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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FACULTIES OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN AND COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

AND

FINE ART

CHRIS DORIS - A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY IN ART

BY

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Introduction

I was introduced to the work of Chris Doris early in 1991 when I visited the Samskara Exhibition of drawings in the Project Arts Centre. The work interested me on two separate, though integrally linked levels: first, his interest in the spiritual as a theme, and secondly, his interest in abstraction.

The awkward question that subsequently arose in my mind concerned the integration or level of integration of both of these issues. In other words, do these interests combine to embody the spiritual? By the spiritual, I refer to what I believe to be an underlying essence that permeates all things and is part of an integrative system.

In this study I hope to trace the development of this artist, through the processes he employs and through the preoccupations that concern him in his work as a means towards arriving at an understanding and appreciation of his work of 1991.

In Chapter 1 I begin by asserting the artists position - his preoccupations, views, beliefs and understanding. This is based on an interview I conducted with Doris on 20th November 1991, (29) at his home in Dublin. In conducting this interview my intention was primarily to ascertain the subjective position and understanding of Doris. This, I felt was best achieved through his continual and mainly uninterrupted discussion of his work,

beliefs and preoccupations. My aim in taking this stance, was to obtain a true picture of the artist from his own point of view, in order to clarify my own understanding and perception of the work and further to allow counterpoint between his understanding of the work as artist and mine as viewer. I have used this interview as source material and for that reason it has not been edited or altered in text. To aid an understanding of the various influences present, I examine in Chapter 2 issues present within an Irish context that are possible contributing factors, the nature of abstraction as a means of embodying the spiritual, and I look at the concepts present in Indian philosophy that may be related within the context of his work. In Chapter 3 I look at the themes and works from both before and after Doris's visit to India.

Chapter 1

WHAT THE ARTIST SAYS

Introduction to Chris Doris

Chris Doris is an Irish artist, although born in England in 1962, he was educated in Dublin's Blackrock College and he continued his studies in Dun Laoghaire School of Art and Design, graduating in 1986 with a Fine Art Diploma.

In 1985/86 he conceived and organised a rotating group exhibition in the resocialization project at St. Brendan's Hospital, Dublin. In 1986 he displayed eight hundred paintings of heads, on paper, around Dublin city centre. In 1987 he conceived and organised Artists on the Boards 87, in which ten painters, including himself, made works which were put on ten Dublin city centre billboard sites.

His first one-man show 'Icons and Monoprints' took place in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin in 1989, reflecting his preoccupations with social and political concerns. In 1990 he travelled in India, and it was there that he first became introduced to meditation. 1991 saw his second one-man show 'Samskaras', in the Project Arts Centre, Dublin. This exhibition followed his visit to India and was a result of his meditational experiences.

The preoccupation with duality and the resolution of duality has always been a strong theme in the work of Chris Doris: 'Dualities in terms of ... subject and object, subjectivity and objectivity, dualities of politics and spirituality, mind and body.' (29, p. 63) These preoccupations may be seen reflected in his first show 'Icons and Monoprints', in 1989. His intention was to devise a process of painting to contain and resolve these issues.

'What I was trying to do', he says

'was bring together these opposite tendencies, and I devised a system of painting ... to correspond with systems theory and the theory of how natural systems work, and then evolve, break down, bifurcate and rise to a higher level of organisation, break down again and eventually reach an irreversible state of organisation and they're complete at that stage, and this is exactly the way I painted.

I bring together all these ingredients, geometric forms, subjective figurative painting, political themes, spiritual themes and the painting would evolve through a level of order, then getting completely broken into a state of disorder, find a much better level of organisation, break down again and ultimately it would reach a stage where it just closed itself and serve as representing matter of this journey.' (29, pp. 63, 64)

Subsequently Doris found he

'was beginning to transcend this system of bringing together dualities and hammering them out and trying to resolve them. I was finding in my own experience and in my way of working, that I was moving beyond it'. (29, pp. 64).

During his visit to India he was introduced to meditation and with

this experience the emphasis of his work changed. The biggest difference as a result, he says, is the shift from the survival of limitations, be it individual, political or social limitations, as an interest in the work, to the realization of the potential of all things.

Meditation has convinced him that 'personal transformation is vital for political transformation'. He now feels that he no longer has to address overt political content, that addressing his 'spiritual transformation is a valid exercise in itself, and has implications for political transformation'. (29, pp. 51, 52)

He continues, 'art is no longer at the centre of my existence; the spiritual journey is ... Now the art will be an expression of that journey'. (29, p. 54) What he is interested in, is considering, as truthfully as possible, perceptions that arise within the journey. He is interested, he says, in viewing the world and its environment in a 'material way' with 'the rigor of a still life painter - such as with the intensity of the analytical cubists'. Through this intense vision, he wishes to perceive as clearly as possible. transformation through each of its stages, and communicate that in a visual language. (29, p. 72)

1990 is a time Doris considers, of pivotal change in his life, and subsequently in his work.

'The reason I went to India' he says,

'was not for the place, but because I had an intuition and some understanding ... that there were philosophies there that had looked into the unity of consciousness and presented the unified tradition, and I thought it might help me move on in my work'. (29, pp 64, 65)

The effects of the visit to India and his discoveries of meditation have been felt in a very deep and personal way, in terms of his consciousness, his understanding and his perceptions of the nature of reality and its relationships. All this has subsequently manifested itself in his art work and ultimately has influenced his method of process. Not only has meditation changed the nature of his preoccupations in his art making, but it has also changed his understanding and perception of its purpose. He says 'I've more of an understanding of the art doing me, rather than me doing the art'. (29, p. 54) The pursuit of his spiritual journey is now seen as his most pressing obligation and art is now seen as 'a by-product of my being'. (29, p. 54)

He sees his work as 'a by-product of taking responsibility for my consciousness, and exploration itself is communication'. (29, p. 59)

The importance of process is of the utmost value to him for its communicative capabilities. He describes the surface of a painting as 'an experiential journey'. That's why he says, mark making is important, not for its expression of emotion but because it demonstrates a 'map of actions, the actions had to make the method explicit'. Process was to 'communicate actions in a

system, and how they were all being integrated'. (29, p. 64)
Therefore, 'the art is just like the map of the journey'.
However, he's aware that 'art is limited ... in terms of what it
can do, in terms of its transformative capacity ... compared to
what an effective system can do' in the transformation of
perception. (29, p. 54)

Doris, since his return from India in 1990, has been involved in a
system of meditation called Sahajmarg, which involved meditating
daily, both morning and evening. A fundamental part of this
system is a facility in the yogin called Pranrhuti - this allows
yogic transmission to occur. 'When you meditate', he says, 'you
receive a transformation from the master'. A transmission he
describes as 'divine energy - the energy of everything,
everything's connectedness'. An integral part of the system, is a
process of cleansing, carried out daily, in order to remove
Samskara, which is impressions that have accumulated in the
subconscious. (29, pp. 60, 61) The goal of meditation he
describes as 'God realization, human perfection'. (29, p. 58)
This system of meditation however, is not totally an ascetic one -
'you have the responsibility to live your life in the world and to
try and effect change'. (29, p. 67)

Some of the qualities of the transformation in meditation he
feels, could be translated visually in painting. These qualities
he describes as 'expanding space, increasing light, and that's not
brightness but lightness, diminishing content'.

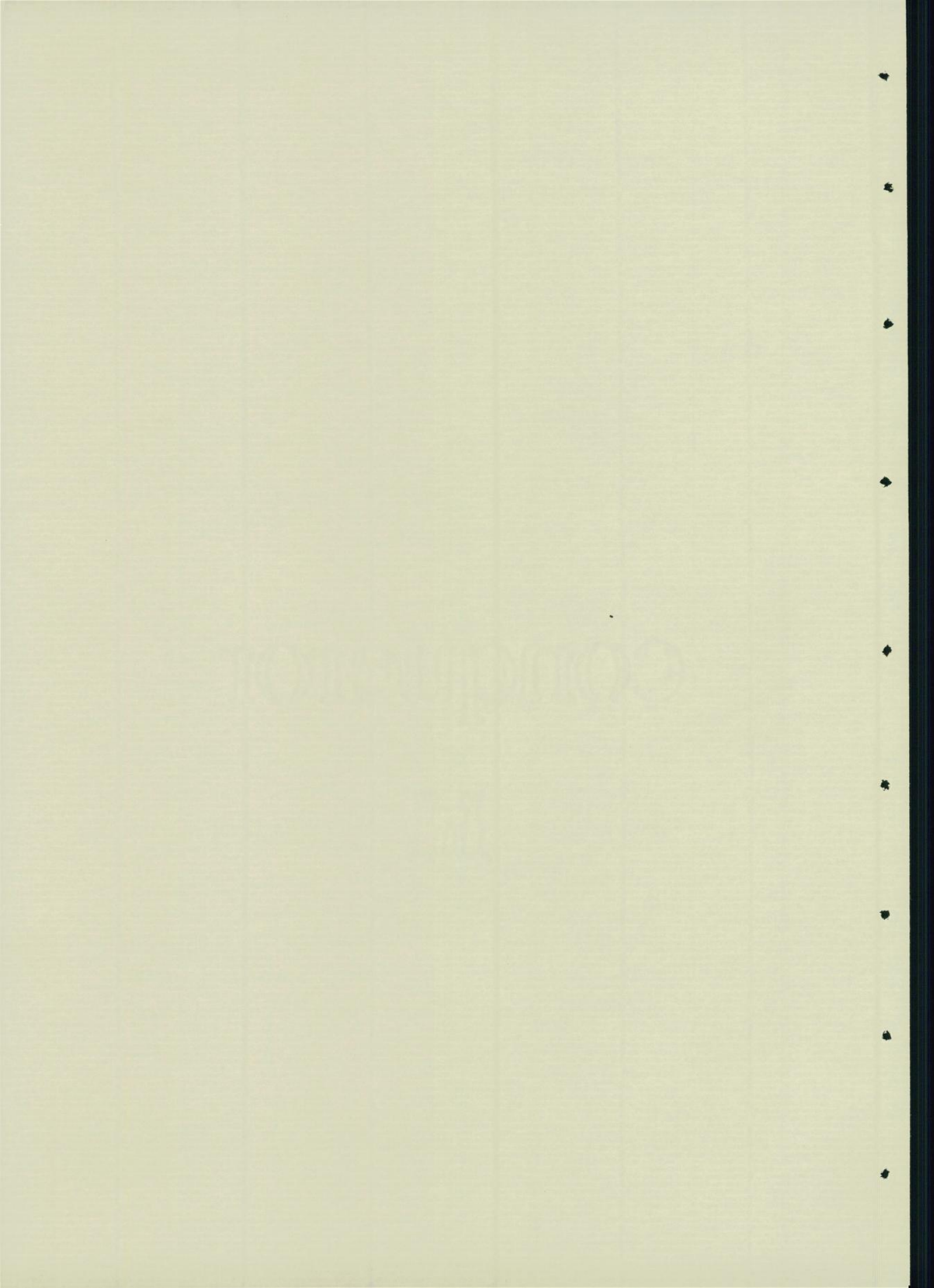
Chris Doris feels that these are times of spiritual change, that we are on the brink of a spiritual transformation in both art and politics. He feels that it is 'only now, that a new philosophy is coming to the fore that is an integrative one, a whole one, a unified one'.(29, p. 56) This is evidenced, he believes, in the coming together of the apparently opposite poles of spirituality and science, with agreement between what the physicists are learning about our physical reality and the perceptions of ancient spiritual traditions.

This new philosophy is, he feels a result of a healing process that is in motion, healing

the separation of man from his environment, of Cartesian philosophy ... with its split between mind and body, Plato with his split between the world of ideas and physical reality, the Christian tradition with its split between the soul and the body. (29, pp. 55, 56)

In terms of art, he sees work in the 80s 'all that heaviness, and all that vomited personal content, all that loaded figuration, clutteredness' (29, p. 68) as a cleansing in preparation for a spiritual development that lies ahead.

He feels that there is a bifurcation going on in the human system which will result in a 'real spirituality' asserting itself which will subsequently be evident in art. Doris sees the work of Paddy Graham as part of this process of change. 'I've been delighted to



see Paddy Graham's work' he says, 'in transition from what seemed to me to be a painting of clean, of Samskara to the transcendence of that ... towards an openness of space'. (29, p. 69) He includes Tony O'Malley, whose work he describes as having 'a love and a humanity', (29, p. 73) Basilitz and Kiefer as also being part of a changing attitude towards spirituality in art.

At the time of interview, on 20th November 1991, Doris had not been involved in an art making process for three months. He attributes this to his need to shed all attachments of identity. 'I had an attachment to it in terms of recognition ... and in order to progress in meditation, I had to shed that attachment'.(29, p. 57)

As to his future direction in art he is not quite sure where it is going to lead him but is 'open to anything unprecedented ... it may be just making simple objects, paintings and sculptures in the studio'.

For the present he says he will make things but in the future 'can imagine arriving at an art making process that is not dependent on materials. I'd include in that performance art, or a form of spiritual practice'.(29, p. 71)

Questions Subsequently Raised

Following this extended interview I have a number of observations to make.

First, Doris appeared more intent on talking of the merits of a spiritual system and the nature and realization of meditation than discussing his work, and he did state that his primary preoccupation now was his spiritual journey.

Secondly, the work which was made during and after his visit to India was discussed only in relation to his spiritual identity and personal meditational experience and was not related within an art making context considering other influences, art or artists.

The nature of 'spiritual' art work is sometimes difficult to assess on a number of levels and the work of Chris Doris in this category is not without problematic aspects. The main point I see as two-fold.

The work of the Samskaras show includes work that the artist suggests are representational of a particular psychological or psychic state. As viewers we have no way of determining the truth or falsehood of these claims. We either accept or reject the artist's word. If we do not accept his claim, we may singularly view his work as abstract compositions. If we do accept his word, we must ask how are we to assess them - as visual compositions, or as bold explorations of unusual psychological terrain?

The second aspect of this point is in counterpoint to the first. Is it necessary for the viewer to be given this background

knowledge for an understanding and appreciation of the work, and if so, to what degree does their impact depend on, to use John Hutchinson's words, 'eroticism' and 'mystification'?

If such knowledge is necessary then it leads us into the area of exclusivism and may be regarded as an art only for those initiated and familiar with Doris's philosophy and viewpoint. If however, the knowledge of the roots and background of these works is not necessary, then one may ask the question, can they exist and be assessed critically in a formal context.

From the position of the artist, these works have been exhibited in public gallery spaces, thus casting them within an art context.

Chris Doris is intent on spiritual transformation, he is also an artist. He couples these two activities together, and as such they cannot be separated. Can one look at the painting or drawing in a material way without being aware of its content or likewise, can one look at the forms describing the spiritual intent without being immediately influenced in the process by the integral relationship of the material activity?

The works shown to us by Doris are more than mere mechanical representational images. They are processed in a very individual and subjective manner, through the choice of materials and through the means of abstraction. In order to assess how successful or otherwise these works are, it would be useful to take cue from

Kandinsky who states that form in itself, unlike colour, can exist singly. We must then ask the question does the form of the work describe or embody the essence of intent?

As to whether it is necessary for the viewer to be given background knowledge or a philosophical point of view regarding the position the artist holds, depends, in my opinion, on how one approaches a work, and upon the way and the extent one relates and communicates with that piece. In other words, is the response of the spectator primarily an intellectual or emotional method of communication. It is possible in my opinion, that if the response is primarily an emotional or intuitive one, then one may be more inclined towards identification with it's 'inner sound' and submitting to 'inner necessity', if however, the level of response is stimulated through the intellect, it is likely that knowledge of the concepts surrounding the work, or those that the work embodies, would further aid the communicative capacity between work and viewer.

Regarding the influence of 'eroticism' and 'mysticism' on the impact of the work on the viewer, it is important, I believe, to begin as a starting point with the work, and ask does it succeed in relating what it set out to investigate or embody?

Chapter 2

CONTEXT

The work of Chris Doris is rooted in two contexts: that of the Indian yogic tradition and abstraction. In order to seek an understanding of Chris Doris, and the possible influencing factors that have contributed to his development and search for identity - his spiritual identity - of which the art work is a by-product, I situate Doris in the context of his early years growing up in Ireland in the 60s and 70s, and in the early and mid 80s during his formative years as an artist.

Irish Context

Post independent Ireland was a country undergoing considerable political, social and economic change. Due to various contributing factors the reassessment of Ireland's identity became a habitual concern. The factors that caused a crisis of national and cultural identity include the effects of the post-colonial development, high levels of emigration, the joining with the European Economic Community in 1973 and the Northern Ireland situation, to name but a few.

The Irish Revival movement flowered as a literary, linguistic and political revival in the early decades of this century. Its campaign surfaced not only to reconquest territory, but more fundamentally, to reconquest the Irish mind, counteracting the colonial prejudices previously effected upon it.(9) This is clearly one of the reasons why Douglas Hyde insisted that the

Gaelic League was primarily 'an intellectual movement', aiming to repossess Ireland's dispossessed culture.

The young Yeats, still under the influence of a cultural apartheid, enthused about an Ireland whose socio-political inferiority to the English was compensated for by its 'poetic ... idyllic and fanciful life of the spirit'. Later Frank O'Connor² spoke of the Irish 'choosing the imagination over the intellect'.

The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies (edited by Richard Kearney and Mark Patrick Hederman) was the first study of its kind to investigate the nature of Irish culture. The importance of this study lay in its reassessment of the Irish identity as a whole. Subsequently, in The Irish Mind, Kearney examines the nature of this mind through the hypothesis that the Irish mind does not reveal itself as a single fixed homogenous identity. In contradiction to the orthodox dualist logic of either/or, Kearney argues that the Irish mind may be seen to favour a more dialectical logic of both/and, showing an intellectual ability to hold the traditional oppositions of classical reason together in creative confluence.(9, p. 9)

Joyce insisted that his own work was a challenge to the reader to discover different and deeper models of understanding. He subverted linear or sequential thinking favouring a mode of expression fostering rather heterogeneous meanings, permitting us to have 'two thinks at a time'. Joyce could refer to Dublin as

'lugly' (simultaneously communicating his ambiguous perception of his native city as both lovely and ugly). Yeats wrote of a 'beauty born out of its own despair' and referred to the 1916 Rising as a 'terrible beauty'.(9, p. 10)

Louis le Brocquy describes how his painting attempts to articulate a 'secret logic of ambivalence'. He explains

It would appear that this ambivalent attitude ... was especially linked to the prehistoric Celtic world ... I myself have learned from the canvas that emergence and emergence - twin phenomena of time - are ambivalent; that one implies the other and that the matrix in which they exist dissolves the normal sense of time, producing a characteristic stillness.

Le Brocquy asks

Is this the underlying ambivalence which we in Ireland tend to stress; the continued presence of the historic past, the indivisibility of birth and funeral, spanning the apparent chasm between past and present, between consciousness and fact ... day consciousness/night consciousness like (Joyce's) Ulysses and Finnegan? (5, pp. 68-69)

Kearney points out that this sense of indivisibility between opposites does not mean, as colonial prejudice presumed, that the Irish abandoned order for disorder or turned their back on conceptual rigour to embrace formless chaos. The complex dualities of life and death articulated by the symbolic systems of New Grange or Celtic mythology enables us to recognize, according to Eliade, systems of a culture that testify to an alternate order

and organisation.(9)

The Boyne Culture, like many archaic cultures, may have understood the mystery of cosmic existence as originating in two opposed cosmic forces, not only in the opposition of life/death, but also male/female, darkness/light, day/night and so on. If this is so, then the New Grange complex may be seen to be functional in the bringing together of opposite poles of, for example, male and female to form a whole and unitive identity. It not only is analogous to the bringing together of opposites, it is the embodiment of opposites.

While stone K1 of New Grange almost certainly due to its southeasterly orientation towards mid-winter sunrise, signified attunement to cosmic life, the back stone K52 which appears to be aligned to the moment which marks the beginning of the sun's dying away at mid-summer sunset, may be as Brendan Purcell says 'New Granges "door of death" facing northwest and leading nowhere'. The significance could be in the polar opposition of life and death.(9)

Another expression of this duality could be the linked spirals or juxtaposition of two spirals as found in New Grange. The symbol of the spiral, with its motion around a centre, simultaneously converging a movement outward from and returning to the centre, suggest, as Walsh sees it, a meditative expression of the cyclical order of being in terms of its divine cosmic origin.(13)

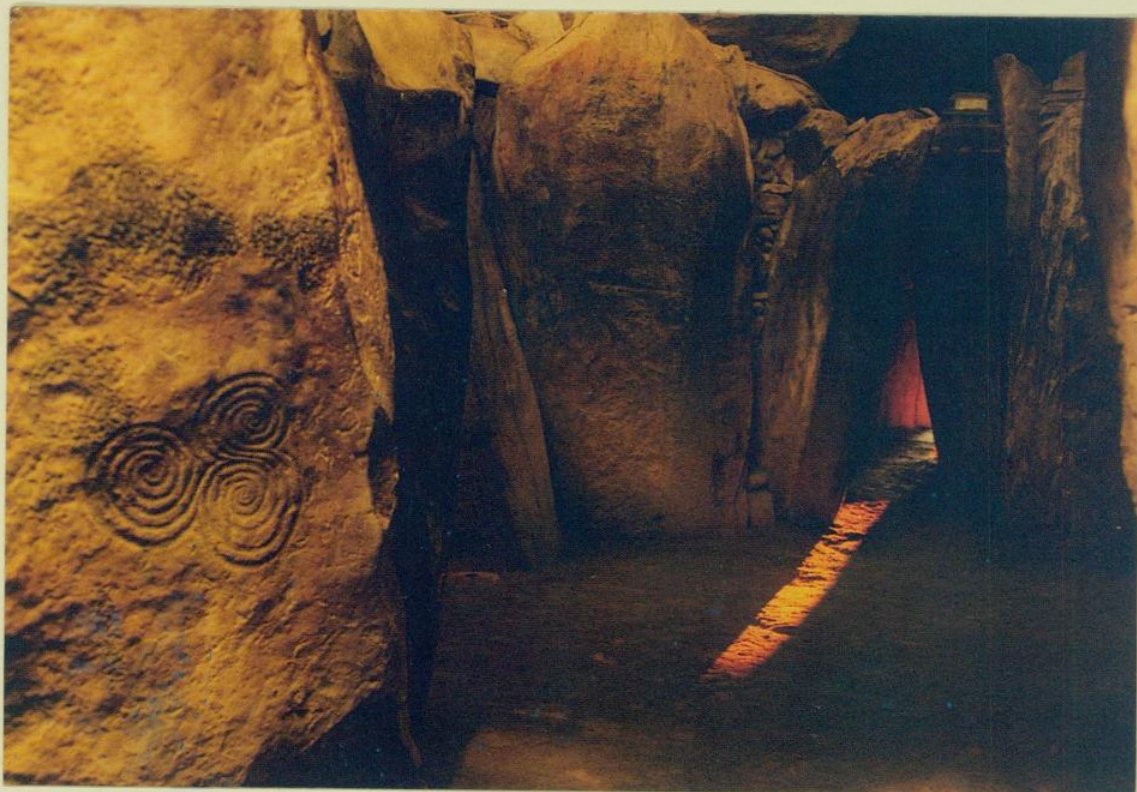


Plate 1: Triple Spiral, New Grange, Co Meath

WILLIAM R. CO. NORTH
WEST COAST

IN AN HOUR
from London to New York



The triple spiral in New Grange appears on the back stone in the rear small recess chamber off the main chamber. The triple spiral has been designated as the symbol of the Celtic Triple Goddess, signifying birth, life and death.(13) Eliade states that the Boyne People may have considered the earth as a mother 'giving birth to living forms, which is draws out of its own substance'. Life and death are not seen as separate polarities but are seen to be part of a single continuous event because

everything that comes from the earth is endowed with life, and everything that goes back into the earth is given new life. What we call life and death are merely two different moments in the career of the earth mother as a whole; life is merely being detached from the earths womb, death is returning home.(9, p. 44)

Indian Thought

In many schools of Indian philosophy, it is held that the world, our physical reality, is an illusion to those who are unenlightened. The whole purpose of life is to pierce the veil of ignorance (avidya) blinding one to the nature of ultimate reality.(10)

The theme of inclusiveness and holism is an intrinsic part of Indian thought. There is no absolute distinction between matter and spirit, both are equal aspects of one single principle. 'Hylozistic', the primitive tendency to allow no clear distinction between matter, life and mind, is an integral part of Indian understanding. Central to this concept of the 'flux of all

things'.(10)

The concept of time integrally links us to a physical spatio-temporal world. Centrally related to time - Kala is Maya (the process that creates and sustains life). Creation is conditioned by time, everything is born only to die, for the life urge not only contains seeds of its own decay, but is also magnetically attracted to the primal source. Non-sequential logic, the theory of constant change and perpetual motion and the cyclical time concept are further aspects of Indian thought.(10)

According to the gradation into which the Indian classifies phenomena, the one is at the apex of the pyramid, the many are at the base, union is hierarchically superior to division, the undifferential to the differentiated.(12)

Among the principle constituents of the mythic time concept Eliade includes the return to origins, the prestige of beginnings and the conquest of time. It is the first manifestation of a thing that is significant and valid. This finds expression in 'going back'³ until the original, strong, sacred time is recovered. Many Indians have devised various methods of harmonizing themselves with the larger reality. Ritual re-enactment of the cosmogenic myth, yoga, art and thought are means of moving from the outstreaming flow of linear time to recover those aspects of the beginning.

Whatever the system, the transcendence of subject-object relationships, the reconciliation of opposites, finally brings immediate experience of solidarity with all things and a state of benign tranquillity is attained amidst the contradictions of everyday life.

Classical yoga, for example, is a systematic formulation of one way of achieving immortality and freedom. Patanjali, whose theories form the backbone of the yogic tradition, maintained that our consciousness is normally fragmented and distracted by physical sensations, feelings and thoughts. Yogic practice, accordingly, begins with a form of mental concentration, 'ekagrata', which purportedly dams these distractions and allows a continuum of unified consciousness to arise. 'Ekagrata' is intended to control the two generations of mental instability - 'indriya' (sense activity) and 'samskara' (subconscious activity). After concentrating on the mental images of 'samskara' the yogin then 'masters' them by replacing them in the whole from which they have become detached. Through continual meditation, he thus 'relives' his past experience. He succeeds in emerging from time by travelling back through it, until he reaches a point of true stasis. In such moments of connection with divine energy, the sense of time is annulled and the flux of all life and its sense of interrelated connectedness is experienced.(10)

The method is to cast off from a precise instant of time, the nearest to the present moment, and to retrace the time backward in order to arrive ad originem, the

point where existence first "burst" into the world and unleashed time, then one rejoins that paradoxical instant before which time was not, because nothing had been manifested One attains to the beginning of time and enters the timeless.⁴

The Abstract and Spiritual in Art

There lies in the earlier years of this century an interest and upsurgence in the spiritual in art in Russia and in Europe, particularly Holland and Germany. The development of abstract art is synonymous with an aspiration towards the expression of a spiritual reality. Abstract art was thought to embody this spiritual reality more adequately than traditional representational forms. The spiritual in art, according to Hugh Cumming, is understood to refer to the artists subjective, creative and intuitive impulse, a sense of ultimate harmony and balance, as well as a notion of the ideal.(21)

Kandinsky is one of the pioneers of abstraction as a valid means towards the embodiment of the spiritual. Kandinsky travelled widely between Russia, Germany and the rest of Europe before the first world war. His writings On the Spiritual in Art, published simultaneously in Russia and Germany in 1911, became an influential treatise in both the East and West before the war. On the Spiritual in Art, which is one of the definitive texts on the nature of the spiritual in art, has been influential on the work of many artists. Kandinsky felt that abstract painting had little connection with materialism and felt it might therefore help awaken the individual to the spiritual values necessary to

bring about a utopian epoch. Kandinsky searched for forms that would be suggestive of the higher realities, the cosmic orders, rather than descriptive of the mundane physical world. Klee has said

... formally we used to represent things visible on earth, things we wither liked to look at or would have liked to see. Today we reveal the reality that is behind visible things, thus expressing the belief that the visible world is merely an isolated case in relation to the universe and that there are many, more other latent realities.

Kandinsky in 1911, saw the dawning of a new phase of the 'internal' kind, for art was seeking to concern itself with more subtle emotions, therefore, the artist as 'child of his age' must inevitably respond. 'Living himself a complicated and comparatively subtle life, his work will give to those observers capable of appreciating them lofty emotions beyond the reach of words.' 'The awakening soul' of something deeper than 'the shapeless emotions such as fear, joy, grief etc.,' which are the only emotional subject-matter of this materialism, is still only 'a tiny star in a vast gulf of darkness'. The true value of an art work for Kandinsky lies in the extent to which it is effective, the effect to which it alters something in the soul.(11)

To Kandinsky, the dematerialization of an initially recognizable subject represented one method among others towards abstraction. He describes the different categories of his paintings as

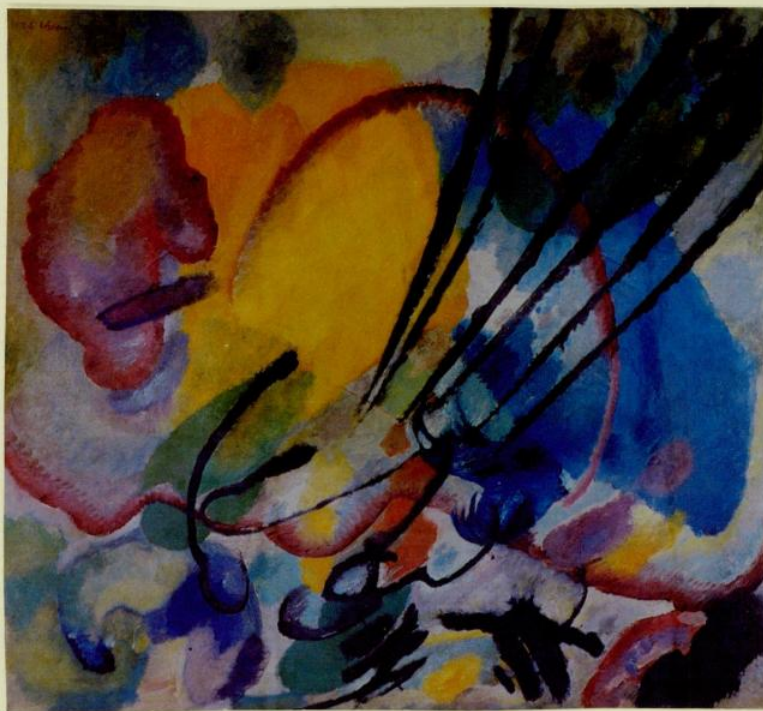


Plate 2: Improvisation XXVI, Kandinsky, 1912, Oil on Canvas, 97 cm
x 107.5 cm

Plate 3: Composition IV, Kandinsky, 1911, Oil on Canvas, 159.5 cm
x 250.5 cm

Competition R 841, 842

847 and 848

849 and 850

Competition IV
Kardinsky

'Impressions' - which are just that, impressions of external nature. The next higher type is represented by the 'Improvisations' which consist of expressions of events of an inner character, hence impressions of 'internal nature'. The highest class is that which he describes as 'Compositions' which are 'the expressions of feelings that have been forming within me in a similar way but over a long period of time'.

The development of Kandinsky's abstract work was also concurrent with his interest in the writings of Rudolf Steiner, such as Theosophic, and those of Mme. Helena Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society in New York in 1881.(15) Theosophy (a seventeenth-century word coined from Greek roots, meaning 'God Wisdom' or 'Divine Wisdom' denotes metaphysical teachings and systems, derived from personal experience and esoteric tradition, which base knowledge of nature and the human condition upon knowledge of divine nature. The primary aim of Theosophical teaching, is not to advance the theoretical understanding of nature, but to enhance awareness of the relationships between nature and spirit, and thus to enable the individual to achieve direct, intuitive knowledge and personal experience of the spiritual.

Steiner believed that artistic experiences stimulate the development of spiritual understanding. The essential influence of Steiner on the work of Kandinsky is that of providing an

intellectual and aesthetic paradigm for his concerns, with non-figurative and non-objective representation and in seeking to evoke an abstract, inner or spiritual truth beyond the tangible and recognizable world of everyday reality.(21)

The one essential claim that characterises Kandinsky's aesthetic manifesto's is that there is an essential inner value or life that should be manifested in aesthetic creation. This is referred to by Kandinsky as 'spiritual' and 'inner' and is at once an aesthetic and spiritual impulse. What was important in a work of art was the 'embodying of inner resonance.(11)

Matisse in his article in *Kunst und Kunstler*, 1909, describes how he paints pictures and in these pictures endeavours to reproduce the divine. 'To attain this end', says Kandinsky, 'he requires as a starting point nothing but the object to be painted (human being or whatever it may be), and then the method that belongs to painting alone, which are colour and form'. Kandinsky describes Picasso as shrinking from no innovation including the total elimination of colour, should it impede 'his search for a pure artistic form'.(21, p. 10)

In pursuit of the 'purely artistic' work in which art becomes 'an abstraction of thought', painting, says Kandinsky, 'has two weapons at her disposal'. These are colour and form. (11, p. 162)

The first effect of colour he says 'is a purely physical

impression', causing only a momentary and superficial impression' on the soul which is 'but slightly developed in its sensitivities'. The second stage is their psychic effect ... a corresponding spiritual vibration felt only by those experienced and developed enough to feel that a colour statement may have 'an inner meaning and eventually a spiritual harmony'. Kandinsky's interest lies also in the fact that 'colours seem to have "sounds"'. (11, p. 159)

Whether by cognitive mechanisms of association with 'real' phenomena, or by other means, says Kandinsky, 'colour is a power which directly influences the soul'. The only 'guiding principle' which can be applied in the creation of 'colour harmony' is that it produces a sensation of harmoniousness in the viewer.

Whether 'representing an object' or being 'a purely abstract limit to space or surface', form can exist without colour. Colour, however, 'cannot stand alone'. To be perceptible to the eye, rather than just to the mind, colour must have 'boundaries of some kind', and its objective position in relation to neighbouring forms and their colours will affect how it is perceived. 'This essential connection between colour and form brings us', says Kandinsky, 'to the question of the influences of form or colour', for 'form alone ... has a power of inner suggestion ... even when totally abstract or geometrical'. (11, p. 162)

On the matter of these spiritual connotations of form, Kandinsky

remains vague. 'A triangle', of whatever type, 'has a spiritual value of its own', as do 'a circle, square or any conceivable geometrical figure'. Each of these values may be modified in the presence of other forms but they remain 'in quality the same'. (11, p. 163) As to what those 'qualities' are, however he ventures no statement. 'A yellow triangle, a blue circle, a green square, or a green triangle, a yellow circle, a blue square ... are all different and have different spiritual values'. Form may 'nullify' colour, if sharp forms like a triangle are combined with soft, deep colours. Conversely a yellow triangle or a blue circle are naturally harmonious. At the same time, 'an unsuitable combination of form and colour is not necessarily discordant, but may ... show the way to fresh possibilities of harmony'.(11) The essence of Kandinsky's colour 'theory' is summed up in three charts presenting various 'antitheses'.

Antithesis A deals with their 'inner appeal acting on the spirit', and identifies yellow and blue as the poles respectively of warmth and coldness. Yellow is expansive, it tends to move horizontally towards the spectator, and therefore has a 'bodily' character. Blue is contractive, moves away, and is 'spiritual'.

Antithesis B deals with black and white. As the poles of light and dark they have horizontal tendencies akin to those of yellow and blue. White represents positive discord and is deathly.

Antithesis C deals with 'the physical appeal of complementary

colours' specifically of red and green, as the mixture of yellow and blue, 'is motionless' and 'spiritually very similar to grey'. Further he says 'in the hierarchy of colours, green is the "bourgeoise" - self-satisfied, immoveable, narrow'. (21, pp. 12-13)

Red on the other hand has unbounded inner energy, 'it rings inwardly with a determined and powerful intensity ... maturely, and does not distribute its vigour aimlessly'. (11, p. 167)

His final diagram combines all the antitheses 'as a circle between two poles', representing 'the life of colours between life and death'. (21, p. 13)

Authentically the spiritual aspect in abstract art does not so much 'communicate' as 'induce an attitude of communication and contemplation'. It is primarily [in this art] that such contemplation and communion with the work of another human being, the sensing of another's perfected feeling and imagination becomes possible.⁵

The means by which the abstract art of today achieve its spiritual integrity are the same as they were when abstract art originated, according to Donal Kuspit. These means he says, are silence and alchemy. Total abstraction is a kind of silence which total realism is achieved to alchemy. Silence is an articulation of the immaterial while alchemy is a demonstration of the unity of the

immaterial and the material. In both total abstraction (complete silence about the world) and total realism (alchemical transmutation of the worldly object) the diverting outer has been eliminated, generating a sense of inner necessity. (15, p. 314)

Thus art that seems to be pure in its being, results no longer in representing but presenting a subjective indication of inner necessity. For Kandinsky the sense of the arts inner necessity and the purity of the being it articulates, converge in authentically spiritual abstraction. The abstractions of silence and alchemy converge in their common pursuit of what Ernst Cassir called 'symbolic pregnance'. (15, p. 315)

Stephane Mallarme viewed silence in art as an instrument of purity. Deliberate silence, deliberate negation is a major way of sustaining the spiritual atmosphere of the abstract work by ruthlessly reducing the artistic ('tasteful outer beauty') to an absolute minimum. Paradoxically, the absolutely silent becomes the radically beautiful. The silence evokes an ecstatic sense of immediacy, an experience of radical beauty, breaking all the habits of mediation conventionally associated with perception. (15)

Rothko

The work of Mark Rothko may be seen to be the embodiment of an aspect of silence. Rothko's paintings may be described as a form of abstraction that developed from a series of combined coloured

bars set against a coloured ground. His characteristic use of essential rectangular form reached its peak with the use of a rectangular frame or window that floated against a large coloured ground. Rothko's prime interest was in the transcendent effect of art on the spectator. His abstract works were intended to act as monolithic sources for spiritual contemplation. He rejected the anecdotal quality of imagery insisting on the spiritual qualities that they represented. 'For me', he says, 'art is the anecdote of the spirit, and the only means of making concrete the purpose of its varied quickness and stillness'. (21, p. 58)

In discussing the work of Rothko, Kozloff said, that it is only when the spectator grows 'more intent on the colour vibrations, [and] learns to discount the surface [so that] the whole painting ceases to be, as a concrete thing', does its 'mystical' or⁶ 'spiritual' character, its transcendental beauty become evident.

This 'transcendental beauty' acquiring symbolic pregnance and containing a sense of the immediate and the immaterial, is materially actualized as colour. Thus the work produces 'a sensory experience [which] by virtue of the pictures own imminent⁷ organisation, takes on a kind of spiritual articulation'.

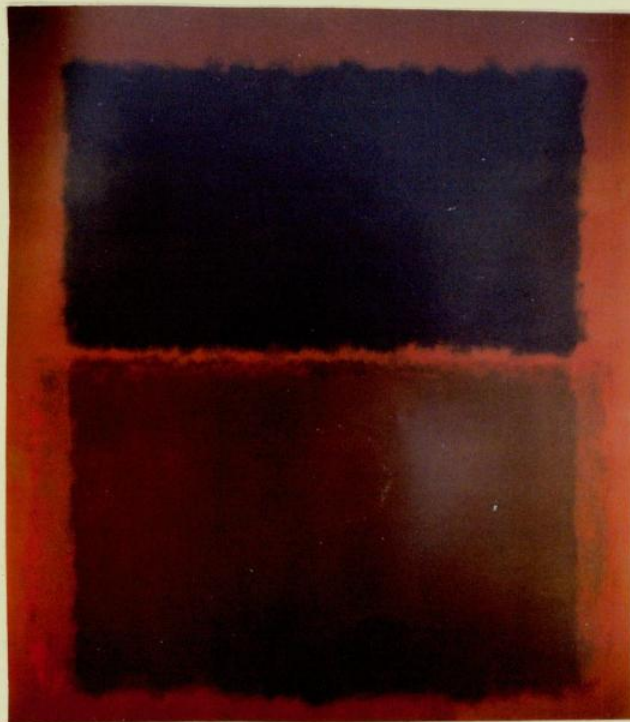


Plate 4: Untitled, Rothko, 1961, Oil on Canvas, 105" x 83"
Plate 5: Black Ochre, Red over Red, Rothko, 1957, Oil on Canvas,
99.5" x 81.5"

Harvard, 1951 1052 55m

On the ground
Lithos.

Blue Peter, Red Sea and

1957, on the ground

974 x 918 m

Lithos.

Footnotes

Chapter 2

1. W. B. Yeats, Uncollected Prose, 1970, p. 172.
2. Frank O'Connor, The Backward Look, 1967, p. 5.
3. M. Eliade, Myth and Reality, 1964, p. 37.
4. M. Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, 1960, p. 50.
5. Schapiro, Recent Abstract Painting, p. 223.
6. Koslott, Mark Rothko, p. 151.
7. Kozlott, Symbolic Pregnancy in Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still
1978, p. 120.

THEMES AND WORKS

Work up to 1989

Doris's interest in social conflict was first seen in a series of eight hundred hand-painted heads, in 1986. The heads were a cry against the anonymity and chaos of the street, 'an assertion' he says, 'of individual pain in the context of the street, of advertising's denial of pain and insistence on happiness'. This theme is continued, in the Artists on the Boards, 1987, which may be seen to challenge the regular notion of advertising space, with confrontation. 'Icons and Monoprints' showed work continuing along the same vein.

The work in the exhibition falls into three sections: monoprints, broadly political paintings which he calls icons, and 'mandalas', a series of large, richly worked meditative paintings.

The monoprints are mainly prisoners, blacks, children, the victims of massacres at Chatilla in the Lebanon. The icons include a series of ecological images, drawing on whales, nuclear power, and the destruction of the ozone layer. The political paintings and monoprints often draw on newspaper photographs for their imagery. The ordinary man as victim of social disorder is put before us, challenging the system, to redress this sense of imbalance in the social condition.

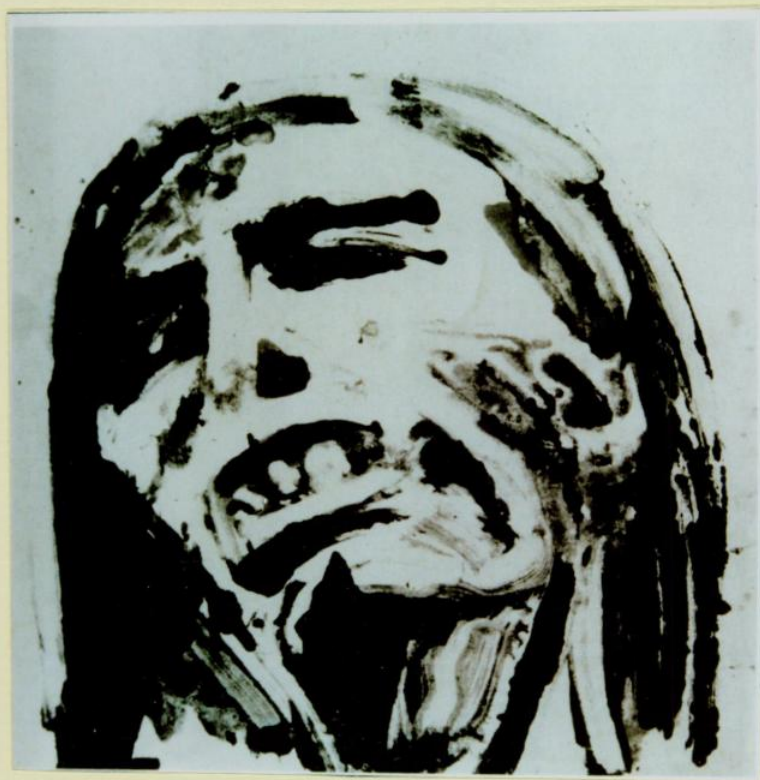


Plate 6: Mourning Woman (1), Chris Doris, Monoprint, 46 cm x 46 cm
 Plate 7: Black Child, Chris Doris, Monoprint, 46 cm x 46 cm
 Plate 8: Couple, Chris Doris, Monoprint, 46 cm x 46 cm

Chest (200)
Hatched (200)
Hatched, 45-50 mm

Cope
45-50 mm

Blackbird
45-50 mm



Plate 9: Young Black Woman, Chris Doris, Monoprint, 46 cm x 46 cm
Plate 10: Traveller, Chris Doris, Monoprint, 46 cm x 46 cm
Plate 11: Prisoner, Chris Doris, Monoprint, 46 cm x 46 cm

Cash Book

Young Glass Bottle

Warrant. 45 on 14th

Warrant

45 on 14th

Warrant

45 on 14th

Finbar O'Toole in On the Face of the Waters sees the tension that Doris creates in his work as 'being poised perfectly' between conflicting forces: order and disorder, content and gesture, objectivity and subjectivity, object and process, geometry and intuition. His paintings are not about the opposite tendencies above, but are, he says, the embodiment of them.(20)

The embodiment of this preoccupation with duality is well demonstrated in the very process through which he paints, together with the material properties and capabilities of paint. Process is seen as a very important part of the work of art and goes towards the embodiment of resolution just as much as the image itself. Thus we see that duality and its discordant effects (i.e. identification of social, political disorder, as being less than the ideal situation, a system of order that we are all by nature part of, and in turn responsible for) is not only identified, but is embodied materially through the systems and actions of his process. He likens his system of painting to that of natural systems where a bifurcation within the earth's processes is of natural order - building, breaking down and renewing of elements to reach higher and irreversible stages of organisation.(29)

The layering of paint, superimposing of shape and image, the constant annihilation and recreation of layer and surface are continually in motion between permanence and obliteration. 'The way I work' he says, 'is to lay down an image, keep breaking down and rebuilding that image with layer after layer of colour, so you



Plate 12: Six Men Down, Chris Doris, Oil on Canvas, 254 cm x 210 cms
 Plate 13: Assassination Icon, Chris Doris, Mixed Media, 365 cm x 275 cm

Chen Piao
Si Hua Piao
Chen Piao, 255 in x 255 in

Chen Piao
Si Hua Piao
Chen Piao, 255 in x 255 in



Plate 14: Chatilla by Night - Head of Christ, Chris Doris,
Monoprint, 183 xm x 92 cm

Plate 15: Chatilla by Morning - Angel of Death, Chris Doris,
Monoprint, 183 cm x 92 cm

Present by House - August
of 1880

Household - 1880 & 1881

Present by House - August
of 1880

Household - 1880 & 1881

Household - 1880 & 1881

get this tension all the time between the image and the process of creating it'. (27)

Inherent in the very process of monoprint are the possibilities of both annihilation and survival. Monoprints are made by creating an image on glass with printers ink and water and then imposing a sheet of paper onto it. The movement of ink and water, flow and change direction on glass allowing only for fast action on the part of the artist.

It's a difficult process ... when you're making the image, you've got about five minutes before it disappears back into the black murk. That means that you don't have time for abstract thought, the gestures have to come more or less from your body rather than your heads.(27)

But the black and white monoprints of heads and the colour ecological icons do survive, they're presented and completed moments before annihilation, the image only just surviving its material process and possessing the inherent potential and possibilities of both life and death in one.

In the monoprints, image and process, art and artist are one, transcending and overcoming dualities. It is at this point of unity, in my opinion, that connectedness occurs, in its purest sense. In his identification of socio-political situation, he is seen as the voice of the victim, placing himself in the hinterland between object and viewer. In these works he merges the objective world of news and the subjective world of the viewer in one,



Plate 16: Ozone Icon, Chris Doris, Monoprint, 183 cm x 92 cm
Plate 17: Icon to the Fallen Trees, Chris Doris, Monoprint,
183 cm x 92 cm

Chen Chen
2000 to the Future
Happily, 2000 to the Future

Chen Chen
2000 to the Future
Happily, 2000 to the Future

linking both with a sense of compassion (through his identification) through the forceful strength of the image.

Doris appears to me, to be moving out of linear devices and transcending dualities, in his more abstract 'mandala' paintings. These mandala paintings, I suggest, mark the beginning of a new point of departure from the figurative, social and political elements, and demonstrate the basis for the change in his work. And while new themes are taken on board, they can be seen within context, to be processed through his knowledge and appreciation of the properties of the materials, together with his preoccupation with duality and its subsequent limitation. In these mandala works, the conflict of duality is no longer an overriding preoccupation.

Birth Mandala is fluid, moving, entering and exiting, both an interior and exterior world. Doris intuites the two worlds of inner and outer as one. It is circular in motion, circular in format. The rhythm and composition of the painting suggests that it is outside the realm of linear time. The motion of the painting appears to be in constant flux, and birth seems not to be a singular event but a continuous one of renewal, of growth towards the future, in the moving out of the central form from a point within the central area.

Conception Mandala, similar to the icons and monoprints, alludes to those moments of time just before the presented surface came

into existence. The point of conception arrives, times, present, past and future are an integral part of its understanding. It arises from times past and moves into its future existence. The moment of conception is suspended before us, while the flux of activity continues around it. There is conflict present here, evident in the almost contradictory state of silence in the midst of flux.

Fintan O'Toole describes the mandala paintings as also surviving within the concept of annihilation. The annihilation here, he says, is the annihilation of pure contemplation, in which the self, the rational mind, sceptical self-consciousness, are annihilated and a release into pure possibility, pure process is possible.

We see in these mandala paintings, a move from figuration into abstraction. Kandinsky saw this as a positive development of one's 'inner necessity' as the embarking upon abstract means, was seen by him, to be an instrumental procedure towards attaining spiritual values in a work.

However, in these works we also see an understanding and manifestation of some Indian concepts, such as the flux of all things being integrally linked with a sense of the cyclical time concept.



Plate 18: Birth Mandala, Chris Doris, Oil on Canvas, 160 cm diameter

Plate 19: Conception Mandala, Chris Doris, Oil on Canvas, 183 cm diameter

Little Hermit
Old on leaves
100 in. diameter

Large Hermit
Old on leaves
45 in. diameter

A more personal and fundamentally universal³ search towards identity of a spiritual unity, that is part of a reality behind this spatio-physical world, is evident in these paintings. It is not only evident through their apparent titles of 'Conception' and 'Birth', as moments of beginnings, but also through an investigation of time before these events. This is materially evident through the fluid, expressive use of paint, and is also aided through the compositional use of form. In Birth Mandala the central triangular-like form moves towards an interior, towards a centre point, a point of beginning. This form, I see as moving outwards, continuing a circular non-linear motion of time.

This search for an identity towards a source or beginning finds sympathy in Eliade's emphasis on the return to origins. This is stressed when he says 'Every human being tends towards the centre and towards his own centre, which confers on him integral reality "sacredness".' 'This desire', he says, is 'profoundly rooted in man, to find himself at the heart of the real, at the centre of the world'.

The use of the circular mandala format is of significance. The Sanskrit word mandala means 'circle'. In psychology and in the sphere of religious practices it denotes circular images, which are drawn, painted, modelled or danced. A mandala used in ritual, known as a Yantra, is an instrument of contemplation. It is meant to aid concentration by narrowing down the psychic field of vision and restricting it to the centre.

Jung notes that individual mandalas, unlike ritual mandalas, use an unlimited wealth of motifs and symbolic illusions. He says that 'it can easily be seen that they are endeavouring to express either the totality of the individual in his inner or outer experience of the world, or its essential point of reference'. (8, p. 5) Thus he says, the basic motif is the premonition of a centre of personality, a kind of centre point within the psyche, to which everything is related, by which everything is arranged, and which in itself a source of energy. The object of the centre is the self which comprises the totality of the psyche i.e. conscious and unconscious altogether. Although the centre of the mandala is represented by an innermost point, it is surrounded by a periphery containing everything that belongs to the self.(8)

Jung says that mandala images often have a considerable therapeutic effect on their authors, and that it is proven that they often represent 'very bold attempts to see and put together apparently irreconcilable opposites and bridge over hopeless splits'.(8, p. 5)

If we take this understanding of the mandala and its potential, and apply it to an understanding of Chris Doris within the context of his work at the time, as being in transition between the bringing together of dualities and the transcendence of duality, and between the 'survival of limitations' and the 'realisation of potential', we can see that the mandala paintings may very well be

instrumental in the further development of his themes and preoccupations.

Works 1990

The work of the Samskara show in the Project Arts Centre 1991, marks a point of change for Doris. The work can broadly be described as fitting into three closely linked categories: (1) Samskara drawings, chalk on blackboard; (2) Earth Samskara drawings, indian ink and fabric paint on silk; (3) Yantra drawings, indian ink on paper.

While in India he began his first Yantra drawings using sepia and black ink, he sketched angular images that fall in the netherland between figuration and abstraction. John Hutchinson describes them as 'like depictions of the dematerialisation of perception'. (23) A Yantra may be described as a visual device intended to aid contemplation. Just as in a mantra, where the sound vibration is supposed to strike a spiritual chord in the aspirant, through its usage, so is the Yantra intended, upon contemplation to impart the visual equivalent to the viewer.

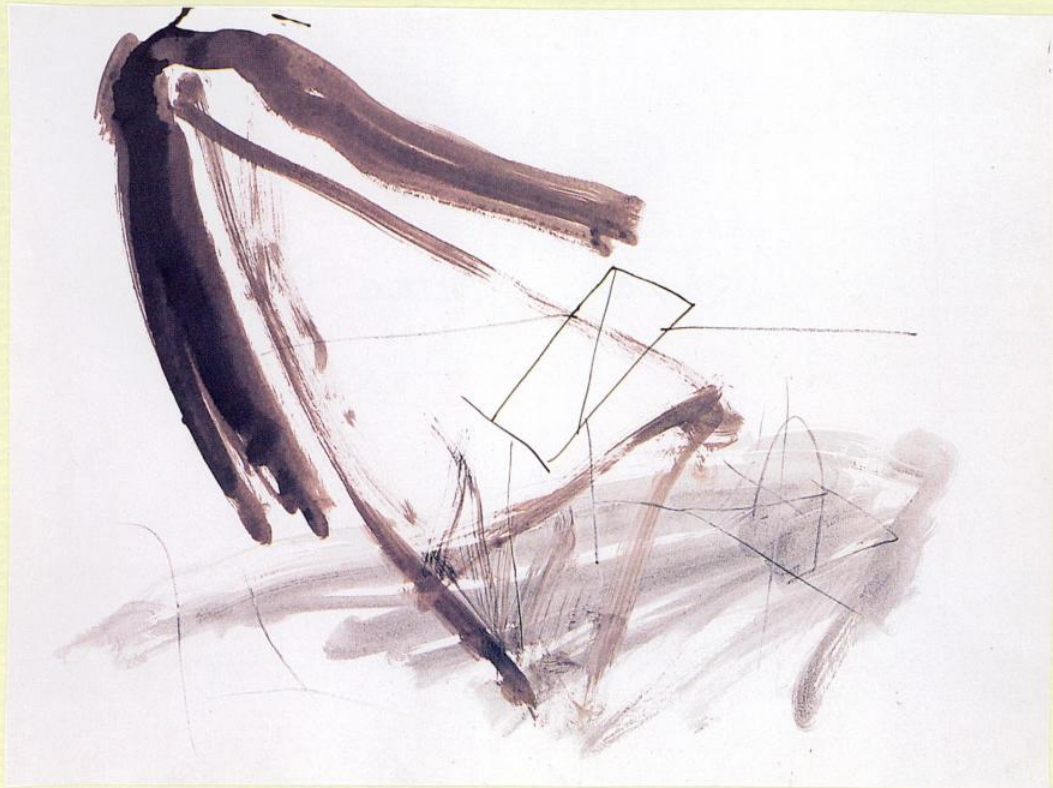
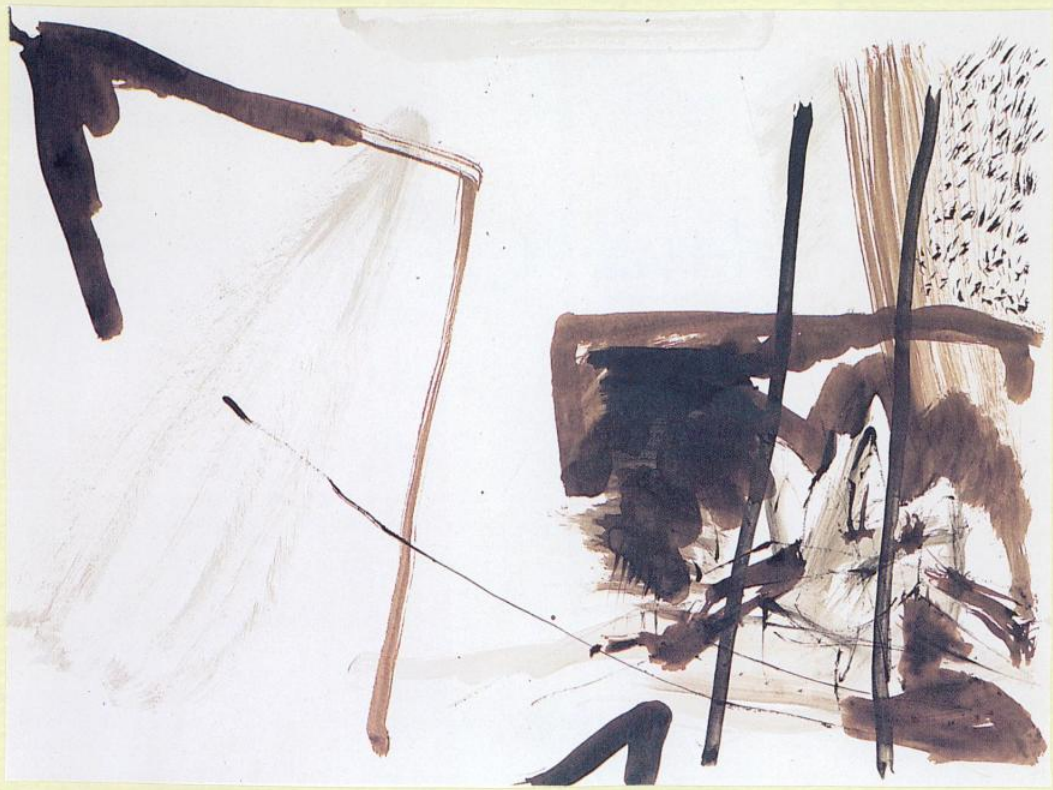
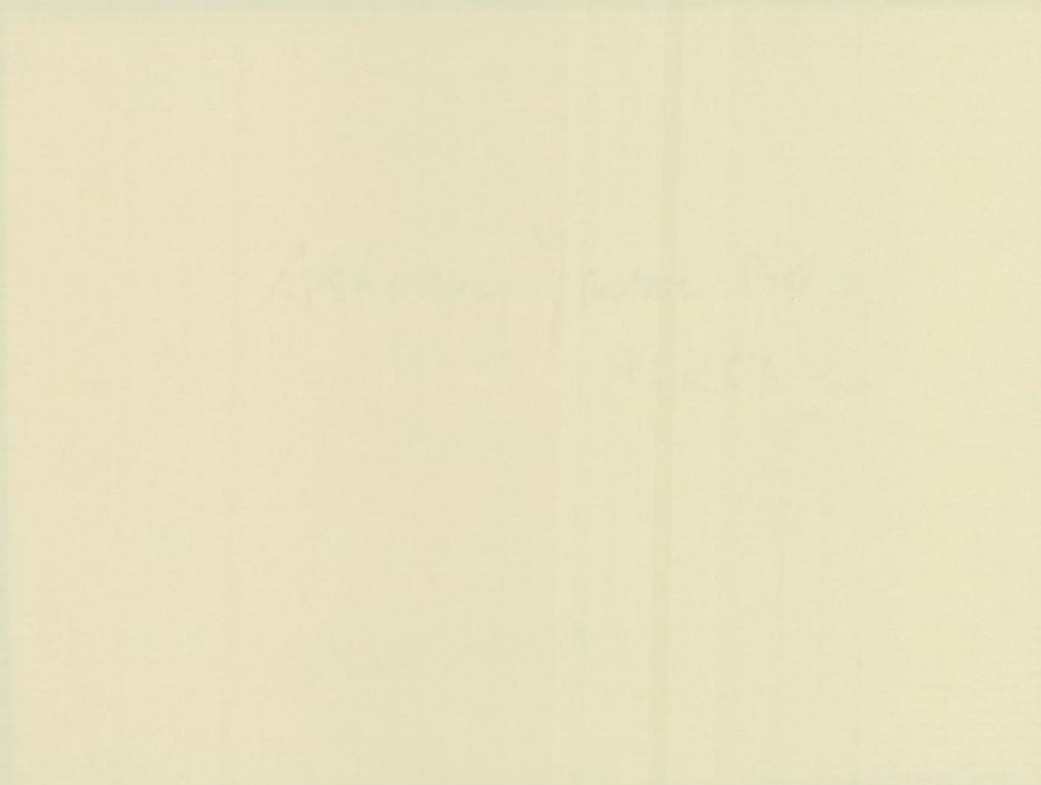


Plate 20: Ashram Yantra No. 1 (1990), Indian Ink on Paper, 76 cm x 56 cm

Plate 21: Ashram Yantra No. 2 (1990), Indian Ink on Paper, 96 cm x 56 cm



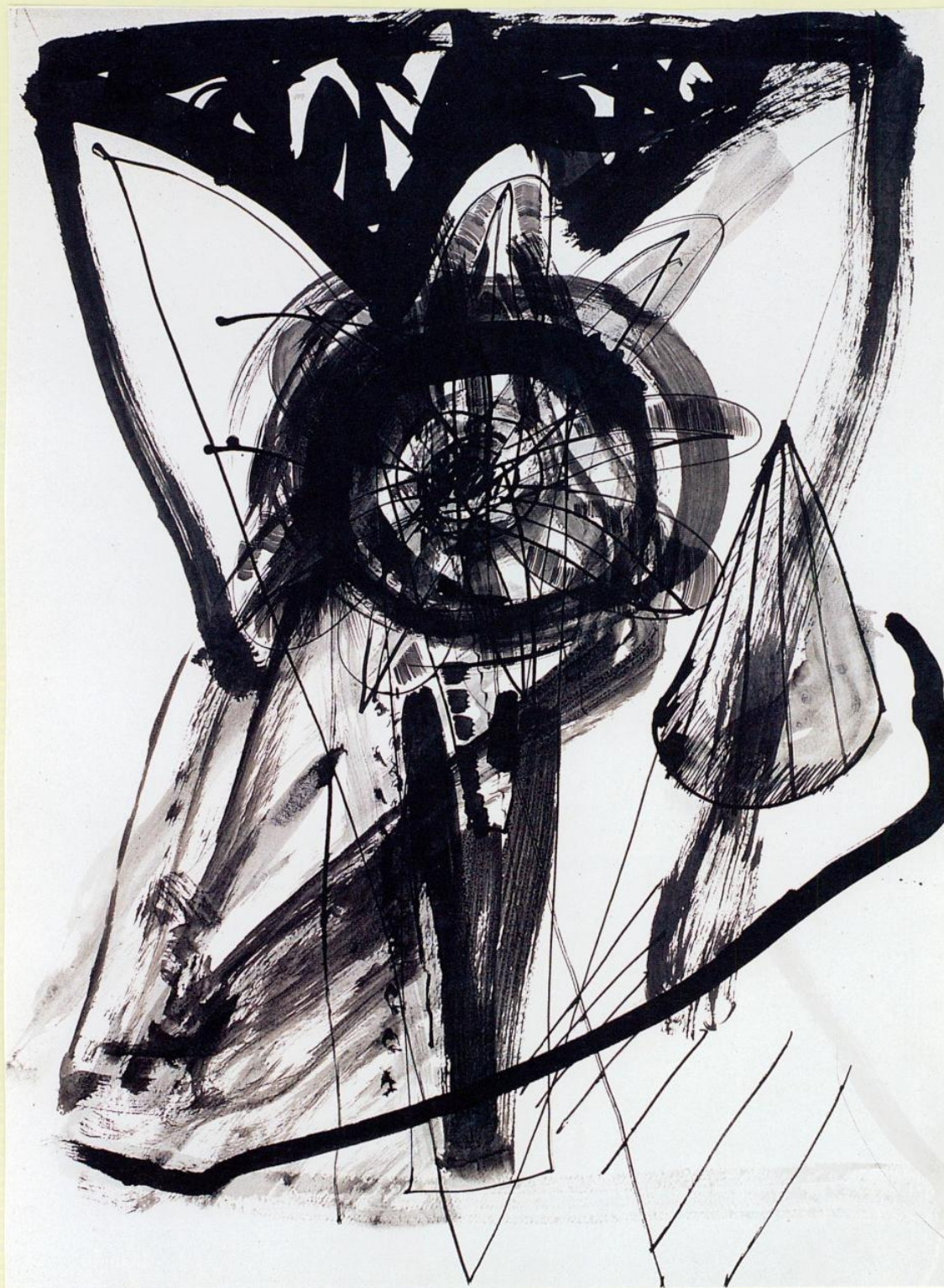


Plate 22: Earth Yantra No. 1 (1990), Indian Ink on Paper, 56 cm x 76 cm

South Western

Earth Yantra No. 1 differs from the Ashram Yantra drawings. The subject of the drawing is a flower-like, organic form with many petals rising from its centre. This is similar to the many leafed lotus flower which is a well known motif in Indian art. The lotus flower is depicted in many forms, and also represents the Chakra on energy centres of the human body in Kundali yoga. This drawing may be seen to evoke a state of contemplation in the viewer, more successfully than the Ashram Yantra drawings. This contemplative state of Earth Yantra No. 1 is due in part to its compositional structure, with its emphasis towards the centre, aided by concentric circles and marks, directing the viewer inwards. It utilizes a variety of lines and images, all serving to describe periphery activity and its relationship to the centre.

Doris describes the Samskara drawings as maps of a natural process, relating his perceptions of change and transformation as experienced in meditation. These drawings are completed after periods of meditation and are mainly unaltered afterwards. Samskara means unconscious patterns of behaviour which the soul is shedding on its journey, residue accumulated in the unconscious mind as a result of past feelings and actions.

Chris Doris implies that these drawings are representations of a psychological state.(19) They may be seen to be part of the cleansing process that he engages in, in conjunction with his meditational practice.

In these blackboard drawings we can see different layers, densities and values, building up an intricate network of mind activity and residue describing the accumulation of effects and influences in the subconscious. These drawings contain in my opinion, both objective and subjective elements, in line and space, hewn together with careful artistic consideration. These drawings contain elements of universal recognizable forms, such as concentric circles in Samskara No. 5, a wheel-like form with radiating lines coming from its centre point, in Samskara No. 3 and the form of a sun in Samskara No. 1, together with other more introspective, subjective marks of personal subconscious actions.

These drawings on the whole, appear to me to be representations of snap-shots of subconscious mind content, while Samskara No. 9 seems to indicate not a representation of elements, but the embodiment of the state of mind or subconscious. It is densely worked, with layer built-up in a web-like fashion.

These works are not to be seen as outside the context of Doris's earlier preoccupation with duality, rather they are the by-product of the transcendence of duality, in the process of meditation through the mastery of body and mind. In meditation the stillness of the body and the clearness of the mind in communion, together transcend subject and object and reconcile opposite states, bringing about an experience of solidarity or unity with all things, and one feels a sense of benign tranquility amidst the contradictions of everyday life.(10) These drawings then are seen

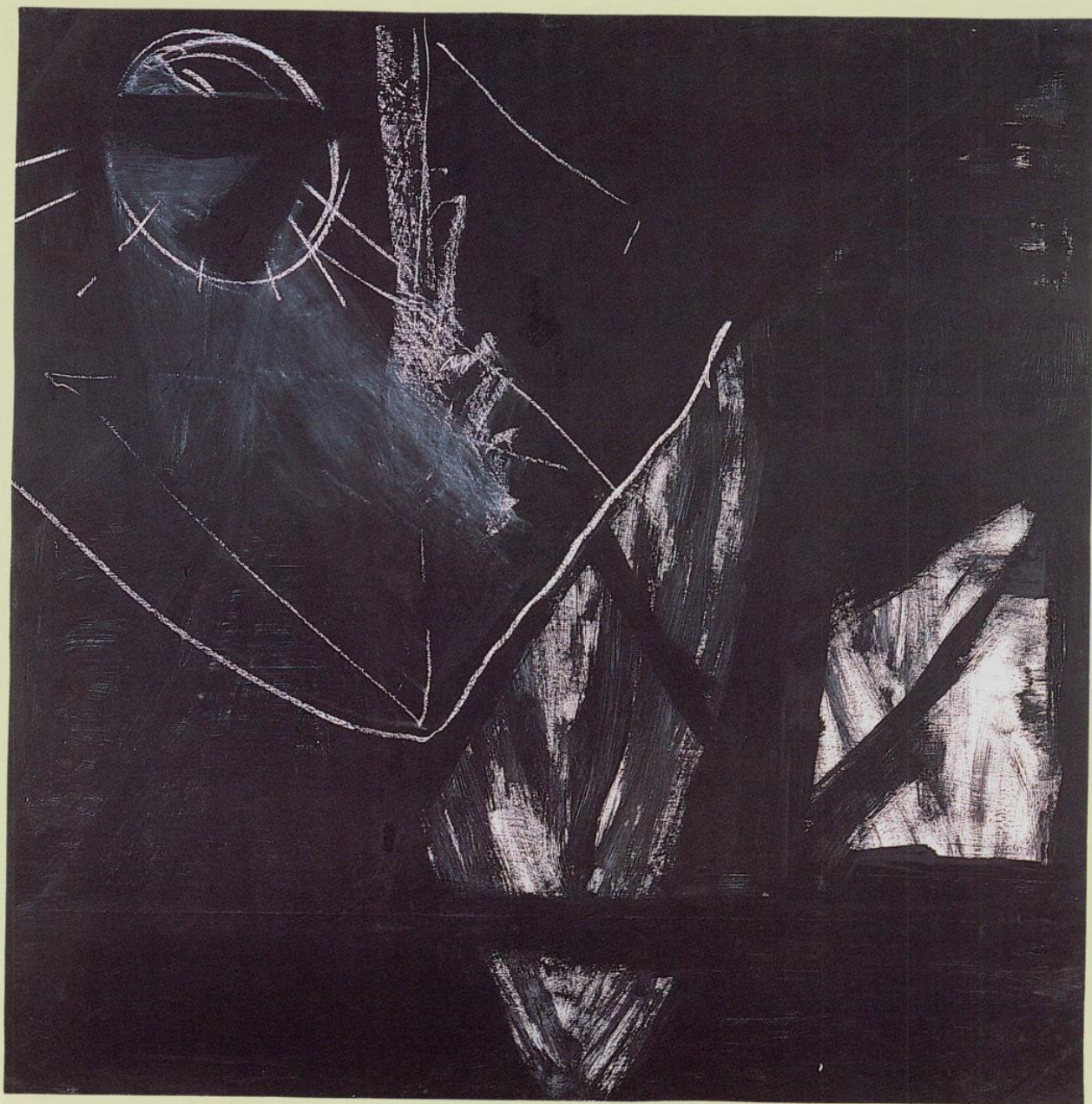
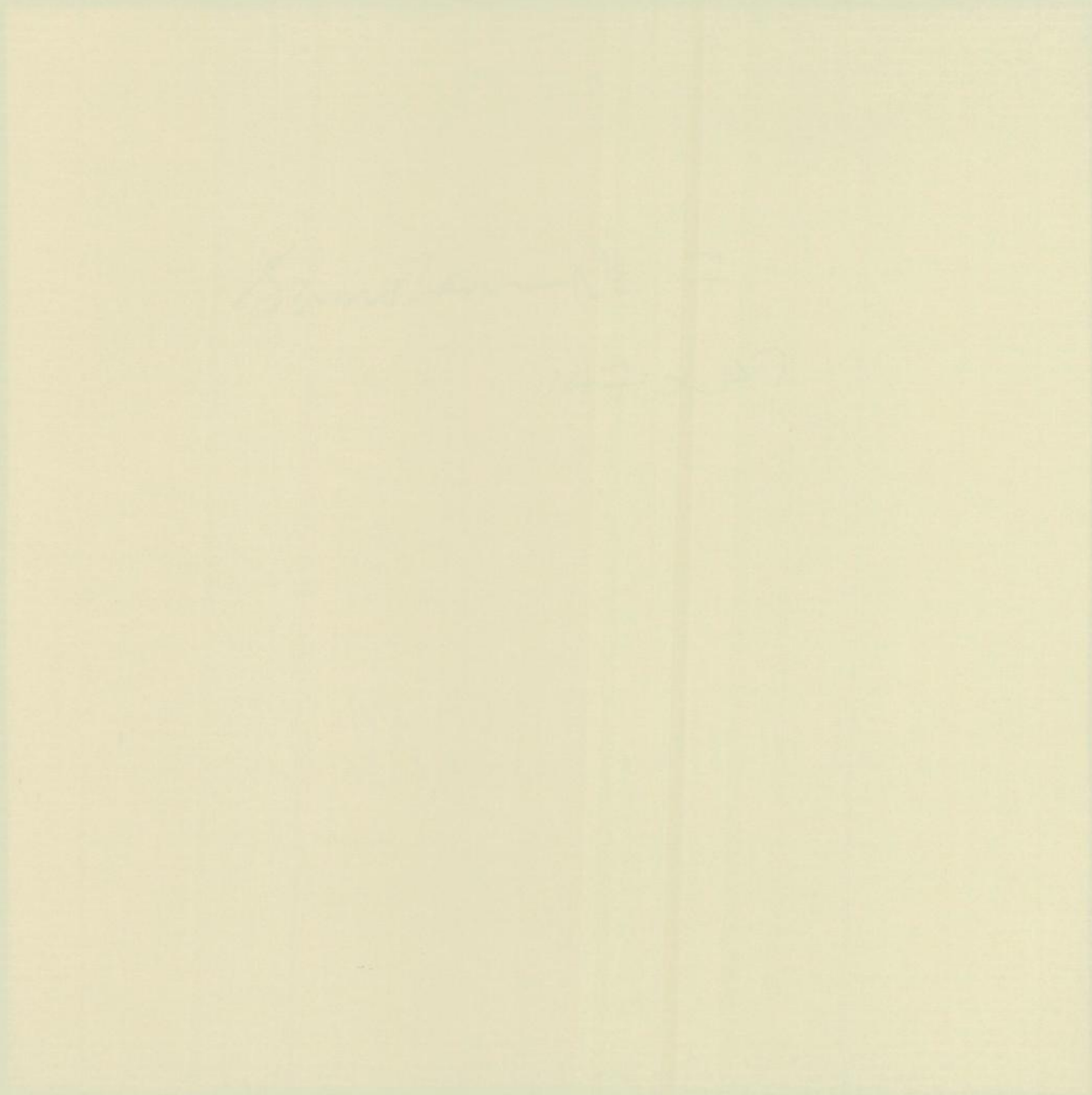


Plate 23: Samskara No. 1, Chris Doris (1990), Chalk, Blackboard
Paint on Hardboard, 147 cm x 147 cm

Section 250



Plate 24: Samskara No. 7, Chris Doris (1990), Chalk, Blackboard
Paint on Hardboard, 147 cm x 147 cm



to be part of a cleansing process, an exorcism of mind activity and content.

Meditation is also said to aim for a sense of nothingness, a sense that brings about freedom from the individual to the collective, when all attachments are shed. Thus in this light, it can again be seen how these drawings as by-products of this process may be part of a ridding procedure.

These drawings are transitory, not only due to the nature of their subject (elements that change continually due to conditioning, and inner and outer influences) but also due to their material process. The Samskara drawings suggest that they are part of a realm that is outside that of time, and the concept of linear potential and development. Residue of its nature suggests accumulation through the time process, and these drawings represent moments, traces of actions and thought; residue of the mind and therefore allude to the passage of time. The subject is transitory as moments of accumulative action are just about caught, with the action of residue coalescing momentarily into configuration.

However, the subject of these works is of the mind or the subconscious, which is not confined by the boundaries of time and space, yet, through the physiological process from mind to body, they are rooted in the physicality of linear time. So there is a conflict and a sense of tension present within the subject itself. Materially, as Beuys realised, drawings on black boards are

diagrammatic, while the use of chalk implies erasure and evasiveness. (19) The marks on the boards are traces of action and thought, not permanent signs or markers because they allude to the passage of time they also signify their own transitoriness and eventual destruction.

The Samskara blackboard drawings seem to me to allude to a microcosm/macrocosm relationship through their very nature and material process. The idea that the human body is a microcosm is essential to Indian Tantric art. The blackboard with its density of black may be seen, I suggest, as the macrocosm while the content and elements of the drawing may be regarded as microcosm. The combination of the use of black - a colour which has absorbed all other, and white, one that reflects all colour, work together to create a sense of harmony and spiritual balance.

For as Kandinsky noted

... white is a symbol of a world from which all colour as a definite attribute has disappeared. This world is too far above us for our souls. A great silence, like an impenetratable wall, shrouds its life from our understanding. White therefore has this harmony of silence ... it is not a dead silence, but one pregnant with possibilities. (11, p. 185)

Kandinsky continues 'a totally dead silence, a silence with no possibilities has the inner harmony of black'.



Plate 25: Samskara No. 8, Chris Doris (1990), Chalk, Blackboard
Paint on Hardboard, 147 cm x 147 cm

Deposition No. 8

Not only does the use of black and white create a sense of balance here, it further asserts silence. According to Poggioli, the purity of silence implies that art can free itself 'from the prison of things'. (15, P. 314) Silence is also arts way of suggesting its transcendence of the conditions of its creation, and appearing to be self-created. It 'transcends the limits not only of reality but those of art itself, to the point of annihilating art in attempting to realise its deepese essence'.²

Amedee Ozenfant felt that silence represents 'the need for extreme liberty and extreme intensity of feeling', absolute spiritual freedom. (15, p. 314) Thus, if one sees the Samskara drawings as emissions of mind content relieving the subconscious of its presence, then they may be seen as part of a cleansing process allowing a clarity and openness towards spiritual freedom to occur.

Furthermore, if one accepts the view of the singular or personal as part of a collective identity, then these works not only imply personal emission of Samskara, but have implication for a cleansing within the collective and therein may be seen to involve transformative qualities for humanity.

The Samskara blackboard drawing are still, however, despite various possible interpretations, representational and seem to operate on a somewhat surface level, by this I mean not breaking through the surface qualities of the two-dimensional picture plane. Samskara No. 9, is the only work of this set of drawings



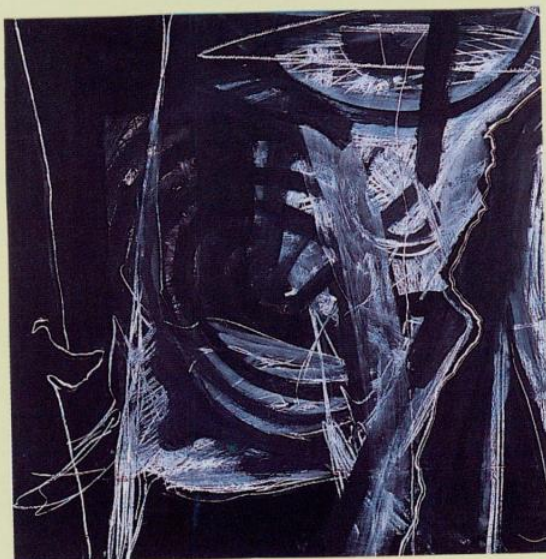
Plate 26: Samskara No. 9, Chris Doris, (1990), Chalk, Blackboard
Paint on Hardboard, 147 cm x 147 cm

30/1/1900

that, in my opinion attempts an investigation into the quality or state of the subject in any manner, integrally relating both subject and materials within the process. Again, relating this work to process, it is more in keeping with previous preoccupations, with a sense of survival and annihilation present, due to the working and reworking of surface. It attempts to interrogate the visual qualities of the state under consideration and 'presents' it as such, compared with the 'representation' of the subjects of that state in the other Samskara blackboard drawings of the series.

Realising then that these drawings are slightly thin in the integration of subject and material, his more recent mediational images Earth Samskara drawings on silk, are more densely worked and go beyond the representational state of the blackboard drawings. In these, the visual quality of the subject and surface is more fully interpreted, probing deeper into the material quality of fabric and paint in order to gain understanding of the process together with an ongoing search towards a greater understanding of their source within subconscious activity.

In the Earth Samskara drawings, a working towards resolution of the internal subconscious process and external material procedure is evident, and as such, these drawings may be seen to chart this process towards understanding. This search towards resolution I see as still being related to duality, the duality of opposing forces within a given structure. This preoccupation, is here



- Plate 27: Samskara No. 5, 1990, Chris Doris, Chalk, Blackboard
Paint on Hardboard, 147 cm x 147 cm
- Plate 28: Samskara No. 3, 1990, Chris Doris, Chalk, Blackboard
Paint on Hardboard, 147 cm x 147 cm
- Plate 29: Earth Samskara No. 3, 1990, Indian Ink and Fabric Paint
on Silk, 81 cm x 61 cm
- Plate 30: Earth Samskara No. 4, 1990, Indian Ink and Fabric Paint
on Silk, 71 cm x 61 cm

London 1845

London 1845

London 1845

London 1845

embodied through the sole use of black and white (colours at opposite poles of colour spectrum) for description of form.

From Earth Samskara No. 1 to Earth Samskara No. 4 can be seen, I believe, a process of growing concern and distillation, which identifies these opposing forces in the relative chaos of Earth Samskara No. 1 to the reidentification and confrontation of these forces in Earth Samskara No. 4.

Subsequently, they emit a lesser sense of outward silence, but simultaneously demonstrate a greater understanding of process which moves beyond the material means utilized, paradoxically instrumental in the creation of a sense of the transient.

Doris has said that he has 'always had the understanding of the artist as a researcher more than a communicator'. (29, p. 56) Not unlike most artists, Doris may be called a researcher, investigating his subjects with a rigour, this is evident from his work situated in social concerns though to his work of 1991 researching his own process of self understanding. The active process of research results in the work of art and for him the 'exploration itself is the communication'. He is a communicator, through the communication of the process of his investigation and by virtue of exhibiting his work in public areas. Schapiro wrote that experiencing art as well as creating it involves 'a process ultimately opposed to communication as it is understood now'. She

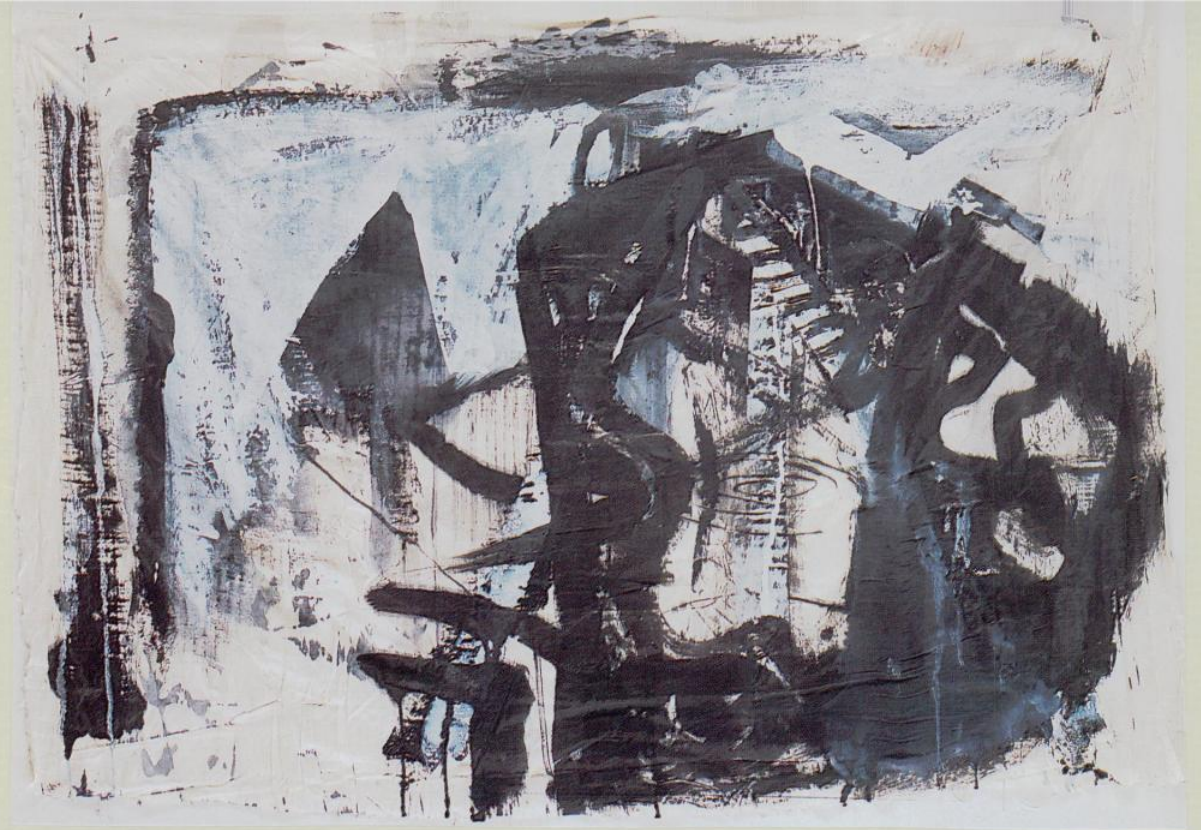


Plate 31: Earth Samskara No. 1 (1990), Indian Ink and Fabric Paint on Silk, 89 cm x 61 cm

Plate 32: Earth Samskara No. 2 (1990), Indian Ink and Fabric Paint on Silk, 89 cm x 61 cm

East Branch No. 1

East Branch No. 2

97 x 8 1/2 in

says authentically spiritual abstract art does not so much 'communicate' as 'induce an attitude of communication and contemplation.' (15, p. 314)

If Doris's work begins to induce as I have suggested, some of this sense, they may be seen as being successful in imparting some communication of the spiritual.

Footnotes

Chapter 3

1. Eliade, Myth and Reality, 1964, p. 37.
2. Poggioli, Avant-Garde, pp. 201, 202.
3. This is based on the assumption that singular identity is part of a larger whole; a universal identity.

Conclusion

Having looked at the work of Chris Doris and counterpointed it with his preoccupations as described in an interview (29) I have come through a process of investigation that has enabled me to approach the work with a somewhat clearer view. Due to the problematic nature of some of the questions that subsequently arose as a result of my meeting with Doris (29), embarked on a procedure that addressed fundamental questions pertaining to his work and by positioning him within the context of his environment, thematical interests and procedure have, I hope, been better able to approach them. For the present, knowledge of the context of the work within a spiritual sphere is essential, towards an understanding and appreciation of the work, otherwise these pieces can be viewed solely as abstract compositions. Knowledge or understanding of the artist's view point is therefore of advantage, when approaching the work.

It seems to me that there are two stages of development in his work; that of the early work up to 1989 as seen in the Kilmainham Show, and the work of 1990 based on meditational experiences. It can be seen how the early work has been a lead up both thematically and process wise, to his departure point of 1990. This latter body of work marked a more defined approach in his thematic and process orientation. Within this body of work, it appears to me, two stages emerge; that of the Samskara blackboard

drawings and that of the subsequent Earth Samskara drawings on silk. In the blackboard drawings representations of particular psychic or psychological states are shown. As such they remain as representations despite the various analogies that may be drawn demonstrating their relationship to their subject. By the second stage, that of the Earth Samskara drawings, it is my opinion that surface representation has been overcome, and a greater sense of investigation is present, through further utilization of process.

After viewing the works over a period of time, it is my opinion that the drawings themselves, while beginning to fulfill the requirements as seen in the preoccupations of the artist (29) do not fully embody the sense of the spiritual that he experiences (29). The path towards this progression however, has been laid in the Earth Samskara drawings. A more complete integration of subject and process will result, I believe in the greater emphasis and manipulation of the art making process, creating harmoniously more balanced work that perhaps, will not depend so heavily on the knowledge of background information surrounding the work.

Chris Doris is as yet a young artist, and as such, his work must be viewed in this light. While his work may still be seen as at an early stage of development, his Samskara drawings intimate a way forward towards potential for an interesting and investigative body of work. I look forward with keen interest to viewing further development in the work of Chris Doris.

Appendix 1

Interview - Chris Doris

Wednesday 20th November, 1991

Doris began the interview by discussing the changes that have occurred as a result of his involvement in meditation.

Chris Doris:

I'd say the biggest difference that has come out of it has been the shift from - in broad terms the survival of limitations as an interest in the work whether be it individual or political or social - This was reflected in the first show, the Kilmainham show in terms of the Chatilla, the Birmingham Six or the Assassination Icons.

So its like the application of compassion to the survival of limitation, and now what I'm interested in, is not the survival of limitation but the realization of potential. It's a shift. Compassion is important as well. I'd say that's the basic shift since I began the meditation.

Well, it's the conviction now, that what the meditation has given me, among other things really, is the conviction that personal transformation is vital for political transformation and I still hold the conviction that I no longer have to address overt political content that just addressing my own spiritual

transformation is a valid exercise and has implications for political transformation.

Critically there often tends to be a viewing of the spiritual, especially in the Circa domain as woolly mystification or as soft science subjectivism, but it really is a rigorous science of explanation, except that it's based on perception whereas conventional science is based on reason. It's also based on wonder whereas conventional science is based on doubt. Through the process of meditation you are perceiving nature and how it works. The boundaries of your consciousness which are bound by the ego disappear and a process of consciousness expanding goes on.

There are two points to take: Survival of limitations to realization of full potential and also the conviction that it's a completely valid and rigorous form of looking and perceiving. Meditation is a research into what is, how nature works.

What occurs to me now is - it's not so much India that is of interest to me. I draw distinction between the lineage of Joseph Beuys and, down right to Mick Mulcahy the shamanistic model - the artist as shaman. That's not part of my understanding of what I do at all.

I'm not interested in place particularly either - India is a spiritual place with a language of symbols. I'm not really

interested in appropriating those symbols and using them in terms of the shamanism and the reference to the spiritual systems of primitive cultures.

I've learnt through the meditation that this particular system, which is a very sophisticated one, limitations of primitive spiritual systems. I think they were given a relativism of the sixties and the anthropology of the sixties. I think it was good the way this idea of progress broke down and so called primitive cultures were given a validity and a quality in terms of what they did, where they worked was perfect for what they required.

I think there are spiritual systems and spiritual systems - some are more effective than others and some are more sophisticated than others.

India has a vast tradition of spiritual exploration with the application of meditation of understanding reality, to effect change. It may have leaned too much towards the ascetic tradition, and to the rejection of worldly responsibility for the pursuit of spirituality through meditation and that's reflected in the culture.

There's an enormous backdrop of wisdom, philosophical depth that doesn't exist here, but they don't have the same capacity to organise themselves to do things, to produce goods and to apply science.

But the beauty of the system I'm involved in is that it has the conception of the two wings, to grow spiritually and to do the practice, meditating rigorously, but you also have the responsibility to serve, to live your life in the world and to try and effect change.

There are so many things that have changed - my being has changed radically since I began meditation.

I've more of an understanding of the art doing me rather than me doing the art. The art as being a product of my being and all this work that I've been doing now, of my being.

It's been very rough over the last year - I've been ill a lot. Through the meditation my personality has broken down. In terms of ... given a different perspective on the art, altogether, also its limitations and the limitations of artists. One of the most important things as an artist in art is the development of perception and also transformation. I now understand that art is very limited compared to what an effective spiritual system can do in both areas.

For me now the art is no longer at the centre of my existence that the spiritual journey is, and the art is just going to be an expression of that, which is a great redress - the fear has gone out of what anybody might consider what I should be doing, or even

myself - the fear in the work is now gone. What I'm really interested in, as truthfully as possible reflecting on the spiritual journey, perceptions that arise within it. As my consciousness expands, as my ego self, as my identity diminishes, is broken down, as it is relentlessly in the meditation, as that happens the bigger self arises and you become much more aware of the sense of connectedness. I want to reflect on this as I go on in the meditation.

Love is at the basis of it. It's very interesting now, because I'm convinced of the importance of this - over the next twenty years or so the spiritual is going to come to the forefront in terms of transformation in art and politically, - but there's a truth in it and it's very interesting that the apparently opposite poles are coming together, of spirituality and science. The first time in I don't know how long there's agreement in terms of what the physicists are learning about our physical reality and the perceptions of ancient spiritual tradition.

In spirituality you can call it love, in quantum physics you can call it connectedness, it's the perception of absolute interdependence between other and the two are intertwined in a beautiful way. And what is happening I think is that the alienating, the separating out of man from his environment, of Cartesian philosophy as being healed, it's been so long - Plato with his split between the world of ideas and physical reality, the Christian tradition with its split between the soul and the

body with Cartesian philosophy with its split between the mind and the body. It's only now really that a new philosophy is coming to the fore, that is an integrative one, a whole one, a unified one and it's new and it's still being formed. As far as I'm concerned, I just want to explore that through the meditation.

I've always had really, the understanding of the artist as a researcher more than a communicator even though I got involved in stuff like the billboards and that access art, with all the constraints of political content. It's very limiting once you've confined yourself to using recognizable political content.

Brenda Friel:

Do you see your work as a communicative force for yourself?

C.D.:

For myself, how do you mean?

B.F.:

Well in that after working, meditating, you would actually see the processes from which you have come from or having gone through. As it is such an unconscious thing that you are doing, or there is a connectedness with an energy.

C.D.:

I wouldn't see it as an unconsciousness thing. I would see it as an opening out of consciousness.

B.F.:

Is this a state that you are in all of the time?

C.D.:

It's a state that is starting to bleed out from the meditation into my general consciousness. My body is being broken down, pulverised, really torn asunder, as has my identity over the past year through meditation. All attachments are being shed, all the props of my identity, even for a period which is only ending now I was unable to do the art, because I had an attachment to it in terms of recognition, in terms of being loved for doing rather than being and for progressing in meditation I had to shed that attachment.

I had to change the perception of what the work is, but it's an emptying out of yourself. It's like the identity is a bracketing system. Ultimately we are waves and particles in flux, as is the chair, table - it's all movement.

In order to get through this existence we've evolved a very useful consciousness to put things in their places. But what happens in a meditation is that consciousness that does that holding keeps things in their place, the ego consciousness dissolves, it's broken down, the bracketing system that keeps you separate from what is around you in terms of consciousness dissolves and you move out into that. Your mind is in your cells, the mind is your

whole - it's not residing in your skull and in the meditation you notice its connectedness with everything outside of your and your mind expands so you can perceive relatedness. Time also becomes irrelevant. You move about in time - like I've learnt about, met my incarnations of four or five previous existences.

Well, what you asked me about was communication. Well, a conviction that consciousness (it relates to what I was just saying) what we think affects what it is possible for other people to think, and this spiritual truth and it's the truth now in terms of quantum physics - a thought is an energy particle before it becomes what it decides to be, that it's going to become, going off all over space simultaneously, exploring all its potentials and it leaves traces - it may use up a number of things and eventually it reaches a stability and becomes a part of a chair, for example. But it has left traces of the potential all over space which affects in the wholeness of things, what is going to come next for other particles, and this happens with thoughts. Our thoughts are part of a subjective collective and you've a responsibility for them.

For me the art is a by-product of taking responsibility for my consciousness and developing as much, developing it as fully as I can. Ultimately God realization, human perfection is the goal of meditation, so that you are in this state or other. The connectedness of science, the love of spirituality. I don't anymore, I haven't made an object in three months and I feel quite

happy about that. I'm working very hard at being, I'm not at doing, and the art will just come in it's time and I'm open to it being in any form.

In some ways this form of mediation, I mean, you have to live, you have to do something, you have to get on with your life and making art objects, making objects of devotion is, it won't necessarily be objects ... whatever, doing ... doing art is as good a thing as any to do. It complements the spiritual journey quite well. But if the pieces can convey some of the processes of the forms of the spiritual journey and some of the love and some of the devotion, I'd be happy enough with that and if it doesn't ... I'll be happy enough with that.

So what I'm saying really is that they're by-products of exploring consciousness and exploration itself is the communication and as far as I'm concerned the art is just a by-product. If I do it honestly, do the art practice and meditation honestly it will have it's effects, have its communicative, doesn't have to be seen in a gallery or whatever. The art is just like a map of the journey.

B.F.:

But in effect by being what it is, it will be some sort of healing force for others perhaps if it is done with this honest, in so much as it is what it is, and if someone else is perceptive enough or sensitive to communicate with it ... they will ...

C.D.:

Yes, but I'd have to say that somebody would perceive it more effectively through the meditation than they would through the art.

I've been to several meditation seminars, over the past year in France, Scotland - you might have a thousand people at the seminars, a lot of artists there in Europe as well. I remember thinking about Joseph Beuys and his failure really, in terms of his inability to bridge the gap between his spiritual preoccupation and his desire for political transformation. I thought at those seminars in terms of what was happening to the people attending them and what they were affecting as they went out into their communities, that it was really the ultimate in social sculpture. I don't think that Beuys fully understood the power of personal transformation or collective transformation.

I think this is what's on the agenda for the next ten or twenty years - the growth in the spiritual and the integration of the spiritual and the scientific which is great. The system is called Sahajmare - it just means the natural path and it was devised by a master Lalahjee earlier in the century - it's a form of Rahj yoga which is yoga of the mind rather than Hapi yoga which is yoga of the body. It revived in ancient, ancient tradition, a capacity called pranrhuti - which is a yogic transmission. Whenever you meditate you receive a transmission from the master, a transmission really, is divine energy. It's the energy of

everything, everything's connectedness which ... you can feel it in your heart it's very powerful.

So the system - the main parts of it really are yogic transmission, the role of the master - the master's very important and submission to the master. Very, very difficult in the early days, a lot of the intellectual baggage had to be shed. I really had to drag my intellect along behind my experience. A lot of the concepts were very difficult to deal with but the experience was so and the perceptions were so convincing and so beneficial that I really just had to drag the intellect along behind.

Pranrhuti, yogic transmission, role of the master, the cleansing process - which you do in the practice. You practice, you meditate for an hour in the morning, half hour in the evening, you do a clean by which you remove the cumulative impressions of the day so that you're not accumulating any impressions. Once every two weeks you have a sitting with a preceptor - these are ordinary abhyasi or seekers, which removes deep impressions from the past.

A few years ago, incarnation - I had a lot of difficulty in dealing with that, but I perceived it - I've met the souls journey, in previous incarnations and I can understand why it incarnated in me and I've no difficulty with it anymore. It's real.

So this idea of samskaras, which are unconscious patterns of

behaviour which the soul is shedding on its journey - these were reflected in the first show, the show Samskaras. It's funny the reviews of the show, people referring to Beuys and stuff like that - that was entirely incidental, and, no thought from him at all, just the appropriate medium for what I wanted to do. Critics are funny - terrible lack of love and a lot of fear, terribly reductive things, terrible dependency on the intellect, on thought and not on perception. In the early stages of the meditation the way I made sense of it was in terms of the Krishnamurti - I was reading this book - I liked what he said about thought.

In order for reality to affect change in our existence, thought has to cease because thought is a material process, all is at one remove from what is happening.

I mean, you're involved in an event, whatever it is, thought travels through the physiological process and is manifested and the reality has moved on. It's an interpretive device, at one removed - from reality. And his idea was that just like transformation thought had to cease, when our thought ceases, our mind becomes still and perception arises. I like that idea.

There was something about John Hutchinson in that essay he wrote about Samskaras, failed to pick up on a point that I was making which was that they were also marks of a natural process. The Samskara drawings, they were perceptions of change and transformation as perceived in the meditation. He didn't really pick up on that.

It's difficult to communicate because it is a way of understanding reality based on experiencing the perceived, it loses something in the translating into language. The catalogue essay by Fintan O'Toole in the Kilmainham show, that, you can really take that as - that was based on a very long talk with him, a five hour interview and the preoccupation with duality and the resolution of, was a fairly strong theme there. Dualities in terms of - at that time, subjectivity and objectivity, dualities of politics and spirituality, mind and body. All these issues, I've tried to devise a process in the painting to contain them and resolve them.

Process, at that stage anyway, the lack of understanding, especially critically, by a lot of painters as well. Other painters understand, people like Pat Hall and Paddy Graham, they understand the importance of process and the communication process in the finished work very rarely looked at. I mean it's a map of an experiential journey - the surface of a painting - not many people can read that. What I was trying to do was to bring together these opposite tendencies and I devised a system of painting that just happened - intuitively again to correspond with systems theory and the theory of how natural systems work, and then evolve, break down, bifurcate and rise to a higher level of organization, break down again and eventually reach an irreversible state of organization and they're complete at that stage and this is exactly the way I painted.

I bring together all those ingredients, geometric forms, subjective, figurative painting, political themes, spiritual themes and the painting would evolve through a level of order. Then getting completely broken into a state of disorder, find a much better level of organization, break down again and ultimately it would reach a stage where it just closed itself and serve a representing matter of this journey. That's why markmaking is important, not for expression, like expression of emotion, which tends to be the critical response to that kind of painting - that was a map of actions, the actions had to make the method explicit, that's why you could see the vigorous brushwork. It wasn't a heightening of emotion, it was to communicate actions in a system and how they are all being integrated. Like the themes were political, it was this research idea of the artist really researching, was a strong theme as well.

But I was beginning to transcend this system of working of bringing together dualities and hammering them out and trying to resolve them. I was finding that my own experience and in my way of working, that I was moving beyond it so there was a dicotomy really, between from the Artists on the Boards to the Chatilla work to the assinationom icon, the Birmingham Six, all this stuff and the Mandalas and the more process orientated work the spiritual work.

The reason I went to India was not for the place, but because I had an intuition and some understanding from a reading I had, that

there were philosophies there that had looked into the unity of consciousness and presented the unified tradition, and I thought it might help me in moving on as I needed to. But I had no idea how radically - the effect.

B.F.:

The actual visit?

C.D.:

Meditation really.

B.F.:

Which you found actually in India or before you went to India?

C.D.:

In India I was introduced to the Master in Delhi at a seminar with about three hundred people there and immediately - there was a degree of scepticism and all the rest but there was an immediate awareness that there was something special here, and the experience of the first meditation was just overpowering - there would be over three hundred and the Master. It was an hours sitting and my expectation was that maybe after twenty minutes the pulse might begin to dissipate and I might feel some feeling of peace. Well, the thoughts unravelled as they do, and I let them go and after about twenty minutes this ferocious searing white light came down on top of my head, down into my heart and I was rattling on the chair and it was just ... I had in a funny sense

... I had presented this guy, as I was thinking about it, matching up the power I felt as an artist when I'm painting, well the power of the unconscious, the power of transformation, which is something I think that Mick Mulcahy over estimates and I was kind of holding it up against the power of this guy and what he's presenting. It was just, it exploded to pieces - you're dealing with the power of the universe. Not that he is a god or divinity but he has developed to such a state that he's in a state of open consciousness all the time. This is why he can transmit, his mind has expanded to the state where it's everywhere, he's that developed through meditation, time and space are no longer relevant. And immediately, this happened twice in the first sitting - it dissipated and then it happened again. It was a massive cleaning - that's why you get the really strong light at the beginning of the meditation, it's really the friction between the grossness of inside and the transmission. But immediately I felt deep fears evaporate and I could feel on a cellular level, areas of the brain were activated and aligned, that had never been so. So immediately I had to stop and ...

It's a difficult process, dealing with a lot of the ideas, a lot of paradoxes in it. The idea of submission to the master I found very difficult, because the idea of doubt as a tool as an artist were very important to me, and being your own man, and the idea of handing yourself over completely to the will of another had resonances in terms of political manipulation, manipulation you know, even facism ... that was just fear.

It's a simple system, it's theoretically and practically safe - it's beautiful. It's not easy ... and that's at the centre now as an artist and the objects will manifest as a result of that.

In visual terms, the main qualities I feel, are the main qualities of transformation, so far that could be transformed into visual terms are expanding space, increasing light, and that's not brightness but lightness diminishing content - they'd be the visual qualities. So I'm not sure where it's going to lead me

B.F.:

So you're talking about an openness?

C.D.:

I'm talking about the connectedness, and that your unconscious is part of other peoples.

B.F.:

As part of a whole?

C.D.:

This is becoming part of my perception - my consciousness is opening out, as the whole of your identity diminishes. There's very little art work that I have seen in the last year that has done anything for me, other than make me feel that I have to clear

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impressions from my mind. It seems to me, like the way I perceive now, the work in the eighties is, in spiritual terms - all that heaviness and all that vomited personal content, all that loaded figuration, clutteredness. In terms of consciousness it seems to me that what the artists are doing for the society was a clear in preparation for a spiritual development that lies ahead. People like Kunz I think are in an aberration in what they're doing. I'm convinced that I wouldn't put a time scale on it, but the spiritual is going to assert itself because it's completely bound up now with the truth about how physical reality operates and that a lot of that dissolves fundamental determining effect on the way we organise ourselves - there's no escaping it.

B.F.:

Do you see your work as rectifying this sense that pervades presently, in work? On a personal way if not on a larger scale.

C.D.:

I sense that generally anyway, that, that kind of heaviness has broken down. I think there's an uncertainty as to where we're going to go.

B.F.:

Do you see this as part of a wholer cleansing process?

C.D.:

I think there's an uncertainty about where we're going to go, I

think ultimately there'll be a lot more true spiritual work. I've been delighted to see Paddy Graham's work in transition from what seemed to me to be painting of clean, of samskara to the transcendence of that, and more recent work of his I've seen has been beautiful - it's like his painting system, is a system of cleansing in each painting, cleansing the samskara process and arriving at the spiritual paintings, an openness of space - I think he's moving into that domain. I think Kiefer is to some extent as well. The most recent work of Basilitz's I've seen seems to me to be doing the same. But I'm open to anything unprecedented. I'll just see what happens, it may be just making simple objects, paintings and sculptures in the studio or it may be something unprecedented, or it maybe the meditation itself - I'm open. I'm aware that art is limited.

B.F.:

In terms of its physical capabilities?

C.D.:

In terms of what it can do. In terms of it's transformation capacity. It's limited. You're dealing with small enough energy as well.

B.F.:

So do you see a case where you may not paint, where meditation may be more important, where it seems you can do more with meditation than you can do with paint, which seems to be the case?

C.D.:

Well, not really because the system - if I were to follow that I'd be doing the meditation all the time and you have to go out and do what you have to do, to work. You have to live, I mean it would be a lot easier just to practice the meditation and there's a certain aptitude for the art and there's an interest in it. There's an obligation to try and make a living.

B.F.:

Well, the living part could come another way.

C.D.:

Well, I think I said earlier, that the art has a lot of volume in it. It's close to the meditation.

You can stay in a ... you can express your devotion and your spiritual discoveries in a way in the art can be shared, is acceptable.

Yeah, I am thinking of getting involved in other areas as well. I just did a Comi (which is a Hopi Indian word) workshop in Galway for four days. It's a beautiful form of psycho-therapeutic practice which is very spiritual as well and shares a lot of the concepts of the spiritual practice and again the power of that in terms of affecting change in consciousness was remarkable. So I think I might do a two year course in that. As well, if you're

going to stay in Ireland, you really do, unless you're very lucky have to do some kind of work for a while anyway. Maybe later on you make the money. I'm teaching now with homeless kids, early school leavers with St. Vincent's Trust in Henrietta Street. They've just done a lovely billboard - 'Living in a Box, Each day a Child in Dublin Becomes Homeless'.

I think I'd rather practice something like that [i.e. two year course] rather than teaching and see then, in having it as a practice how it would ... to the way I work as an artist. You see, I'm not sure, for the moment I will make things but somewhere down the road I can imagine arriving at an art making that is not dependent on materials, but I'm not sure what the model will be for it or whether it will just go from object making - I'd include in that performance art - whether it would just move from that into a form of spiritual practice and living it. I don't mean meditating all the time - the model, I'm not quite sure - maybe working as a spiritual therapist. This is what Beuys would have said he was, but I have the feeling that - I admire what he did a hell of a lot and I really like him - that he was just playing around with signs in a way, when you really get down to it and I have this feeling of Mick's work as well. Not to downgrade it too much - I really admire what he's doing and I think he has beautiful paintings, but that it is a jostling around with symbols, that it's a form of metaphoric action in symbols rather than an attempt to go into the visual qualities of spiritual transformation, that what is being used really are the symbols of

spiritual forms, and that's the raw material that's being arranged in ways to create a sense of spirituality.

I'm not interested in a sense of place or of using collective symbols - spiritual traditions. Whatever they might be.

I'm interested in looking at the way a still life painter looks in a material way - very often - I'm into looking with the rigour of a painter who paints still lives, say like, with the intensity of the analytical cubists - just looking at things so closely that the profound visual equivalent to dialectical materials, and I feel I just want to look, to perceive as clearly as I can, the nature of consciousness and the nature of it's transformation through each stage of that, and communicate that in a visual language but, I don't think it will be ... inevitably then you have to use symbols because it is a metamorphic form of the visual form - it's not the paint itself, but I don't want to use symbols which can note spirituality. I want to make images which reflect what I see, what I perceive.

B.F.:

Do you see your work being testimony to this journey that you are undertaking?

C.D.:

Well it obviously it, I don't like the way you phrase that - self-importance.

I support they are markers for the journey, but in a way I don't really see my work as I don't know what it's going to become. I don't have the same control over it that I used to have - that has been handed over. I'm just going to work in trust and in remembrance, which is also an important part of this meditation system, remembrance of the Master and the divine. I'm not going to exert control on it, just going to see where it goes and I've no certainties, as I would have done.

There was a much more superficially coherent structure to what I was doing in Kilmainham. Now I'm more open and there's no fear, whatsoever, what comes out of me will come out of being.

A painter who has risen in my esteem enormously is Tony O'Malley - it's funny those two shows running one after another - Mick's and his. There's a love and a humility about his work, an openness that is beautiful. I don't resonate with his perceptions of light and colour that he has - I find them too sweet for me. I admire his quietness, the way he goes about his work, his lack of propagandising for himself and his trust in his life.

The rabbit race, where the place amongst artists, especially young ones, the competitiveness, the lack of clarity about what they are doing and those who are tip-toeing into the spiritual areas as though it's about angels. It's amazing the lack of understanding about spirituality. I suppose it's been cultured out for so long,

we're illiterate in it really - it carried enormous power, enormous depth. It makes constructions of the intellect seem quite puny really - but they have a validity. I find it quite sad the attitude of a lot of artists. The amount of fear in them, the ambition and the conservation and the egocentricity. I really don't know how you can make art out of conditions like that - there are very few artists.

It's amazing how reductive most of the criticism is. I think critics find spiritual work difficult because it's assertions of wholeness, and because often the process by which the work is made is an important part of the meaning and most critics don't understand process because they haven't processed themselves. I find it gas how invariably a work, deconstructive work, quite often conceptual work, work which is about the displacement of ideas, usually the work that critics like to write about. I find most art that deals in the displacement of ideas in that way, most conceptual art, most deconstructing art quite pointless. It's like philosophy by joining the dots. It's like just looking at something and making a rudimentary, not to mention crude analysis of the semantic parts of it, and then just rearranging it and once the code is read there's nothing left - it's linguistic, and critics work sometimes reminds me of it.

So it's going to be difficult for the spiritual to assert itself - it's up against an awful lot in terms of the fear and the ambition of the artist practising themselves and the condition of

most critics - the way they approach most work.

It's gas if you look at our culture, and newspapers, the organs of communication in the country, how much space is given over to the definition, and the analysis of and the reduction of creativity when it could be used for creativity itself. All this space could be used for the poets and the artists instead of for the analysis and safe making. I'd have to say as well, that not having worked, well I have worked, see this is what I have to change as well, well I don't have to change - it's changing. This understanding that the art is merely a consequence of your being, it's not a consequence of your doing. I mean what happens in the materials is purely an expression of your being. I haven't had a break of this length before from the - from what I know of other break's, that often when you're not working your aspirations rise above the materials, and the processes allow you - so we'll see what happens.

As well, how often a major shift in an artist creates such a relatively insignificant change in visual manifestation. It's very rarely, I mean that was a massive shift after India for me and what happened in that show, and some people saw it as such. It's not as radical as the change in life that can occur. We'll see though, see what happens. I don't mind really.

Anything in silence that is not contradictory is extensive. Anything contradictory with its own energy is limited, and when the limited tries to find the extensive there is no silence.

Divinity really is connectedness - that's what God is - connectedness.

B.F.:

So what you are striving for is this connectedness along such a journey?

C.D.:

Yes, it's the diminishing of selfishness and the growth of connectedness, and with the growth of connectedness and the perception of it, is the roots of understanding of what is, how reality works, which is nice to know is being reflected in what the physicists are discovering. I often think really what the inventive, what the physicists who are taking risks of the age, the really creative people are doing is akin to what the artists who are willing to endure a bit of chaos. Both are moving beyond their technique. Scientists who make these discoveries make them at a level which is beyond empiricism, and the artists who make really great art, make it beyond technique and that's where it happens.

Yeah, that's something I find very pervasive, the amount of fear in art, the number of artists who use techniques to conceal themselves.

B.F.:

To conceal what they're actually doing?

C.D.:

To conceal themselves, to conceal their being, using devices to hide.

There was an appalling review of this man (Krishnamurti) in the Times altogether.

Understanding of the self only arises in relationship, in watching yourself in relationship to people, ideas and things, to trees, the earth, and the world around you and within you. Relationship in the mirror in which the self is revealed. Without self-knowledge there is no basis for right thought and action.

Krishnamurti

I think that a lot of artists could do with taking that on board.

It would be funny if I ended up not making - I mean what is art? - you can get into all of that thing. I liked Beuys' opening up art without boundaries. I don't have to hold on to art anymore - whatever it will be, it will be. I'm finding a new studio - the one I'm in at present is falling apart - hopefully we're getting a warehouse down in the docks - Anita Grooner, Eithne Jordan and a couple of others.

I'm just going to play for a while and see what comes out of it.

It's something that artists rarely afford themselves, the time to

play as artists. Play demands freedom really, a lot of discoveries are made in play.

I admired John Hutchinson's review in the paper a lot more than the essay in the catalogue. I thought he had sifted through a lot more at that stage, than he had done for the essay itself. The next time I'm going to write it myself - if there is a next time - ah - there will be, probably in the city centre at the end of next year - it's a bit close. It'll probably be a while before I find my new process. An awful lot has happened and it will take a few efforts to get the ball rolling.

I'd say there'll be an exhibition of objects, just to get them out of the system at least, and see what's happening - in the city centre, at the end of next year or maybe into the spring of the following year and if there's a catalogue I'll write it myself the next time.

It's funny talking about it when I haven't been doing it for a while - so much change has been round. It's remarkable the reality of the spiritual and how we've cut it out of our lives, how we've separated ourselves out from that wholeness and that connectedness.

If you think of the alienation, the scepticism, the atheism, the agnosticism of a while through this century, and the brutal reductionist science that has fed that, the understanding of

ourselves as separate even from our bodies, that our thoughts, our minds, are separate from our bodies and that we are separate from our environment. How it has separated people out from the collective into a society of individuals and the loneliness, and the disempowering damage that that has done. And the spiritual is really returned to the collective not through rational structures by the application of science which Marxism has done, but through the transformation of self and through perception. Though the political realities being power of the multi-nationals, and the starvation in the world, and the chaos of the world might argue for a different picture of events.

I think there is a bifurcation going on in the human system, the collective system - there's a breakdown in the reorganization and I think that out of it the perceptions of quantum physics and of a real spirituality which is not religion. Spirituality begins at the back end of religion. But that is going to assert itself and so it'll be coming through in the art. I think that is why Paddy Graham has been the most important painter in Ireland. He has taken on with conviction a spiritual journey. I now feel I would like to say to Paddy Graham to try this system of meditation because I feel he could move even quicker on his journey with the aid of the Master and with the aid of this system.

It's very hard to remember, you get caught up in the struggle of the journey. They say there are eight stages to what is God realization - I think in the yoga system and Sahajmarg ignores the

first six and takes you in at number six - the sixth level and this is why the power of the experiences are so strong, as they were for me in the beginning. Because there's an enormous amount of cleaning going on, the removal of impressions, of emptying out of fear, of the content of the individual consciousness, the ego consciousness.

To feel the freedom of individuality, individual freedom, as against the freedom of submitting yourself to the collective spiritual sense is amazing. It makes individual freedom, a freedom we cherish too much in the capitalist society seem to unfree.

Brenda Friel c. 1991

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