

Pye in the sky thinking

THE review by Cristin Leach Hughes of my book, *Patrick Pye: Life and Work*, seems to have reviewed the book that she considers ought to have been written, not the one that was (“Window on life of Pye”, *Books*, last week).

The book is categorised as a biography whereas it is not. It is a study of the career of the artist — the biographical element occupies roughly one-seventh.

Hughes then berates me for not including enough “passionate, funny and informative” anecdotes by the artist, claiming that I “decided not to mine the live source for personal insight”. I spent two years interviewing the artist — he was in his early eighties and had health problems. I also read everything he wrote or said.

She claims that I “prefer to

concentrate on situating the work within an international contemporary and art-historical context”, as if I didn’t do the Irish context (which is, in fact, done in detail) or that situating the work within a broader context was somehow a negative response to the work.

The problem with much Irish art history is precisely that it concentrates on the local and parochial and refuses to evaluate Irish artists within an international context — a point I have made for 30 years.

She then states “the book is shorter than one might expect”. In fact, the book is nearly 80,000 words. I was originally commissioned to write 20,000, which is the average length for books of this kind.

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by email