early landscapes done on Aran, she did few pure landscapes.<sup>18</sup> There is a strong lyrical quality in her work, as is evident from *The Ark in Storm*, 1948, *Still Life with Bananas*, 1958-60 or *The Pool of Water*, 1960-62. Clearly she was influenced by the Modern Movement which, since the turn of the century, had dominated the development of European art and, by the late twenties and thirties, had become increasingly influential on British painting too. Much of the emphasis of Modernism was evangelistic, but Rivers, while embracing its ideals, nevertheless pursued a personal vision.<sup>19</sup>

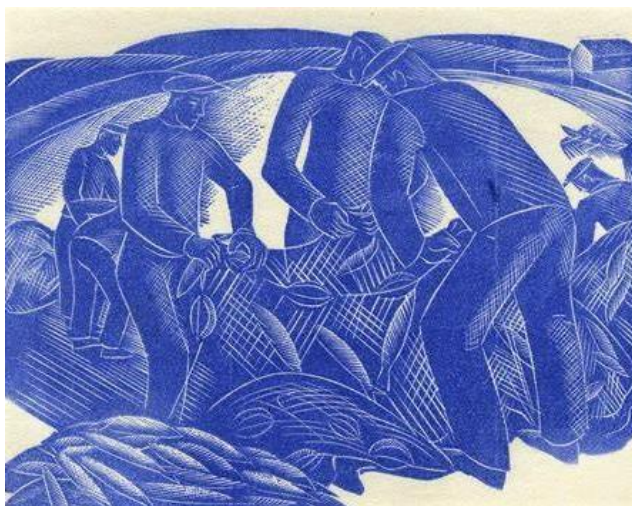
The development of Elizabeth Rivers' work is difficult to trace on stylistic grounds but with caution it may be regarded as falling roughly into three periods, namely the years before about 1940, 1940-1960 and 1960-64. The main difference between each of these periods is in her use of colour. Her early work is firmly in the tradition of British painting of her time and her handling of paint, with a heavy impasto, in pictures such as *Tulips*, 1931, done just before she went to study in Paris, recalls artists such as David Bomberg (1890-1957) whose work she may have known from exhibitions of the London Group, a venue where she herself exhibited in 1934. But her *Portrait of a Dark Haired Woman*, 1931-35, almost certainly done either during her time in Paris or immediately afterwards, is distinctly French in feeling. Here the simplification of forms, boldly contrasting shapes and economic use of colour, all combined so as to suggest a relatively flat picture plane, betray the influence of Lhote. From this time onwards her work was increasingly indebted to Modernism and to Lhote's teaching in particular. Of her other teacher at the time, Severini, it is harder to find trace in her work, although *Abstract: Two Men*, 1931-35, may have been done under his influence and the lyricism and frequently expressed sense of movement which are characteristics of her work in general may have derived in part from him.



7. *Keening Women, Inis Mór, Aran*

Of her early paintings, done about the time she first came to Ireland, we know little. Few seem to have survived but her delightful study, *Loading the Pony-Aran*, 1937-39, which depicts a group of fishermen loading a pony into a boat for transit to the mainland, shows her ability to capture atmosphere and character with a few swiftly executed brushstrokes. This picture was exhibited at the Nicholson Galleries, London, in February 1939, when the *Irish Times* commented that “The mackerel harvest, the seaweed, the hookers with turf, the Connemara ponies, the fishing nets, kelp-making and spinning (were) among the subjects depicted”.<sup>20</sup>

The years from 1940 to 1960 were the most fruitful and successful period in Elizabeth’s career. In these years she developed fully her mature style in painting and was most completely in control of her work. In the forties she produced a number of paintings, each strong in colour and with a firmly resolved composition. *The Ark upon the Waters*; *The Ark in Storm*, 1948; and *Children at Hallowe'en*, 1948-51, are the best of these. In both versions of the ark, we can see explicit for the first time several features which remained characteristic of her work. There is a bold use of line to define forms which are mildly Cubist in concept; the colours are boldly stated; she has employed a broad brush which is free of any sign of hesitation; and the whole composition, which is mildly symbolic in conception, is resolved with a degree of completeness which she rarely achieved in later works. It is also one of the first of a number of paintings she made which have a strong religious theme, and this was an aspect of her art which increasingly dominated her later work. The more muted and somewhat earthy colours of *Children at Hallowe'en*, however, are more typical of her work of the forties and fifties. Here the semi-Cubist treatment of the composition and the bold brushwork, which produce a mild form of abstraction, assert Lhote's influence. Discussing this picture in his review of the 1951 Living Art exhibition, however, Edward Sheehy thought that Rivers had “more to say outside the limits of the abstract.”<sup>21</sup> This particular stage of development in her work culminates in *The Images*, 1950, a work which is redolent of religious Symbolism, although the title is difficult to understand. However, the painting is another representation of the ark. Noah, at the foot of the gangplank, receives his instructions from Jehovah as his wife, three sons and their wives, already embarked, look on. The composition has an air of resolution, as though we are witnesses at the beginning of some momentous event. Structurally it again owes much to Cubism and the whole picture is composed with subtlety and executed with great assurance. During the early fifties, Rivers' work retained a strong Cubist element although her composition grew looser than hitherto. We can see this development in part in *Italian Shepherd Boy*, 1950-55, which clearly owes much to Lhote, and in *The Tree*, 1954-56,



8. *Mackerel Harvest, Aran Islands*

another composition with mildly religious overtones. But as the decade developed her style became increasingly Fauvist or Expressionist in character. In *Strange Shore*, 1954-55, for example, the various forms have been roughly indicated in strong colours but delineated by bold lines set down briskly with a broad brush. The title may be a reference in an autobiographical sense to Ireland, that 'strange shore' where Rivers chose to live. Indeed, Arland Ussher may have had this work in mind when he described Rivers as being an interpreter of biblical stories in terms of life in the Aran Islands.<sup>22</sup> With this in mind, it is reasonable to suggest that this work may represent everyday life on Inis Mór, in which case it would be one of the last works painted there.

*Still Life with Eggs*, 1954-55 and *Still Life with Bananas*, 1958-60 also illustrate her move towards Fauvism. As in *Strange Shore*, the first of these works, which Edward Sheehy once described as showing "feeling and economy (with) profound concentration"<sup>23</sup> betrays a suggestion of *angst* which, alas, became a common aspect of Rivers' work; but in *Still Life with Bananas*, with its exquisitely delicate juxtapositions of blues, mauves and greens, the whole composition exuding vigour and vitality, we see her at her very best.

This period of development culminated in about 1960 in *Creation: The Fifth Day*, a painting which stands as a watershed between her work of the forties and fifties and the whole of her later *oeuvre*. Here is a painting which, in its strident colours and harsh angular shapes (which may refer back to Severini), is boldly Expressionist and in it, too, is a hint of anxiety which, as we have already observed, increasingly became a feature of her work from this time. The subject-matter here is taken from *Genesis* (1:20-23) yet one feels that the painting represents something distinctly personal for the artist. Only rarely did she employ such strong colours as in the combinations of scarlet red and ultramarine blue so that one feels the work may have come at a time of particular emotional stress in her life. But the underlying structure in this composition prefigures a great deal of her other work such as, for example, *The Worm* or *Figures before a building*, both of 1960, in which she returned to a more Cubist manner and which may have been influenced by Evie Hone. *The Worm* is one of the most successful and light-hearted compositions of her later years. There is a strong Braque-like quality to the composition and the colours, especially the juxtapositions of reds and greens (complementary colours) which divide the picture plane virtually into two equal halves, betray no trace of emotion as do so many of her other works of the time. With its emphasis on the flatness of the picture plane *The Worm* is one of Rivers' most abstract pictures.



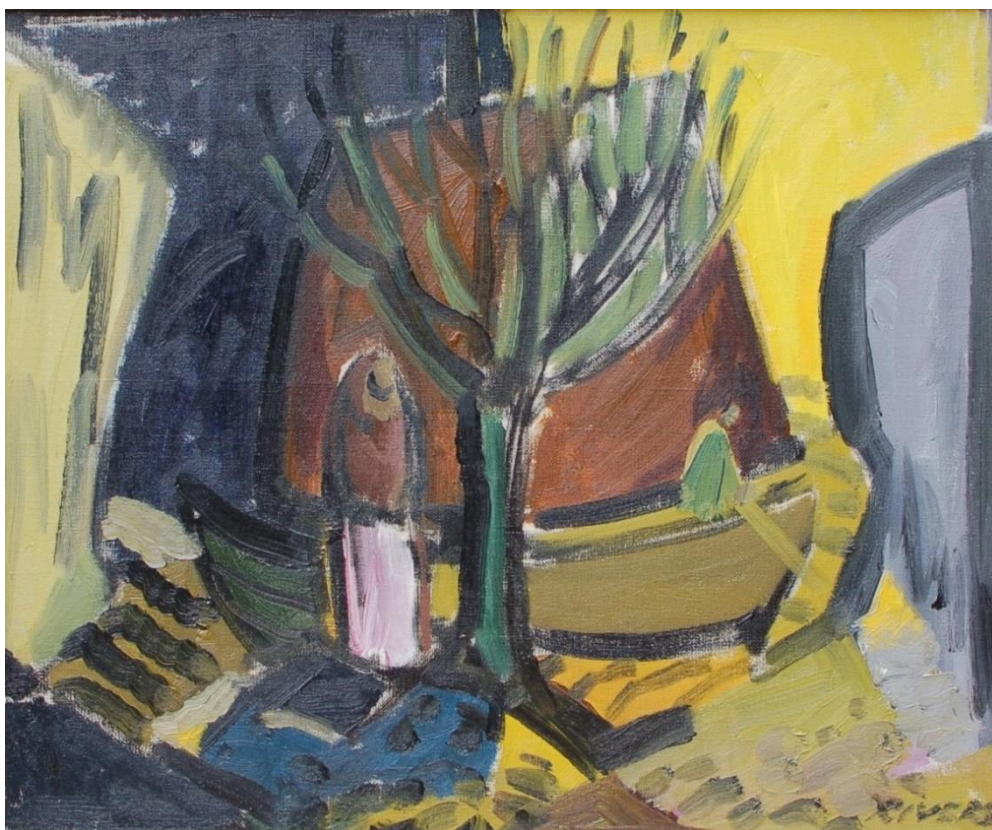
9. *Our Lady of the Apocalypse*

From about 1960, however, one senses that Rivers became increasingly restless and that life possibly felt somewhat claustrophobic for her. *Aran Women Waiting for Boats*, 1960-62, prompts a strong feeling of pathos and *Mourning Women*, 1964, one of three versions of her last composition, is filled with foreboding. A number of her last works, however, show the influence of Evie Hone and of her years preparing cartoons for the latter's work in stained glass. *The Second Fall*, 1960 and *At the Foot of the Cross*, 1960-62, two events from the Passion, are fine examples. A third painting from the series, *Christ Draped in Purple*, is a good example of Elizabeth's ability to interpret a motif in her own unique language.

However, *Our Lady of the Apocalypse*, 1960-64, is undoubtedly the most important illustration of the unique style developed by Elizabeth Rivers during the time she spent in the Túr Gloine workshops. As with much of her work, the composition is rich in symbolism and, unusually for Rivers, divided into a number of separate scenes. However, there is a legible narrative, which joins these scenes together. In the centre panel is the Virgin depicted beneath the sun and a crown of stars. She stands on a crescent moon, crushing the evil forces of Satan, represented by the coiled serpent. To the left is her interpretation of New Jerusalem, based on Ezekiel's prophetic vision of the city standing on the rebuilt Holy Temple. The scene below this represents the biblical Mount Sinai, one of the most important sacred places in Abrahamic religions. According to tradition, this was the mountain where Yahweh gave the Ten Commandments to Moses as he led the Israelites out of Egypt into the Promised Land. To the right is her version of the Tree of Life, located in the primordial Garden of Eden; the garden of good and evil from which all humans were banished. The fifth panel depicts a group of three women modelled on *Aran Women Waiting for Boats*, but the precise symbolism of this particular panel eludes us. However, we must bear in mind Ussher's description of Rivers as an interpreter of biblical stories in terms of life in the Aran Islands.

As is appropriate to the title of the work, the mood suggested by the painting is one of hope and revelation. Indeed, the motif is based on 'The Woman of the Apocalypse', a figure from ancient times. However, the painting follows her portrayal in the book of Revelation, Chapter 12 and although the strict formalism of the composition and the use throughout of a heavy black line contributes to a degree of solemnity in our reading of it, one feels it is again indicative of the artist's mood at the time.





10. *Strange Shore*

### **Elizabeth Rivers and Irish Art**

In retrospect, Elizabeth Rivers strikes one as a gentle, retiring person. Yet, as we have noted, at times there is in her work a feeling of restlessness with which she never fully came to terms. Why, we must wonder, should a young woman have spent so many years in the comparative isolation of the Aran Islands? Our answer, judging especially by her drawings of Aran and her book illustrations, that the Irish landscape and its people struck some special chord in her and her work appears to have been a journey of self-discovery.

Looked at in the wider perspective of Irish art during the thirties, forties and fifties, years of extreme chauvinism and introversion, Elizabeth Rivers can be seen to have brought a refreshing view to the landscape, notably to that of the west which hitherto had been represented over-picturesquely by so many. She was also one of that large group of notable women artists of her generation who did so much to encourage and stimulate an interest in Modernism in Ireland. She must be viewed especially in the company of Mainie Jellett, Evie Hone, Norah McGuinness and Nano Reid, for hers was the kind of Modernism which they all espoused. Like Jellett and Hone in particular, she felt that the basic necessities of art remain intact, and thus she constantly sought what she termed the “reality underlying appearances”. Modern painting, she said, “is distilled through a screen of the mind; art is a language of passionate conviction.”<sup>24</sup> Yet unlike so many of her contemporaries, Rivers was not a romantic; rather, as Brian Fallon noted in reviewing her Memorial Exhibition, she was a harder, more intellectualised painter.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, unlike her friends, she took few pupils and campaigned for few causes, although she did help to organise some of the early exhibitions of the Independent Group of artists. In all things she followed a solitary course and the real influence of her work was brought about by example rather than by intent. Reviewing her exhibition at the Waddington Galleries,



11. *Three Keeners*, Inis Mór, Aran

Dublin, back in 1953, Edward Sheehy had admired her courage in trying to forge an individual style of abstraction which, he said, “did not admit of merely moderate success”. Although he did not think that she succeeded in this altogether, nevertheless, he felt that her best work had put her “among the more interesting of our modern painters”.<sup>26</sup> At her best, she produced some of the most rigorously conceived and technically avant-garde paintings of her day as well as some of the most outstanding wood engravings to have been made in the modern era.

In her last years, Rivers made a number of light-hearted studies which serve as a relief to the seriousness of the main development of her work. *Still Life-Fruit*, 1960- 64, is a good example of such works and in the use of colour and brisk execution it recalls something of the vitality of earlier works like *Still Life with Bananas*. *Still Life with Fish and a Lemon*, 1963-64, is a splendid study which, in its almost abstract treatment of the subject-matter recalls the work of another Irish painter, William Scott (b.1913), and is perhaps indicative of the way in which Elizabeth Rivers' work might have developed but for her premature death. Taken with *Still life with Lemons and Oranges in a Wooden Dish*, 1960-64, and *Lemons*, 1963-64, it appears to have been an attempt to bring a degree of freedom to her work and, while she succeeded to a certain extent, nevertheless the structure and handling of her composition are much less satisfactorily resolved than in her earlier work where she retained a more linear approach. In these pictures, alas, one senses a certain impetus to 'move with the times' which at heart was alien to her outlook.

Rivers was an accomplished colourist, although the subtlety of her work is not always immediately apparent and repays closer study. In *Portrait of a Dark Haired Woman*, *The Ark in Storm*, *Still life with Bananas* and *The Worm*, we can see the development of her colour sense over a number of years and can join in her sense of excitement at the play of one colour against another. In *Christ Draped in Purple*, we find an exuberance, which emanates from the colour scheme, despite the muted palette. Reminiscent of her work with Lhote, the painting is a fine example of her skilled use of the palette knife and shines a light on her exceptional draughtsmanship, which is apparent in all she did. In her use of line, she revealed her mood more clearly perhaps than in any other aspect of her work. In her life drawings, such as *Bending female nude*, 1933, we can see the economy with which she could indicate anatomical form, but her early drawings of life in Aran for example, *Connemara Turf Boats Unloading-Aran*, *Fishermen-Aran* and *Dance-Aran*, all of 1935-43, show her at her very best and illustrate her sense of excitement at the discovery of life there. *Dance-Aran* shows too the acuteness of her observation in the posture of the figures, their actions and movements. There is a strong ebullience in these drawings which was not always a characteristic of her work. In other, more minor, works as well she caught the mood and atmosphere of the times as is clear from *Pimlico, London*, *London* and *Trees and Buildings-London*, all 1944-45. Rivers also made a number of sculptures, such as *Untitled (Two heads and cross)*, a low relief carving which was exhibited in her 1966 Memorial Exhibition.



12. Keening, *Inis Mór, Aran*

These works are usually characterised by brisk chiseling and evoke a strong feeling of pathos. Apart from her painting, of course, it was as an illustrator that Elizabeth Rivers is justly remembered. Her early illustrations, such as the wood engravings for Walter de la Mare's *On the Edge* (1930), were rather severe in treatment, with a strong linear emphasis and considerable stylisation of forms. They often combined human forms with natural elements such as clouds, light and heavenly bodies and occasionally evoke mild symbolism. These characteristics can be seen in *Nature and Imagination III*, 1930-35 (59). During the forties she illustrated a number of books-including O'Connor, *A Picture Book* (1943), Dorman, *Valley of Graneen* (1944), her own *Stranger in Aran* (1946) and Lynch, *The Mad O'Haras* (1948)-with pen, ink and wash drawings. Most of these drawings were done rapidly; they are characterised by an economy of line, a complete absence of modelling and are casual in both concept and execution. People and places, usually from the west of Ireland or Co. Donegal, generally form the subject-matter in them and in style they changed only slightly from work to work. However the illustrations invariably convey Rivers' natural respect for her fellow man and her appreciation of her surroundings. Of her major wood engravings those for Christopher Smart's *Out of Bedlam* (1956) and Thomas Kiernan's *White Hound of the Mountain* (1962) should be mentioned. The severity, stylisation and emphasis on line which we have mentioned as being characteristic of her wood engravings of the thirties also typify both of these sets of engravings and, indeed, her style as an engraver changed little throughout her career. The precision of line which wood engraving demands suited her temperament exactly, as did the need to be concise in the composition, and the overall feeling suggested by these works is of an artist in full control of her materials and technique. In none of these studies does one sense that feeling of *angst* which, as we have seen, was prominent in so many of her paintings. Always her subject matter is figurative and in the *Out of Bedlam* suite, the frequent use of harsh, angular and architectural elements betrays the influence on her of Modernism and, in contrast to the distinctly French influences on her painting, these engravings recall the work of contemporary German artists, especially of those associated with the Bauhaus. The individual prints in this suite were designed to illustrate the aphoristic nature of the accompanying text and they succeed admirably in doing so. Her compositions in the *White Hound* series are, perhaps, more rigorously compressed and economical in terms of space than in her earlier prints, and her handling of the imagery is more lyrical than before. Two other compositions stand out from the body of her later work, namely *Winter Skies*, 1960, and *The Scribe*, 1964. In the former, a wood engraving, with her emphasis on line, movement, the juxtaposition of masses and strong feeling of atmosphere and of poetry, she has combined all her best qualities in the medium. This is one of her very best prints and is the standard by which she must be judged. And in *The Scribe*, a linocut and probably one of her last works, in the broader character of the medium we can see that boldness of concept which also typified so much of the best of her painting.

Dominic Milmo-Penny / Dublin, September 2022 / Source, Kennedy, 1989





13. *Three Women Keening, Inis Mór, Aran*

## Notes

1 Letter of 23 March 1989 from the librarian, Royal Horticultural Society, London.

2 Marian Fitzgerald, 'Talking to Elizabeth Rivers', *Irish Times*, 11 August 1962. Unless otherwise stated this is the source of all quotations and other information below.

3 There is an outline of Elizabeth Rivers' career in *Who's Who in Art* (1948) and later eds. There is, too, a biographical note in the catalogue of the 1966 Memorial Exhibition of her work. The latter has been the source of all subsequent notes on Rivers' career.

4 Elizabeth Rivers, notes from a lecture, 'Appreciation of Design in Arts & Crafts-Wood Engraving', given at Termonfeckin, Co. Louth, August 1958.

5 Student records, Royal Academy of Arts (letter of 7 March 1989 from the librarian). These records also note the course of studies which she followed and the prizes which she won at the Academy.

6 The early development of Cubism, the first great innovative movement in twentieth century art, is usually regarded in two distinct phases, namely Analytical Cubism in the years 1907-12, and Synthetic Cubism in the years 1912-14. In the first of these two phases artists were concerned principally with the analysis of forms and structures set down on a flat surface without the aid of perspective to suggest recession, and colour was of little importance to them; while in the second phase colour became all-important and areas of different colours were often juxtaposed one with another so as to create abstract compositions, often with an emphasis on aspects such as light or rhythm and movement. Andre Lhote joined the Cubist movement in 1911 and thereafter in his work applied Cubist stylisation as a formal discipline to scenes from everyday life. Divisionism is a method of painting whereby tones and hues are obtained not by mixing pigments on the palette but by applying small areas-often mere dots-of unmixed pigment on the canvas so that they combine optically when viewed from a distance. It permitted the rendering of strongly luminous effects. Divisionism was developed systematically by Seurat and other Neo-impressionists in France and influenced the early Futurists, including Severini, in Italy. However, by the time Elizabeth Rivers studied with him, Severini had largely embraced an orthodox Synthetic Cubist manner.



- 7 Lucy Carrington Wertheim, *Adventure in Art* (London: Nicholson & Watson), 1947, p.39.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p.48.
- 9 'Pictures from Aran: Miss Rivers' London Exhibition', *Irish Times*, 9 February 1939, p.2
- 10 Tim Robinson, *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage* (London: Viking, 1986), p.170.
- 11 Clara Vyvyan, *On Timeless Shores* (London), 1957.
- 12 Hitherto 1941 is the year given for her return to London, but that is unlikely. Rivers told Marian Fitzgerald (op. cit.) that she first went to Aran in 1935, spent a year there and returned the following year to live for a further seven years on the island. Also, in the spring of 1942 she held an exhibition of recent paintings at the Contemporary Picture Galleries, Dublin, which in the light of war time travel restrictions suggests that she was still living in Ireland at that time. Moreover, she exhibited four pieces at the annual exhibition of the Watercolour Society of Ireland in the spring of 1943.
- 13 'Paintings by Elizabeth Rivers', *Irish Times*, 9 May 1960, p.7.
- 14 Eileen Black, Ulster Museum. Information derived mainly from a conversation of 4 January 1980 with Mrs. Frances Biggs. Henceforth referred to as 'Black, 1980'.
- 15 Black, 1980.
- 16 James White, 'Elizabeth Rivers', Memorial Exhibition catalogue, 1966, p.5.
- 17 Patrick Pye, 'Elizabeth Rivers: An Appreciation', *Irish Times*, 2 September 1964 and reprinted in the Memorial Exhibition catalogue, 1966, p.17.
- 18 Black, 1980.
- 19 Irish art too had been influenced by the Modern Movement since the closing years of the nineteenth century but public recognition of it only came in the late forties and early fifties with the first Living Art exhibitions. For a discussion on this subject see Brian Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism 1920-1949*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Dublin, 1987. Rivers' views on art generally and on Modernism in particular are set-out in her article 'Modern Painting in Ireland', *Studies*, vol.SO, 1961, pp.175-83.
- 20 *Irish Times*, 9 February 1939, p.2.
- 21 Edward Sheehy, *Dublin Magazine*, October-December 1951, p.50.
- 22 Arland Ussher, 'Painting and Sculpture in Ireland', *Ireland of the Welcomes*, vol.4, no.1, June 1955, pp.16-17.
- 23 Edward Sheehy, 'Art Notes', *Dublin Magazine*, October- December 1955, p.36.
- 24 Elizabeth Rivers, 'Modern Painting in Ireland', *Studies*, vol.SO, 1961, pp.179-80, 183.
- 25 'Elizabeth Rivers Memorial Exhibition', *Irish Times*, 9 March 1966, p.4.
- 26 Edward Sheehy, 'Art Notes', *Dublin Magazine*, July- September 1953, pp.37-38



14. *The Images*

## Works in Public Collections

Belfast Ulster Museum:

*Cat and Egg* (495), oil on canvas, purchased 1953.

Dublin Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art:

*Saint Alone* (1127), print;

*Wood engraving* (1241), lithograph (sic), presented by the Graphic Studio, 1964;

*The Untidy Table* (1256), oil on board, presented by Mr. & Mrs. Michael Biggs, 1966;

*Sea Weed Gatherers* (1271), oil on board, presented by Miss Ethel Mannin, 1966;

*Aran Island Scene* (1272), oil on board, presented by Miss Ethel Mannin, 1966;

Galway Coláiste na hOllscoile:

*Eamon de Valera* (5).

**London** British Museum:

*Head of a woman* (1929) (1930-2-21-7), woodcut;

*Mystic composition* (1928) (1930-2-21-8), woodcut;

*Bookplate* (c.1932) (1932-7-1-4);

*Requiem* (1931) (1932-7-1-5);

*Two dancers resting* (1932) (1932-7-1-6);

*Gerontius* (1931) (1932-7-7-1). From the 'Dream of Gerontius';

*The Angel* (1931) (1932-7-7-2). From the 'Dream of Gerontius'.



15. Aran: *Women Waiting for Boats*

## Books Illustrated

**Theocritus** (trans. Charles Stuart Calverley). *The Second and Seventh Idylls*, 1927;

Alfred, Lord Tennyson. *The Day-Dream*, 1928;

**Walter de la Mare** *On the Edge: short stories* (London: Faber & Faber), 1930. Illus. with wood engravings;

**Elizabeth Rivers** *This Man* (London: Guyon House Press), 1939. Illustrated with wood engravings. Edition of 200 copies on Corinthian Fine Text paper and 5 copies on vellum. (All the blocks and most copies of this book were destroyed by fire in London in 1940);

*Stranger in Aran* (Dublin: Cuala Press), 1946. Written and illustrated by Rivers. Edition of 280 copies. Illus. with pen and ink drawings, some copies hand coloured in part;

*Out of Bondage: Israel* (London: Peter Owen), 1957. Written and illustrated by Rivers. A factual and humorous account of a visit to Israel in 1951. This book was a Book Society Choice. Illustrated with pen and ink drawings;

**F. O'Connor** *A Picture Book by Frank O'Connor* (Dublin: Cuala Press), 1943. Edition of 480 copies, illus. with pen and ink drawings;

**Sean Dorman** *Valley of Graneen* (London: Peter Davies), 1944. Illus. with pen and ink drawings;

**Ethel Mannin** *Connemara Journal* (London: Westhouse), 1947. Illus. with wood engravings;

*Late Have I Loved Thee* (London: Jarrolds), 1948. Cover design by Rivers

**Patricia Lynch** *The Mad O'Haras* (London: Dent), 1948. Illus. with pen and ink drawings

**C.C. Rogers** *Our Cornwall*, 1948;

**Sean O'Faolain** *The Man Who Invented Sin, and Other Stories* (New York: Devin Adair), 1949;

**Daniel Corkery** *The Wager and Other Stories* (New York: Devin Adair), 1950;

*Initium s. evangelii secundum 5. Joannem* (Dublin: Dolmen Press), 1953. Illus. with wood engravings;

**Christopher Smart** *Out of Bedlam* (Dublin: Dolmen Press), 1956. Illustrated with wood engravings. Edition of 225 copies;

**Lady Clara Vyvyan** *On Timeless Shores* (London), 1957. Illus. with the drawing *Old Breege*;

**Thomas Kiernan** *The White Hound of the Mountain and other Irish Folk Tales* (New York: Devin-Adair), 1962.



16. *Any Mother*

## Exhibitions

### ROYAL ACADEMY, LONDON

(33 Harker St., Chelsea, SW)

1928 664 *Morning*

1144 *Crucifixion*, wood engraving.

1929 377 *The departure*

1930 252 *Mother and child*

1931 1134 *Age to Youth*, wood engraving.

(26 Princess Road, NW 1)

1944 728 *Connemara Girl*

739 *Young Girl*

### ROYAL HIBERNIAN ACADEMY

(Kilmurry, Aran Islands, Co. Galway)

1936 361 *Noonday*

363 *Interval in the Ceilidhe*

369 *Dawn - Aran Islands*

371 *Journey*

374 *Night*

376 *Morning*

378 *Johnston's Harrow*

(Knockrabo Studio, Mount Anvil Road, Dundrum, Co. Dublin)

1948 157 *The Building of the Ark* (watercolour)

### IRISH EXHIBITION OF LIVING ART

1948 88 *'And He sent forth a raven'*

91 *'And the arc went upon the face of the waters'*

1949 55 *Autumn*

94 *Field of Dry Grass*

1950 16 *The Images*

51 *The Man and the Mountain*

(Willbrook Cottage, Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin)

1951 13 *Children at Hallowe'en*

112 *Composition of the Picture*

1952 91 *Outgoing Boats*

(Summerfield, Dalkey, Co. Dublin)

1953 3 *The Young Dove*

31 *Dove Alighting*

60 *Tree and Birds*

77 *Children Climbing a Wall*

1954 99 *Drawing*

1955 44 *Eucalyptus*

(27 Herbert Place, Dublin)

1959 58 *Absolution* (stained glass)

79 *Splintered Form*

1960 49 *Creation, Fifth Day* (stained glass)

(Summerfield, Dalkey, Co. Dublin)

1961 57 *Flight*

77 *Nightfall and Moonlight*

1962 1 *The Dove*

74 *Saint Thomas*

1963 25 *Single Lemon*

51 *Four Plums*

(c/o Dawson Gallery, Dublin)

1964 21 *Mourning Women*

78 *Connemara*

95 *Melon*

### WATERCOLOUR SOCIETY OF IRELAND

1943 84 *Descent! Ascent*

91 *'Though Earth and Man were Gone'*

112 *Nude*

121 *Nude*

1948 81 *Mountains*

86 *Hill Farm*

1950 100 *Mountain Farm*

106 *Valley in Provence*

124 *Threshing*

1951 35 *Trawler*

1960 140 *'Mount of Beatitudes'*

148 *'Hills of Galilee'*

1961 128 *The Harpist*

129 *Drawing, Girl's Head*

1963 114 *The Cat*

1964 29 *Arab Woman and Child*





17. *At the Foot of the Cross*

#### INDEPENDENT ARTISTS

- 1960 67 *Study for 'Card Players'*  
 68 *Flight*  
 69 *Jesus in Gethsemane*  
 70 *Hen*  
 122 *Sleeper* (graphic work)  
 123 *Madonna and Child* (graphic work)  
 124 *Mother and Child* (graphic work)  
 125 *Study for Stone* (graphic work)  
 (c/o Dawson Gallery, Dublin)  
 1961 9 *Water Bird*  
 10 *Children Climbing a Wall*  
 11 *Agony in the Garden*  
 12 *Sea Bird on the Shore*  
 104 *Two Figures* (watercolour or drawing)  
 105 *Nude* (watercolour or drawing)  
 106 *Playing the Irish Harp* (watercolour or drawing)  
 (Summerfield, Dalkey, Co. Dublin)  
 1962 36 *St. Thomas*  
 37 *At the Foot of the Cross*  
 38 *The Sleepers*  
 39 *Portrait of Brigid*  
 1963 52 *The Untidy Table*  
 53 *Sleeping Cat*  
 54 *Cat Nap*  
 55 *Lemon in a Wooden Dish*

#### OTHER EXHIBITIONS

Titles in parentheses refer to works by Rivers in group exhibitions.

- 1933 Elizabeth Rivers, Wertheim Gallery, Manchester (no details).  
 1934 12-30 November. London Group, thirty-second exhibition, New Burlington Galleries, London (Italy (206))  
 1939 February. *Elizabeth Rivers, Pictures of Aran*, Nicholson Galleries, London.  
 1942 27 April-9 May. *Recent Paintings by Elizabeth Rivers*, Contemporary Picture Galleries, Dublin.  
 1946 April. *Elizabeth Rivers*, oils, watercolours and drawings, Dublin Painters' Gallery, Dublin.  
 1947 From 3 November. Oireachtas Art Exhibition, HLMG.  
 (?) December, *Elizabeth Rivers*, Dublin Painters Gallery.  
 1948 5-23 October. Dublin Painters' Society, Autumn Exhibition (*The Ark in Storm* (20); *The Figurehead* (21); *Pears on a Windowsill* (28); *Green Apples* (43)).

October. Oireachtas Art Exhibition, HLMG (*Oganach ag Iompar Ein Mhairbh*).

1949 Spring. Dublin Painters' Society, group exhibition (*The Ball Game, Still Life*).

From 25 October. *Elizabeth Rivers*, oils and water-colours, Dublin Painters' Gallery.

1950 Spring. Dublin Painters' Society, group exhibition (*The Man and the Mountain*).

1953 April-July. *Irish Painting 1903-1953*, HLMG (*Boy with Bird* (84)).

Till 15 June. *Recent Paintings by Elizabeth Rivers*, Waddington Galleries, Dublin.

22 July-8 August. *Contemporary Irish Painting & Sculpture*, Waddington Galleries, Dublin (*Bog in a rocky landscape* (12); *Pool with Fishes* (13)).

July. *Contemporary Irish Art*, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth (*Children Playing Cards on the Pavement* (58)).  
 1956 February. *Thirty Years*, Victor Waddington Galleries, Dublin (*Early Morning (BO)*; *Drawing Seaweed, Aran Islands* (92); *The Ox and the Ass* (95); *African Head* (113), a sculpture in wood).

1960 From 5 May. *Elizabeth Rivers*, Dawson Gallery, Dublin.

1966 From 8 March. *Elizabeth Rivers: Memorial Exhibition*, HLMG.

1960s *Modern Irish Paintings*, Great Southern Hotels, venue and date unknown (*The Proposal* (48), *Flight* (49)).

1975 1 December-1976, 31 January. *Irish Art 1900-1950*, ROSC Teoranta, Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork (*Willbrook, Rathfarnham* (123)).

1980 24 August-7 November. *Irish art 1943-1973*, ROSC Teoranta, Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork (*Lemon in a Wooden Dish* (93)).

1987 9 July-16 August. *Irish Women Artists: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day*, National Gallery of Ireland, HLMG, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (*Seabird on the Shore*).

1913 February, *Analysing Cubism*, Irish Museum of Modern Art (*The Images*); June, Crawford, Cork; September, McWilliam Gallery, Banbridge.

2022 29 September-5 November, *Women Artists Who Studied Under André Lhote*, Court Gallery, Somerset (*The Ark in Storm*).

#### LONDON VENUES

NEAC; Redfern Gallery; Royal Society of British Artists; St. George's Gallery; Society of Wood Engravers.



18. *Creation: The Fifth Day*

## Bibliography

### Exhibition Catalogues

Dublin Painters' Society, *Autumn Exhibition*, 1948.

*Irish Painting 1903-1953*, Municipal Gallery, Dublin, 1953.

*Contemporary Irish Painting & Sculpture*, Waddington Galleries, Dublin, 1953.

*Contemporary Irish Art*, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1953.

*Thirty Years*, Waddington Galleries, Dublin, 1956.

*Elizabeth Rivers*, Dawson Gallery, Dublin, 1960.

*Elizabeth Rivers: Memorial Exhibition*, Municipal Gallery, Dublin, 1966.

*Modern Irish Paintings*, Great Southern Hotels, Ireland, 1960s.

*Irish Art 1900-1950*, Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork, 1975-1976.

*Irish Art 1943-1973*, Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork, 1980.

*Irish Women Artists: Eighteenth Century to the Present Day*, National Gallery of Ireland; Municipal Gallery, Dublin; Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, 1987.



19. *Nature and Imagination*

## Bibliography

### General Sources

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- Hogan, Robert (ed.) *Dictionary of Irish Literature*, Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1980.
- Johnson & Greutzner, *Dictionary of British Artists 1880-1940*, Antique Collectors' Club, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1976.
- Peppin & Micklethwait, *Dictionary of British Book Illustrators: The Twentieth Century*, London, John Murray.
- Rivers, Elizabeth, 'Evie Sydney Hone', *Journal of the British Society of Master Glass Painters*, vol.12, no.I, 1956, pp.71-73.
- Rivers, Elizabeth, 'Modern Painting in Ireland', *Studies*, vol. 50, 1961, pp.175-83.
- Robinson, Tim. *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage*, London, Viking, 1986.
- Royal Academy Exhibitors 1905-1970*, vol. 3, Hilmarton Manor Press, 1987.
- Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts: Index of Exhibitors and their Works*, vol. 3, Dublin, Manton Publishing, 1987.
- Ulster Museum, *Concise Catalogue of the Drawings, Paintings & Sculptures*, Belfast: Ulster Museum, 1986.
- Ussher, Arland. 'Painting & Sculpture in Ireland', *Ireland of the Welcomes*, vol.6, no.I, June 1955.
- Vyvyan, Lady Clara. *On Timeless Shores* (London), 1957.
- Waters, Grant M. *Dictionary of British Artists working 1900-1950*, Eastbourne Fine Art, 1975.
- Wertheim, Lucy Carrington. *Adventure in Art*, London, Nicholson & Watson, 1947.
- Who's Who in Art*, London, Art Trade Press, various eds.
- Dublin Magazine* and *Irish Times* reviews of exhibitions as listed.

## Catalogue

### *Christ Draped in Purple*

1. Oil on canvas 30 x 20 inches

Signed by the artist

Provenance: The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

€8,500

### *The Second Fall*

2. Oil on canvas 25 x 32 inches

Signed by the artist

Provenance: The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Exhibited:

Memorial Exhibition, Dublin, 1966, number 25, illustrated p.32;

Gorry Gallery, Dublin, 1989, number 21.

Literature:

Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View', Dublin, 1989

p.o.a.

### *The Ark in Storm*

3. Oil on canvas 27 x 22 inches

Signed by the artist b.r. Rivers

Provenance:

The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Exhibited:

Dublin Painter's Society, 1948, number 20;

Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Dublin, 1950, number 51;

Society of Women Artists as 'Man and Mountain';

Memorial Exhibition, Dublin, 1966, number 67;

Gorry Gallery, Dublin, 1989, number 7.

Literature:

Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View', Dublin, 1989

**SOLD**

### *Study: Keener, Inis Mór*

4. Oil on canvas 20 x 24 inches

Rivers Studio stamp

Provenance: The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Reference:

Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View', Dublin, 1989, p.21

**SOLD**

### *The Nativity*

5. Oil on board 14 x 20 inches

Rivers Studio stamp

Provenance: The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

€2,250

### *Jubilate Agno*

6. Wood engraving on paper 5¾ x 4½ inches

Artist's proof

Provenance: Elizabeth Rivers Estate:

Adam's Auction, June 2016;

Private collection, Dublin

**SOLD**

### *Study: Keening Women, Aran*

7. Oil on canvas 16 x 12 inches

Rivers Studio stamp

Provenance: The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Ref. Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View', Dublin, 1989, p.21

**SOLD**

### *Mackerel Harvest, Aran Islands*

8. Wood engraving on paper 2¾ x 4½ inches

Signed by the artist

Artist's proof

Provenance: Elizabeth Rivers Estate:

Adam's Auction, June 2016;

Private collection, Dublin

**SOLD**



*Our Lady of the Apocalypse*

9. Oil on canvas 32 x 48 inches

Rivers Studio stamp

Provenance: The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Exhibited:

Gorry Gallery, Dublin, 1989, number 26.

Literature:

Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View',  
Dublin, 1989

p.o.a.

*Strange Shore*

10. Oil on canvas 20 x 24 inches

Signed by the artist

Provenance:

The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Exhibited:

Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Dublin, 1955,  
number 55;

Memorial Exhibition, Dublin, 1966, No.19;

Gorry Gallery, Dublin, 1989, number 7.

Literature:

Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View',  
Dublin, 1989

**SOLD**

*Study: Keeners, Aran*

11. Oil on canvas 16 x 20 inches

Rivers Studio stamp

Provenance:

The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Reference:

Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View',  
Dublin, 1989, p.21

**SOLD**

*Study: Mourning Women, Aran*

12. Oil on canvas 24 x 20 inches

Rivers Studio stamp

Provenance:

The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Ref. Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective  
View', Dublin, 1989, p.21

**SOLD**

*Study: Three Keeners, Aran*

13. Oil on canvas 15 x 22 inches

Rivers Studio stamp

Provenance:

The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Reference:

Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View',  
Dublin, 1989, p.21

**SOLD**

*The Images*

14. Oil on canvas 25½ x 21½ inches

Signed by the artist

Provenance: The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Exhibited:

Dublin Painter's Society, 1948, number 20;

Irish Exhibition of Living Art, 1950, no.16;

Society of Women Artists, Dublin;

Gorry Gallery, Dublin, 1989, number 8.

Literature:

'Analysing Cubism', Irish Museum of Modern

Art, Dublin, 2013; Crawford, Cork, 2013;

F.E. McWilliam Gallery, Banbridge, 2013

Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View',  
Dublin, 1989

p.o.a.

*Aran: Women Waiting for Boats*

15. Oil on board 26 x 30 inches

Signed by the artist

Title verso

Provenance: The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Exhibited:

Independent Artists, 1962, number 38;

Memorial Exhibition, Dublin, 1966, number 23, reproduced plate 5;

Gorry Gallery, Dublin, 1989, number 25.

Literature:

Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View',

Dublin, 1989

**SOLD**

*Any Mother*

16. Wood engraving on paper 6 x 3½ inches

Reference: Katharine Tynan's poem of the same title.

Provenance:

Elizabeth Rivers Estate:

Adam's Auction, June 2016;

Private collection, Dublin

**SOLD**

*At the Foot of the Cross*

17. Oil on canvas 24 x 48 inches

Rivers Studio stamp

Provenance: The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

Exhibited:

Independent Artists, Dublin, 1962, number 37;

Gorry Gallery, Dublin, 1989, number 24.

Literature:

Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A Retrospective View',

Dublin, 1989

€12,500

*Creation: The Fifth Day*

18. Oil on board 30 x 20 inches

Signed by the artist

Provenance: The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989.

Exhibited: Dawson Gallery, 1960, number 10;

Memorial Exhibition, Dublin, 1966, no. 27;

Gorry Gallery, Dublin, 1989, number 7.

Literature: Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A

Retrospective View', Dublin, 1989

p.o.a.

*Nature and Imagination*

19. Wood engraving on paper 4½ x 2 inches

Artist's proof

Signed by the artist

Provenance: Elizabeth Rivers Estate:

Adam's Auction, June 2016;

Private collection, Dublin

**SOLD**



*20. Study: Jubilate Agno*

Wood Engraving on paper 4 x 3 inches

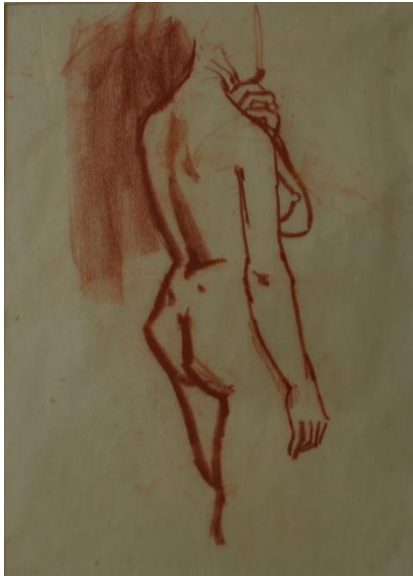
Artist's proof

Provenance: The artist's studio;

Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;

Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989

€350



21. *Nude Study*

Conte on paper 16½ x 11¾ inches

Provenance: Elizabeth Rivers Estate;  
Neptune Gallery, Dublin;  
€450



22. *Figures in a Park, London*

Charcoal on paper 10½ x 14½ inches  
Signed by the artist

Provenance: The artist's studio;  
Frances and Michael Biggs, 1964;  
Milmo-Penny Fine Art, Dublin, 1989  
Exhibited:  
Gorry Gallery, Dublin, 1989, number 51,  
illustrated p.47.  
Literature: Dr S. B. Kennedy, 'A  
Retrospective View', Dublin, 1989  
€585



23. *The Good Shepherd*

Wood Engraving on paper 5 x 3¼ inches

Provenance:  
Elizabeth Rivers Estate;  
Adam's Auction, June 2016;  
Private collection, Dublin  
**SOLD**



24. *First Confession*

Wood Engraving on paper 4 x 4¼ inches.

Artist's proof. Illustration for 'The Man who  
Invented Sin', Sean O'Faolain, Devin Adair  
Company, New York, 1948, p.59.

Provenance:  
Elizabeth Rivers Estate;  
Adam's Auction, June 2016;  
Private collection, Dublin  
**SOLD**



25. *Chalice and Cross*

Wood Engraving on paper 4 x 3 inches

Provenance: Elizabeth Rivers Estate;

Adam's Auction, June 2016;

Private collection, Dublin

**SOLD**



26. *Ten Commandments*

Wood Engraving on paper 3 x 4 inches

Provenance: Elizabeth Rivers Estate;

Adam's Auction, June 2016;

Private collection, Dublin

**SOLD**



27. *Initium S. Evangelii Secundum S. Joannem*

Wood Engraving on paper 1½ x 3 inches

Artists proof. See no.28.

Literature: Dolmen Press, Dublin, 1953

Provenance: Elizabeth Rivers Estate;

Adam's Auction, June 2016;

Private collection, Dublin

**SOLD**



28. *Evangelii Secundum Joannem*

Letterpress, folded quarto 5 x 3½ inches

Artist's proof

Dolmen Press, Dublin, 1953

Provenance:

Elizabeth Rivers Estate;

Adam's Auction, June 2016;

Private collection, Dublin

**SOLD**



29. *Jubilate Agno III*

Letterpress folded quarto 7 x 4½ inches

Artist's proof

Provenance: Elizabeth Rivers Estate;

Adam's Auction, June 2016;

Private collection, Dublin

**SOLD**



30. *Bookplate*

Wood Engraving on paper 1 x 1 inches

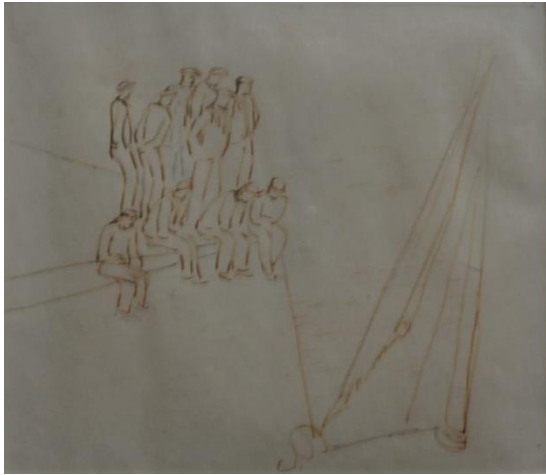
Provenance: Elizabeth Rivers Estate;

Adam's Auction, June 2016;

Private collection, Dublin

**SOLD**





31. *The First Turf Boat of Spring*

Pen and ink on paper 6½ x 7¾ inches

Provenance: Elizabeth Rivers Estate;

Frederick Gallery, Dublin

Private collection, County Dublin

€385



32. *Seaweed Harvest, Aran Islands*

Wood Engraving on paper 6 x 7¾ inches

Signed by the artist ER in the block and inscribed 'Seaweed Harvest; Aran Islands'.

Provenance: Elizabeth Rivers Estate;

Adam's Auction, June 2016;

Private collection, Dublin

**SOLD**

33. *Seaweed Harvest, Aran Islands*

Woodblock print on handmade paper 6 x 7¾ inches

Signed by the artist ER in the block

Limited edition of 10 restrikes from the original block.

Provenance: Original block, Elizabeth Rivers Estate;

Private collection, Dublin.

€450



*Our Lady of the Apocalypse*

# Elizabeth Rivers 1903 – 1964

## *A Second View*

1<sup>st</sup> May– 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023

01 2693486 - SMS 089 2341455

All of the woodblock prints carry the Rivers studio stamp

Photos of paintings mentioned in text available on request.

Further details and condition reports from [dominick@mpfa.ie](mailto:dominick@mpfa.ie).

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