While on one of his many fishing trips to New Zealand, Barry Cooke's solitude was interrupted by the appearance of a young couple upriver from his encampment. Although initially resenting the intrusion, he later developed a close relationship with the couple, with the woman appearing in many paintings as Diana, the Roman goddess associated with wild animals and woodlands, and lauded for her strength, athletic grace, beauty and hunting skills. The brightness and purity of Lake Tekapo contrast with the polluted landscape in many of Cooke's Irish paintings, both revealing his deep commitment to issues of environmental concern. This painting expresses the deep connection between Cooke's major passions for painting and fishing. Through his painting he manages to create ‘a sensation of being under the waterroof, of having a fish-eye view of greenery and weeds and roots’ (Seamus Heaney, Profile 10 - Barry Cooke). Cooke originally enrolled at Harvard University to study marine biology but then discovered his need to paint. He is a master angler, and since moving to Ireland in his early twenties, has always lived near water. He has painted numerous portraits of literary figures. For years, a portrait of the poet, Ted Hughes, remained unfinished in his studio. Whenever the poet came for a sitting, the two friends would go fishing instead, Hughes sharing Cooke's enthusiasm for pike-fishing. The great Irish pike was the subject of a collaborative series of lithographs by Cooke and Hughes, which is also in the UCC Art Collection.

Nora Hickey, Curator of Education and Collections, Lewis Glucksman Gallery

Barrie Cooke (Born Chesire, England, 1931)
Diana of the Tekapo II, 1988
Oil on canvas 102 x 102 cm