NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN
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'Barrie Cooke and the Sense of Place'

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INTRODUCTION

> 'Place is everything. Place is terribly important. Places, places, places. You've got to go to a place that does something for you. Or rather, you gravitate - when you get there, you know you belong - it gets at you, it eats you. Its as though you've been there and always been there. Once you get there you know you're kith and kin. The stones start to talk.' (22)

This 'sense of place' has many implications. I believe it to be a growth from within, which is manipulated by the surrounding environment of the artist. This surrounding environment is both private and public, and will be explored in the first Chapter, with reference to the Irish painter, Barrie Cooke.

I chose Barrie Cooke for a combination of reasons, the most important being he is not Irish, and so his 'sense of place' cannot be romanticised as typically Irish. Like many of his Irish contemporaries (e.g. Sean McSweeney, Brian Burke) he shares this 'sense of belonging, of rootedness' (2) with the land, but in choosing Cooke, we realise it is not just an Irish fetish. The poet, Seamus Heaney, a close friend of Cookes states 'however, we have to understand also that this nourishment which springs from knowing and belonging to a certain mode of life is not just an Irish obsession'. (13). It is important to look beyond our island in search of an identity, Irish or otherwise. Thus I look beyond my own environment and seek Cooke. He reveals his own interpretation of this 'sense of place' in Chapter II.

In the third Chapter, I consider Cooke's preoccupations. It is almost impossible to limit any artists concerns to a specific number, but I have chosen a selection which are appropriate to this discussion. Unfortunately, this selective treatment edits our overall view of the work, but it is better to discuss one work completely than to have an impression of many.

Finally, these paintings will be compared to their places, in acknowledgment of the 'sense of place'.

CHAPTER I

The Personal and Public Environment of the Artist.

> 'Art begins from the mind, the mind being shaped consciously or unconsciously by the environment in which the artist lives, thus the art produced is indirectly moulded by its surroundings'. (18)

In undertaking this subject, there are many factors to be considered, and so in order to fully comprehend this discussion I feel it imperative to first analyse this term 'environment'. I wish it to embrace:

(A) The artist's day to day environment, his personal circumstances.
(B) His surrounding landscape, and the country to which it belongs.

(A) <u>The Artist's Day to Day Environment.</u>

Artist as Filter.

The making of modern art is primarily an expression of the self. It is a communication of inner feelings to the outside world. Most modern art, therefore, is autobiographical because the artist is at the very core of his art. There are the extremes who consider themselves as the art object, their life and art being inseparable, Joseph Beuys being an obvious example. There are also those who, instead of ignoring the outside world and focusing on their feelings, choose to acknowledge this world using it as the primary source of their art, for example, Willie Doherty.

This outside world constantly feeds us with noise, agitation and visual stimuli. Through accepting or rejecting specific links between himself and this universe, the artist can manipulate what is agreeable or threatening to him, what enhances or diminishes himself. In turn, he manipulates his canvas. This process of painting establishes a silence; it is a process of elimination. According to the Irish painter Barrie Cooke 'Painting is a process of letting you know what you feel about something, its not self revelation for other people, but revelation to yourself, its how you understand the outside world, and if someone shares it, that's splendid'. (3) Cooke has to a degree alienated himself from society in search of his own identity.

He has become the filter between the environment and his art.

First Glance.

Indeed, the aim of his art and most art may be to function on purely a visual level. However, paintings and other artistic forms do not always generate their meanings at first or indeed fourth glance. Therefore just as we can only understand an instance in an individual's life if it is read in the context of previous happenings, most art work can not be read in its entirety without the accompaniment of previous work. One painting records just one preoccupation of the artist. However, if it is viewed in relation to both previous work and to the experiences of that artist, we find it easier to empathise. Upon viewing Barrie Cooke's work for the first time at the Initial Independent Artists' Show of 1960, the poet John Montague speaks of the mixed response:

'I think the general response was interested but a bit baffled (I know mine was). This was partly because Cooke's work ran sharply against the taste for Abstraction developed by the Living Art: but there was another simpler reason: we had been denied any participation of the artist's previous development. We did not realise that what we were seeing was the first surge of a development based on a careful study for more than ten years'. (20)

Expression of Experience.

Often in examining subject matter or drawing meaning from a work, the influence of ordinary day to day occurrences is continuously overlooked or ignored. To illustrate this point I will refer to the work and lives of Camille Souter and Patrick Collins. Both artists chose painting late in their careers, and due to their lack of finances they worked with cheap materials, Souter with aluminium bicycle paint, Collins painting on cheap hardboard. Both artists, too, have restless histories. Souter settled eventually in Wicklow at the age of 33 after many travels between Italy, Achill, London and Dublin. Collins, after his earlier years in an orphanage, commuted between Ireland, Normandy and the South of France for many years. It seems more than coincidental that these two artists, who have had no permanent address for so many years should find a sense of place so vital to their art.

This leads us to believe that painting is for many, a personal expression of

experience. Behind the artist is a history of people; those who have reared him, schooled him, conditioned him. These influences have kept him alive and awake. They have both encouraged and stunted him without trying, just by being. They are in effect his most distinguished teachers, and it is a manifestation of these every day occurrences and experiences, which models the artists main preoccupations. It is impossible to analyse what specific incidents trigger particular concerns of the artist, as generally these incidents have tapped into the artist's subconscious. Souter speaks of this quiet influence;

'I'm stimulated by something I see. It sinks into my mind. It may be three years before it comes out in a picture'. (21) The circumstances of the individual's life serve as building blocks in the forming of the individual's character. So in speaking of the artist's preoccupations, we must acknowledge it is not always the result of conscious decision. Often these incidents can be traced back as far as childhood. Just as the importance of the environment is stressed in the development of the growing child, equally it is a crucial factor in the development of the artist. The difference is that the child does not have a choice of locale, whereas the artist does. Cooke speaks (12) of our ability to retain vivid childhood memories. As children we are completely unaware of ourselves. 'We do rather than look, now we remember the smells and have the ability to hold the memory of a place visually. In forgetting ourselves, the essentials come to the fore'. Thus, in experiencing a place or a thing subconsciously, they remain with us quietly influencing our perceptions.

(B) <u>The Surrounding Landscape.</u>

Influence of the Land.

From that more intimate environment, we turn to the public environment of the surrounding landscape. There are two basic ways an artist responds to the landscape. The first is an obvious aesthetic response observing the physicalities of the surrounding landscape. It is the most immediate response; instantly it appeals, disgusts or leaves the viewer apathetic. The second response is far more prolonged and complex. It is guided by feeling, where the artist grows accustomed to one dear place. It is the latter which intrigues me and so it shall be discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

Like the personal environment of the artist, the landscape affects the artist's vision

consciously, and subconsciously. Consciously the artist attempts to represent a certain feature of a landscape. Subconsciously the land subtly guides the artist's choice of colour, his use of form and his interpretation of light. The artist manipulates this landscape through his painting, but on a broader scale the landscape also forms the artist, gaining empathy with a particular place. It becomes part of his life and part of his way of thinking. So this influence of the land on the artist is complex. In order to understand its complexities, it is necessary to compare certain places and paintings.

An Irish Context.

It would be blinding to discuss a 'sense of place' purely in an Irish context for many reasons, primarily because it is not particularly relevant to Barrie Cooke. Cooke comes from an English/American background; he was 23 years of age upon his arrival in Ireland. Thus, unlike many of his Irish contemporaries, Cooke had the experience of contrasting cultures. This factor alone, does not discourage me from discussing him alongside his Irish contemporaries, for Cooke is a well travelled man. He has absorbed influences from many countries other than Ireland, including England, America, Holland, Germany, Spain, Malaysia and New Zealand. It seems parochial to assume he has been influenced primarily by the Irish landscape and the Irish climate. True, Ireland is his base and it is the country he spends most time in, but, I believe his work to be an accumulation of influences and interests, a search for universal truths in nature. Therefore, his work must be analysed individually, and not compared to the work of his contemporaries. Finally, Cooke claims to be more influenced by art from outside of Ireland rather than from within; 'There are painters here I feel sympathetic with, but it would be too precise to say that I have been influenced by them'. (19) It is appropriate therefore to continue this discussion of the influencing landscape with particular reference to Cooke.

CHAPTER II.

Sense of Place.

In this Chapter, Cooke's coming to live in Ireland and its importance in his interpretation of art will be discussed. The relevance of past experiences on his work will be dealt with, as will be Cooke's explanation of the 'sense of place'.

Cooke and Ireland.

Cooke chose Ireland as his base and in order to discuss this 'sense of place' thoroughly, it is necessary to first outline his background.

Cooke's Background.

Cooke was born to an American mother and English father in Cheshire, England, in 1931. There he and his family stayed until a decision to emigrate to America came when Cooke was just 16 years of age. Their stay in America however, was short. They were not entirely happy and instead choose to journey towards the nearest British Colony, Bermuda On route they stayed in Jamaica for three months where Cooke discovered the literature of D.H. Lawrence and had his first experience of romance. 1949 saw Cooke attending Harvard University, attempting Biology for a brief three week period, he subsequently studied Art History. During these student years, Cooke attended many informal Art classes and for two Summers was a pupil at Skowhegen College, Maine. Following his graduation in 1953, Cooke made plans to travel to England in search of his roots.

Choosing Ireland as a Base.

'We are dwellers, we are namers, we are lovers. We make homes and search for our histories. It is in the land itself that we must look for continuity'. (13) Before Cooks's arrival in Ireland, we can see the skeleton of his interests surfacing, which in turn dictated his choice of locale. Cooke was an obsessive fisherman with a great love of literature, Yeats in particular. He was disappointed upon his arrival in England, finding it stifling and dismal. A Boston friend, whom Cooke describes (12) as a 'literary person' was married to an Irish woman and so suggested Ireland as a

trial for Cooke. It was appealing from the very moment of his arrival. Cooke sensed an openness and freedom unlike that of his English/American background. It seems that his roots were here in Ireland, '... I came here and found that this is where they were in a curious way'. (19) Cooke does not consider himself an English man by any means. The only trace of Englishness left in him he states (12) is his accent and that is beyond his conscious control. He adopted Ireland some years ago and feels this country to be his home. 'If I lived here for three hundred years I still would not be Irish in some ways, but I have no other home and all my roots are here'. (19)

Much as he has adopted Ireland, it seems Ireland too has coloured his life and his art. Cooke is a naturalist. He is a fisherman, hunter and gardener and so the rural surroundings of Ireland suited him. Like all of Cooke's places, Ireland is to a great extent isolated. This insularity appealed greatly to him, but his colleagues were stunned at the ease with which he excluded himself from the prestigious art circle of New York. To Cooke, it was a perfectly natural decision, as was the decision to live in the heart of the countryside.

The Rural Setting

Cooke has chosen to live in the depths of the countryside since his departure from America. His homes have ranged from Kilnaboy and Quin, Co. Clare, Thomastown village, Co. Kilkenny, and most recently, Highwood, Ballinlig on the Roscommon/Sligo border. All of Cooke's homes have been notably close to water. He has remained at the heart of nature in both his life and art throughout his career.

Cooke is a naturalist, farming cows in Kilkenny, hunting in the Burren, gardening and fishing regularly at each locale. This relationship of work is the deepest and oldest relationship man can have with the land. It is in this merging of the self and the land that Cooke begins to search for his roots, identifying with the basic life cycle of nature and man. John Montague, a close friend of Cookes, defines Cooke's knowledge of nature 'a hunter and fisherman, he seems to know nature as she knows herself'. (20) It is through living in the country that Cooke becomes his subject. Through this close proximity he observes and experiences the processes of nature without disturbance. 'My wish in painting, and one of the main reasons why I live in the country is to experience these things without distraction'. (19) For Cooke, living with nature in all seasons, fine and foul weather, makes up this experience. He abhors a romanticising of rural life, claiming it as the rumours of urban painters. It would be inconceivable

for him to live in an urban environment. He is mystified by those who can. In the city the romantic ultimates e.g. death, decay, birth are avoidable. 'In a city there are many ways you can avoid the hard stuff'. (19) In the country Cooke states bluntly 'you're faced with blood'. (12) Cooke claims to have enough inner conflict without city conflict.

It is the barriers that civilisation places between man and nature, which encourages Cooke to a rural setting. According to Aidan Dunne this intrusive barrier starves the spirit of the people. He states they 'distort consciousness, producing impoverished individuals, bodies without spirit' (6). However, Cooke is not a bigoted ruralist. He acknowledges the dangers in isolating himself, and so makes a conscious effort of being aware of what is happening outside. Otherwise he states (12) an artist is in danger of becoming 'smug and self satisfied'. 'To say that it is a good thing to be isolated from outside art, I don't think that's true at all'. (19) He is vulnerable to another kind of isolation, feeling that as painters get older they alienate themselves both from society and from each other. They do not talk to each other as frequently or as freely as they did when they were young. Cooke illustrates this point by mentioning he meets Camille Souter approximately once or twice a year and this is the only contact he claims to have with other painters. He does, however, have contacts with the Butler Gallery and the Douglas Hyde Gallery, but these contacts may be more professional than personal.

A National Art

Like any artist, Cooke is apprehensive about the categorising of work. All of these categories, in Cooke's opinion, overlap. He is particularly unsure about a 'national type' of painting. If Irish painting is any one thing he states (12) it must be ambiguous. But just as Cooke implies categories overlap, so too does his interpretation of ambiguity. At its worst, it can be defined as blurred; at its best it can be defined as enriching. Cooke then refers to Kiefer and Bacon who are both ambiguous, but not Irish. 'Maybe its something to do with the climate...about the rain and the mist and so on. And the colour and texture of the landscape, more than any other single fact, is what creates a national type of painting.' (19)

To see Barrie Cooke's work as typically Irish would be 'quite pointless' for Cooke, but he is an admirer of regional painting which does not necessarily appeal to the International eye. He uses Camille Souter as an example of work which does not

register abroad for some reason. He speaks (19) of it being 'very intimate', and in this respect it is of great value, because it is revealing something to us about our world in Ireland, 'and that's the most important world'.

Incidently, Cooke does not care about the whereabouts or place of his actual work. He has no idea where the majority of his work hangs and is of the belief that his job as an artist is to create, not to sell. He states (12) if only one person every three years is struck by a painting of his, hanging in an office, Cooke would feel fulfilled, his job done. He is unlike Souter. Each piece is precious to Souter. She finds it difficult to part with her work, not willing to let it fall into anonymous ownership. In the late sixties, Basil Goulding approached Souter concerning an exhibition in London. Souter was apprehensive about where her pictures would go to if bought. 'If they bought them I wouldn't know where they had gone'. (10) Cooke is less sentimental about particulars. It is the place that they are based on that is important, not their home. This leads us to discuss Cooke's interpretation of a 'sense of place'.

Sense of Place.

'Places have always been important in Barrie Cooke's work. Not merely in a narrow geographical sense, but in terms of their wider implications, their nature as exemplars of particular ecologies or processes'. (7) Cooke does not go to a particular place in an attempt to extract meaning from it. None of his work is premeditated in this fashion, Sometimes it is a combination of preoccupations which directs him to a place. Sometimes it is an act of fate, where a place he encounters by chance gives birth to one of his concerns. Whatever way it occurs, the result is constant. Cooke's places become a metaphor for his own state of mind or his past experiences. 'Place seems to be a metaphor for an inward place, a state of mind. If there is a world that an artist lives in, he lives there by accident, by birth, and very often by choice, and when he makes a choice, he man not have any conscious decision to link up. He chooses it instinctively, because of a correspondence with his own attitudes to life, his own emotions. Any such places seem to literally be co-relatives, corespondents to the state of mind that exists already in that particular person.' (4)

Past Experiences.

It is almost impossible to discuss Cooke's sense of place in relation to his past experiences, for Cooke does not reveal any personal details. He is an extremely

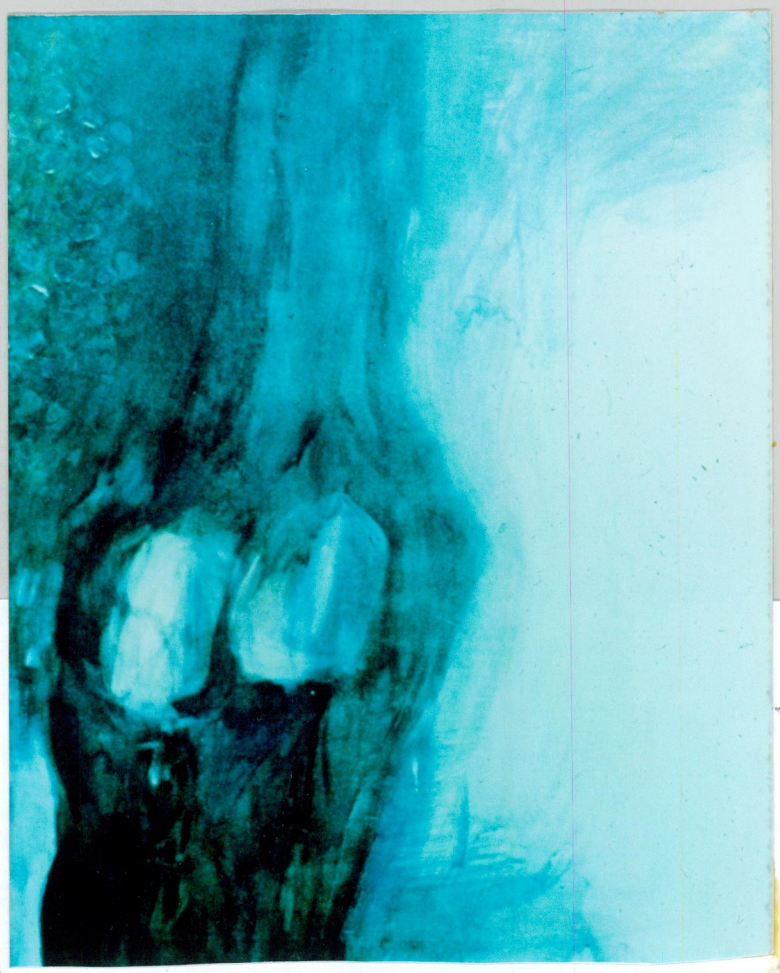
STOMACH (1964)

SHEILA-NA-GIG (1964)

private man who guards his privacy with the utmost caution. (He stated a preference to written notes rather than a recording of my interview with him). However, this is not to say he is reluctant in his hospitality, or is not forthcoming with information concerning his work. Basically Cooke is insistent that any details of his day to day existence bears little relevance to his subjects. I question his dismissal of the subject, it seems he contradicts himself stating in an interview with Circa of 1984 'anything that happens during or before your life becomes part of your potential vocabulary'. (19) To illustrate this point, I refer to Stomach, 1964. The history of the sketch is this; Cooke had been talking with Frank Morris, the late husband of Camille Souter. Their conversation was based on their mutual fascination with the complexity of the human body, the stomach in particular. After some time, Cooke insists, the conversation was forgotten and he worked on other themes e.g.; Sheila na Gig, 1964 and Couple I, 1964/67. It was some weeks later when Cooke found himself working on these stomach sketches for no concrete reason. Thus proving that ordinary, everyday occurrences, such as conversations or meetings with people, all have some underlying influence on the mind of the artist. Rarely is the influence of an experience as specific as the incident above. These experiences become so embedded in Cooke's character it is impossible to decipher them. However, Cooke's view of visual experiences is one of interest. Cooke believes (12) that these 'things' an artist learns through experience are never lost or forgotten, whether it be the green of the jungle or the blue of the New Zealand waters. Cooke believes the learning is there, so his 'sense of the jungle' is always present, being carried from one theme to the next. Likewise, I believe his experiences in life lurks beneath the surface of the canvas. As these experiences grow, so too does the complexity and depth of his work.

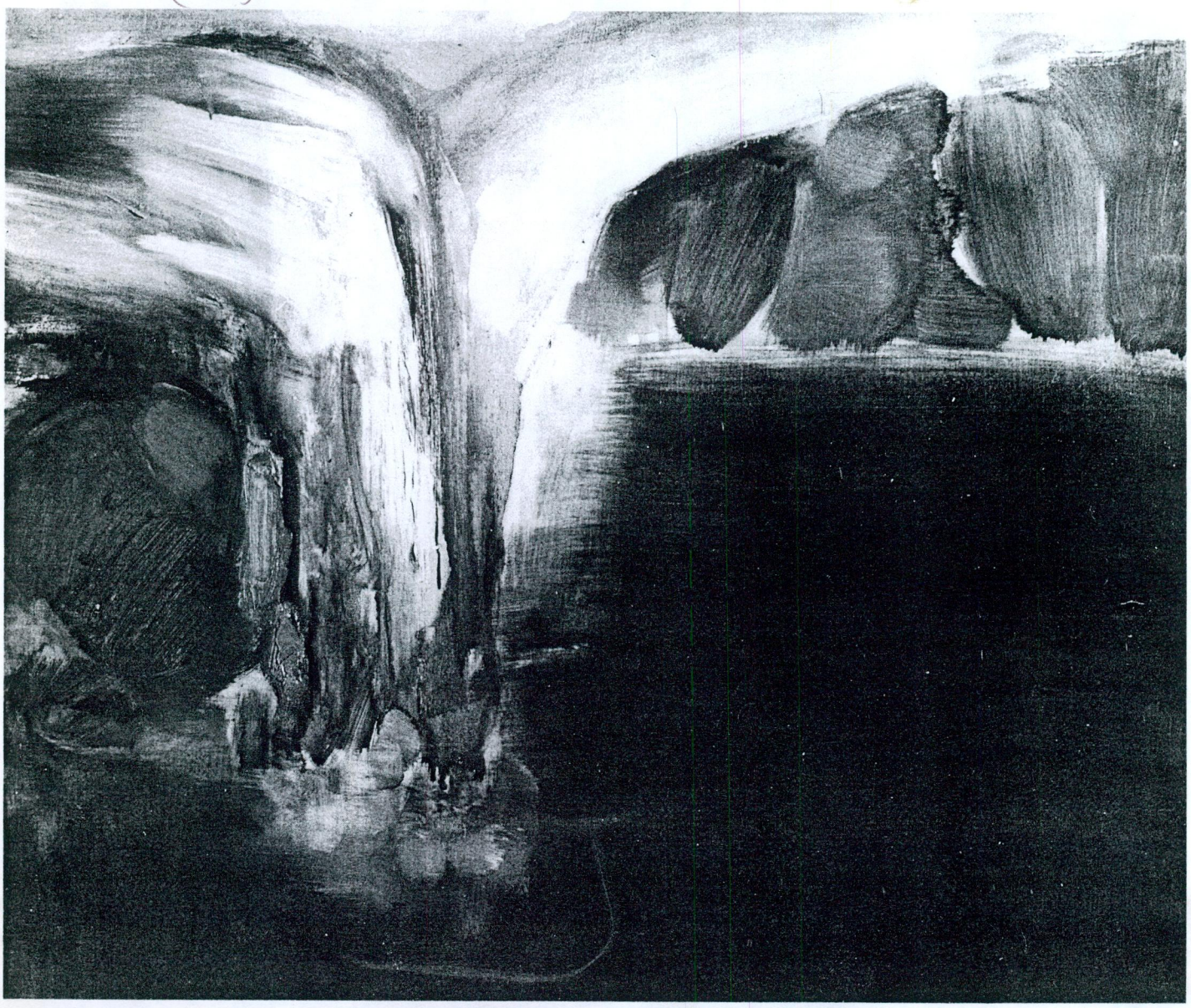
One of the only acknowledgments Cooke makes in reference to the influence of home, on his work, is that he finds it, as most artists, impossible to work amid some 'domestic catastrophe' (12). This, he concludes, is possibly the only thing which would inhibit him from working.

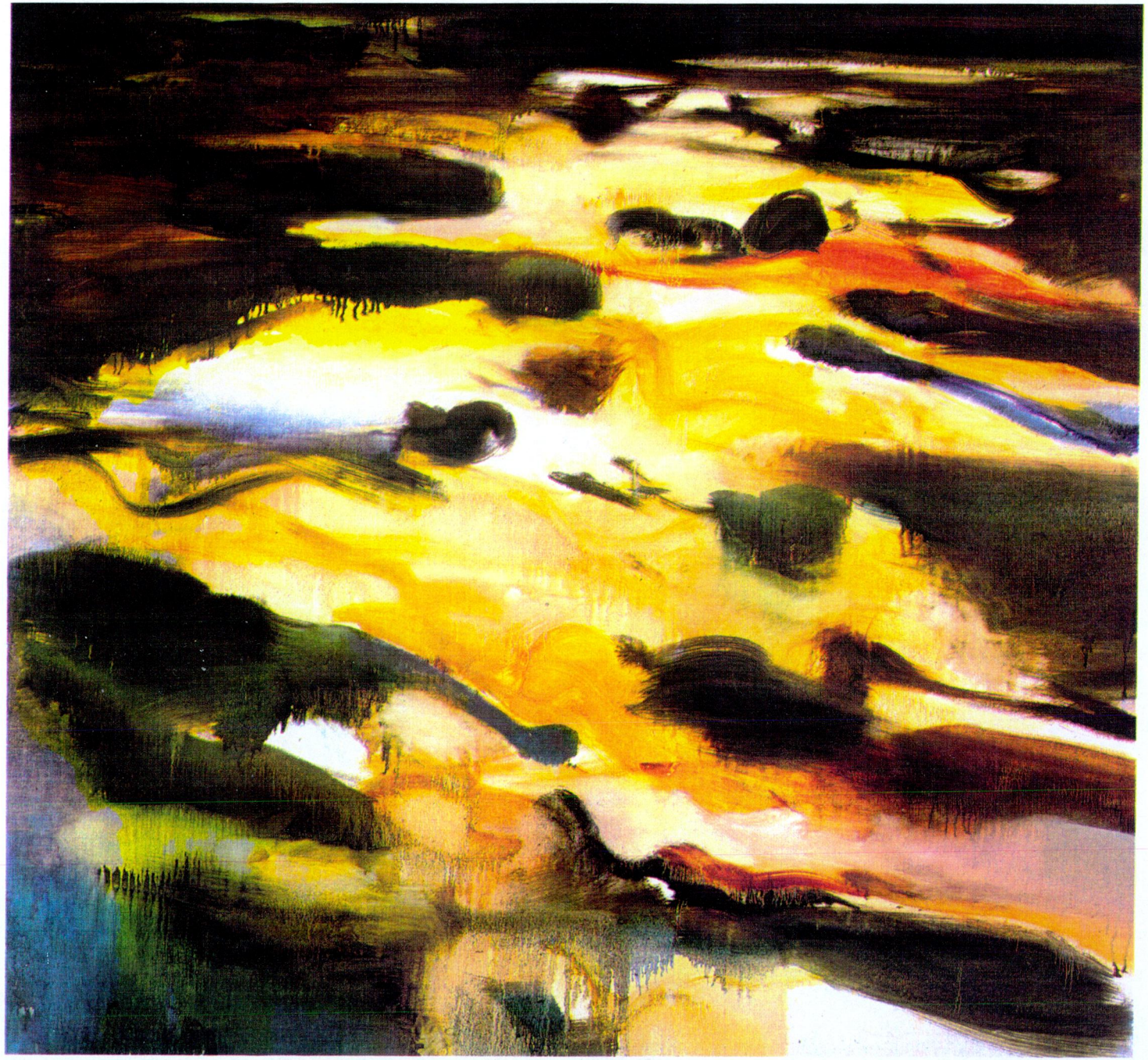
The places he has chosen as metaphors for this state of mind are varied. He is particularly partial to specific places in Ireland. 'Nearly all people have special, unshakeable places in their lives. They are often places where something important happened to change their lives, though they did not know it then. For this reason the small list of important places grows as one grown older. At present I have three; the rain forest in Malaysia where, fifteen years ago I discovered what growth actually entails; the bogs of Ireland where growth has gone into hibernation; and the Burren



DEEP CURRENT AND TWO STONES (1962)

WATERFALL RIVER FEALE (1961)





NIGHT LAKE YELLOW (1979)

in Co. Clare where...I still don't know'. (1) These specific places will be dealt with in Chapter IV.

Monet and Turner - some parallels.

Presently, one thing is certain. All of these special places share a sense of growth, and the one factor which is vital to successful growth, is water. This obsession with water will also be discussed later, but for the moment I turn specifically to Monet and Turner, both of whom were obsessed with water.

Cooke is clearly an admirer of both artists for their admirable treatment of water, and for their use of place as metaphor. 'Turner seems in a way the epitome of this using place and nature as a metaphor for an inward world of his own'. (4) Turner choose to depict water in its various states; the heavy swollen clouds above a rough, choppy sea. His depiction was constantly one of turbulence. Cooke speculates (4) that this friction in nature which Turner was fascinated with, may correspond to a sense of friction in himself. This is obvious in Turner's later works, where it is almost impossible to identify the place. The place is not the important world in these paintings, the mood is. True it may be a reflection of sorts, but Cooke refuses to see his own depiction of water as a direct reflection of his own temperament. Many of Cooke's water paintings are calm and reflective, e.g.Deep Current and Two Stones, 1962, Tench Fishing, 1974, Night Lake Yellow, 1979. Cooke, like Turner, fishes continually, and so he accounts for this calmness being derived from the lakes and not from within. I would be hesitant in accepting his argument, believing it to be a reflection of his character, rather than a reflection of habit. This is most obvious in his depiction of water in motion which remains calm to an extreme e.g. Waterfall River Feale, 1961.

There is a certain twist which is relevant in discussing Cooke's respect for this 'sense of place' in Turner's work. It seems before Cooke's departure to Borneo in 1975, Cooke visited the Turner show in London. He spent three days there, and against his better judgment, he felt continually drawn to one particular painting. It was one of Turners earliest, featuring a lake and some faraway landscape. It was by no means exceptional. Only later upon reading the catalogue did Cooke realise it was of a lake in Cheshire, his own home town. It was the same lake that Cooke and his father fished on when he was just eight years of age. It seemed Turner had absorbed the place so much that Cooke in return could experience it at its fullest.

Cooke's admiration for Monet reveals significant aspects of his own character. He talks (4) of Monet's love of gardening, which parallels his own love of fishing. 'I think that he was a passionate gardener and he loved making his garden. His passionate love for gardening was just entirely part and part of his passionate love for the movement of light'. Cooke's passionate love for fishing echoes these sentiments. Referring to a fishing trip in Lough Carrow in County Mayo, Cooke recalls his attempts at catching 'the looseness of the place'. (4) It was only later when Cooke was glancing over a photograph of the trout he caught there, that he realised the place was actually reflected in the fish itself. 'What struck me was the gleam of light as much on the fish as on the place'. (4) Thus he disagrees with the notion that Monet made his garden purely to make his paintings. To admit this would be like Cooke admitting he fished only to fuel his painting.

Cooke states (12) all good art is specific, specific in that it has a beginning and end, it is absolute, 'even Monet's water lilies were definitive.' He also admires Monet's accuracy in his depiction of a place. 'The brushwork, the form becomes absolutely the coefficient of a place...his own inward world is just as physically precise as the actual world of his garden'(4). Cooke's paintings are just that. Whatever place Cooke encounters, one thing is certain; it becomes a definite metaphor for his own state of mind, his own inner world.

CHAPTER III

Cooke's Preoccupations and Motivations.

Preoccupations.

Through discussing Cooke's preoccupations and motivations we come closer to our understanding of his sense of place. There are particular obsessions which are at the core of his life and his art. Cooke states that the two are interwoven; 'I don't feel any break in my work or my living'. (12) It is a combination of these factors which influences Cooke's choice and interpretation of place.

Processes of Nature.

Nature is at the core of all Cooke's art. His vision of which is neither morbid or sentimental, but realistic. His work 'addresses nature because nature is what is real'. (6) His art centres around processes of change. The central process of fascination is that of life and death, for that is what all creation stems from. These processes of growth, decay, death and rebirth are universal. It is a combination of these elements which triggers Cooke's theories and in turn accents particular aspects of his painting.

Cooke is not particularly obsessive with death. Indeed, his work may be perceived as morbid by the spectator, in his depiction of bloody carcasses and bone stripped of flesh. But all death originates from life, and just as his bones are 'living matter' (25), his carcasses also breathe life in their eternal painted image. He does not consciously choose a subject which condones death but, living in the country, these processes surround him. 'And the animals, I've painted live animals, but it was easier to paint dead animals. If you live in the country, again, you see dead animals'. (19) Cooke aims for this truthfulness, which is not beyond nature but within it. Most of his subjects centre around this theme of life and death because all of his subjects are organic. Life and vitality are present in these subjects but because of my chosen topic, death is the major focus of his work. Cooke sees the presence of death in the land more than in his figurative works for the following reasons: In Cooke's observation of nature, he is analysing his own sense of place, his own identity. As spectator, he is acutely aware of the time span as human being as opposed to that of a geographical time span. As fisherman/painter, this process of work and meditation with the land enables him to see himself as an integral part

of this evolution. He becomes one with the land claiming 'we are all animals'. (12) Thus observing the decadence of the land, Cooke finds himself closer to understanding the mystery and beauty of death. For Souter also, this is essential; 'you will try to seek out beauty even in death'. (10) He views the decadence of the land in direct relation to his own death. 'The theme of the land can not be other than central to human life.'(4)

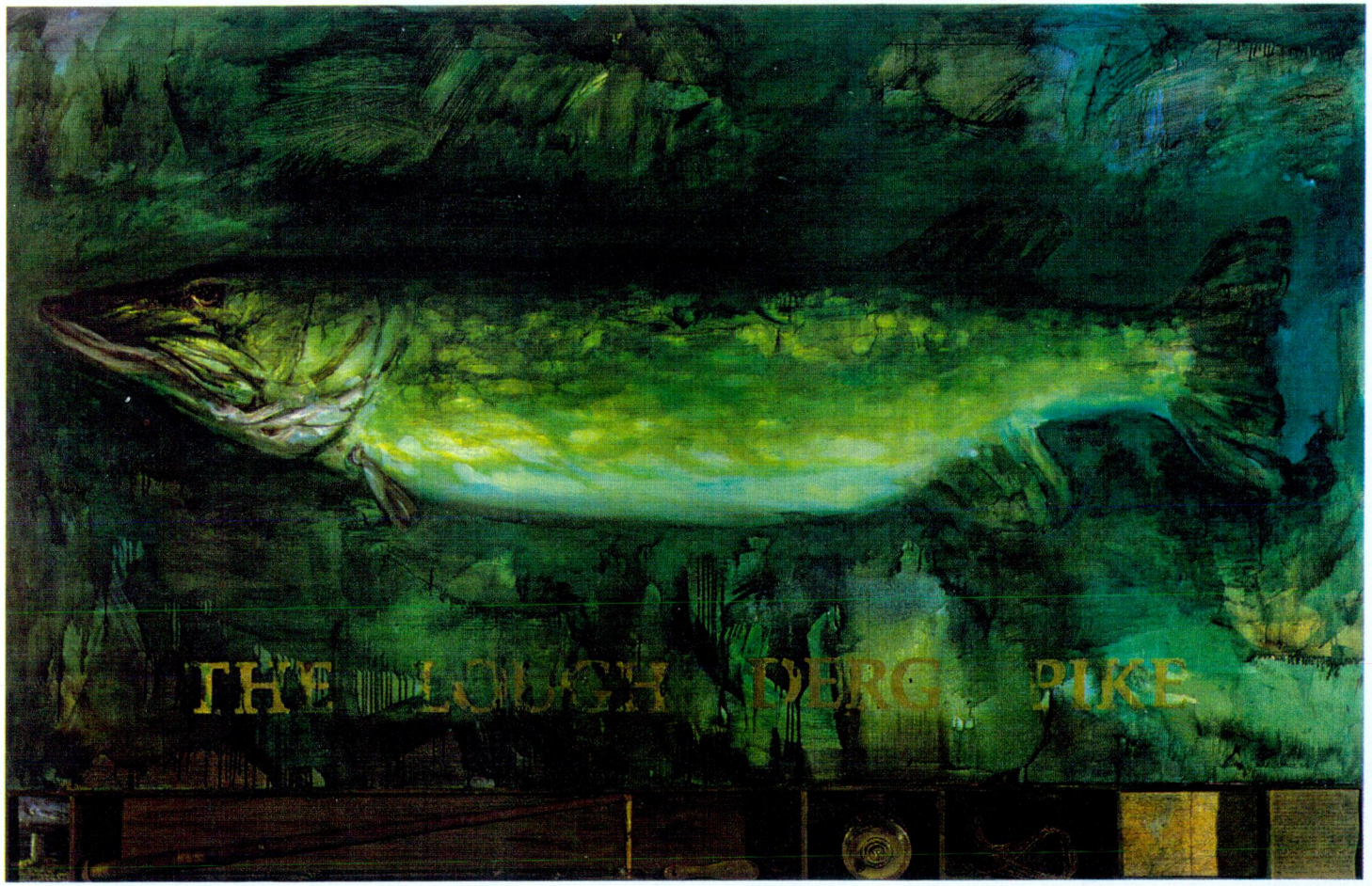
Conservation.

Cooke sees the presence of death in the earth because it is what is real. He expresses his disgust of the barriers between man and nature. He is deeply involved in conservation, 'if you live in the country, you have to be'. (19) His opinion of the deteriorating ecological condition is one of grave concern. He states 'for the first time ever, we have the ability to destroy ourselves'. (12) For Cooke the bomb was the beginning and so he draws comparisons between the regional and universal problems of conservation. He condemns the critics who pester Northern artists to paint the troubles, he feels that these will solve themselves eventually. Cooke's priorities lie further afield, on a more universal scale. To paint dying lakes and dying rain forests is far more harrowing for Cooke.

A Green Art.

Many of his paintings (Borneo and New Zealand in particular) may be accused of being environmentally friendly. True, they are 'green' and their message is one of concern, but because his vision is so firmly rooted in nature, Cooke's work fits into many categories. Cooke has consistently witnessed the deterioration of the land, either through natural causes or through being encouraged by man. From as far back as the Borneo days of 1975, Cooke has been conscious of conservation. In many respects he is ahead of his time. Aidan Dunne referring to Cooke's work of the mid 1970s,(in the context of International Modernism), states 'oddly enough, much of Cooke's organically obsessed work actually fits in such a context without apparent contradiction'. (6)

This is not to say that Cooke uses his work as a form of propaganda; he believes that it is up to the individual artist to comment on the ecological state of a place. He insists painting cannot be used in that way, 'I go on committee and knock doors rather than use painting to put my views across, that would be too much like



Portrait of the Lough Derg Pike, life size, with Relics, 1980, Oil on canvas and mixed media, 139 × 208, Crawford Municipal Gallery, Cork

programming'. (3)

At One with Nature.

'I fish, fishing refuels me...it is a renewal and also a way of focusing; precision, intensity'. (3) To Cooke, nature is the teacher. Cooke becomes one with nature when he is fishing. This process of becoming the subject is imperative for all good art, and acts as a key in understanding Cooke's choice of locale. It is fishing which is the source of most of his painting. It is his link to nature, and his link to art. 'A good days painting is like when you've been fishing and suddenly everything goes right. You're casting perfectly and the trout are meeting the fly. It wouldn't have happened without all the effort beforehand. You've been guiding it without being aware that you were guiding it.' (3) It is Cooke's way of meditating, he loses all knowledge of himself and his reactions. Through this he is completely absorbed in nature. Beyond concentration he notices things he never would normally. It is his constant reference point. His year is punctuated by fishing trips; they are a catalyst for Cooke.

It was primarily for the fishing that Cooke came to Ireland. He has tied flies since the age of nine and he was an obsessive fisherman at 23 years of age. It is his fishing that has directed him to all of his homes in Ireland and it has influenced his decisions of locales abroad.

It is this obsession with fishing which points to his fascination with the subterranean world. Many of his paintings reflect life below the surface, imaginary (e.g.Woman in the Burren,1964) or realistically (e.g. Air to Water Box, 1969 and Portrait of the Lough Derg Pike, 1980). This fascination may also stem from his obsession with death. His oneness with nature, 'the animal' in Cooke or his scientific mentality leads to his digging beneath the surface. These factors confirm Cooke's inability to accept his subject purely on an aesthetic level. Cooke has to probe and analyse his subject before adopting it as his own.

Water's Place.

The hibernation of scientist in Cooke also attracts him to water. In his depiction of water, Cooke deliberately unfolds it to reveal its very core. It is more than an average aesthetic curiosity. He shares this fascination with few artists, Leonardo (Turner and Monet as mentioned). Like Leonardo, Cooke looks upon water as the

driving force of the universe, holding all of creation together. Chalked on the walls of his last studio in Kilkenny was a maxim from Heroclitus, 'all existence flows in the steam of creation and passing away'. It is in this, that the essence of all Barrie Cooke's theories are founded. Cooke sees water as the metaphor for life itself: 'everything stems from water, life itself does...think of the Double Helix. There is very little in life that doesn't begin in the form of a dot forming a circle and widening out.'(3) For Cooke, water concretes the intangible objects e.g. space. 'It's like a tangible approximation of space itself; the closest thing to space really.'(3)

CHAPTER IV.

Cooke's Work with Reference to Place.
The Burren.

In discussing Cooke's work with reference to place, it is obvious first to focus on Ireland. The first place Cooke came properly into contact with upon his arrival, was the Burren. From the frantic pace of cosmopolitan America to the stark openness of the Burren, it was a contrast of extremes. This isolation suited Cooke, and even then it seems his love of literature was quietly guiding him, for it was Yeat's original secretary who introduced him to the Burren, and arranged his accommodation in Kilnaboy. There Cooke rented a small run down cottage without running water or electricity, and there he stayed alone for two years, painting, fishing and reading borrowed books. Cooke describes it as primitive, the village operating on a system of bartering and being self sufficient. There was little contact with the outside world without the aid of cars or phones. Cooke made his own charcoal and due to financial pressure and perhaps inhibition, he painted small. However, his main attempts at painting the Burren have been largely unproductive for many reasons.

Initially it was the shock and newness of such a powerful landscape. Cooke was inhibited by its power. He was at a vulnerable stage. Living alone surrounded by his work, he may have become easily bored and disillusioned. Much of his work at this time would have been experimental, even though Cooke disagrees that art can be experimental. 'I don't think art is ever experimental; I think a painter or sculptor makes something because there is an image which nags him and there are only certain ways he can approach it'. (19)

Other reasons for his lack of progress was his own place in the landscape. Being in the environment he is attempting to paint, is counterproductive for Cooke. It is distracting, in its influence of colour and light. It is possibly too accurate. Perhaps it is only when an artist is separated from something close, that he becomes more reliant on his memory, which hoards the pure essentials. It is, however, far too broad to impose this on every artist, for each artist's vision requires various essentials.

There were also domestic infringements on Cooke's life at the time. His decision to marry and start a family in 1954 must have been more time consuming for Cooke,

TWO FOWLERS (1954)

and so to paint became more of a conscious effort.

There remains little documented work of this period, and the years prior to his arrival in Ireland. When approached on this, Cooke was largely dismissive of the work, stating he did very little painting before his arrival. So it is impossible to discuss paintings that were done prior to his arrival because there is no existing evidence of such work.

The earliest painting of the 50s to be documented is Two Fowlers, 1954. Unfortunately access to it is only through a bad black and white reproduction, but it is significant nonetheless. It is unusual for Cooke in many respects. Cooke infrequently paints the figure, and on the occasions that he does, it is portraits of friends or nude studies. These hunters do not look like people he might know. They are anonymous to a degree similar to that of his later nude studies. They are looking directly at the spectator; there is no room to escape their glare, their stance is direct. Such direct confrontation is not a characteristic displayed in Cooke's later figure studies or portraits. This painting instantly tells a story. Cooke's works of just a few years later are distinctly different to this work, in that his art never directly tells a story. It is always subtle in its message, however direct his tackling of the subject may be. His use of materials is unlike that used in later paintings. His paint is absolutely dry, almost chalky; there is not a hint of moisture in this painting. His brushwork is decorative in certain places, most of which is done with a small brush, perhaps reflecting his strained finances, or the inaccessibility of materials locally. The influence of Abstract Expressionism is obvious in its contrasting tones and modelling of paint. This paint hugs the figures in a sculptural fashion, building his subject. The naivety of the piece is obvious in its consciousness, its absolute control. The areas of paint which have been left raw are the most confident and the most effective. However, the piece is appealing for its courage, and for it being autobiographic.

The Burren still remains close to his heart. It is a constant point of reference for Cooke. Burren paintings, like fishing trips, regularly surface between themes. It is his touchstone. The combination of themes which attracts Cooke specifically to the Burren is its wetness and its solidness. He speaks of its 'femininity' and refers to it as a 'frozen river'(12). This femininity lies in the surface of the Burren, which is grey and curved, owing to the porous limestone being sculpted by the effects of the Ice Age. This grey blanket acts as a mirror; like a lake, it reflects the climate on its

WOMAN IN THE BURREN (1964)

surface. It is a mystical place for Cooke which haunts him. 'I lived in the Burren, on the edge of it, where bare rocks join rich pasture, for nearly ten years when I was young. Its age and its womanly combination of barrenness and richness nurtured me and still does. No year has passed without at least two return visits there and many times I have tried to paint my feelings about it. I have walked in it and lived in it, in lovely and filthy weather, day and night.'(1)

The next notable time Cooke chose to paint the Burren was some eight years later. Significantly, he was placed in Holland. There are some coincidences in his decision to paint the Burren there. Cooke went to Amsterdam (not entirely through choice) following the breakup of his marriage to Harriet Leviter. It was the Burren which witnessed the beginning of this early relationship, he and Harriet starting their family there, and remaining in the heart of the Burren for a further eight years. This stay in Amsterdam saw the beginning of a new relationship with the ceramic artist Sonja Landweer. It may be that his decision to paint the Burren in Amsterdam was a symbolic way of Cooke coming to terms with his separation from Harriet, and his leaving of the Burren.

More of a coincidence may be Cooke's physical place in this particular landscape. The Dutch landscape consists purely of verticals and horizontals. I question the underlying effect it may have had on Cooke's subconscious. The flat Dutch landscape may have quietly encouraged him to paint the Burren which is also composed of vast areas of flat open space. Referring to the Dutch painters, Cooke himself poses the question 'maybe if you live in Holland, which consists entirely of these horizontals with occasional vertical punctuations, something like this is going to result from it'. (19)

Cooke's painting Woman in the Burren, 1964 is one of forty two paintings he worked on in Holland. Of the forty two, only this and Potato Field, 1964 exist. He destroyed all others. Both paintings have their focus below the ground's surface. It is the contrast of these worlds and the contrast of wet and dry which intrigues me. This presence of contrast is in all of Cooke's work and it is directly reminiscent of Cooke's own personality, his own lifestyle. 'One thing I do know about my life is that it consists of a constant, sometimes chaotic switch of parallels, between my sensuality and my puritanism, my right hand and my left hand...all these things. And so I have always had a wish to oscillate between the two'. (4)

In ten years there is an enormous difference in painting technique. His palette wetter, his colours subdued and the vast areas of open canvas all become a characteristic of his later works. Cooke's paint has become purer and more atmospheric, reflecting the Irish climate. His blurred soft edges echo his Irish contemporaries. The influence of Abstract Expressionism has fled from this painting. If any influence is present in this work, it is the influence of the Irish heritage. The woman in this painting symbolises a mother earth figure, encouraging fertility and growth, like Cooke's earlier studies of the Sheila na Gigs. There is what appears to be an umbilical cord uniting the subterranean with the above, myth to reality. Perhaps this is a metaphor for Cooke's own inner world.

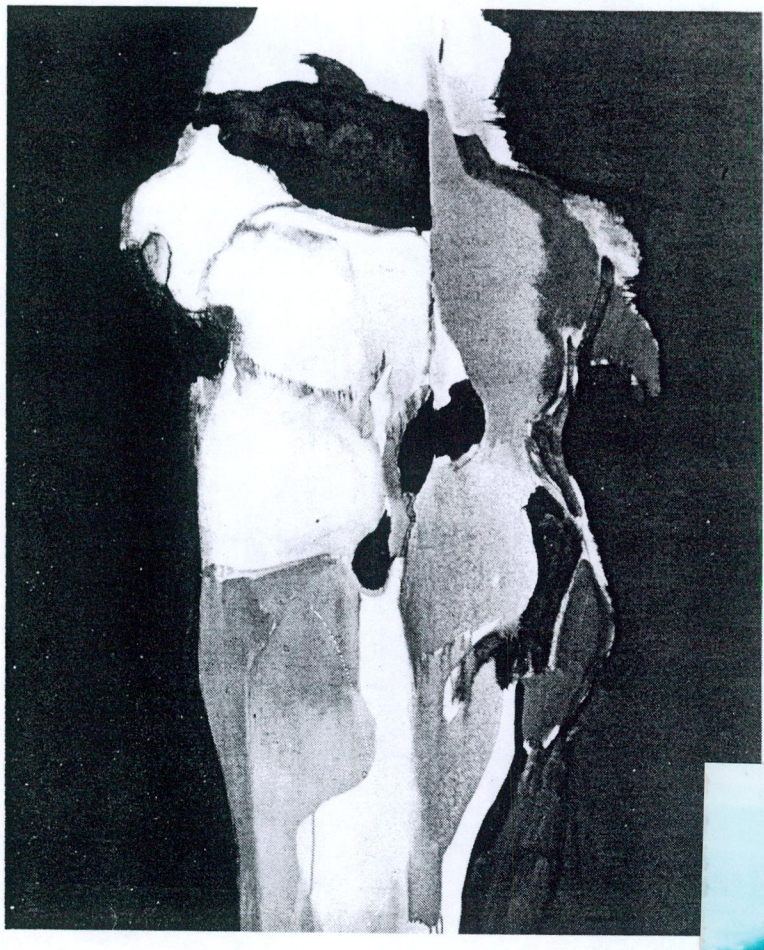
In these first ten years, Cooke's paintings displayed a considerable amount of open white canvas. It may be that Cooke's visit to Spain in the Winter of 1955 subconsciously influenced his vision, even though he states it was not to his taste. 'I lived in Spain for a time and I found that I did not work well, it was not my feeling for place'. (19)

Kilkenny.

Following Cooke's travels to Germany, Spain and Holland, his next address was to be Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny. It was through a series of what he describes as accidents, that this change came about. Cooke had been commuting between Ireland and Holland for some time. After some months, Sonja was offered employment in a Kilkenny Design Workshop, and so they decided to try Kilkenny temporarily... temporarily being some 27 years.

Kilkenny did not have the same impact on Cooke as did the Burren. Indeed he painted the trees of Thomastown but it was not a theme which entranced him in the same way as the Women in the Burren series. It appears a temporary subject reflecting a temporary place. Kilkenny was more of a base for Cooke to observe and travel from. The art produced from there in the earlier years is not specifically of Kilkenny, the place. His trees from this period could be compared to the trees from any midland district. There is no specific detail which is particularly reminiscent of Kilkenny, the place. The only thing that is specific about these painting is their title. So Cooke's feeling for this particular place seems distant.

It is not difficult to determine why Kilkenny did not attract him in the same way as



Inside Pair, 1968
Oil on canvas
93 x 84
Gordon Lambert

BESIDE THOMASTOWN (1965-66)

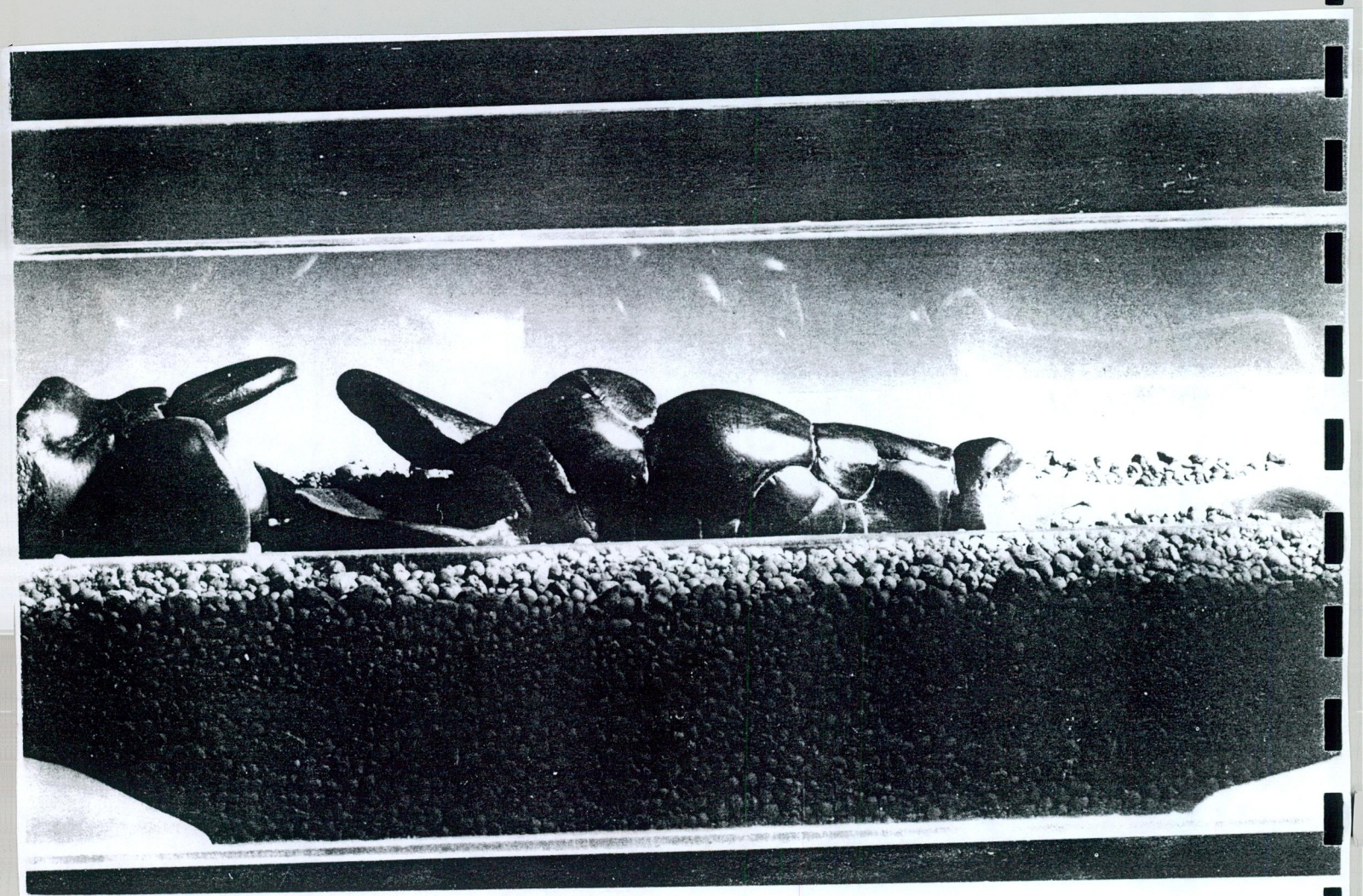
other Irish landscapes. The most obvious reason is, as already stated, that Cooke finds it impossible to paint the landscape in which he lives. But Cooke is not a landscape painter. Cooke chooses highly charged environments because of his recurring themes and obsessions, but also because of his energy, (Cooke constantly paces a room amid conversation). The midlands of Ireland seem too moderate for Cooke.

Cooke's move to Kilkenny saw the dawning of a greener canvas. His paintings are based on the trees above the river Nore. Beside Thomastown, 1965-66 is, like Woman in the Burren, 1964 embedded in a white light, echoing the atmosphere of the Burren to an extent. His use of paint has become even more fluid and expressive, and less conscious or polished than before. The canvas is split horizontally, with an unusual view of a mountain in the background. The foreground has been edited considerably. He has omitted any superfluous information which may distract the viewers gaze. In this respect it echoes Two Fowlers, 1954. The spectators gaze is directed to the essentials. Cooke's colours are Irish, to suit the 'rich lush fields and atmosphere of Kilkenny'. (11) His light is typically Irish in its broad sweeping movement over the faraway mountain. Clearly these Thomastown studies are made from a height and Cooke focuses on the outside appearance of the trees. Both viewpoints suggest the artists removal from his subject.

Between his move to Kilkenny in 1964 and his trip to Borneo in 1975, Cooke embarked on several projects. Aidan Dunne describes it as a period of 'drier analytical painting' (6). The influence of place upon his work during this decade was minimum. Cooke's subject matter became more personal, being largely figurative or analytical, (e.g. Junction, 1969 and Inside Pair, 1968). It was based on his relationship with Sonja, the influence of his contemporaries and his own instincts as biologist. The work from this period can not be classified as Irish in any sense. Nor can it be categorised as any national type of painting, and so it is largely irrelevant to this discussion. There is, however, one exception; it was in this decade that Cooke encountered the bogs of Ireland.

The Bogs of Ireland.

'For Cooke the earth is bountiful. It also has its secrets, sometimes yielding clues to man's past from under its surface. Unearthed, these objects can bridge the gap between contemporary man and the ancients'. (25)



Beginning of Bone 1973

Living in the midlands, it was a natural occurrence for Cooke to stumble across the bogs of Ireland, his attraction to which is obvious. Both the Burren and the Bog are ancient lands. Recalling Cooke's 'tendency towards the fecund' (19) and the subterranean world, the bogs were an ideal location. Cooke's first acknowledgment of the subterranean was obviously Woman in the Burren, 1964. This was largely due to Cooke's instinctive feeling that there was a woman beneath the surface. Now, however, he was faced with something far more concrete than instinct. Beneath this 'strange vegetable blanket' (6) of the bog (which is porous like the limestone of the Burren) there lies fragments of Irish history.

The content of the peat is largely the remains of plants and animals from generations back. Also present are many living organisms. This balance between living and non-living matter was an obvious attraction for Cooke enabling him to establish his own relationship with nature. Aidan Dunne refers to the bog as 'a ready made metaphor for the idea of a unity embracing organism and environment'. (6)

The bogs of Ireland were a significant point of departure for Cooke. There he saw the rate of decay slow to an extreme, in effect, witnessing death itself. The bog resembles a grave, uniting in death, man and his environment, above is life, growth and vitality.

Cooke's decision to sculpt the bog rather than paint it is an important one. He had been using peat from as far back as the mid 1950s, being of the view, 'anything that is done before is ancestral and is there to be used'. (19) However its repeated usage in Irish art made it tired and cliched, and so Cooke had to rethink his methods. Sculpture was a preference because Cooke feels painting can only go so far, 'painting reveals a sensation of a place'. (12) Cooke believes the sculpted form can reveal more, it enables him to physically become the sensation because he can 'hold it'. (12) 'I'd like painting to have everything but you just can't do it.' (19) I question the role of the spectator in this instance. Many of Cooke's sculpted works (e.g. Beginning of Bone, 1973)are encased in a clear perspex box primarily for protection. He refers to the fragility of these sculpted works, and compares his boxes to an eyelid. Clearly the spectator cannot 'hold' this sensation like Cooke, and in many of his works, these bones are small, their scale offputting. It may be that it is the process of making sculpture that appeals, but the degree of participation from the spectator is arguable.

It was important for Cooke to make his bones rather than use somebody elses, because real bones, Cooke states 'were not bony enough'. (12) It was also important to make the bog, rather than paint it, because I believe Cooke felt if he could hold history, he would be closer to it than feeling it through a sensation.

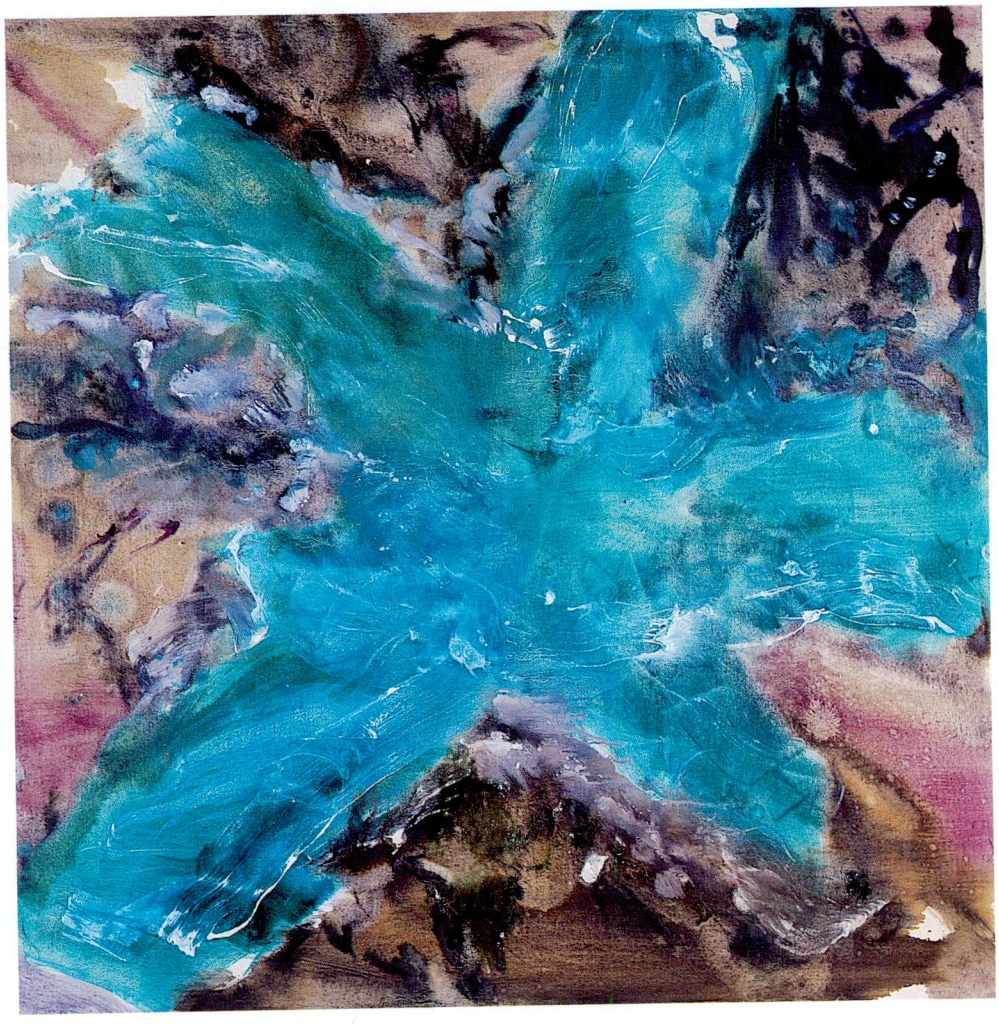
Beginning of Bone, 1971 is unlike the majority of bone boxes. The tension is lessened. The perspex box protects its fragility and in a curious way, it is reminiscent of Woman in the Burren, 1964. It appears to be slumbering or hibernating . There is a secrecy and anominity echoing many of Cooke's nude studies. It may not be meant to suggest a sleeping body, but that is its mood. Strangely these 'bones' lie on the surface of a bed of gravel instead of below. The surface of these forms is tanned and leathery like the surface of an 'embalmed body recovered from bogland'. (6) It is the unification of man and nature.

Malaysia.

Without doubt, the most important place to influence Cooke's work was Malaysia. Unlike the bogs of Ireland, Borneo represented vitality to Cooke. His first taste of tropical rain forest was at 16 years of age between America and Bermuda. Since then Cooke explains, it had been a dream of his to return to the 'luxuriance of the jungle'. (12) It was in the mid 1970s when Cooke had a feeling for it, and like his close friend, Camille Souter, Cooke could not ignore it. 'I think places call you, call painters and the one thing a painter can do wrong is not to go when a place calls'. (17)

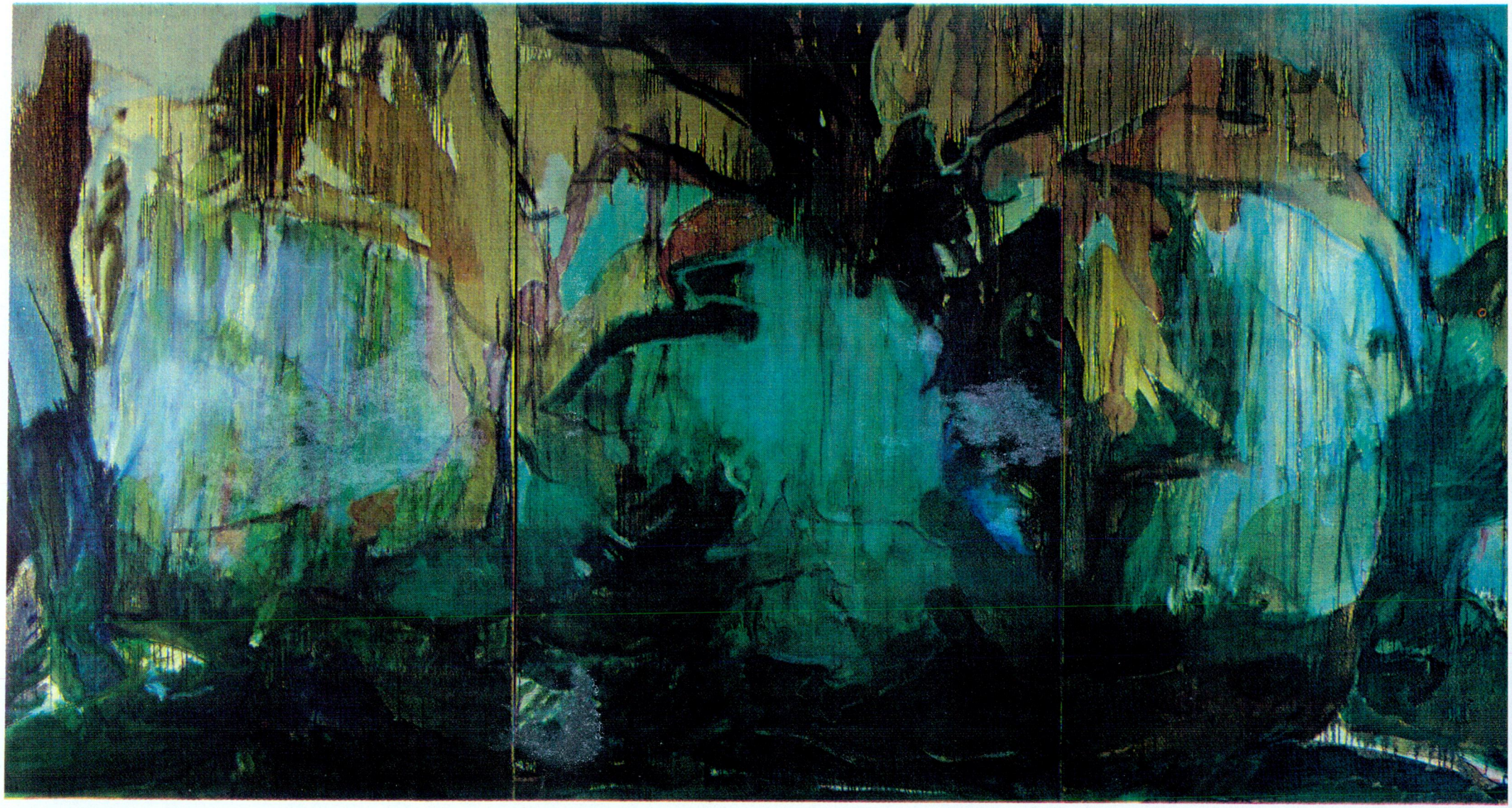
So Cooke made his preparations, gathering funds from previous buyers and promising them work to the value of their contribution. Cooke inquired after many possibilities. The Amazon was too vast, it would have taken over a week to get anywhere that was remote enough for Cooke. Borneo looked attractive. It had the advantage of being small and completely undisturbed. Unlike other rain forests, Borneo had an ideal change of altitude, contrasting with his other choices of locale.

Primarily, it was the remoteness which attracted him. It is worthy to mention Cooke's disinterest in people at that particular time. He saw the human race as destructive and full of self importance. Here in this land Cooke could be alone to study his subject, simply man in his environment. Significantly it is only in his sketch books, and not his paintings that we see Cooke depicting the natives. Cooke states that it



ALGAL GROWTH 1991

lain Forest Knot, 1976/82, Oil on canvas, 117 × 117, Private collection



BIG FOREST BORNEO (1976)

was in the natives that he saw truly civilised people, in the way that they fed and cared for each other, and in the education of their children. These natives replenished Cooke's faith in humanity again.

'There are no flowers, the dark canopy covers an incredible variety of blacks, greens and browns - and when you see another colour its shocking'. (16a) Rain Forest Knot, 1976/82 is absolutely these colours. Cookes use of contrast is present in the start whiteness of this knot against the moodier dark brown, however, they are compatible. This painting mirrors the Night Lake pictures of the late 1970s. The gaze of the spectator is not focused, being drawn towards the centre of the knot at first but quickly being averted towards the top right hand corner of the painting. These outward branches pull our gaze from branch to branch in what resembles a musical notation. It is the purity of this white know which draws our attention, behind it, is a muddier brown which swirls quietly. This is close to the symbol seen at Newgrange. This painting is one of the drier paintings from the Borneo series, with an unusual use of glazing. It is remarkably like the later painting Algal Growth, 1991 in form. This form is the personification of the rain forest. Its existence came to Cooke, not through direct observation but through his subconscious. The form began after Cooke's trip to Borneo, Cooke worked intensely for a year and a half. He attempted many different subjects. A curious motif constantly emerged from these subjects, Cooke had no idea of its origin. It was only sometime later, through working on a number of images that the motif became stronger, until it resembled the Knot paintings we now know. This symbol is one of growth. It is inbred in the natives of Borneo. It seems Cooke absorbed that place so well in just four months, that he too had acquired an understanding of the nature of the rain forest. 'I had no choice as to how to paint when I got back, my studio got greener and greener'. (27) Cooke's palette changed dramatically after this visit to Borneo. It became greener than ever before, echoing the earlier Thomastown paintings. It is no Irish green, it is a denser and wetter green than that of Ireland. Big Forest Borneo, 1976 is more typical of this period. The upper section of the painting is heavily layered with dark green and brown staining. Cooke is obviously in an enclosure. The light, unlike that of Ireland is not coming from above. It is directly ahead between the foliage. The paint is soaking wet, dribbling horizontally from the very top of the canvas down. It drags the colour with it but does not drain it. It is the heavy rainfall that drags the plants down, which inspired this use of paint. It enhances the depth of the painting. These translucent layers of paint convey a depth which is different to his previous work. The Water paintings of the early 1960s conveying depth in solid texture, rather than

a build up of layers. The scale of Cooke's paintings has always been unpredictable and the Borneo paintings do not break this tradition. Cooke sees the scale of a painting completely differently to that of the scale in life. It is the idea which dictates the size for Cooke and not the size of the canvas dictating the importance of the idea. Like all of Cooke's special places, Borneo is also an ancient land. The Burren of County Clare, the bogs of the midlands and indeed Borneo in Malaysia all present us with a glimpse of what nature may have been like towards the beginning. It is a view we rarely get in a lifetime. John Hutchinson asks if such a thing exists, 'it is come to the time when it is argued that there is no such thing as nature, it doesn't exist. There is no place on the globe that remains untouched by man'. (15) If any such place is in existence the closest to it would have to be Borneo. Borneo escaped the Ice Age leaving us with a 'mess of plants, insects, fungi and bacteria...the most important resource that we have - information. It is a memory bank evolved over billions of years.'(6)

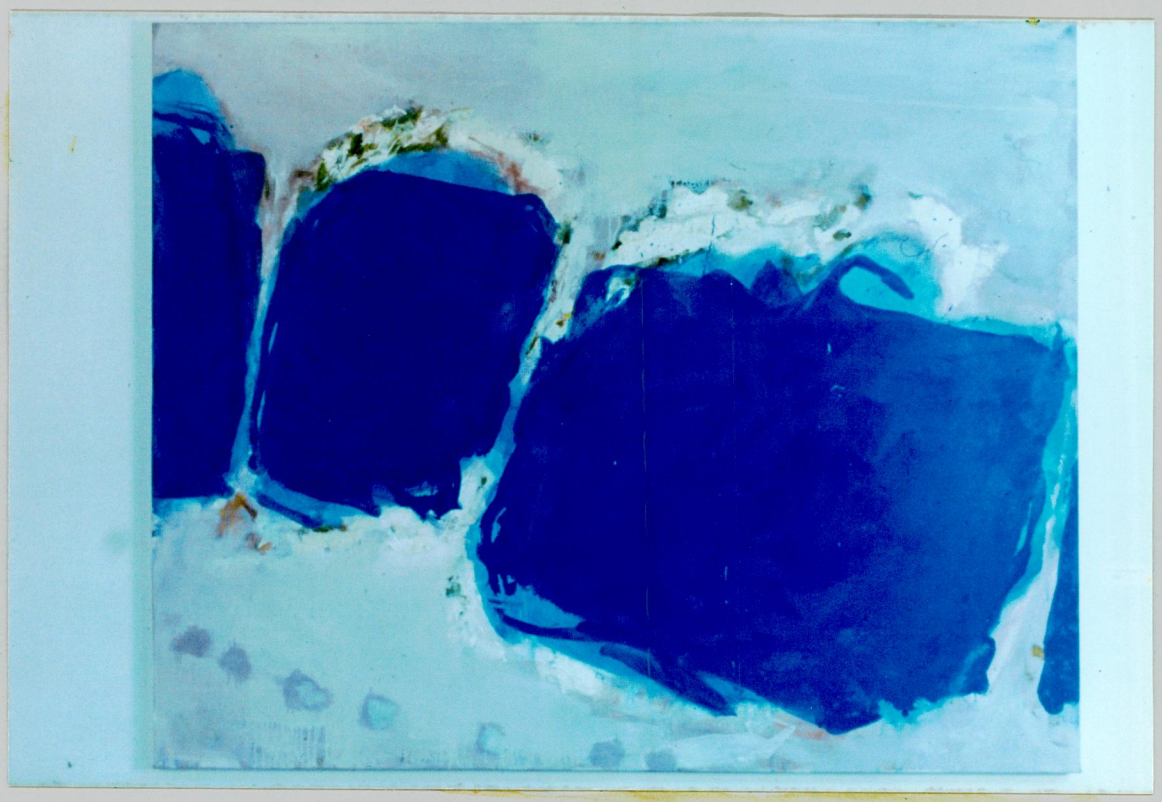
Borneo, unlike the Burren or indeed New Zealand has never been revisited by Cooke and he has no intentions of returning. He is afraid of being disillusioned, it was such an 'enriching experience' and he is unsure how much of Borneo remains. 'Humankind has succeeded in eradicating (roughly) half of the (five billion)acres of rain forest which existed a few thousand years ago'. (6)

New Zealand.

Following Borneo, the next final point of departure for Cooke was his journey to New Zealand. As Cooke states, the list of important places grows as one grows older. I believe New Zealand is an important new addition. It was an unusual choice for him, a contrast to his previously highly charged environments. New Zealand was a calmer and more peaceful location. His reasons for choosing this place are simple and refreshing. Cooke won the Marten Toonder Award in 1987. It was agreed that any journey of his choice would be financed. Cooke chose 'the furthest, newest and most different place'(12) he could think of while also taking into account his obsession with fishing.

Borneo and New Zealand have much in common. Like Borneo was a catalyst for all of Cookes later work, it seems New Zealand also broke the tradition and moulded the art which followed. Both places injected Cooke with a new life, out of which came an unanticipated energy. From the pure glacier waters of New Zealand came a new

II



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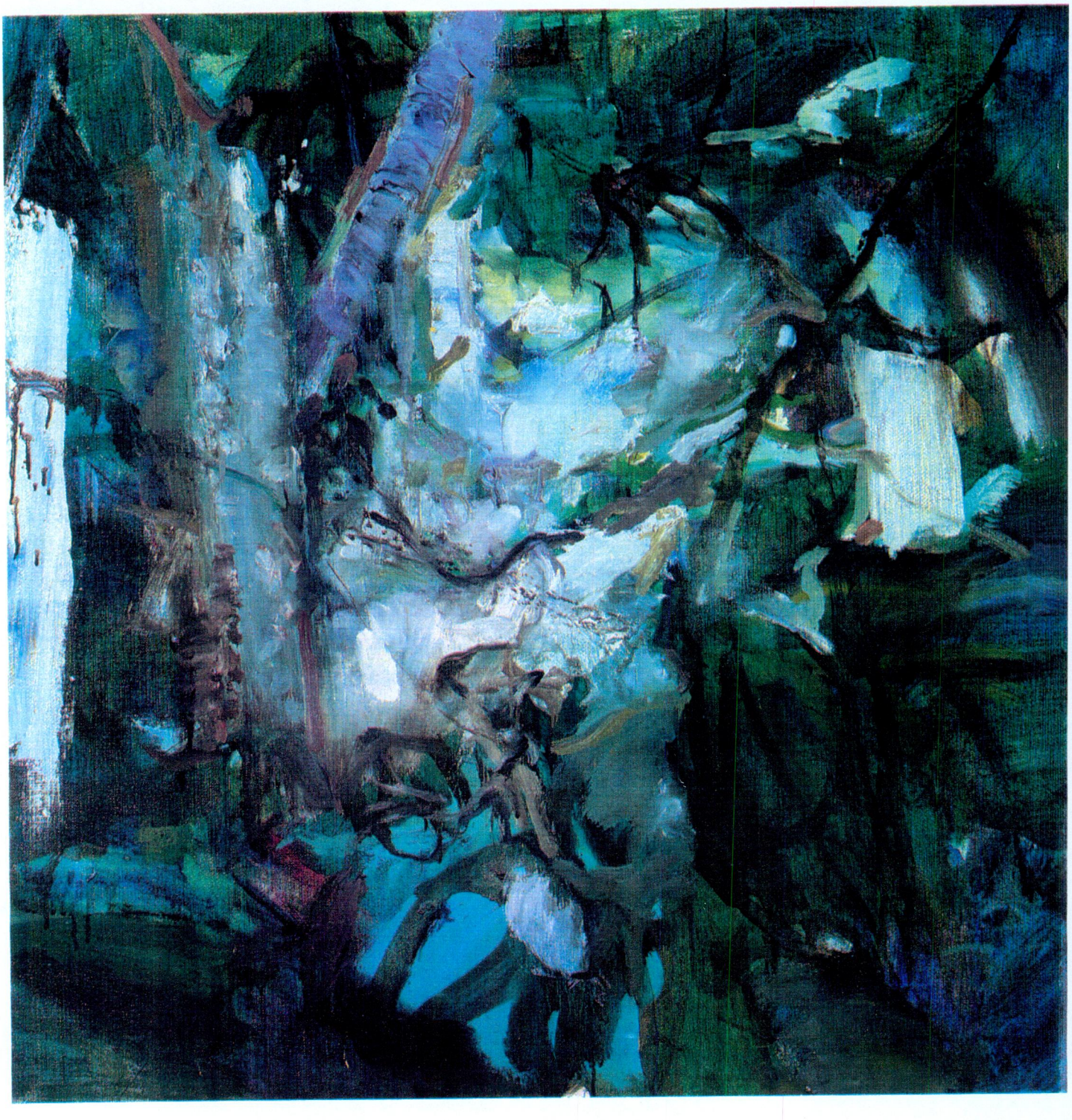
PATTERSONS LAKE SERIES (1989)



Forest III, 1975, Oil on canvas, 72 × 72, Collection of the artist

optimistic vision, calm and undisturbed. New Zealand represented a unified, primitive nature to Cooke, the ideal. He speaks of its purity in relation to Ireland. 'New Zealand is probably the purest, most unspoiled country in the world - the way Ireland was a hundred years ago - and environmental destruction is rare.'(5) John Hutchinson questions the existence of this 'pure nature', and queries Cooke's interpretation of this landscape. 'The landscape is remarkably unspoiled. Or at least that is the way Cooke perceived it.'(16) This pure, still landscape inspired Cooke's 'puritanism', it was an important breakthrough for Cooke, which affected his palette dramatically.

Like his discovery of green in Borneo, Cooke became gripped by this sharp, clear blue of the New Zealand waters. This blue has dominated many of his works since, and certainly it would not have been encountered if Cooke had chosen a different locale. This is the epitome of place moulding art. Upon Cooke's return to Ireland in 1987, he frantically searched the art shops in Dublin, buying every possible variety of blue paint available. He was attempting to capture its intensity. It was only sometime later he discovered it to be a variety of different blues, layered and placed side by side. Cooke follows Matisse's way of thinking in this respect, believing it is not the individual colour the artist puts down, but it is the colour that is placed beside it that is important. His theories are best illustrated in the paintings themselves.

Patterson's Lake Series, 1989.

Personally, I find these paintings of Cookes, the most successful and the most attractive. They are not attractive purely because of the place but are appealing also in their honesty. These paintings echo all of Cooke's concerns, particularly Patterson's Lake I, 1989. In this painting, the tension of the bone boxes is immediately visible. It is as yet the nearest Cooke has come to painting sculpture. The vast area of loosely painted open blue is scaffolded by the earth, stretching around the rim of the canvas. This scaffolding accentuates the freedom of the lake, allowing it to flow over the edge of the canvas. The depth of this blue is never ending, in it is the freedom of the wet jungle. The rugged land-shapes mirror the sexual overtones of the bone boxes and again Cooke has focused on the essentials. The play of contrasts holds the spectator's gaze; solid/hollow, rough/smooth, parched/soaked, all in turn hold the painting together. It is reminiscent of Forest III, 1975 where spontaneity and deliberation oscillate. In this painting, the aerial view (which resembles a satellite photograph) is reminiscent of the Thomastown paintings, however here the spectator hovers directly above, being drawn hypnotically towards

it's very core.

Sligo.

Cooke moved to Sligo in January of 1992. He chose Sligo for its clean lakes and its unspoiled landscape. His new home is situated at the top of a hill which overlooks Lough Arrow. Again, it would seem, that Cooke's new choice of locale was directly influenced by his love of fishing. I await the fruit of this 'sense of place'.

CONCLUSION.

The artist is a filter. He absorbs aspects of his environment, consciously or subconsciously, and in turn, he feeds his canvas. The circumstances and experiences of the artist shape his work to a degree similar to that of the surrounding landscape. This influence is obviously relevant in more than just an Irish context, and so Barrie Cooke is of particular interest. Cooke is a naturalist, he is happiest when he is completely isolated within nature, and so his many concerns and preoccupations are organically based. Particular places are close to his heart for this reason. The Burren is one of those places. Cooke returns there constantly, it is a place he can not yet truly understand. The bogs of Ireland are important because they unify man and nature. This is the aim of much of Cooke's art. Borneo is an important landmark for Cooke, because it was the turning point for all his paintings. It symbolises a growth in both the art and life of Cooke. From Borneo sprang many works, full of energy. Following Borneo, Cooke encountered New Zealand. This too, saw the dawning of a new art. This pure art encouraged the move to Sligo. Throughout his travels, Ireland has been his base. It has remained so for almost forty years. Cooke has adapted his life and his art to each locale he has travelled to. He has always become his subject in order to understand it adequately, and so his paintings become their locale. They are the place. Cooke, after remaining in Ireland for so long has in fact become his subject. He is an Irishman, and his place is Ireland.

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