Peter Brannan at the Usher Gallery

Moyes


2. ‘Home is a Place for Art – critic’, Lincolnshire Echo, 6 November, 1950, p 4.

3. The work of Edward Eaton Brannan focusses largely upon the towns, villages and rural landscapes of north Lincolnshire. His 1948 one-man show at the Usher, for example, exhibited 67 pictures, of which all but eight had their roots in the county. For details of the exhibition, which took place between 8 May and 31 May 1948, and a useful biographical notice, see the catalogue, Works by E. E. Brannan at the Usher Art Gallery.

4. The catalogue, Exhibitions of Paintings and Drawings, Foyle’s Gallery, London, 4 April – 28 April 1951, lists Peter Brannan’s work in the watercolours section as follows: Number 61: Landscape, near Chester; Number 62: Cornfield; Number 63: Covenham St Mary’s; and Number 64: Landscape, near Hereford. The change in title from Covenham Abbey to Covenham St Mary’s, used in the 1950 LAS Exhibition, is clearly a correction.

5. See Mayor, op. cit., p 48, for names of LAS artists represented at Foyle’s, including Edward and Noel Brannan.

6. 38th LAS Exhibition, Usher Gallery, 28 October – 30 November 1944. Exhibit 51: Fish and Chips. The painting in the later exhibition may well be a reworking of the earlier work: it was not unusual for Brannan to have a fresh look at a painting that had not sold several years later, in order to improve it. See Malcolm Moyes, Mr Brannan’s Diaries: an introduction, at http://www.ournottinghamshire.org.uk

7. ‘Creditable Work’, Lincolnshire Echo, 5 November 1951, p 4. The anonymous special contributor is identified by Mayor, op. cit., p 48, as Robert Melville, the influential art critic whose book Picasso: Master of the Phantom, (OUP 1939), was the first book by a British writer on that artist. Melville was also an early champion of Graham Sutherland and Francis Bacon. The second review of the 1951 LAS Exhibition in the Lincolnshire Echo, titled ‘About artists' exhibits in the Usher Gallery’ and written pseudo-anonymously by ‘Causerie’, appeared the day after on 6 November 1951, p 3. It was a much shorter piece, praising Edward Brannan and following the earlier reviewer’s lead in expressing reservations about a Worrall Nude, albeit in the jocular terms of ‘a mate for hercules’. Curiously there is no mention of Peter Brannan’s work.


9. Lincoln Mayor on ‘Puzzle paintings’, Lincolnshire Echo, 3 November 1952, p 5. The mayor clearly felt some discomfort at having to comment on something about which he knew very little, but nonetheless proceeded to lambast modern paintings as ‘a password in a secret society of which artists were exclusive members’, and to caricature them as having ‘no more beauty than the hind quarters of an elephant’.


11. See Peter Brannan: a Retrospective, (Goldmark Gallery, 1995), p 21 and also p 6 for a reproduction of Clock Tower. Street Scene (LCNUG: 1927/2179) was the first of eight works by Brannan to be acquired by the Usher Gallery over the next 40 years.

12. ‘Local Artist’, Lincolnshire Echo, 29 January 1954, p 3. Reviewing the exhibition, the pseudo-anonymous ‘Gossiper’, possibly a reviewer with the initials F.J.C., describes Brannan’s work as ‘deeply reflective’ and writes that his subjects are ‘usually people posed in dramatic manner and with an intensity of expression that suggests that the artist is preoccupied with matters of deep human import.’ The article also confirms that the Usher Gallery bought Street Scene from the 1953 LAS Annual Exhibition, describing the painting as ‘the result of deep cognition’ and asserting that Brannan had ‘the equipment necessary for the making of a great painter’.

13. Mayor, op. cit., p 50, notes that 18 works were sold.

14. ‘Lincs paintings on exhibition praiseworthy, says critic’, Lincolnshire Echo, 31 October 1955, p 3. What was meant by the term ‘progressive’ is not clear. The article provides a lengthy summative quotation from Merriott, which observes that the work on show was strong on
Lincolnshire based themes, but also ‘ventured further afield’ to include views of Venice, Corfu, Wales and Cornwall.

15. The Barman is now in the collection of the Manchester Metropolitan University (Acquisition Number 11249) and is signed and dated 1955. It was acquired, along with Reading in Bed (Acquisition Number 11251), signed and dated 1959, at Peter Brannan’s first one-man exhibition at the Trafford Gallery in 1960. I am grateful to Ms Stephanie Boydell, Curator of the Manchester Metropolitan Special Collections, for details of the paintings.

16. ‘Artist lashes out at the luxurious, vulgar, bulbous’, Lincolnshire Echo, 22 October 1956, p 5. The report is a lengthy one, which without exaggeration described the speech as ‘a hefty kick in the pants’. After deriding modern art the speech became all the more astonishing when it ferociously indicted the modern motor car for its ‘huge chromium wings that look like nothing on Earth’ and which were getting more luxurious, more bulbous winged’. It may be significant that the denunciation of the modern car’s American influenced style coincided with the growing interest in radical American art, most notably that of Jackson Pollock, whose paintings were still a cause of discomfort and debate in the traditional parts of the art establishment. 1956 was the year of Pollock’s death and his first retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, just a few weeks after Sir Albert’s apoplectic tirade.

17. Peter Brannan’s views on tradition and modernity are recorded in a newspaper article, which reported a meeting of the Newark Arts Club in which the subject of modern painting was debated: ‘Modern Art – no such thing’, Newark Advertiser, 3 March 1954, p 9. His view was the measured one of a middle way between being a slave to tradition and moving away from it completely: ‘Everything we do today has its roots in the past but that does not mean it is just a copy of it.’


19. The painting was offered to the Newark Town Council, but was peremptorily rejected on both aesthetic and economic grounds. Ironically, it was accepted for hanging later in the year in the 112th New English Art Club Exhibition at the RBA Galleries in Suffolk Street, London. See ‘Rejected painting on show in London’, Newark Advertiser, 14 October 1959, p 1.

20. The shared exhibition was held at the Trafford Gallery, Mayfair. Six pictures were exhibited by Brannan, including East Coast Beach Scene and On the Coast, and were favourably reviewed in the Arts News and Review, 10 October 1959: ‘Peter Brannan… shows a remarkable ability to lend a strange luminosity to drab colours and a nice appreciation of texture.’


22. Brannan exhibited the following paintings at the Royal Academy in the 1950s: Beach Scene (Catalogue Number 417) and Interior (Catalogue Number 362) in 1954; Children with Masks (Catalogue Number 696) in 1955; Newark Landscape (Catalogue Number 289) and Two Children (Catalogue Number 500) in 1957; and Snowy Day (Catalogue Number 82) in 1958. See Royal Academy Exhibitors 1905–1970, (Royal Academy, London), 1971, Volume 1, p 186.