



**National College of Art and Design  
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**Contemporary Women Artists in Ireland : An Interpretation Based on  
Representational Data and on the Work and Thought of Six Key  
Figures**

**by**

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## Introduction

"There should be no sex in art.....I am pointing, I know, to a millennium at least in the woman's view if I predict an hour when the term 'woman in art' will be as strange sounding a topic as 'men in art' would be now", (Rosen and Brawer, 1989, p. 51). This remark was made by the American painter Cecilia Beaux when addressing the situation of women artists some 75 years ago. Sadly, while times have changed, there is still nothing strange about addressing the issue of women in art or indeed in almost any other sphere of activity whatever the context. However, while the heading 'Contemporary Women Artists' in a sense automatically places women artists in a world apart from that of the male artist, such a placing, or perhaps the word 'displacing' is more apt, in fact runs counter to the intention of this thesis which is to explore and to highlight the central role played by women in the contemporary Irish art world.<sup>1</sup>

Irish art has witnessed immense change, productivity and diversity within the past decade and such developments within the cultural world are inextricably bound up with the wider social and political upheavals of the period. Many critics and writers have recognised 'a new vitality' in Irish art and women artists have been increasingly identified as being at the forefront of that vitality. Such a perception is in itself a radical one, not just in Ireland, but in the art world and in the context of art history generally. For, whatever the role women artists may have actually played throughout different historical eras, their work has traditionally been marginalised, trivialised and indeed quite often simply ignored. In this, if not in many other senses, Ireland has something in common with international trends.<sup>2</sup> However on the more positive side of such associations this contemporary rise to prominence of women artists is also something which Ireland holds in common with other countries more prominently renowned within art history generally, such as for example, England and the United States (Rosen and Brawer).

It is somewhat ironic perhaps that the two most notable trends within Irish art in recent times have been, on the one hand, the emergence of what has been called the 'New

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<sup>1</sup> Re the dangers of 'ghettoization' see the opening paragraphs of Joan Fowler's 1987 essay and also note Christina Reid's introduction in the catalogue for Rita Duffy's exhibition at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Irish art has generally been characterised by its insular nature and has traditionally developed independently of international trends, see Fowler 1987, pp 72 - 73 and Dunne 1987 p 61. As to the role which women have played in the visual arts in Ireland see Brian Fallon's comments in 'Fairly Modern Mainie', *The Irish Times*, 7th December 1991



Expressionism'<sup>3</sup>, - traditionally perceived both in Ireland and internationally as an almost uniquely male preserve, and, on the other hand, an increasing recognition and appreciation of women artists generally. In order to understand how and why Irish women artists have now come to the fore it is of course necessary to look at the specific social, cultural and political context within which this has occurred, but because this is something of an international phenomenon, it is necessary also to look outside of these particular confines and to consider how the phenomenon has been analysed and explained elsewhere. This broader perspective in effect introduces the realm of feminist theory and art history and thereby raises for consideration such issues as the controversial and putative association between women and nature and the politically sensitive area of gender construction. The objective of this thesis is therefore to inquire into the perceived rise to prominence of Irish women artists in order to ascertain both the accuracy of the perception, and how and why such a situation may have come about. The inquiry is a complex one and accordingly takes place on several levels including a general socio/historical review, a detailed literature review of contemporary feminist art history and theory, and original research in the form of :-

- (a) Indepth interviews with six of Ireland's most prominent contemporary women artists;

and

- (b) The gathering of original data concerning the ratio of male:female representation in exhibition spaces throughout Ireland and in cultural institutions such as Aosdana and the country's main art colleges.

The structure of the thesis is therefore as follows :-

Chapter 1 examines the background situation, looking at the national or specifically Irish context, within the past decade and considering questions relating to both national and personal identity;

Chapter 2 reviews in some detail contemporary feminist thought and theory relating to art history in general, and to the woman artist in particular;

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<sup>3</sup> Concerning the 'New Expressionism' in Irish painting see Aidan Dunne, 1990 pp 25 and 97, and also see Hutchinson, 1990, p. 80.





and Chapter 3 looks more closely at the contemporary Irish scene by examining the work of selected Irish women artists and by inquiring into the working experience of those artists and into such aspects of their experience which relate to the fact of their being female and artists, this inquiry having been undertaken by way of indepth interview with each of the individual artists in question and being further supplemented by detailed background data relating, inter alia, to exhibition representation of male and female artists and male:female representation in the country's major art institutions. This background data was in turn compiled by way of a survey conducted amongst the major public and private galleries and art institutions nationwide and is both discussed in the text where relevant and set out in full in Appendix B attached.

The conclusion draws together the information set out in the preceding chapters linking the theory of chapters 1 and 2 with the findings of chapter 3 and the detailed background data set out in Appendix B. The objective being to see to what extent, if at all, the theory and literature of the art historians and commentators fits the reality of both the experience of the individual artists and the facts as represented by the exhibition and other data set out in Appendix B. The conclusions drawn from these findings in turn indicate areas of necessary future research and investigation.



## Chapter 1

### **Background : The Irish/National Context**

"The 1980's were the time in Ireland when impermanence became absolute, when the attempt to construct a realm of symbols and images and values that would be unchanging came into ever sharper conflict with a shifting, divided and contradictory reality", (O'Toole, 1990, p. 7). Following the social transformations of the 1960's and 1970's the Ireland that had previously seemed to be a 'single, imaginable entity' found itself gradually reaching the position where the dominant assumptions concerning its identity became untenable so that by the 1980's the belief that Ireland was simply Gaelic, Catholic and Nationalist was finally shattered. The 1980's bore witness to the continuing war and strife in Northern Ireland while in the south the political and social debacles of the divorce and abortion referenda, together with rising unemployment, emigration and an ever-widening gap between the haves and have nots and between the urban and rural communities, clearly underlined increasingly evident social tensions and divisions.

All of this, coupled with the political uncertainties of the decade (five general elections, no one party gaining an overall parliamentary majority) was a reflection and "not a cause, of a wider and deeper cultural instability, of a situation in which it had become impossible to think of Ireland as a unifying concept"....and...."the sense of Ireland as an invention, a fantasy, as something up for grabs and needing to be refashioned every time a speech was made or a painting begun, became overwhelming". The fact that the real world was itself "so fantastic, so fictional", was "both the burden and the blessing of Irish culture in the 1980's". It was a burden because there was so little that could be relied on or taken for granted, but a blessing because of the new openness of Irish culture in the 1980's, and while this openness may have been accompanied by a perceived loss of identity "when the identity that is thus undermined is as rigid, narrow and illusory as the Irish one was then a loss of identity is not necessarily a bad thing", (O'Toole, *ibid* pp 10-11). An important part of this new openness, was the extent to which women began to take their place in the public realm. However, while many people may have felt a sense of loss in terms of their cultural heritage, it was compounded for women by the feeling that even what there may have been in the way of a tradition was not necessarily theirs.<sup>4</sup> For women therefore there was a double need to begin anew and, because of the international nature of the woman's movement, a double incentive to look outwards to a wider context than the immediate Irish one. Before looking at this 'wider context' in Chapter 2 below some facts about the

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<sup>4</sup> On this point see Barber, 1988 p. 35.





immediate Irish context, particularly from the womens point of view, must first be noted here.

It is generally accepted that the 1980s was a decade of "unparalleled productivity and diversity" within the Irish art world and it has also been observed that the high proportion of young women artists working in Ireland today ensures that an account of their work is central to any discussion of Irish art over the decade (Dunne 1987, p. 61 and 1980, p. 21). The question arises however as to whether strength in numbers is indeed a sign of equality. It is a fact, for example, that women were totally excluded from two of the largest group exhibitions held during the decade - *Making Sense* in the Project Arts Centre, Dublin in 1983 and *Directions Out* at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin in 1987 - both exhibitions incidentally wholly selected by men. It is also a fact, however, that women were dominant as prize winners of the Guinness Peat Aviation Awards throughout the 1980s (see Peter Murray, 1990) and that, at the turn of the decade into the 90's women have been numerically more than well represented in group shows such as, for example, the Douglas Hyde's *A New Tradition*, 1990 - 1991; the *Irish Contemporaries Exhibition* at the Royal Hibernian Academy, 1991; the *Strongholds* exhibition of *New Art from Ireland* at the Liverpool Tate 1991, and the *In A State* exhibition - a collaboration between the Project Arts Centre and Kilmainham Jail, 1991.<sup>5</sup>

According to Penelope Curtis (introduction, 1991 (s)) the selection of the *Strongholds* exhibition reflects both the renewed vitality of the Irish art world and the emergence of women artists as a particularly strong force within that world. However this success takes place within the context of a society which is still hide bound by a deeply entrenched conservatism. The observation that Irish women do not lay claim to the same tradition as Irish men is extremely pertinent - but why? Perhaps because, as Ailbhe Smyth points out, (1991 p. 45) "Irish woman" has traditionally been a name to be given away, "her flesh and blood, grief and pain, desire and pleasure having been immaterialised in image, metaphor and symbol". Again, as Smyth observes (ibid.), "women and men are not identically placed in relation to either the myths or lived experiences of Ireland or Irishness" and, accordingly, the question of what it means to be a woman and Irish effectively becomes two questions, namely those of nationality and of sex.<sup>6</sup> Women do not have a sense of a

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<sup>5</sup> In 1987 the Douglas Hyde Gallery, the National Gallery and the Municipal Gallery co-organised a special exhibition entitled *Irish Women Artists from the 18th Century to the Present Day*. While this was an important event in terms of giving a long denied platform to womens work it nonetheless falls into a different category in the context of this argument since it was a show of womens work only, selected on a completely different premise to that of the other shows mentioned. For further reference to this exhibition see Chapter 2 below.





'female artistic tradition' which they can either identify with or reject (Barber, 1988), indeed in a broad historical sense, as well as in the artistic sense, Irish women have largely been placed 'Outside History' (Boland, 1988 and 1990) with their very reality either subtly undermined through being romanticised or flatly denied through silence. According to Boland, "when a woman poet begins to write she very soon becomes conscious of the silences which have preceded her, which still surround her" and to this extent it is certainly fair to say that every square millimetre of cultural space occupied by Irish women has been very hard won and as Smyth points out, must also be constantly guarded against repossession. This argument is borne out by Fionna Barber's observation (1991, pp 35 and 37) that the Douglas Hyde, which occupies a key position within Irish culture "has consistently failed to treat womens art as worthy of serious, sustained attention throughout the last decade", and that "apart from a token acknowledgement in a handful of group and one person exhibitions" it has so far failed to take sufficient account of the work and activities of Irish women artists, a failure which prompts her to conclude that "the institutional basis of support for womens art is lacking".<sup>7</sup>

It is interesting to note that while the early part of the decade is perhaps identified with the so-called 'neo expressionism' of the Independent Artists (note the *Making Sense* exhibition 1983), it is also notable for having witnessed the emergence of a new generation of artists who are effectively the product of a whole new ethos in Irish art education (Fowler, 1987 p 71 and Dunne, 1990). Lending credence to the comments of Boland, Barber and Smyth however, Fitzgerald (1991, p. 38) points out that the Irish women artists who emerged from the art colleges in the late 1970s emerged into a cultural vacuum, the positive by-product of this being that it is in fact partly what prompted the founding of the first co-operative studio - The Visual Arts Centre - set up in Dublin in 1979 by Cecily Brennan, Eithne Jordan, Teresa McKenna and Gwen O'Dowd. The centre was set up in response to a specific need and the co-operative nature of the venture signalled a very different approach to art practice than that which had existed previously.

"The decision to put in place a co-operative studio structure and to tackle the very considerable practical, legal and financial problems inherent in such a scheme indicated not only a commitment to staying and working in Ireland but also displayed a confidence that change was possible", (Fitzgerald, *ibid*). The foundation of co-operative studios, according to Fitzgerald, is just one example of a fundamental change in the way a

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<sup>6</sup> For interest see also Eavan Boland., 1988 and 1990 and as to the relationship between nationalism and feminism in Irish art see Fowler, 1990, p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> For similar views in this regard but outside of the Irish context see also Rosen and Brawer p. 197 et seq.





generation of artists who started working in the 1980's organised themselves. "They rejected the exclusive 'club' mentality of the past in favour of a more inquiring and pluralist approach. Only by changing the context could the artist of the 1980's have been different from that which went before. It was women artists who first identified the need for change and more importantly, did something about it". She is all the more disappointed therefore that, in her view, the Douglas Hyde's *A New Tradition* at best misrepresents the experience of artists working in Ireland in the 1980's and, at worst, fails to represent them at all. She contends that it fails in this sense "because it manifestly ignores the conditions and practices" which formed the work of artists during the decade and that the project engaged in a retelling of myth at the cost of seriously questioning "the events and personalities which really characterised the decade," (also see Fitzgerald, 1992 (b)).

Such events, according to Fitzgerald, include for example the co-operative structures mentioned above but also the emergence of 'community' art which is of course linked with Arts Council policy, in itself another highly relevant factor in the revitalisation of the general arts scene in Ireland throughout the decade. Indeed, the Arts Council (An Chomhairle Ealaíon) which was established as early as 1951, appeared to enter a more energetic and progressive phase during the 1970s and into the 1980s and 1990s, than had hitherto been the case.<sup>8</sup> This partly resulted from the Council's response to the changing environment in Ireland and the growing audience for the arts which was a feature of the general opening up of Irish society throughout the 1970s in particular. While the Council had begun to take steps to help young Irish artists to devote themselves full-time to their activities as early as the 1960s (note for example the establishment of the MacAuley prize) such endeavours took a dramatic leap forward following publication of the so-called Richards Report in 1976 (Kennedy 1990-91, p 121) when the Council introduced a stream of innovative programmes including a programme of scholarships and awards in both music and the visual arts. The Council also became increasingly aware of the need to foster private arts sponsorship as best exemplified perhaps by the initiation of the Guinness Peat Aviation Awards for Emerging Artists in 1980 (an annual event to 1984 and biannual from 1986 to 1990), but also by the establishment of Cothu - the Irish Business Council for the Arts, and by the then government's enactment of Section 42 of the Finance Act., 1984, which offered tax benefits to corporations and individuals for sponsorship of the arts.

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<sup>8</sup> For a concise history of the aims and ambitions of the Arts Council see Dr. Brian P. Kennedy's article (1990-91) and for analysis of more recent issues concerning the Council see Paddy Woodworth's article (1991-2).





From the late 1970's the Council also began to make a more concerted effort to develop its regional policy giving greater support, for example, to touring exhibitions and new arts festivals and art centres including for example the Limerick Exhibition of Visual Art (EVA). The most dramatic measure formulated for direct assistance to the artist, however, was the creation of Aosdana, which was launched by Charles J. Haughey in March 1981, the first 89 members being named the following December. Aosdana (meaning - perhaps significantly - 'men of art' - the men whose skill gave them a status beyond that due to them at birth) was established "to honour those artists whose work had made an outstanding contribution to the arts in Ireland and to encourage and assist members in devoting their energies fully to their art", (quoted in Kennedy, p. 122). The practical assistance which Aosdana offers to its members comes in the form of the Cnuas or annuity, which now amounts to a sum of £8,000 and is intended to allow the individual artist to pursue his or her artistic endeavours without the necessity to engage in other work in order to make a livelihood.

The early 1990's have also witnessed significant developments in the arts world both linked with the Arts Council and otherwise. With its ambitious building programme the Council has seen to completion the National Sculpture Factory in Cork (1991), and the Buckingham Street Project for sculptors and artists in Dublin, (1992), while of course the other most significant developments in this context - although not by-products of the Arts Council - were the opening of the new Irish Museum of Modern Art at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin, in May 1991, and the appointment of Ireland's very first Minister for the Arts and Culture in January, 1993. Despite such developments however, and despite the "general air of innovation and excitement in the arts in Ireland" (Kennedy, p 124), many problems remain. The Arts Council itself continues a rather turbulent existence as evidenced by its ongoing battle for funding and for clarification of its role,<sup>9</sup> and there are also shortcomings apparent for example, even with Aosdana which has now reached its quota of 150 members (as of October 1992) and which quota is also arguably significantly underrepresentative of women artists, (see Chapter 3).

Much of the difficulties experienced by the Arts Council and consequently by its clients (namely artists, art centres and the like) spring from the lack of a comprehensive State plan for the arts, leading to continual crisis management without any real possibility of long term planning.<sup>10</sup> Thus, while the situation for Irish artists, including Irish women artists is

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<sup>9</sup> See Woodworth (1991-2).

<sup>10</sup> For further information on this point see the Artists Association of Ireland document 'A Crisis in the Arts', 1985; Woodworth 1991-92, and the Dublin Arts Report, February 1992. Also note the discussion of the Dublin Arts Report in *Circa* no. 62, Autumn 1992 at pp 48-49. Ireland is not alone





considerably healthier at the end of the 1980's and moving into the 1990's than at the beginning of the decade, there nonetheless remain continuing and serious problems within the arts in general, but there are also strong elements of conflict and dissatisfaction which are particular to the experience of women artists. This may not be a wholly negative thing since it contributes to generating a certain dynamism which has played and continues to play a definite role in infiltrating and changing the general consciousness. It is hopefully unlikely for example, that an exhibition like *Making Sense* with its "unprecedented display of the male penis" could take place now without provoking strong reaction on the representation of male sexuality and on the absence of women artists, (Fowler, 1990 p 56) and it is worth noting, in a parallel sense, the overwhelmingly angry reaction on the part of Irish women writers and commentators generally to the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991) which, for example, included only 3 women poets in the 41 contemporary listings and not a single female among its 21 editors. This reintroduces the point noted earlier about the need to look to the International Womens Movement in order to understand these developments because much of the change in consciousness which has taken place in the past decade results from the advances of the womens movement since the 1970's and the effect of such advances on the visual arts in Ireland, and this introduces the subject of the next chapter, namely feminist theory and art history.

## SUMMARY

Firstly, however, the main points of this chapter may be summarised as follows :-

1. The 1980s and indeed, the early 1990s, in Ireland have been a time of immense social and political instability and change, giving rise to a new openness in Irish society and culture and raising questions of national and personal identity, particularly for women who, while gaining a new and more prominent standing in the public realm, have thereby been forced to confront questions relating to their traditional exclusion from public life.<sup>11</sup>

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in this dilemma, however, similar problems certainly exist in Britain, see Simon Mundy's article 'Arts Comes Under the Hammer' in *The Observer* 8th November, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> The question of the artist's identity in a general sense within Irish society is also of some interest and arose for discussion in the recent RTE production 'Art on Film' broadcast on 6 January, 1993. All of the artists interviewed for the programme appeared very much concerned with the question of identity both in relation to their own work and also in terms of the specific problem of being taken seriously and treated as a professional working person within the Irish context. The hope was however expressed that the great increase in numbers of those now working in the visual arts in Ireland is bound to effect some change in the somewhat warped public perception of the artist's persona and lifestyle.



2. At the same time the 1980s have proven to be a decade of unparalleled change and diversity in the Irish art world with the emergence of a noticeably high proportion of young and talented women artists who were and are again faced with profound questions of identity and most especially with questions pertaining to the place of women - artists and otherwise - within the cultural tradition both past and future.
3. A number of factors have contributed to this new energy in the Irish art world, including for example, changes in art education, the emergence of co-operative studios, and various developments attributable to Arts Council policies.
4. Despite such positive developments, however, and despite the new energy in the Irish art world, many problems remain both in general but also specifically for women artists. In a general sense there is a lack of planning within the arts, the Arts Council itself encounters continuing and serious problems in defining its role and in securing financing to pursue its objectives, and bodies such as Aosdana, set up specifically to assist individual artists in pursuing their careers, are significantly under-representative of women artists. In addition, there is a clear perception that women in general encounter far greater difficulties than men in securing their 'cultural space' and that furthermore there is a failure on the part of key institutions to adequately support and exhibit the work of women artists.





## Chapter 2

### **Feminist Interventions in Art History**

Feminist inquiry into art history is generally perceived to have begun in 1971 with Linda Nochlin's article "Why have there been no great women artists?" (reprinted in Nochlin, 1989). In this seminal article, Nochlin states (p. 152) that "the question of womens equality - in art as in any other realm - devolves.....on the very nature of our institutional structures themselves and the view of reality which they impose on the human beings who are part of them". She points (p. 153) ironically to the fact that underlying the question about women artists we find what she calls the myth of the Great Artist and goes on to stress (p. 158) that "art is not a free autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual....but rather occurs in a social situation, is an integral element of social structure and is mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions, be they art academies, systems of patronage, mythologies of the divine creator and artist as he-man or social outcast". She concludes, (p. 176), that "while great achievement is rare and difficult at best, it is still rarer and more difficult if, while you work you must at the same time wrestle with inner demons of self-doubt and guilt and outer monsters of ridicule and patronising encouragement". To Nochlin, therefore, "what is important is that women face up to the reality of their history and of their present situation without making excuses or puffing mediocrity".

As Gouma-Peterson and Matthews point out, (p. 326), the potentially radical implications of Nochlin's initial analysis could not be fully explored until neglected women artists were identified and much of the research which initially followed her article shared the apparent objectives of proving that women had been as accomplished as men and of attempting to place them in the traditional historical framework. However, by emphasising the primary role of institutional factors in determining art history achievement Nochlin challenged the myth of the great artist but did not question the authority or validity of the male defined notions of greatness and artistic achievement and she was ultimately taken to task for this by Parker and Pollock in their book *Old Mistresses : Women, Art and Ideology*, published some 10 years later in 1981. Before discussing the arguments of Parker and Pollock, however, it is important to look firstly at issues surrounding the very notion of so-called female sensibility "because one of the most heated debates within the first decade of feminism was the possibility of a female sensibility and aesthetic expressed in contemporary art", (Gouma-Peterson and Matthews, p. 334).

The question was first formulated with respect to the sources and the nature of the female sensibility. Was it biologically determined, or was it purely a social construct? "A belief in



a female nature or feminine essence, which could be revealed by stripping away layers of patriarchal culture and conditioning, dominated American feminist investigations in the early 1970's. The desire to reclaim women's histories and to resituate women within the history of cultural production led to an important focus on female creativity", (Chadwick, p. 9). Artists such as Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro and writers such as Lucy Lippard, claimed to be able to recognise female or sexual body imagery in art by women. However, such "central core" imagery or "vaginal iconology" was as much a political as an essentialist or erotic statement, an attempt to challenge the notion of female inferiority and 'penis envy' as well as to establish and reclaim a sense of female power. From the beginning many feminists reacted strongly to the idea of womb-centred imagery as just another working of biological determinism and a restrictive attempt to redefine femaleness. The notion of an unchanging female "essence" remained to be tested against theories of representation which argue that the meaning of visual images is culturally and historically specific and unstable i.e. with no fixed 'truth' which can be uncovered (Chadwick, p. 323). Accordingly, many artists and art critics now see the female sensibility as a totally constructed one and art historians too have explored the specific nature of female creativity and have subsequently moved from a consideration of female sensibility to the study of gender construction. Regarding a specifically female imagery, Nochlin claimed that women artists are closer to those artists of their own period and outlook than to women artists in history. Later, after rejecting the essentialist theories about women's 'natural' directions in art, she recognised a socially constructed female sensibility and accepted that "the fact that a given artist happens to be a woman rather than a man counts for something", (See Gouma-Peterson and Matthews p. 336). Gouma-Peterson and Matthews refer to numerous studies in this area and point out (p. 337) that "they all conclude in their different ways that gender is a factor in how women create and interpret images, not for biological reasons, but because their experiences in the world are different from those of men".

Two basic positions therefore co-exist in feminist art criticism today each with a number of variations. The first position, sometimes termed essentialist, conceives of a woman as a fixed category determined through social and cultural institutions, and, less often, through the concept of an inherent and biological female nature. The second sees woman as a non-fixed category, constantly in process, examined through her representations and ideological constructions within a male system. Writers such as Lisa Tickner, Lucy Lippard and Griselda Pollock refuse however to see the two positions in dichotomous terms adopting an encompassing rather than a selective perspective.

As Pollock writes :







*To avoid the embrace of the feminine stereotype which homogenises womens work determined by natural gender, we must stress the heterogeneity of womens art work, the specificity of individual producers and products. Yet we have to recognise what women share - as a result of nurture not nature, i.e. the historically variable social systems which produce sexual differentiation. (quoted in Gouma-Peterson and Matthews p. 348).*

Feminist art historical methodologies, like those of feminist scholarship in all disciplines, have moreover become increasingly sophisticated, moving from a desire to integrate feminism into the traditional methods of the discipline to a deconstruction and a critique of the discipline itself. Parker and Pollock for instance conceive the task of feminism in art very differently from the simple legitimation of women within a male establishment or attempts to educate new attitudes. Their stated objective is to explore womens place in the history of art and to ask why these women artists have systematically been effaced from the history of art in the 20th century. This is clearly quite a different question to that posed by Nochlin some 10 years earlier and demonstrates a critical leap in feminist thinking. In their review of traditional art history Parker and Pollock identify two notable trends namely an inconsistent pattern of recognition of women artists and "the construction and constant reiteration of a fixed categorisation - a 'stereotype' - for all that women artists have done", (1981, p. 3).

This stereotyping of women they view as "a product of a patriarchal culture which constructs male dominance through the significance it attaches to sexual difference", (ibid, p. 8). It is this ideology of 'sexual difference' which is central to their overall thesis because, in their view, it provides the rationale for placing women in an altogether different sphere from that of men and also provides the opportunity to view women in terms of 'femininity' and a specific feminine sensibility. To Parker and Pollock the important questions concern women artists relationship to an ideology of sexual difference, (ibid, p. 80). They argue that the endless stereotype of a feminine sensibility and a feminine art is accounted for by the need to provide an opposite against which male art and the male artist find meaning and sustain their dominance. As they point out "we never speak of masculine art, or man artist, we simply speak of art and artist". However, in their view women artists are not outside culture or history but rather occupy and speak from a different position and place within it. It is therefore critical they contend (ibid, p. 170) that



we understand "the historical processes and practices that have determined the current situation of women artists for only by doing so can we confront the role of cultural production and representations in the system of sexual domination and power".

This essentially deconstructivist approach is continued in their subsequent book *Framing Feminism*, published in 1987, in the preface to which they state that "whereas the majority of political movements have employed art and artists for propaganda purposes, feminism has worked to transform art and artists themselves". In line with this they observe that women's sense of themselves as artists has changed and that behind this change in self-image lies a challenge to the denigration of women's art as second rate and innately inferior to that of men. Pollock (1987, p. 1) goes on to contend that "demanding that women be considered not only changes what is studied and what becomes relevant to investigate but it challenges the existing disciplines politically". She speaks of "feminist interventions" in the history of art and such interventions she argues, "demand recognition of gender - power relations making visible the mechanisms of male power, the social construction of sexual difference and the role of cultural representations in that construction", (ibid, p. 9).<sup>12</sup> She refers (ibid, p. 31) to Elizabeth Cowie who argues in her 1978 article 'Women as Sign' that the very term 'woman' and its meaning are not given in biology or in society but are produced across a range of inter-relating practices. 'Woman' she states, equals the significance attached in our culture to the fact of being non-male. Cowie herself refers back to the researches of Levi-Strauss concerning exchange (particularly the exchange of women) and communication where man is positioned as the exchanger and woman as a sign of the exchange as well as its object. Pollock (ibid, p. 32) extends the argument to point out that woman as sign signifies social order and that the category of woman is of profound importance to the order of a society. Thus, to her, (ibid, p. 55) feminist art history has a double project, namely the historical recovery of data about women producers of art, and a deconstruction of the discourses and practices of art history itself. She emphasises that historical recovery alone is not sufficient because we also have to recognise the historically variable social systems that produce sexual differentiation. This theme is in fact echoed by Nochlin in her more recent essay *Women, Art and Power*, (1989). In her introduction to this collection of essays Nochlin defiantly states that "feminist art history is there to make trouble" and that "it should not be mistaken for just another variant of, or supplement to, mainstream art history". What Nochlin is really interested in (ibid, p. 1) "are the operations of power on the level of ideology" and she argues (ibid, pp 2-3) "that the patriarchal discourse of power over women masks itself in the veil of the natural - indeed of the logical".

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<sup>12</sup> As to 'feminist interventions in art history' see also Chadwick pp 12-13 and Barber 1988, p. 35.





Contemporary art critics such as those mentioned above bring a feminist perspective to their use of new post-modern methodologies of post-structuralism, semiotics and psycho-analytical criticism, (Gouma-Peterson and Matthews, p. 349). This connects neatly with their deconstructivist approach since, as Chadwick points out, (p. 11) "all forms of post-structuralism assume that meaning is constituted within language and is not the guaranteed expression of the subject who speaks it, and that there is no biological set of emotional or psychological characteristics which are 'essentially' masculine or feminine". "Post-structuralist texts", she continues, "expose the role of language in deferring meaning and in constructing a subjectivity which is not fixed but is constantly negotiated through a whole range of forces - economic, social and political. They have undermined long cherished views of the writer or artist as a unique individual creating in the image of divine creation, and the work of art as reducible to a single 'true' meaning. And they have demonstrated that one way that patriarchal power is structured is through mens control over the power of seeing women"<sup>13</sup>

Craig Owens (p. 59) points to this "apparent crossing of the feminist critique of patriarchy and the post-modernist critique of representation" and attempts to introduce the issue of sexual difference into the modernism/post-modernism debate, observing however that there is a blind spot in discussions of post-modernism in general, namely its failure to address the issue of sexual difference, (p 61), and concluding that the existence of feminism with its insistence on difference in turn forces a recognition of the 'indifference' of post-modernism, (p. 77). Gouma-Peterson and Matthews point out, however, that there is a danger that women will once again be positioned in post-modernist discourse as the weaker, essentialist voice of 'nature' and 'experience' in opposition to culture, theory and intellect, (p 350). They contend nonetheless that, in spite of such dangers, the feminist/post-modernist discourse has proven quite rich and fruitful although they ironically point to another quite different danger namely, the unfortunate fact that feminist post-modern positioning can often take the form of authoritarianism itself, a point which is also mentioned by Eavan Boland in her essay on the dilemmas of the woman poet, (Boland, 1987).

The question then arises as to the effect or pertinence of such thinking in relation to the visual arts in Ireland and at the outset it must be noted that there has in fact been very little theorising or research conducted in Ireland along the lines of that discussed above. This lack, however, is not particular to this specific area of art history or inquiry since there is in

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<sup>13</sup> On this point also see Hirsch's article 'Validity in Interpretation' where he discusses the meaning of text and its interpretation by author and reader.





fact a general and recognised dearth of literature and information in relation to the visual arts in Ireland resulting in part in the necessity for the field research conducted in connection with this thesis. Such writing as has been done in this particular area has been carried out in the main by writers such as Fowler, Barber and to a lesser extent Dunne and their views are referred to and quoted throughout this text both in relation to the more theoretical aspects discussed in chapter 1 and in this chapter, and also in relation to the work of the specific artists discussed in chapter 3.

In the broader social context the effect of the womens movement was felt throughout Irish society in general during the 1970s and 1980s in that various legislative reforms recognising and protecting the rights of women were brought into effect during that period. Such legislative changes necessarily affect the particularities of daily social relations and the position of women in Irish society today is in many respects unrecognisable to that of two decades ago. That said, tradition and belief die hard and Irish society maintains an extremely conservative streak which periodically manifests itself to the detriment of women as evidenced clearly in the recent debacle of the 'X' case and in the highly controversial wording of the government's subsequent proposal to amend the Constitutional ban on abortion. In addition, many forms of sexual discrimination and sexism still exist in Irish society although they may possibly be more subtle and latent than heretofore. However, women, and young women in particular, have come to expect equality as their right and this undoubtedly contributes greatly to their self-confidence and determination as evidenced, for example, by the initiative and determination of the young women artists who set up the first group studios in Dublin. This is most certainly a key feature in the emergence of so many women onto the contemporary art scene in Ireland and it is only reasonable to expect that such women will approach critically the received images of their sex in both art history and consumer culture and that they will set out to counter and reconstruct those images, (Dunne, 1987 p. 52). This will inevitably involve them in dealing with such areas as individuality, male/female relationships and individual roles within social groups. We are, as Dunne points out, talking about constructing an alternative image of a world we have come to take for granted. The womens movement has changed the general perception of female experience, investing it with a validity and significance previously denied. Younger artists have thereby been enabled to reassess in their work the quality and nature of previously obscured levels of experience and perhaps to make a truer image of both women and the world they inhabit (Dunne, *ibid*, p. 62) and these are areas which are dealt with more specifically and in greater detail in relation to the six individual artists discussed in the next chapter.





At another level the concept of 'equality' has enabled women artists to work for changes in womens representation in art exhibitions and art institutions (see Fowler, 1990, p. 56). In 1986 an 'Irish Women Artists' seminar was held in London, later that year a *Women on Women* exhibition was held in the Fenderesky Gallery in Belfast, the following year an International Womens conference was held in Dublin and to coincide with the event the National Gallery, the Municipal Gallery and the Douglas Hyde Gallery co-organised an exhibition, *Irish Women Artists*, which included women artists from the 18th century to the contemporary. As Fowler (ibid) comments, "the exhibition suffered from a lack of overall co-ordination and was neither a survey nor an issue based event but to some extent it provoked the creation of the women artists action group in Dublin (W.A.A.G.), and a group in Belfast who organised an exhibition entitled *Identities* which was specifically feminist based".<sup>14</sup>

According to Fowler (ibid, p. 57) many people apparently thought that these events were unnecessary, since, it was argued, women artists had always been at the forefront of Irish art anyway. Fowler, however, counters that a preliminary investigation of the facts suggests that while a few individual women artists may have been involved at a crucial stage of Irish art history, the general picture is very different. In her view, therefore, one of the functions of womens exhibitions was quite simply to highlight the representation of women artists and this is an argument which is also quite forcibly advanced by Fionna Barber, (1987). The whole issue of 'women only' exhibitions is quite a complex one, however, and while they at one time may have served a certain purpose in providing visibility for women artists their continued validity is open to question, a matter which is further developed in relation to the views of the various artists as discussed in chapter 3 below.

This in itself, as Fowler (ibid, p 57) comments is but a small part of the much more complex set of issues surrounding gender and she further counsels in similar vein to Pollock, that "just as the womens movement can no longer be seen as a unified lobby, so, in the visual arts, womens issues cannot be summarised within a single range of aims and practices". This is not, she reassures, to suggest that there is no distinct consciousness but only to say that "a consciousness of womens issues is manifested at different times, in different mediums (sic) and often with different objectives".

This is a critical point in the context of this thesis because, while using feminist analysis and art history to understand the position of women as artists, I do not intend to impose a

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<sup>14</sup> Also see Barber, 1987. Note, however, that W.A.A.G. is now defunct.





feminist stance on artists simply because they happen to be women. In looking at Irish women artists I have no wish to conceive of them in terms of a unified movement, which would in any event be an entirely false thesis, and nor indeed do I intend to imply a cohesion where none in fact exists. Rather I am concerned, as in the preceding chapters to:-

- (a) Look at the structure out of which contemporary Irish women artists have emerged; and, as in the next chapter to :
- (b) Look at the work and the work experience of selected women artists within that context.

Of course some Irish women artists are consciously exploring feminist issues in their work but equally well many more are simply working as artists without addressing specifically feminist or even simply womens issues in a direct way. However, the fact that so many women are currently working to such effect inevitably puts women and womens issues on the agenda with a prominence and effectiveness that has not heretofore been the case. Similarly, because these artists are now being taken seriously there is somewhat less danger of their work being stereotyped or undermined because of a particular choice of subject matter or medium and this must inevitably allow for a greater freedom of expression not only for women but possibly equally so for men.

## **SUMMARY**

In summary of this chapter the following key points emerge :-

1. Feminist inquiry into art history which essentially began in the early 1970s initially undertook the task of identifying neglected women artists and locating them within the traditional framework where their existence had previously been denied. It subsequently moved on via the controversial issue of 'female sensibility' and creativity to focus instead on concepts of 'sexual difference' and 'gender construction' concentrating ultimately on a deconstruction of the traditions of art history itself. Two key factors emerge as having hindered the progress of women artists - namely inconsistent recognition and stereotypical categorisation of their work and thus it is emphasised that recognition of womens common experience as women must be balanced by recognition of the heterogeneity of their actual art work.



2. In relation to the particular Irish situation, while the womens movement has had an undoubted impact in broad social and political terms, there has been little or no writing or research conducted in Ireland at the level of the international literature discussed. Evidence of the impact of the womens movement in the art world is apparent in the very emergence of so many committed and successful young women artists and in their preparedness to create innovative working environments and to deal with issues relating to their own personal experiences in their work. Women artists have also become more involved in structural issues concerning their representation in art exhibitions and institutions which in turn raises the thorny issue of the merits and demerits of 'women only' exhibitions. It is this issue which provides the link between the ideas discussed in terms of feminist art history and the situation as perceived in relation to Ireland, raising as it does the twin and seemingly universal problems of (a) 'recognition' of womens art work and (b) the risk of its being subjected to a stereotypical categorisation. This factor, coupled with the lack of other research data and information, points to the importance of exploring both the work and the working experience of key contemporary Irish women artists in order to determine both the nature of their work and its subject matter and their immediate experience of working as women artists in Ireland in order to ascertain the fit between the theories discussed in the literature and the reality as borne out by the experience of the artists themselves.





### Chapter 3

#### **Selected Artists, Six Key Figures : Cecily Brennan, Dorothy Cross, Mary Fitzgerald, Alice Maher, Gwen O'Dowd and Kathy Prendergast**

A review of the work and experience of any more than a selection of artists would be impossible within the scope of this study and so the procedure adopted has been to select 6 artists who, each in their own way, and taken together, are representative of the remarkable success of women artists in Ireland over the past decade and who consequently - better than any critic or observer - are ideally placed to assess and to analyse the specific working experience of women artists during that period. Because of the period under review the particular artists selected are all essentially of the same generation and have each established their careers over the past decade. To a large extent therefore they share a similar experience in terms of the period when they each attended college and the actual timeframe and environment in which they have been working. This selection process inevitably excludes from the study not only other artists of the same generation but also artists who established their reputations prior to the 1980s and of course any younger artists who are more recently embarked on their careers. However, the selection results in large part from the writer's immediate experience both of viewing exhibitions and of reading contemporary reviews and literature over the past decade and the selection made is based on a belief that the 6 artists so chosen may fairly be counted amongst the very best of artists working in Ireland or elsewhere today. Furthermore all of the artists in question have both worked and exhibited abroad and so have been building international as well as national reputations.

In addition, the work of the artists selected covers an eclectic range of style and media, including painting, sculpture, drawing, installation and mixed media and thus the concerns of the individual artists in relation to their work are considerably varied. The objective, however, is not to do an in-depth analysis of the work of each artist (see bibliography for catalogue essays and monographs on the individual artists and also refer to the artist biographies in Appendix A) but primarily to inquire into their individual experiences of working as women artists in Ireland throughout the 1980s et seq and to consider this generally in the context of the type of work which they do and, more particularly, in relation to the theories and arguments discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 above.



THE BOARD

The chapter is accordingly divided into 2 parts : part 1 documents data in the form of a mini profile on each of the artists, the purpose being to provide a contextual background setting out something of the artist's personal history and discussing the nature of each artist's work and working concerns. The section is intended to be descriptive only and does not purport to offer an in-depth or comparative analysis of the work of the artists discussed. Part 2 sets out and discusses the most significant points which arise on foot of the individual artist interviews, each of the 6 artists having been interviewed individually over a period of approximately one hour by way of a general questionnaire supplemented as necessary in the individual case with more specific questions relating to the artist's particular work and experience. Each taped interview was in turn transcribed and typed up in full but the chosen procedure in relation to the thesis text has been to extract and to detail the most significant information from the interviews in general rather than to include the interview text in full, the purpose being to set out the information compiled with clarity and brevity rather than in unnecessary detail. A sample of the general interview questionnaire is however included for reference in Appendix C attached.

## **Part 1 : Artist Profiles**

### **Cecily Brennan (b. 1955, N.C.A.D. 1974-1978)**

Cecily Brennan is invariably described as a "landscape" painter but it would perhaps be more accurate to say that she is a painter who uses the landscape as a source of information or reference, a starting point in a sense, to develop her own ideas and to achieve her own specific and personal objectives. Brennan does not actually like to be "stereotyped" as a landscape artist, (Brennan 1991 (a)) but brings instead her own extremely personal response to the landscape as source.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to traditional landscape painting Brennan aims, not to control, but to involve the viewer, particularly in the large scale works such as the Wicklow and Icelandic paintings.

Brennan had her first one person show in the Project Arts Centre, Dublin, in 1982 and since then has shown at regular intervals in one person shows in Dublin and in many national and international group shows. On the surface her output over the last 12 years

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<sup>15</sup> See Fowler, 1987 p. 77 where she refers to Brennan's "personal" vision of the Wicklow mountains and the Rhododendron Gardens at Howth. Also see Brennan, 1984 p. 24, where in conversation with John Meany she herself says that her work has been an "extremely personal response to the landscape".





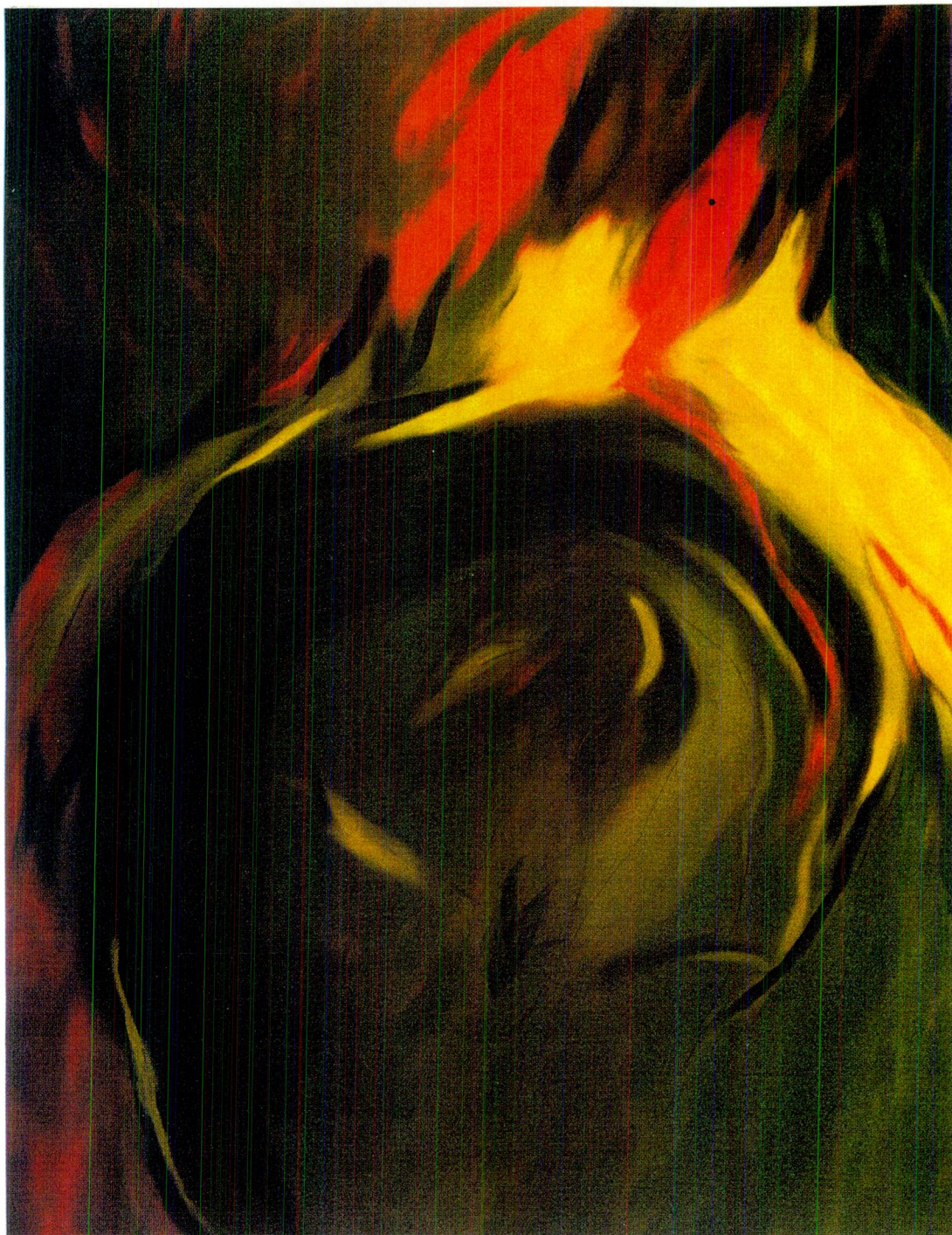


Plate 1

Cecily Brennan  
Oil on Canvas

*Garden Clearing*  
200x188 cms.

1985





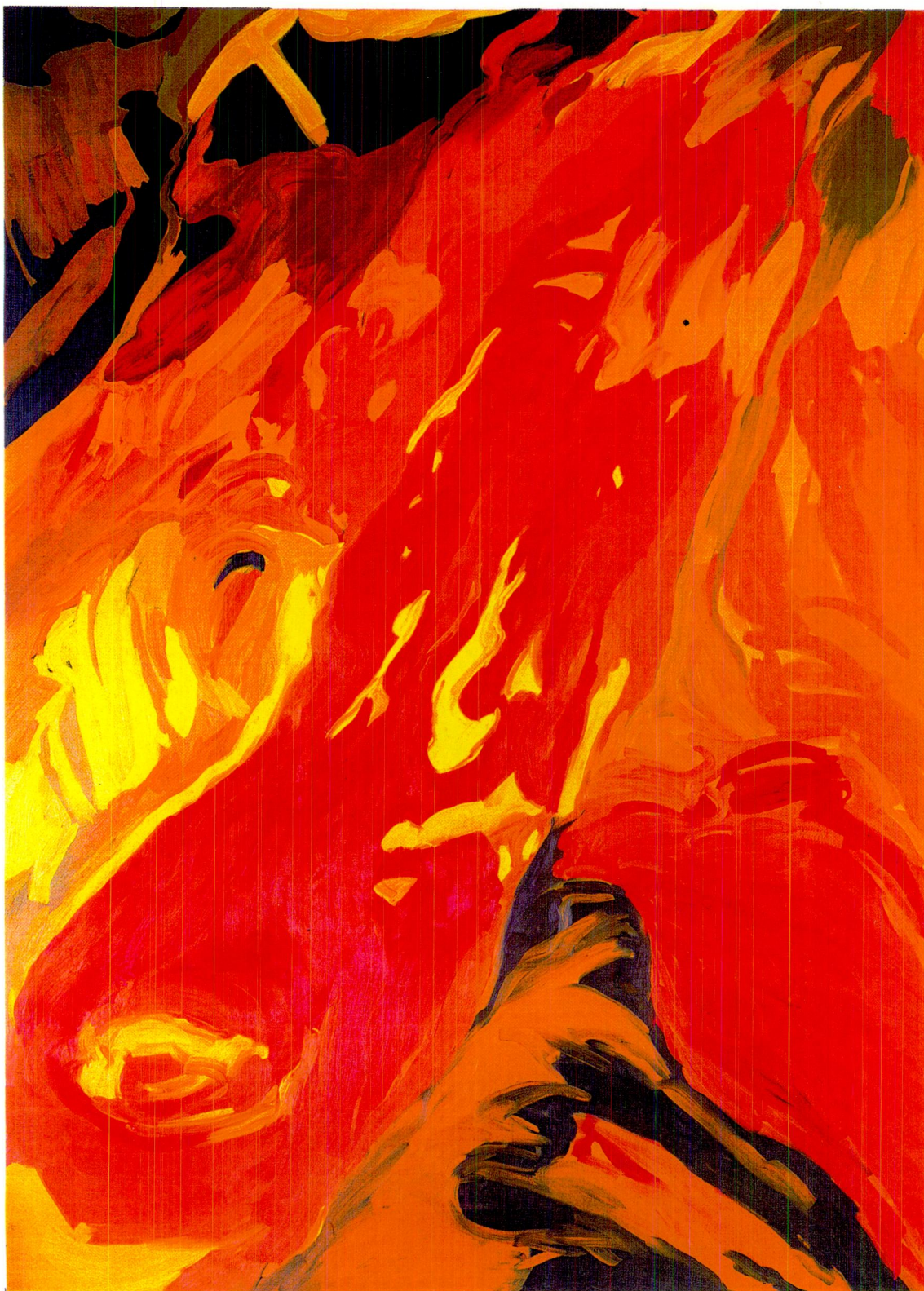


Plate 2.

Cecily Brennan  
Oil on Canvas

*Lava Flow*  
11'x8'

1990





can be neatly sub-divided : the early work from North Co. Dublin, then Wicklow, then the Rhododendron Garden at Howth and most recently Iceland. "But Brennan has never been concerned to record a particular place and particular places have not caught her unawares. Instead landscapes have answered Brennan's own reasons and indeed, the neat sub-divisions gloss over periods of searching. It was Brennan's own subject matter which led to the finding of an image and its formulation in painting", (Penelope Curtis, 1991, (c.b.)).

Writers and commentators are unanimous in noting the energy, vitality and courage evidenced in Brennan's work. In reviewing her first one person show of paintings and drawings at the Project, Frances Ruane remarked that she was particularly struck by Cecily Brennan's bravery. "The big drawings are a product, not just of technical skill as a draughtsman, but of real gutsy courage. It is impossible to look at these paintings and drawings and not be aware of the struggle it took to produce them, as well as the sheer physical energy.....Cecily's excitement transfers to the pictures and to us", (Ruane, 1982). Similarly, Aidan Dunne (1987, p. 67) observes that the detail in the Wicklow work is described with "urgent gestural strokes in images that are brimming with energy" and again, but in relation to the Icelandic work, Brian Fallon (November, 1991) comments that the "sheer energy and confidence" of the paintings speaks loud and clear, while Vera Ryan (1991) points to the sense of power and energy in Brennan's mark making.

Again, in marked contrast to the formal landscape tradition, a sense of place has never in fact been a concern for Brennan and while, for example, the Wicklow pieces may have conveyed the reality of their source they were already more than that. According to Penelope Curtis (ibid), "Brennan's landscapes have looked for the symbolic and echoes of her own state of mind and body" and a constant feature of her work has been "a fascination with the tension between order and disorder, chaos and control", and in a sense this ultimately comes to a head in the Icelandic work.

In all of the work prior to this - the North Dublin Nursery Gardens, the Wicklow works and even the Rhododendron Gardens (Plate 1) - Brennan confronts man's struggle to impose order and his own mark on the land and to battle with the unruly, unpredictable force of nature. The choice of these landscapes may have been more instinctive than conscious but, as Curtis (ibid) points out, Iceland was chosen differently. Here Brennan is extending her concern with ideas of disorder and chaos and while she likens the chaos of the Icelandic landscape to the controlled chaos of life (Brennan, ibid) she underlines the fact that the paintings are not in fact about Iceland itself but about ideas of physical force and change - the Icelandic landscape - chosen for its very particular characteristics - is the vehicle through which she explores and carries out her objectives. It is in these paintings







Plate 3

Cecily Brennan

*Waterfall (Plunge Pool)*  
Oil on Canvas

11'x6'

1991





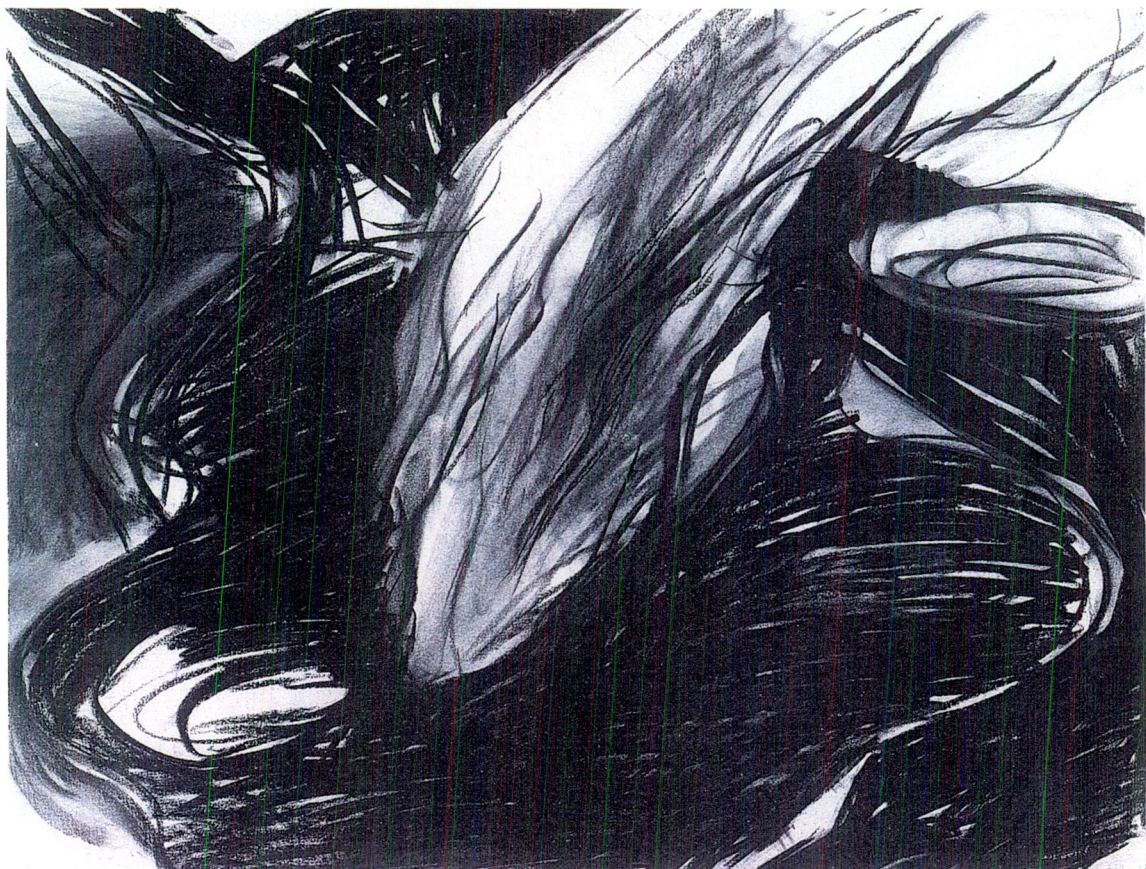


Plate 4

Cecily Brennan      *Steaming Crater*  
Charcoal on Paper      22"x30"

1988





that Brennan's empathy with her chosen landscape becomes most evident since she interprets the peculiarities of the Icelandic landscape as human, both in a general sense but also, and more particularly, in relation to her own body. As Curtis (ibid) points out "the artist is in the work, rather than outside it" and "this is made apparent in its format and substantial material quality which allow the spectator a viewpoint and a way in". The momentous size of the paintings, as Brennan herself says was not simply scale for scale's sake, but rather reflects her continuing interest in the human relationship between the spectator and the painting. Indeed, as Luke Gibbons points out in connection with the Icelandic paintings, the usual "insulating props of traditional landscape painting are removed and the viewer is plunged into a turbulent pictorial field without any safety barriers", (Gibbons, 1991), (see plates 2 and 3).

Brennan's empathy with the landscape is accentuated through her own experience of pregnancy and birth and she draws powerful parallels between the chaotic, overwhelming nature of the landscape and the similarly overpowering nature of her own physical experience. To her, pregnancy and childbirth were very much like the Icelandic experience (Brennan, ibid) and while she felt it important to say this because of its importance to the work she was nonetheless nervous of possible stereotyping as a "woman artist" since the project was not essentially a feminist project but came from a very direct personal experience. Similarly she is nervous about being locked exclusively into an internalism as she points out that the paintings are about an internal and an external world (Brennan, 1991 (b)), "the boundaries that are questioned are those between the private and the public realm, between the maternal body and the external world", (Gibbons, ibid).

Just as the focus of the work has evolved, so too has Brennan honed and developed her abundant technical skills. In her earlier work Brennan did a lot more drawing and while the work was always characteristically energetic, paint was not essentially predominant. While Brennan continues to draw most effectively - as evidenced by the extremely powerful charcoal studies executed as preliminaries to the Icelandic paintings (see plate 4) - her obvious delight in the physicality and colour of painting has now arguably come to the fore. In the Rhododendron Gardens, which were her first works in oil, Brennan pursued her technique of colour staining over sensitive pencilled sketching, and in these paintings her sense of colour and painterliness is evident, if somewhat muted, combining with the rather closed nature of the images to create the sense of a private, secretive world. The experience of scale and space in the Wicklow work and the exploration of paint and colour in the Rhododendron paintings combine with Brennan's graphic and drawing skills in the Icelandic project to create the most vital, dynamic and exciting of her work to date. Here the power of her sense of colour and the joy, energy and sheer



physical effort required to make these monumental paintings bring out and invite, if not demand, the viewers response and participation. The Icelandic works are open, fresh and "breathtakingly spontaneous" and "the meaning is carried in the paint itself", (Curtis, *ibid*).

Penelope Curtis draws attention to this new independence in Brennan's painting and attributes it in part to her growing experience of handling oil paint and colour but also to the birth of her son who has essentially broadened her identity and who "refers her to the future rather than to the past". Symbolically and visually therefore Brennan has moved from her efforts to tidy and contain the Rhododendron Gardens, to a landscape which refuses to be tidied - Iceland is chaotic, untamed and unpredictable and Brennan dares successfully to paint in the same manner, (Curtis, *ibid*).

**Dorothy Cross** (b. 1956, Crawford Municipal School of Art, Cork 1973-74; Leicester, England 1974-1977; San Francisco Art Institute USA 1980-1982)

Dorothy Cross is frequently described as "one of Ireland's leading young sculptors". Trained largely outside of Ireland she has nonetheless been living and working here almost continuously since the early 1980's. The experience of her study and work abroad clearly contributes to her freshness of content and style and to her ongoing consideration of post-modernist attitudes towards materials and content to an extent which is remarkable for an Irish artist, (see Fowler, 1988, p. 3).

On her return to live in Ireland she first exhibited in a group show in the Hendriks Gallery, Dublin in 1984, followed by a one person show again in the Hendriks in 1985. On the strength of these shows Joan Fowler selected her for inclusion in the Douglas Hyde's *Irish Women Artists Show* in 1987 which in turn led to her *Ebb* exhibition in the Douglas Hyde Gallery in 1988. As she says herself (Cross, 1992) "Everything leads to something else" and she has essentially been working and exhibiting continuously both in Ireland and abroad ever since,<sup>16</sup> having also had a piece - *Kitchen Table*, 1990 (plate 5) purchased for the permanent collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin.

Having completed her Masters degree in print making Cross brings the characteristic print makers cleanness and precision of line to bear in her sculpture and her works are

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<sup>16</sup> See biography in Appendix A for full details.









Plate 5

Dorothy Cross

*Kitchen Table*

1990

Wood, enamel bowl, steel, glass, fossilised sharks teeth

90x162xx60 cms.



technically perfect - beautifully and expertly designed and executed. Conceptually the work is original, humorous and unnerving. In his foreword to the *Ebb* catalogue, Patrick Murphy writes of the strength of the 'personal' response to Cross's work while also pointing out how rare it is that "such apparently cool, obviously intelligent work ends up being so powerfully evocative and disturbing". Again commenting on the *Ebb* exhibition, Joan Fowler (1988, p. 21) observes that it is "a mental rather than a physical space".... "where the viewer is taken on a journey that is analogous to states of mind", and this might equally be said of Cross's work in general for she is concerned to delve into and explore aspects of the psyche and particularly of sexuality which in Ireland, at any rate, are more commonly dealt with in a more subterranean and less public fashion, if indeed at all.

In her earlier work, Cross dealt with more evidently public or political issues, being concerned "with depicting her idea of Ireland, real and mythical, the physical place and Mother Ireland" (Dunne, 1984 (b), pp 34-35).<sup>17</sup> In a sense this work was a formulation of her reactions to Ireland after a period in America and it was therefore inevitable that she would comment on the role of the Church within the Irish context pointing up its psychological power while also drawing attention to its patriarchal, essentially 'phallic' nature, (see Fowler, *ibid* at p. 59 and Arts News, *The Sunday Tribune*, 29th of September 1985). Cross was disappointed in the response to this work as she felt that it failed to grapple with the issues which the work presented and so she decided to make her work less subtle so that people would have to confront something in it and would then in turn have to respond to it themselves in some definite way (Cross, 1992).

Elements of the psyche and undercurrents of psychological power play and relationships, sexual and otherwise, while present in the earlier work have become more dominant as the work has evolved. Accordingly Fowler (*ibid*, p. 3) sees the *Ebb* show (1988) not "as a radical departure in Dorothy Cross's work" but as a "drawing together and exploration of themes" that had involved Cross in the preceding 5 years. Fowler correctly points to the importance of Jungian theory in relation to Cross's work but also establishes the link which Cross made in *Ebb*, albeit unintentionally, (Cross, 1992), with the writings of feminists such as Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, whose common concern is their analyses of sex and sexuality as representation (Fowler *ibid*, p. 5). As Fowler points out "their programmes are about the social, the ways in which the representations of men and women are related to the construction of society and ultimately it is this which becomes the 'meaning' of Dorothy Cross's work also".

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<sup>17</sup> Such political concerns have continued in her work and are most evident in her site specific projects such as her installation in the *In a State* exhibition in Kilmainham Jail, Dublin, 1991 and her *Urinal* piece in London for Edge '92'.







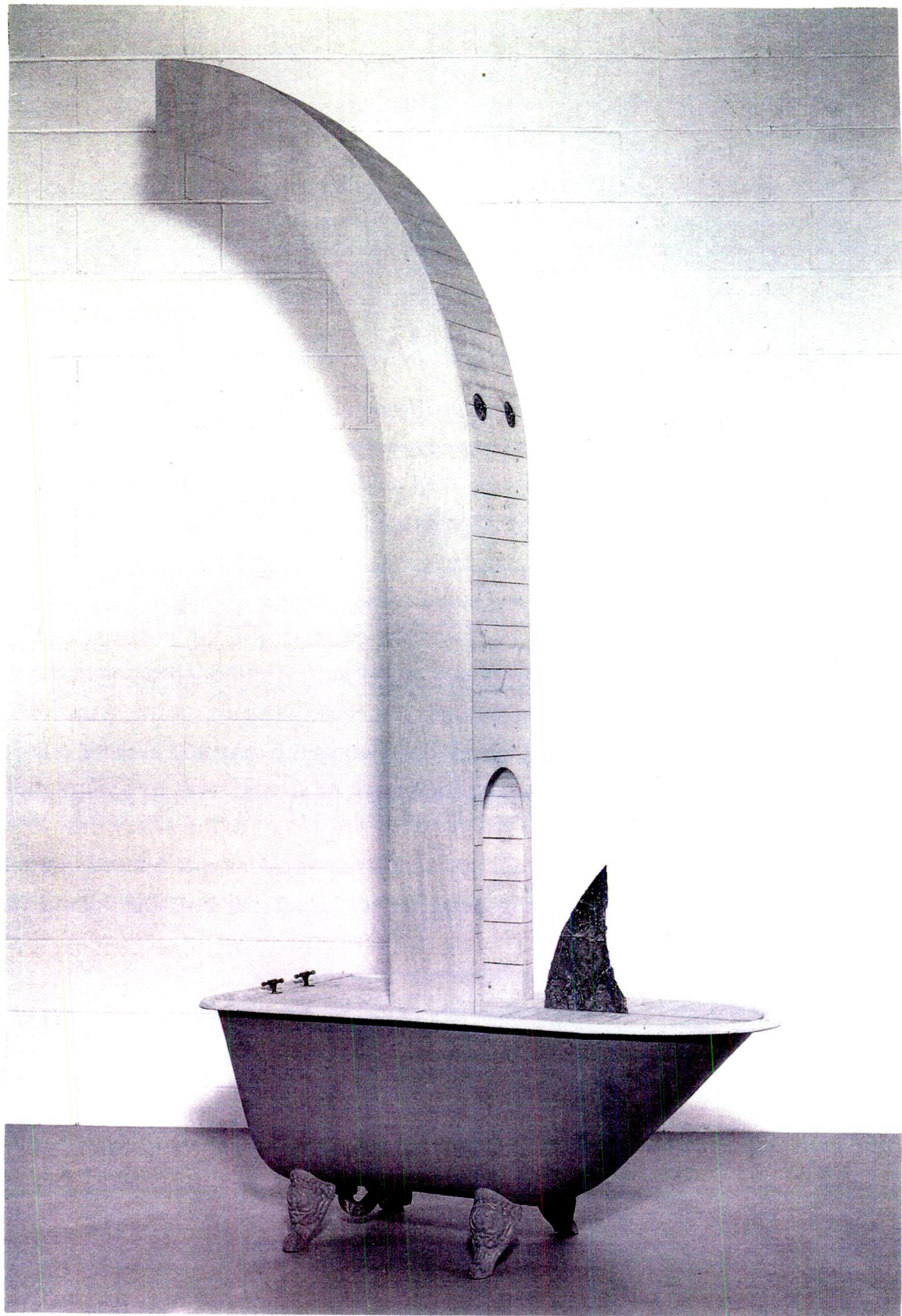


Plate 6

Dorothy Cross *Bath*  
Cast iron bath, painted wood, bronze

1987







Plate 7

Dorothy Cross

*Shark Lady in a Balldress*

1988

Cast and woven bronze

110x70x70 cms.





A recurring theme of fish, in particular sharks, begins to emerge, the identity of figures is ambiguous and enigmatic, their 'personalities' are not fixed. "Cross's exploration of male and female figures is a form of questioning which challenges something that is very fundamental to society, namely the representation of men and women and sexuality", (Fowler *ibid*, p. 18 and see plates 6 and 7). Cross recognises a 'male' and a 'female' sensibility but contends that they both function in each sex and that it is essentially - ideally - the balance of each sensibility in all of us and the achievement of that balance which her work is all about (Cross, 1992).

In *Powerhouse*, Cross continues her inquiry into sexuality but this time locates it within "the traditional male arena of the industrial environment" (Murphy, 1991). As Murphy points out, however, while Cross is informed by late feminist and post-Freudian discourse she does not create an art that is "theoretically pedagogical" but "adopts a surrealistic strategy to create an environment full of metaphor and enigma which emphasises the experiential and confronts the viewer with the complexity of their own sexual identity". The investigation on which she embarks is "a study of power dynamics in relationships between men and women" (Feldman, p. 7) and the conceptual basis of the installation yet again addresses the male and female aspects in each of us and the way that this duality manifests itself.

Essentially, Cross's work is about personal space and identity, about the interplay between public and private space and the overlaps between male and female qualities. Cross seeks a balance and at times provides one but all the time underlines its precarious nature intimating that essentially we swim alone in our own passage through space.

**Mary Fitzgerald** (b. 1956; N.C.A.D. 1973-77; Tama University of Fine Art Tokyo 1980-1981)

Mary Fitzgerald is generally recognised as one of the foremost artists in Ireland and has steadily exhibited since her first one person show in the Oliver Dowling Gallery in 1982. She continues to show with the Oliver Dowling and amongst her many achievements she was a GPA award winner in 1983, was included as one of the very few Irish women artists ever in Rosc 1988 and her most recent Dublin exhibition, a nine part site specific installation, entitled *Orientation* (June/July 1992) was purchased in full by the Irish Museum of Modern Art as part of its permanent collection, (see plate no. 8) She has also



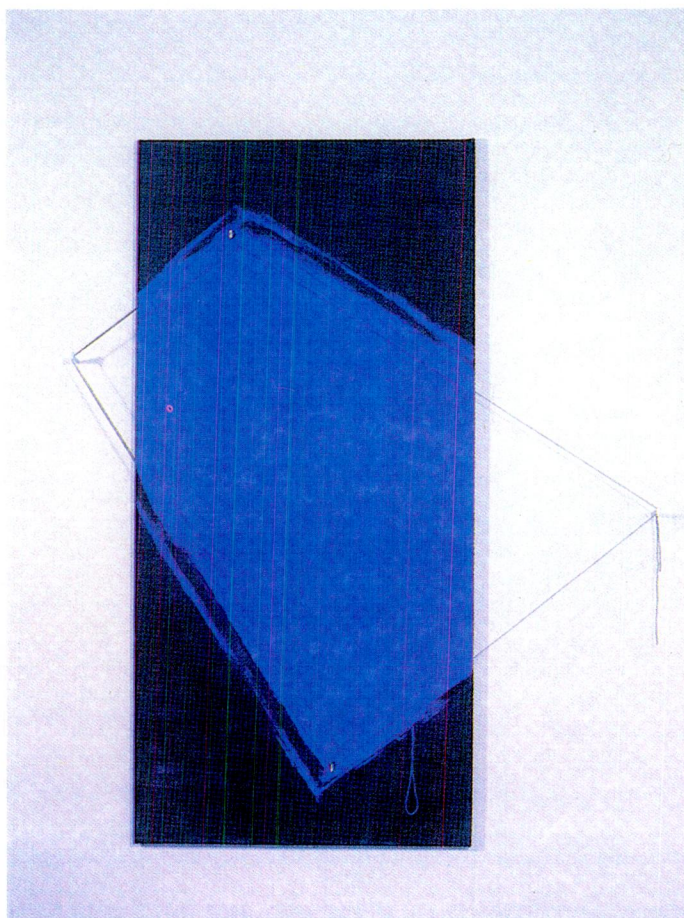


Plate 8

Mary Fitzgerald

*Orientation 1*

1992

Pastel, oil, plate glass, bolts and metal spikes on canvas

110x53 cms.





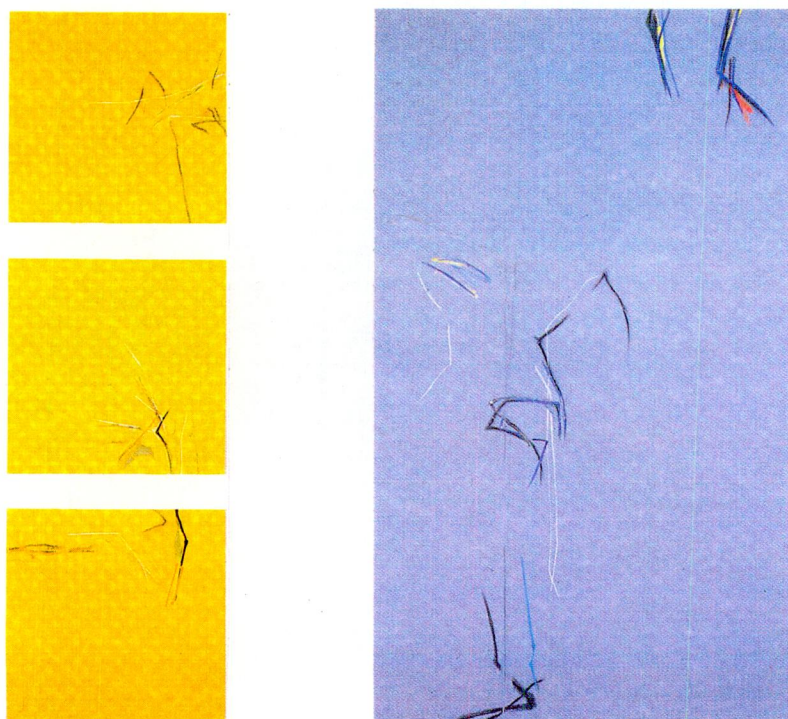


Plate 9 Mary Fitzgerald *The Drawing Room 2, Yellow to Cerulean Blue* 230x70 cms. and  
*The Drawing Room 3, Ceruleam Blue* 230x150 cms. 1986  
Acrylic, graphite and pastel on canvas



recently successfully negotiated a contract with a New York Gallery - a significant and a somewhat exceptional achievement for an Irish and Irish based artist.

Having completed her studies at the National College of Art and Design, Fitzgerald then spent 2 years on a post-graduate scholarship in Japan and her experience there continues to have a strong influence on her work which is abstract and ascetic in nature. Fitzgerald is essentially a painter but came to painting through a sculptural background and designs her paintings in the form of installations, frequently employing elements of sculpture and three dimensional forms. She is interested in the nature of language in general, in particular in the language of space and structure, and not surprisingly, architecture has been a continuing influence on her work. The installation format is central to her working method in that each piece is designed in a spatial relationship both to the other pieces and to the environment which it inhabits and in this way the work has a physical relationship to the audience who in turn share the same space.

Her experience in Japan has inevitably perhaps led to a somewhat mistaken perception of an 'oriental' influence in her work and she stresses in response to this that her interest is rather more in "alternative approaches to the use of space" - something which she found in Japan - and also in "the concept of time and the pace at which a painting gives up its meaning", (Fitzgerald 1991, p. 18). Abstraction is for her "the language of potential" which rather than presenting "a set of fixed conclusions" allows instead for "the greatest set of possibilities". "Abstraction" she says "allows one to consider the specifics of one's experience in the context of a universal language" and "allows spatial and temporal freedom, an arena for working through experience and an opportunity to build up many levels of meaning which reveal themselves to the viewer over time", (Fitzgerald, *ibid*). Her work essentially springs from a personal experience but in the working process is transposed into the general allowing the viewer in turn to make his or her own personal connections. Certain of her concerns are, for example, specifically rooted in female experience - the cyclical aspect, both structurally and thematically in *The Drawingroom* (1986 and *Rosc* 1988) (plate no. 9) and the treatment of vulnerability and the choice of certain forms and materials which have domestic parallels in *Counter/act*, 1991, (plate no. 10). These works also have more general connotations. *The Drawingroom*, for example, is a personal attempt at coming to terms with death (see Fitzgerald *ibid*, p. 21) - the paintings form an unbroken circle around the exhibition space, the colour tones move from light to dark and through to light again as they progress from one painting to the next. The effect is of continuity, of passage of time and of movement in space.





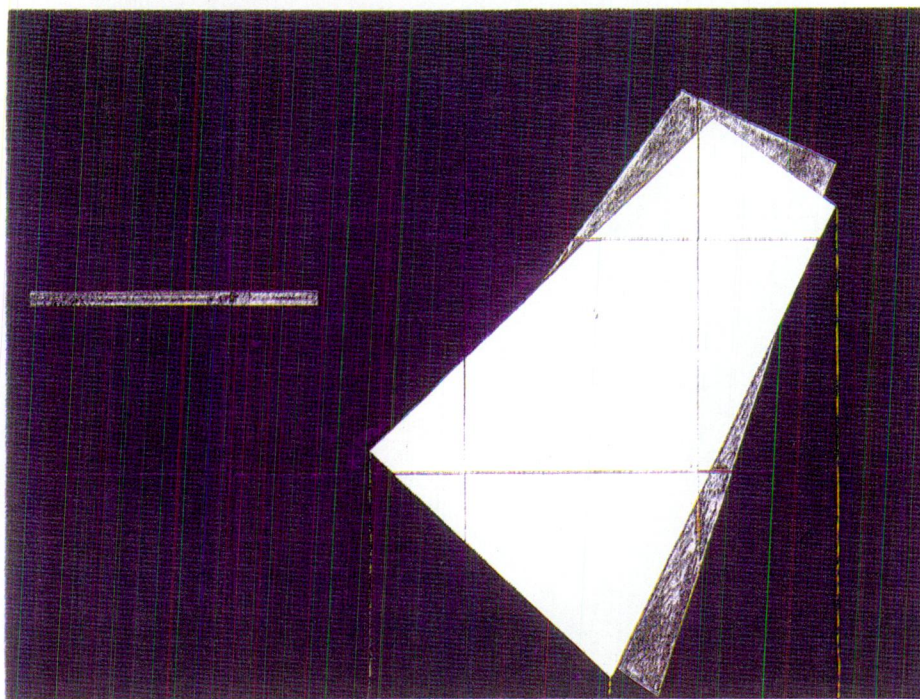


Plate 10

Mary Fitzgerald

*Counter/act 1*

1991

Plaster, wire, string, charcoal and acrylic on 12 canvases

194x259 cms.



Fitzgerald, who is on the editorial board of *Circa* art magazine is articulate and outspoken in her views and is critical of attempts to evaluate work in general in terms of art historical categories which she considers "a backward and constraining exercise", (ibid, p. 21), pointing out that the artist's commitment is for the long-term and that any coincidence between an artist's style or method of working and any given art historical 'fashion', while it may provide a welcoming and positive environment for reception of the work, is not in any way central to the work's evolution or production (Fitzgerald, 1992). To her "history can either be seen as the ordering of the past or as documenting the evolution of the present" and while, as an artist, she is naturally aware of and informed by the critical climate, she does not accept it as the only way of evaluating work, (Fitzgerald 1991, p. 21).

This independence of mind clearly carries over into her work where her materials and colours are chosen in order to carry specific meaning and where colour is employed for its psychological impact rather than for its associations with nature. The effect throughout is visually spare and every aspect of her work is carefully and intelligently resolved.

**Alice Maher** (b. 1956; Crawford Municipal College of Art 1981-85; University of Ulster, Belfast 1985-86; San Francisco Art Institute, 1987)

Alice Maher's enormous rate of success since she emerged onto the Irish art scene in the mid-1980s is quite remarkable. She has had four one person shows : *Transfiguration*, at the On the Wall Gallery Belfast, 1987; *Tryst*, at the Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick, 1989; a touring exhibition entitled *The Thicket*, in Cork, Dublin, Derry and Limerick, 1990/91; and *Keep*, an installation at the Old Museum Arts Centre, Belfast 1992 and she is, furthermore, scheduled to have a major solo show in the Douglas Hyde Gallery in 1994. She has also been included in countless group shows, has exhibited outside of Ireland in San Francisco, Bonn and Liverpool, has been the recipient of numerous scholarships and bursaries and was a GPA award winner in 1990 - all of this in a period of under 10 years.

The dynamism and energy indicated by such achievement is also characteristic of her work which is normally executed in the form of vigorous mixed media drawings, in various modes of installations, or in a combination of both media. Maher is an artist whose own private and fertile imagination feeds into her use of sexual, religious, mythical and art historical imagery and iconography. This, combined with her dramatic and energetic working methods, produces an art which is original, vital and challenging.







Plate 11

Alice Maher

*Drawing from 'The Thicket'*

1990

Mixed media on paper

1400mm.x1120mm.





Plate 12

Alice Maher

*Drawings from 'the Thicket'*

1990

Mixed media on paper 1400mm.x1200mm.





She is interested in exploring and representing images of the female psyche and body and is conscious of the fact that for a woman to use her own body and image as subject is in fact a fairly recent and radical break with tradition which can provoke a reactionary response not unknown to result in the marginalisation of such work as 'womens art' (Maher, 1992)<sup>18</sup>. Maher "both disrupts the conventional representations of women and transforms her images with an energising exuberance .....her sources do not emerge in any singular way but are combined together and are split through one another .....the drawing or painting surface is approached from different angles and with different perspectives and each figure within the work is interfered with by another overlapping figure or by a change in perspective...." (Fowler 1990 (a), p. 60). Her images contain elements of the exotic and her "inspiration is drawn from who she is and where she is in the world - both the physical world she lives in and the private world within her that carries the past and all its magical gained knowledge", (McNamara, 1990).

Her earlier work was predominantly in the medium of drawing and the work in her 1988 exhibition *Transfiguration* consisted mostly of "charcoal and coloured chalks on unframed paper pinned directly to the wall" creating "a total environment, exploring the female psyche and condition in general and her own in particular", (Pakenham 1988, p. 39). As Pakenham observes "Maher adopts a technique which allows the imagery to evolve and develop from the mark making.....sometimes she changes her mind, a line tapers off and is semi-obliterated, yet still remains.....like the ghost of an image". Pakenham speaks of her "assured draughtsmanship and technique, of a willingness to take risks and of a fertile imagination at work." "There is" he says, "a baroque exuberance and drama" in her world of "flying, falling figures intermingling in a gravity-free world of energy and explosive creation".

Aidan Dunne (1991), writing about *The Thicket* series 1990-91 also observes that Maher is a "natural draughtswoman" referring to the "terrific physicality" of her drawing and to his perception that she doesn't so much draw her figures as "hacks them out of the paper, the surface of which is invariably scraped, scarred and gouged.....the eventual image being but one of many layers drawn, erased and redrawn". Also writing about *The Thicket* series Fiona Barber (1991) contends that "through the very physical process of scraping into layers of collage and the erasure of earlier drawings these works on paper seek to reconstitute a moment" - in the girl's discovery of the world - which has been "seemingly buried beneath the weight of adult womanhood", (see plates nos. 11 and 12).

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<sup>18</sup> On this point of avoiding stereotypes see Eimear MacNamara, 1990 and note also reviews by Jordan (1990) and Dunne (1991) who both link her work to the "Adventures of Alice in Wonderland". Note Maher's own comments on this particular point in Maher, 1992.





Plate 13

Alice Maher

*Tryst (detail)*

1989

Mixed media and cotton cloth

350x150 cms., 360x150 cms.





Maher combines her images of childhood, woman and sexuality with images derived from both religious and art historical iconography and in doing so she deconstructs and reconstructs the extensive iconography of Irish Catholicism. Her work, as Fowler (1990 (b), p. 127) notes is therefore "not only about the power of representation, but it challenges the ways in which representations are produced" and she has succeeded in doing so not only in her imagery but also in the methodology which she employs. In 1988, for example, she used four old bedsheets as a ground for four paintings which had as their subjects the biblical stories of the Coronation, Visitation, Annunciation and Birth. While she made "reference to the Renaissance tradition of representing these sacred subjects she made each into a physical event and sexual fantasy incorporating the stains on the previously used sheets" and she "also introduced multi-cultural and personal images which disrupt the Catholic origins", (Fowler *ibid*, pp 126-7).

In her exhibition *Tryst* (Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick 1989) Maher extended this use of installation by constructing three painted fabric tents of varying size and colour suspended by wires from the ceiling and thus able to rotate slightly like fairground carousels, the painted forms on the tent being visible from both inside and out, (plate no. 13). Through this approach Maher succeeds in allowing the viewer to experience the physicality and wonder of her world in a far more immediate sense introducing an added element of magical delight to the encounter. Penelope Curtis (1991, (s)) sees this use of cotton sheets as being significant in that it allowed Maher "to evolve her drawing style" and also provided her with "a history of meaning". Thus she considers that, for example, Maher's drawing in *The Thicket* series has become "progressively less anecdotal" and also "allows the viewer to enter into a more real space". In *The Thicket* series memory is still central but the memories evoked are general and the work both suggests and derives from the senses. The senses mean discovery and here the girl's discovery of the world have become the key focus for Maher who strives "to validate and reclaim the boldness of adolescence," (Curtis, *ibid*).

In her most recent work Maher has moved almost exclusively into installation mode as for example in *Cell* - a site specific work set quite literally in a cell in Kilmainham Jail, Dublin 1991 - and in *Keep* an installation made of discarded human hair at the Old Museum Arts Centre, Belfast 1992. According to Fionna Barber (1992) however, the antecedents of *Keep* are visible in *Tryst* although in this instance "it is the material qualities of the object itself, rather than a decorated surface, which act as a catalyst for meaning". In *Keep* Maher continues her exploration of the self through retrieval of experiences and materials



often dismissed as marginal and thus she continues what Barber calls her "strategy of subversion", challenging and questioning the locus of power within a patriarchal culture.

**Gwen O'Dowd** (b. 1957 N.C.A.D. 1976-80)

Since she left art college in 1980 Gwen O'Dowd has been one of the most consistent and individual of the younger Irish artists. Exhibiting regularly in several solo and all of the major group exhibitions "her work has been a strong, sober fibre running through Irish art of the 1980's" (Julian Campbell p. 3).

In a sense O'Dowd does not fall readily into any category. Her work is largely intuitive and abstract but with a figurative reference. She increasingly uses landscape as source but more in order to evoke an internal response to the particular experience of a given place than to create any representational image. She is not purely an abstract or a landscape painter but employs elements of both traditions thereby defying ready made categorisation.<sup>19</sup> Texture and technique are also of critical importance to her and particularly in its earlier phases her work clearly carries the diverse influences of both Tapies and the Abstract Expressionists in its concerns and style.<sup>20</sup> While certain elements have been consistently honed and developed throughout her working career the progression and development of the work is perhaps best and most simply illustrated in chronological fashion.

O'Dowd had her first one person show in the Project Arts Centre, Dublin in 1984. Here she presented mixed media paintings in a primarily urban context. Her work then and continuously has related to her immediate surroundings and at that time her concern was with "the peculiar, frenzied eclecticism of any modern city, densely layered and recklessly haphazard in shape and form" (Dunne, 1984 (a), p. 18). The painting from the very outset established a characteristically textured and multi-layered surface, a technique which at that particular time was employed to give a sense of "the processes of ageing, erosion and wilful destruction to which the fabric of the city centre is subject". (Dunne, *ibid*). On the strength of this first show O'Dowd was identified as "a painter of strong intuition and obvious ability" and it is at this early stage that the influence of Tapies is most profound both in a formal technical way in terms of the expressive physical qualities of paint and

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<sup>19</sup> See Julian Campbell, p. 3 "Gwen does not regard herself as an 'abstract' artist in that her paintings always 'come from something'.....but neither does she regard herself as a landscape painter, at least in the traditional sense".

<sup>20</sup> See Hutchinson, 1987, Dunne 1990-91, p. 238, and O'Dowd, 1992.







materials but also in a sense of the paintings "as metaphors of universal truths or meditations on the inter-relation of matter and the human spirit", (Hutchinson, 1987).

O'Dowd's next series of paintings brought her more closely in contact with the landscape as source in that they were inspired by the experience of living and working in the Welsh mountains. The paintings are, as Hutchinson says, "the fruit of a struggle to conjoin the very essence of the Welsh mountains and her ambivalent reactions to them". These paintings mark a progression from a more pure abstraction to "a growing desire for specificity" (Hutchinson, *ibid*) although O'Dowd is insistent (O'Dowd, 1992) that a source, or reference, was always present in the work albeit, not necessarily identified by the critics or viewers. Her sense of place is however "predominantly an interiorized conception, related more to self-exploration than to direct representation"....."emotions are her main motivation and images stem from them" but landscape is crucial to this strategy "acting, if nothing else, as a break on her subjectivity," (Hutchinson, *ibid*).

In her next solo show at the Butler Gallery, Kilkenny in 1989 O'Dowd showed a large number of pieces drawn from her time in Wales and a selection of her then more recent work which extended her exploration beyond landscape into seascape. As D.C. Rose (1989, p. 40) remarks "O'Dowd continues here to convey much of what she feels by medium using mixed media on board, oil on paper and encaustic on canvas. Julian Campbell in his essay accompanying the exhibition draws attention to the three dimensional qualities of O'Dowd's work and her concern with texture and the tactile. Her roughening and scoring of the painting surface suggests her own physical involvement with the work, giving it a sense of immediacy, urgency and passion.

As did Dunne and Hutchinson, Campbell (p. 3) draws attention to the intuitive nature of O'Dowd's work, her paintings he points out "are not direct or spontaneous evocations of nature" but are more concerned with the "essence of a place rather than with specific objects". He also notes (p. 7) that "her work has become increasingly sensuous and romantic, her sea paintings showing a new fluidity and expressiveness, a richness of colour and a sense of freedom".

In his reviews of both the Butler Gallery show and O'Dowd's first show at the Kerlin, Dublin (1990) Dunne (1990-91 p. 238, 1991-92 p. 238) draws attention to the importance of the viewer in relation to O'Dowd's work. The spectator who is confronted with her amorphous play of natural forces and currents has no choice he says (1990-91) "but to plunge headlong into the maelstrom" and the intensity of her compositions derives, according to Dunne (1991-92) from her constant concern to plunge the viewer "right into





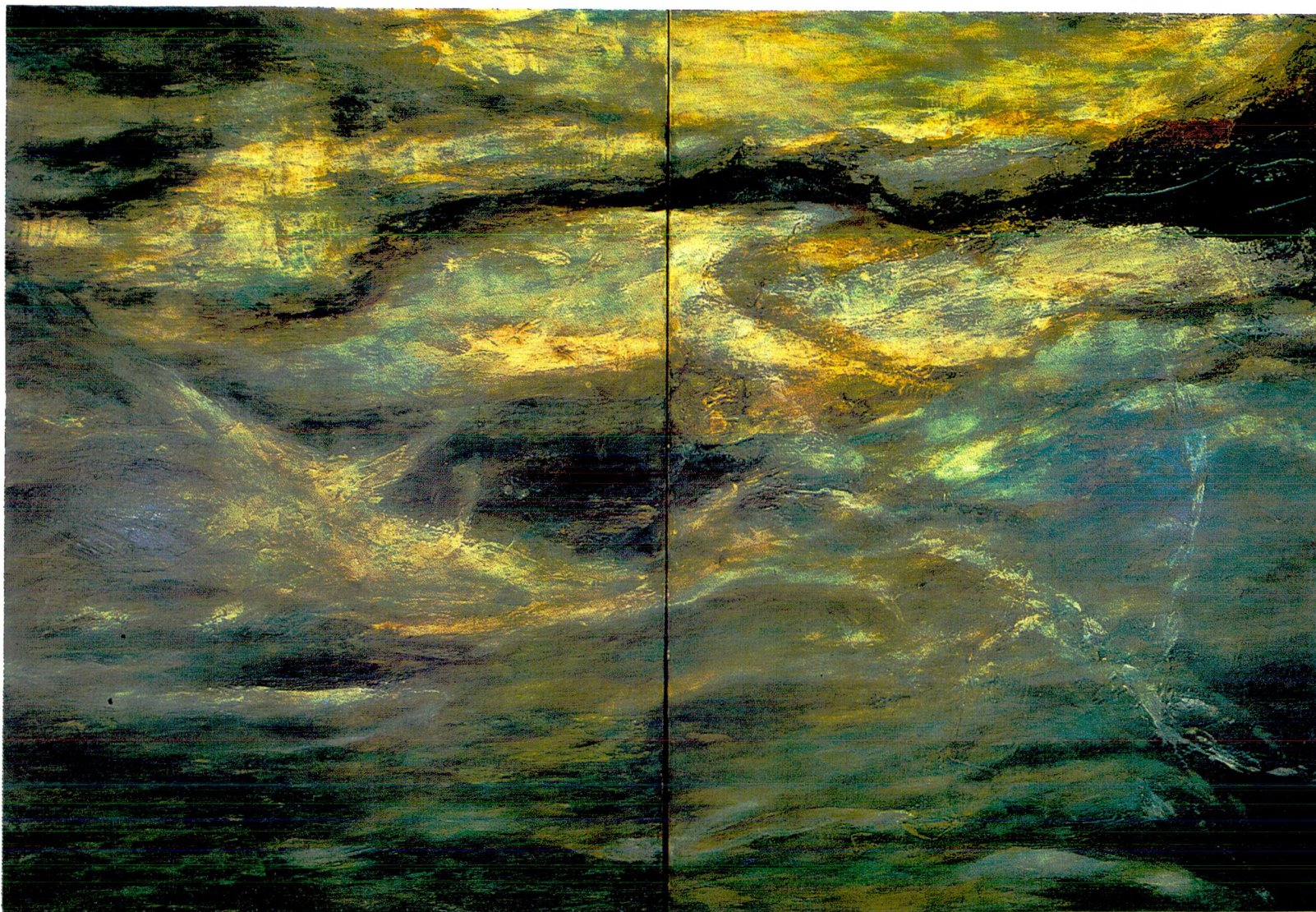


Plate 14      Gwen O'Dowd      *Underneath the Waves*      1988  
Encaustic on canvas      192 cms. x 280 cms.







Plate 15

Gwen O'Dowd  
Oil on canvas

*On Inis Mor*  
54"x42", 137x107 cms.

1992



the thick of the landscape". By so powerfully evoking her own response to the immediate experience of the landscape O'Dowd obliges the viewer in turn to confront his or her own response to the experience evoked and to in effect "close the circle" (Dunne 1990-91) and while this is of interest in the more general sense of the emotions and responses involved it is also of particular interest when O'Dowd is exploring environmental issues as for example in the painting *Underneath the Waves* commissioned for the exhibition 'Clean Irish Seas' jointly organised by Greenpeace and the Visual Arts Foundation, (plate no. 14).

O'Dowd's political concerns also underlie her most recent exhibition at the Kerlin, Dublin 1992, which was prompted by the abortion and Maastricht debates and by the infamous 'X' case at the beginning of the year, (O'Dowd, 1992). These stimuli prompted her to deal with issues and images concerning the idea of living on an island, being surrounded literally and metaphorically by water and small-mindedness, living, in a sense, on the edge between land and sea. The literal origin of the work may give way to the creative process resulting in an image which does not necessarily yield its source but the origin of the work remains important being conveyed perhaps, as in the case of these paintings, in a sense of the aggressive and oppressive powers of nature (O'Dowd, 1992). The immediate visual source of these paintings is the area around the Dingle peninsula and the elemental powers of nature are harnessed to O'Dowd's intentions resulting in visual images, which though as richly worked as ever, embody a greater sense of air and movement than was previously evident in her work, (plate no. 15).

In this sense, although obvious links exist between the various phases of O'Dowd's work, the progression and evolution of the work is self-evident. O'Dowd, as Campbell (p 14) remarks, is a painter with "courage aplenty" whose painting displays her remarkable commitment both to openness and to continuity.

**Kathy Prendergast** (b. 1958; N.C.A.D. 1976-80 and 1982-83; Royal College of Art, London 1983-86)

Kathy Prendergast "one of the most unorthodox Irish artists of the past decade" (Hutchinson, 1990, p. 41) was still a student at the National College of Art and Design when she first gained a reputation as an artist and indeed she was already a two time Guinness Peat Aviation award winner (1981 and 1983) by the time she had actually graduated from the N.C.A.D.







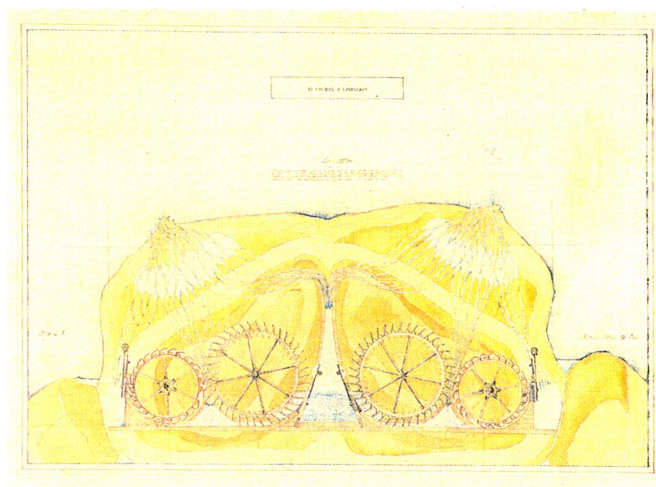
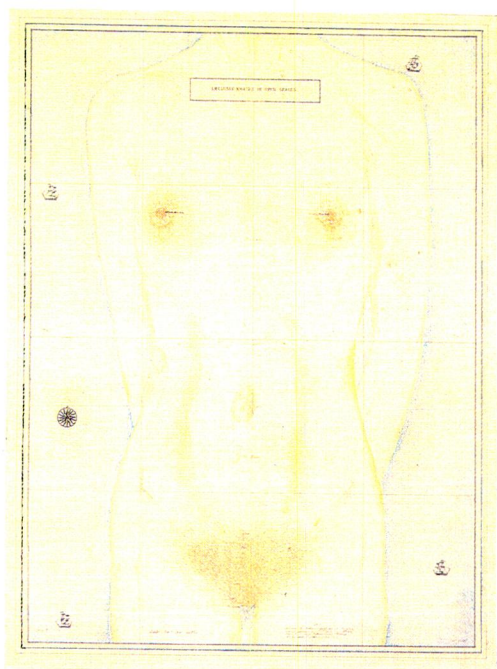


Plate 16

Kathy Prendergast *Enclosed worlds in Open Spaces*  
 Watercolour and ink on paper 76x56 cms., and  
*To Control a Landscape - Irrigation*  
 Watercolour and ink on paper 36x60 cms.

1983

1983



From the beginning her work has been concerned with an investigation of the essence of life, an attempt to make sense of our existence. Because of this her work is not immediate, it is quite difficult to understand and often leaves the viewer questioning. Her work is always devoid of unnecessary detail, her use of material varies as much as does the scale, and each piece, although it might stand in isolation, has a powerful presence that makes it difficult for the viewer to forget.

The best known of Prendergast's work is perhaps the early work connected with her Diploma (1980) and Degree (1983) shows and the more recent work exhibited in a large one person show at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin in 1990. Prendergast completed her Diploma and Degree at N.C.A.D. and then went on to take her Masters Degree at the Royal College of Art in London where she has now lived for a period of almost 10 years. Part of the significance of the Douglas Hyde show therefore is that it demonstrates the progression in her work which resulted from this change in location and personal environment i.e. the difference to her of living at home - in Dublin, in Ireland - with its particular social and cultural environment and by contrast living in an environment where she does not essentially belong and which therefore provides more various stimuli of an altogether different kind, (Prendergast, 1992).

Although there is a break in imagery between the earlier and more recent work, Prendergast's quest to explore a highly personal and internal space which leads her in turn to address more universal, human concerns lies at the core of all of her work and, in a sense, provides its unifying feature. For Prendergast art is about questioning "yourself and your own position in the world or the world in general" and she contends that "all of the best art reflects or reveals the inner self in some way", (Prendergast, *ibid*). This philosophy has been reflected in her work from the outset although occasionally her imagery has been misinterpreted as having quite different intentions. For example, to her, both *Sea Bed* (1980) and what are known as the *Body Map* drawings (1983) (plate no. 16), were intended as a personal diary and as an exploration of identity in a general as opposed to a gender based sense, whereas in some quarters - and perhaps generally - they were interpreted as a more specifically 'feminist' statement.<sup>21</sup> This, she observes, makes it problematic to deal with the female body since work of this nature - however it may be intended by the artist - is invariably immediately categorised in terms of gender.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Fowler 1987, p. 75 and note also the inclusion of the *Body Map* drawings in the Sexuality and Gender category of the Douglas Hyde's Irish Art of the Eighties series.

<sup>22</sup> Prendergast, 1992 and also note, for example, her rejection in this interview of the sexual connotation attributed to *Stack* by Aidan Dunne (Dunne, 1990, *Circa*).





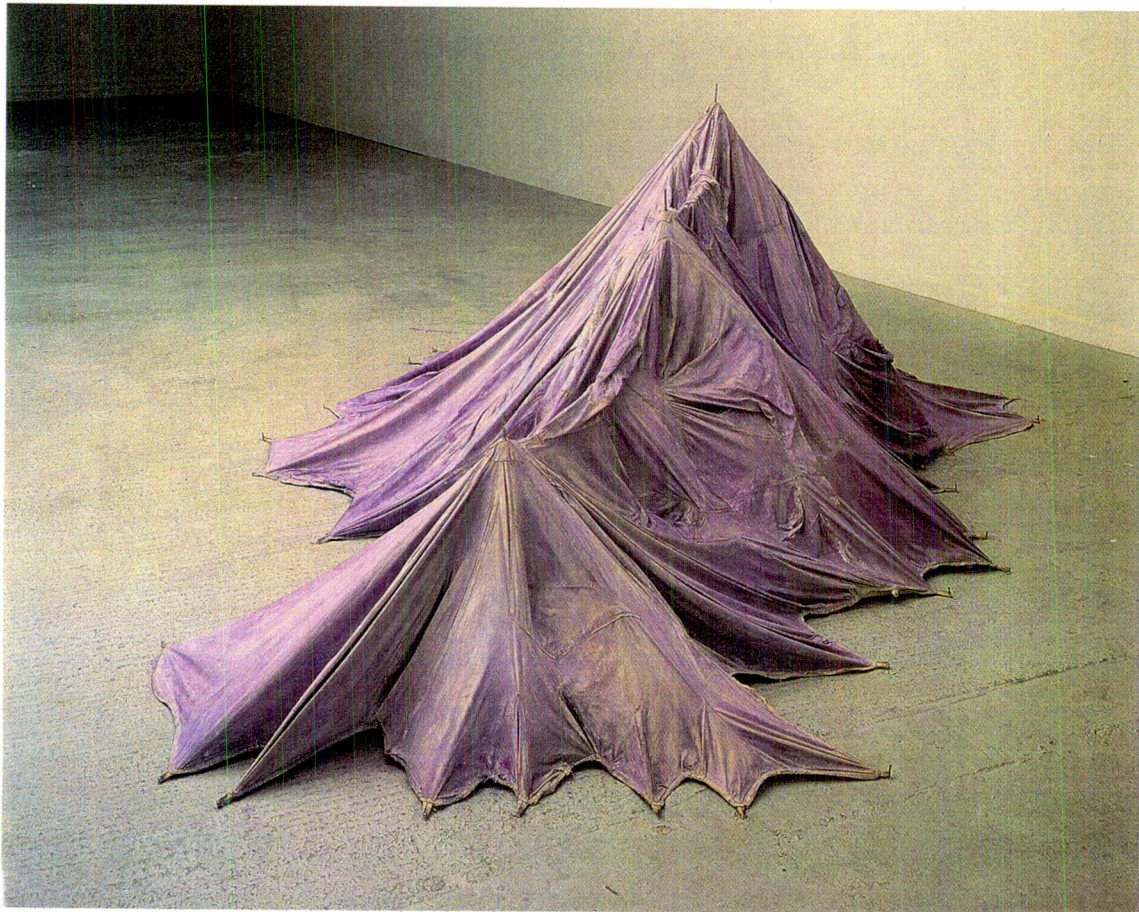


Plate 17      Kathy Prendergast      *As Small as a World and as Large as Alone* 1989  
Mixed media      137x382x256 cms.





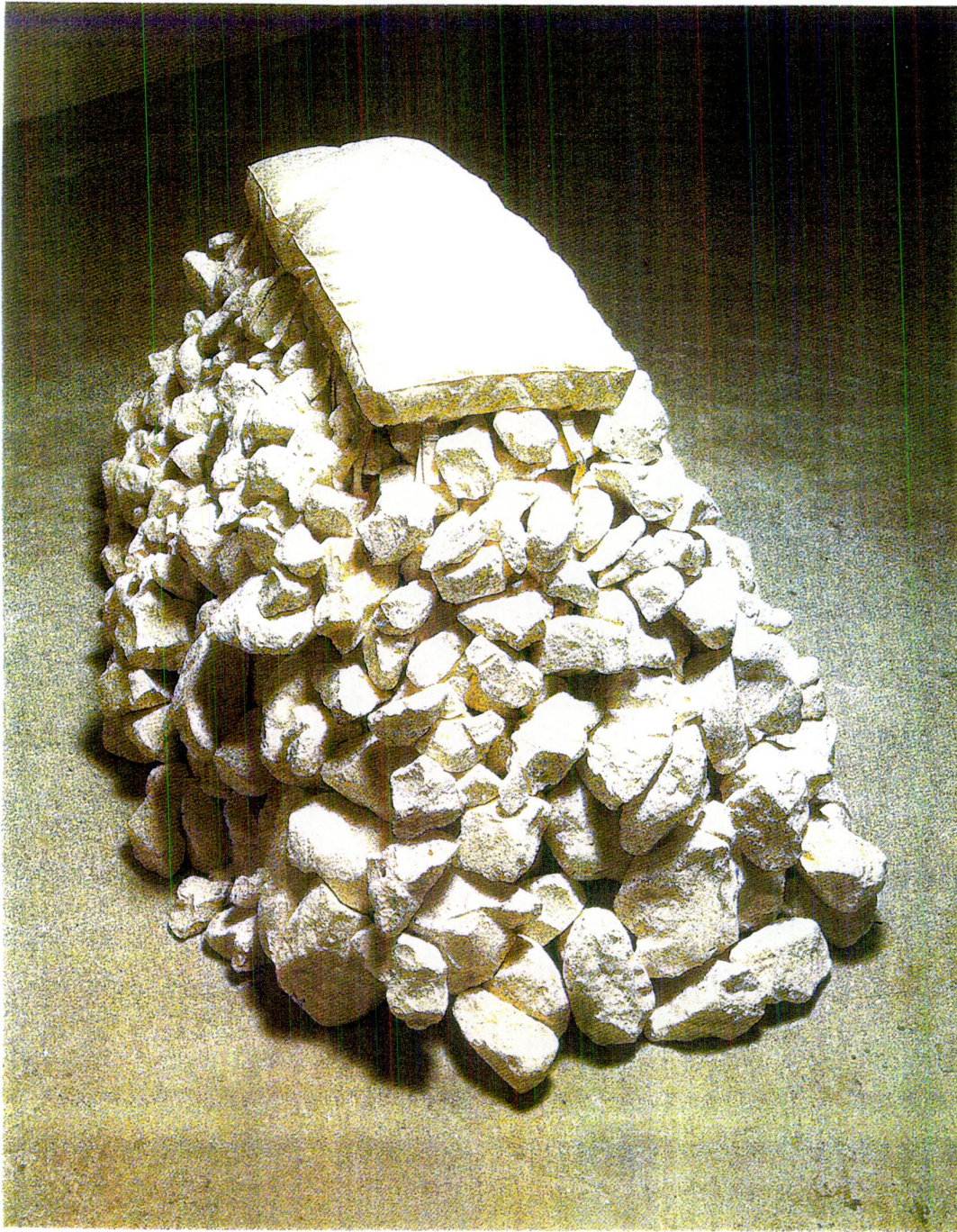


Plate 18

Kathy Prendergast  
Mixed media

*A Dream of Discipline*  
120x255x135 cms.

1989





This early work however was praised for its "conceptual completeness and originality" (Dunne, 1987, p. 64) and Prendergast has continued to expand and develop her use of the 'map' image moving on from its initial imposition on the body or body parts to a more esoteric association in the sculpture and sculptural reliefs included in the Douglas Hyde show (1990). As Dunne (1990 (Circa), pp 33-4) wrote, this exhibition "although physically formidable" had a "quality of understatement about it" with the pieces themselves and their network of images, edging unobtrusively into the consciousness rather than confronting the viewer directly. While the exhibition included a number of large-scale drawings, the works that physically dominated the space were the three 'Peak' sculptures and their attendant drawings. Although each of these pieces carries its own clues and implications, Prendergast as always challenges the viewer to search and to question at the same time creating a sense of extreme isolation, these sculptures, drawings and reliefs being ultimately "isolated from each other as they are from the viewer" (Joyce, 1990, p. 12). Even the title of the pieces, especially *As Small as a World and as Large as Alone*, (plate no. 17), and *A Dream of Discipline*, (plate no. 18), evoke a sense of mystery, longing and loneliness. The first of these is a tent like structure which, on closer examination, reveals itself to be a formidable mountain range while the second consists of a mound of chalk stones surmounted by a plain mattress which is firmly strapped to the stones. The third piece *Stack* (plate no. 19) is again a self-contained and isolated object but is somewhat more serene and reassuring than the former two.<sup>23</sup> This is in part attributable both to its material substance and to its shape. A 12 ft. high sculpture made of layer upon layer of gorgeous blue cloth it almost warmly invites the viewer's curiosity but remains impenetrable being, as Conor Joyce notes (p. 16), "just there in a most extreme sense".

The selection and use of particular materials is also important in relation to Prendergast's work as the substance of the materials chosen itself goes a long way in terms of drawing out and establishing the import of the work. While she has never been afraid to experiment with different media and has an eclectic interest in materials, she now likes for example to use cloth, sewing and plaster bandage because of the simplicity of material and method and because it seems "a natural way of working", (Prendergast, 1992). This lends credence to Dunne's (1990, *Circa*) opinion that "her works persuade us of their own materiality, of their human familiarity" and also underlines the intensely personal and private nature both of her work itself and of her working methods.

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<sup>23</sup> *Stack* has been purchased by the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin for its permanent collection.





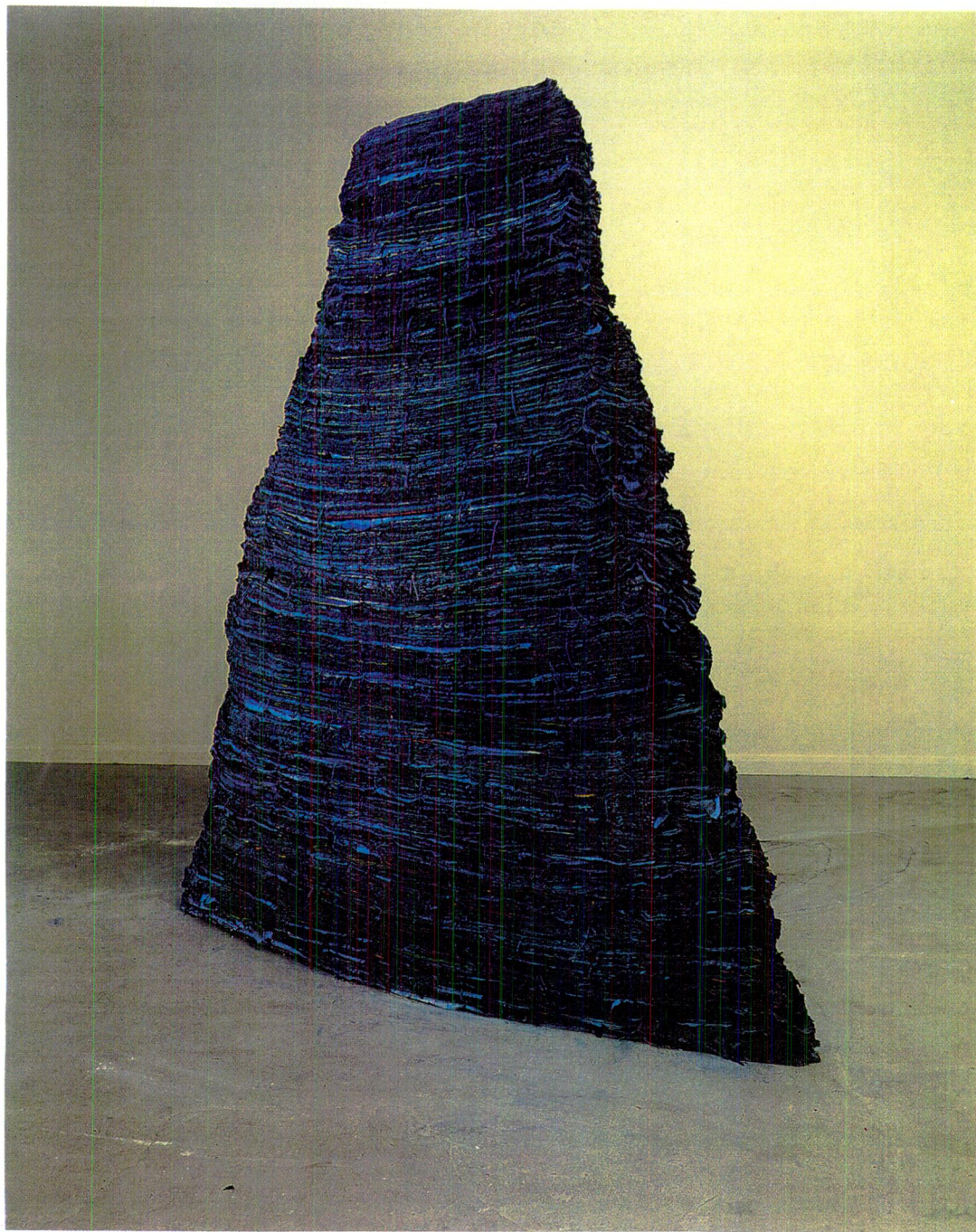


Plate 19

Kathy Prendergast  
Stacked cloth, twine and paint

*Stack*

1989  
270x260x70 cms.





Prendergast's work essentially originates as a 'private' affair which, because it is imbued with such sensitivity and insight, also happens to carry within it wider, more universal connotations. Her work embodies a tension between "the outer face of the world and its roots beneath" (Curtis, 1991 (s)) and while this accounts in part for its enigmatic character, it perhaps also goes some way towards explaining why, although understated, it invariably succeeds in gaining "a stubborn foothold in the mind", exercising a "disquieting, hypnotic hold on our imagination," (Dunne, 1990, *Circa*).

## SUMMARY

To summarise this section briefly each of the 6 artists discussed has pursued a sustained and successful career pattern following graduation from art college. Their working concerns while obviously highly varied bear witness in each case to a distinct independence of mind and even those artists who work most closely within what may be termed a given art historical tradition - such as, for example, Brennan and O'Dowd who might loosely be associated with the landscape tradition - bring a highly personal input and insight to bear on their work. In all cases the artists are prepared to deal with personal and private matters not in a purely autobiographical manner but in a sense which transposes the personal into a more universal concern. To this extent they each raise and deal with questions relating to identity and by their resultant efforts to create a truer image of both women and the world they inhabit they are effectively - whether consciously or unconsciously - both working towards a development of 'a female artistic tradition', and towards bringing Irish women, and Irish women artists, back in from 'Outside History' as discussed in a general sense in Chapters 1 and 2 above.

On the other hand while they would all obviously regard such issues as valid subject matter for the practising artist they are nonetheless conscious that by working outside of or on the borders of accepted and traditional subject matter, and, in most of their cases, by engaging with unorthodox and original working methods, they risk exposing their work to possible misinterpretation and thereby to unjust marginalisation and stereotyping, as discussed theoretically in Chapter 2 above (refer in particular to the arguments of Parker and Pollock) and as further discussed below in the analysis of the artist interviews.



## **Part 2 : Artist Interviews**

As explained at the beginning of this chapter this section does not reproduce the interview texts in full, (for sample interview questionnaire refer to Appendix C below), but rather extracts and sets out the most significant recurring points arising in the course of the interviews relating to matters - both positive and negative - perceived by the individual artists as having had or as having a continuing influence on their career patterns, and for ease of reference these points are grouped here under the following 5 headings :

1. Institutional, economic, political and historical factors;
2. Gender issues;
3. Critics/reviews;
4. Children;
5. General.

### **1. Institutional Economic Political and Historical Factors**

A number of both positive and negative factors can be identified under this heading. On the positive side, the careers of the artists interviewed were, according to their own accounts, variously influenced, encouraged and promoted by :

- (i) The pioneering example of earlier women artists in Ireland such as Mainie Jellett, Norah McGuinness and Evie Hone;
- (ii) The sense of freedom and opportunity generated by the womens liberation movement;
- (iii) A positive and dynamic atmosphere in art college where they were imbued with a sense of commitment to a professional career which in large part resulted in the setting up of the first co-operative studios;
- (iv) A growing optimism and interest in the visual arts in Ireland, particularly at the beginning of the 1980s, as borne out in the practical sense by, for





example, increased Arts Council funding and support and an increase in the number of galleries and exhibition spaces nationwide. This generation see themselves very much as the first generation of Irish artists to make a conscious decision to live and work in Ireland with the resulting fact that there is now a sense of an art community in Ireland which had not existed previously;

- (v) Somewhere on the borderline between positive and negative factors lies the perception of a number of the artists that women have been allowed the opportunity and space to do well in the visual arts precisely because the visual arts are not taken very seriously in Ireland, and thus women are allowed, or have been allowed, to compete in an area where they are not perceived as a threat. The visual arts market in Ireland is not as sophisticated or affluent as that in Britain or internationally but the more it becomes so the more it is likely that market forces may pose a threat to womens' careers. This is underlined by the comments of a curator in one of Dublins most prominent commercial galleries to the effect that women artists are not always perceived as being commercially viable because of their variable career patterns - usually owing to marriage and family commitments - and thus a lower monetary value is frequently placed on their work making them less attractive to collectors and investors whose concerns revolve more around economic and market issues than art per se. The international art market is precisely that - a market - and the marketing of art and artists is very often an artificial and contrived affair which has little to do with the real value of art and much to do with manipulation of market forces. This, however, is fuel for another debate and the point of real interest here concerns the sense in which the market may have contributed to the advancement of womens careers within the specifically Irish context.<sup>24</sup>

The unqualified negative factors under this heading are twofold, namely :

- (i) The perceived failure of art world institutions such as, for example, the art colleges, the Douglas Hyde Gallery, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Aosdana, the Royal Hibernian Academy and the commercial art galleries, to

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<sup>24</sup> On the point in relation to the art market in general see Fallon, 1993, and also see Hughes, 1991 Ch. 8 p. 409 et seq.



take full account of and to adequately represent womens work, activities and interests.

While the art colleges have been financially supportive of younger artists - both male and female- in engaging them as part-time and occasional tutors, it is undeniable that the hierarchical structure of the colleges is heavily weighted against female representation. A large number of women may be engaged in the colleges as part-time teaching staff or in the lower to middle level administrative positions but very few women are engaged as full-time teaching staff (see Appendix B) or in the higher level administrative positions in the colleges, and this is generally considered by the artists interviewed as having a negative effect in terms of the running of the institutions and in the example that it communicates to art students generally. The reasons for this failure to engage women at the higher levels are complex and manifold and while practical details such as the availability of positions over any given period must be taken into account there can be no doubt that the structures of institutions like the colleges have been traditionally and remain currently unsympathetically tailored towards the needs of womens lives and so, ironically, even where such positions may or indeed have become available to them many women are reluctant to take them up because of the practicalities involved.<sup>25</sup> An added complication is that for many artists, both male and female, the commitment required by full-time teaching and its attendant administrative responsibilities is viewed as having a potentially damaging effect on their own work and so an increasing number are disinclined to become involved at all at this level. This obviously generates difficulty for the colleges in terms of finding suitable candidates - male or female - to fill vacant positions and points up the resulting and urgent necessity to revise the working structures of teaching positions in order that possibilities such as, for example, job sharing and/or the elimination of the many administrative responsibilities attaching to teaching positions might be considered.

In relation to the other institutions mentioned, the Douglas Hyde Gallery has repeatedly come under fire for its failure in a general sense to reflect the reality of art practice in Ireland (see Fitzgerald and Barber, *Circa* 1991, pp 35 and 37); the Irish Museum of Modern Art has been criticized for its

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<sup>25</sup> This contrasts for example with the experience of artists in the co-operative studios as discussed by Mary Fitzgerald, 1991 (*Circa*) and 1992.





failure to include a more representative number of Irish women artists in its permanent collection (5 women artists in a total collection of 31 artists, 4 Irish women artists in all), and while the supportive structure of Aosdana is acknowledged and indeed welcomed by all of the artists interviewed, they are nonetheless highly frustrated at the poor male:female ratio of its members in the Visual Arts category is 50:19 i.e. 27.5%. Women are comparatively well represented in the Visual Arts category however as in literature the ratio is 57:9 (13.6%) and in music is 15:1 (6.6%), the figures for the Royal Hibernian academy are similarly discouraging with only 4 women included in the total of 28 academicians (14%), honorary and associate members faring slightly better at a male:female ratio of 6:3 (33%). Such figures speak for themselves!

- (ii) The second significantly negative factor under this heading relates to the general economic downturn of the mid to late 1980's and early 1990's and its attendant effect both on the art market and on the air of optimism which had briefly characterised the art world in the early 1980's. While the artists interviewed here inevitably suffer the financial fallout of a depressed economy they would essentially view themselves as having, in a sense at least, established their careers and interpret this economic downturn as having a more damaging effect on the generation coming after them many of whom have resorted to the age old pattern of emigration from necessity rather than choice. Support structures for artists in general are extremely poor and more detailed discussions of the situation in this regard are set out in the Artists Association of Ireland document 'A Crisis in the Arts' (which although published in 1985 sadly remains a relatively accurate account of the situation into the 90's) and in the Dublin Arts Report, published in February 1992.

## 2. **Gender Issues**

Although all of the artists interviewed have dealt in their work with issues - in some cases clearly and deliberately, and in others more tenuously - that connect with gender, all dispute the fact that gender is an inevitable or a central factor in their work. In general they view gender as having an inevitable and important influence on their lives as women but are insistent that it is not necessarily a motivating or a conscious factor in the work which they produce. They see gender



as being linked to work only in the sense of being part of their individual experience and are more conscious of being 'artists' rather than 'women artists' whose experience of being women may, but does not necessarily, inform their work.

All query the putative relationship between 'woman and nature' and the so-called 'female sensibility', being all the time acutely aware of problems with the perception of their work and the attendant dangers of being stereotyped. Such dangers arise particularly when dealing with imagery using the female body which may not necessarily at all be intended to raise issues connected with gender but is almost invariably interpreted as doing so. However, the tendency to stereotype or marginalize the work of women artists appears to arise even when so-called 'female imagery' is not obviously present - a particular style of work or use of particular materials can often be dismissed with a catch all label 'feminine'.<sup>26</sup> Such stereotypical perceptions are also reflected in a tendency, for example, to associate women artists with issues of sexuality and gender while political issues generally tend to be perceived as the preserve of the male. This angers many women artists who feel that their work has a definite political content which is either overlooked or ignored, (on this point see also Barber, 1987). There is also a perception that perhaps the work of women artists is sidelined because it does not necessarily fit within mainstream convention and also because of its possibly posing a threat to the status quo of more established art practice. It is of course quite a novel thing for woman to use herself as subject instead of being used by others as object and this in itself is something of a disruption.<sup>27</sup> Some of the artists also believe that there is a general feeling abroad that artwork should be above direct experience whereas they would feel that all artists - women and men - should be free to deal with their own immediate experience in their work.

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Mic Moroney's review of an exhibition by Catherine Kenny, *The Irish Times*, 11th of November 1992, where he says that her work is "attractive in a vaguely feminine, illustrative way ...." - a somewhat deliberate put down!

<sup>27</sup> Also see Chadwick, p. 365 and note the striking parallels here with the world of Irish poetry as observed by Eavan Boland : "that movement of Irish women from being the objects of poetry to being the authors of it disrupts the centre of poetry and its relationship to the national tradition ....the sentimentalisation of women had to be challenged once women began to write about their own lives", (interview with Kevin Myers, *The Irish Times*, 18 April 1992).

Boland (1987) also discusses the woman poet's dilemma in terms of choice of subject matter and the perceived validity of subject matter within the opposed dictates of poetic tradition and of feminist ideology - a similar dilemma inevitably arises for the visual artist as indeed discussed by the artists interviewed.





Given all of these considerations the artists interviewed were also dubious about the value of 'women only' exhibitions which may effectively serve to further marginalize work by putting it into a separate, 'different' category. Such exhibitions also run the risk of either being totally ignored or of including below standard work for the wrong reasons and thereby inviting adverse comment on the work of women artists generally.

### 3. **Critics/Reviews**

On the subject of critics, quite apart from the matters raised above under 'gender', the artists were unanimous in commenting on the general failure of critics, both in Ireland and elsewhere, to engage seriously with their work or indeed with the work of any artist. This, while obviously disappointing, is also potentially damaging, since a bad review can have a knock on effect on sales and income and on the possibility of further exhibitions. In Ireland there is also the problem of quite simply getting reviewed in the first place and if a show is not reviewed then the general public are unlikely to get to know of it and both work and artist can consequently sink without trace.

### 4. **Children**

Most of the artists interviewed felt that the issue of having children was very much relevant to their careers, the decision whether or not to have children being largely related to economic factors but also to such other practical matters as added time pressures and the vexed question of whether having a child or children would drain some of the creative energy necessary for work. The artists were united on the economic factors and the practical difficulties attached to the unpredictability of the artist's income which make it difficult to commit to such financial responsibilities as mortgages and child minding expenses. There are also time difficulties in the sense of child bearing years very much coinciding with the early years of establishing a career and the conflict that the choice of having a child in this context involves - it boils down to a question which basically affects all working women namely, the choice between family and career and the balancing act which such choice requires.

Somewhat tellingly only one of the women interviewed actually had a child however, and her response to the combination of motherhood and career was extremely positive, but in a sense this is such a deeply personal issue that its resolution must vary enormously in each individual case. The real problem arises



however when there is in fact no choice and when circumstances effectively dictate a course of action. While this is not a hardship that is peculiar to women artists it is nonetheless a highly relevant factor in considering their particular career patterns.

## 5. **General/Suggestions**

In concluding this section a number of more general comments and suggestions are worth noting :

- (i) It is clear from each of the artists interviewed that the question of individual attitude and commitment is absolutely central to the success of every artist, male or female. Furthermore, their views underline the fact that a good artist must deal with his or her own concerns and not tailor work to cater for any given art climate or market. In this context it is particularly significant that one of the artists with considerable teaching experience noticed a distinct lack of confidence on the part of female art students. Why this might be so is not exactly clear but if it is the case then it would obviously account, at least in part, for the failure of many women graduates to pursue or sustain a career beyond college.

If only one point comes through with striking consistency in conversation with each of the artists interviewed it was their absolute commitment to and belief in their work, combined in each case with an enormously consistent application to it year after year and with a vision of the same dedication continuing into the future. As one of the artists remarked, this particular group of artists are representative of the first actual generation of committed, ambitious, professional women artists in Ireland - there were certainly a number of individual women artists before that (and there were of course others such as Mainie Jellett, Evie Hone and so on who were not strictly professional in the sense that they had independent means and were not reliant on their work for a livelihood) but never before have so many women of the one generation succeeded in establishing and maintaining substantial professional careers. While it is clear that very many factors have in fact contributed to this development it could never have taken place without the considerable commitment and determination of the individual artists and they have thus set the pace and provided a very clear working





role model for succeeding generations - male and female - with similar aspirations.

- (ii) The remaining points are all interlinked, namely the importance to an artist of having a good gallery or promoter and of having control over how work is presented; the continued importance of debate and forums for discussion on matters affecting all artists and finally, the difficulties of moving from the national to the international level.

This last point is an extension of the whole question of promotion except that in this case it concerns not only the individual artist in question but also the perception of Ireland and of Irish artists abroad which is not always either accurate or favourable.<sup>28</sup>

While all of the artists interviewed are proud of their national identity on an individual level they eschew categorisation as 'Irish' artists and query the validity and utility of any such label pointing instead to the importance of avoiding insularity, of projecting an image of Ireland as having a vibrant, cosmopolitan, visual culture that goes far beyond the parochial and clichéd images that we sadly so often project of ourselves and that are also frequently the received images of Ireland abroad.

## SUMMARY

In summary therefore, a somewhat complex picture emerges from this analysis. The 6 women artists interviewed are all undoubtedly successful and their success in a sense, bears out the perception of the increasing importance of women artists in the contemporary Irish art world. They can all clearly identify a number of factors which have contributed to their individual and collective success but in spite of this they are also all trenchantly critical of the significant number of factors which remain as impediments to the careers of Irish women artists generally. In part these impediments are the result of

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<sup>28</sup> Note in this context the lively argument which broke out at the *Random Access* conference (Dublin 6th and 7th of November, 1992) where Valerie Smith, an American curator currently preparing a major international show for Arnheim, Holland, remarked - provoking a furious response - that Irish and British art was in her view too contextual for an international audience who could not possibly understand it. This in itself points up to some extent the dangers of 'tourist' curators who make whistle stop tours to countries in search of art for international shows - a search which is largely dictated by the international fad or trend of the day rather than by any genuine artistic inquiry and which, because of its invariably brief and superficial nature, of necessity frequently fails to do justice both to the artists who are and who are not selected.



unchanged or slowly changing traditional structures but in larger part they result from problems of perception and attitude which are evidenced in practical terms by ,for example, the proportionately small number of women artists on the lists of the major commercial galleries or the poor ratio of female:male artists in a body such as Aosdana. In addition these artists have also observed that the next generation of artists who should in effect now be 'making their mark' do not in fact appear to be in evidence and this may be in part be due to the more depressed economic situation resulting in their general dispersion abroad but also to the fact that Ireland's small art market is easily saturated. Thus the situation as it appears at first glance is somewhat deceptive : on the one hand there do seem to be and are a large number of women artists practising and exhibiting in Ireland and quite a significant number of these have achieved a high level of success, while on the other hand, on closer analysis, the actual figures of female:male artists in relevant areas of professional life are disappointingly low and there is also certain evidence of discriminatory attitudes at work in terms, for example, of the categorisation of work by women artists.

Yet, while the artists interviewed may all have encountered these difficulties, to greater and lesser degrees in the individual cases, they, and undoubtedly quite a number of others also, have clearly managed to rise above them through, no doubt, a combination of determination, ability and a certain element of sheer good luck! There must be some element of chance in being in the right place at the right time but without the necessary talent and, perhaps above all, on the evidence of this analysis, without the necessary commitment - no artist and certainly no woman artist, could ever hope to succeed.





## Conclusion

While there is an arguably accurate perception that much of the new vitality in Irish art is attributable to the increased proportion and participation of young women artists it is also true to say that women artists have been frequently excluded, under represented or ignored when it comes, for example, to selection for both one person shows or a particular type of group show, and to nomination for membership of cultural bodies such as Aosdana, or to higher level positions in art colleges, museums and galleries.<sup>29</sup>

The irony, ambiguity and importance of this situation require to be addressed and it is useful in doing so to draw attention to the links which exist between the experience and the views of the 6 artists discussed in Chapter 3 and the analysis and arguments advanced in particular by Pollock, as discussed in Chapter 2.

The most critical points which arise in this context are twofold, namely :-

- (i) A failure on the part of core institutional bodies to recognise and address possibilities of bias and discrimination in their underlying policies and structures;
- and
- (ii) A tendency in art history and in art criticism generally to either ignore or to stereotype and thereby to marginalise the work of women artists.

There is a clear need therefore to engage in further research in this area in order to :-

- (i) Examine both the policies and structures of such core institutions in order to ascertain the existence or otherwise of bias and discrimination and to design and effect appropriate mechanisms to address same;
- (ii) To provide for more adequate training on the part of art critics in order to raise the standard of art criticism generally and to generate a greater understanding of the art critic's role;

and

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<sup>29</sup> For detailed data see Appendix B.



- (iii) To generate a more widespread discussion by and about artists and their work and perhaps more importantly in this context, to encourage more research into the lives and works of women artists, both past and present, in order that we might know more fully about their lives and how they have each negotiated their particular conditions and situations.

It is clear from analysis of Chapters 2 and 3 that much of the earlier feminist theory is now somewhat dated and redundant in that, for example, the concept of an exclusively 'feminine sensibility' was roundly rejected by all of the artists interviewed and, that furthermore, the concept of 'women only' exhibitions has largely outlived its usefulness. Women artists have now, partially at least, succeeded in attaining recognition and a platform for their work and they rightly want their work to be seen in context and not to be artificially categorised or labelled in a manner which bears no relationship to the work's context or merit. In this connection, furthermore, it is clear that the work of the 6 artists discussed here does not readily fall into any so-called 'category' and that the artists in any event regard any form of categorisation as a rather senseless and outdated exercise which may ultimately only serve to limit appreciation and understanding of the work in question.

While many of the problems faced by women artists are undoubtedly also encountered by their male counterparts there are still certain underlying obstacles which hinder the progress of women alone and it is important to be aware of these while at the same time remembering that, in essence, there is certainly no difference in quality between the work of male and female artists. One obvious advantage of the changes effected by the womens movement is that women, in many spheres, are now competing equally with men. Indeed, the early 1990s have in some respects been a celebratory period for women in Ireland generally with the election in 1991 of Ireland's first woman President, Mary Robinson, and with the election in 1992 of an unprecedented number of women T.D.s to Dail Eireann. There are proportionately more women than men graduating through the art colleges (see Appendix B) and an increasing percentage of these women graduates are now intent on pursuing a professional career which, in itself, has to be one of the most significant points of difference between the contemporary situation and the situation as it existed when Nochlin first posed her famous question in 1971. Thus while much remains to be done a great part of the discriminatory structure has in fact already given way and there is a need to go beyond womens issues towards consideration of the production and evaluation of art and the role of the artist.

In the immortal words of Eva Hesse : "The way to beat discrimination in art is by art"....."excellence has no sex" (quoted in Rosen and Brawer, p. 22), and this is certainly a





maxim which applies to the work of the 6 women artists discussed here and indeed to very many more. The bottom line is that it is the work which is important and that talent will ultimately out but only through persistence, dedication and time.

To quote another famous and great artist, Louise Bourgeois :

*The problem of history is yours not mine. I fit into history like a bug in a rug. The work and myself are part of history whether I like it or not. I don't need to be boosted into history. I have made history in spite of myself. I am just another stone in the wall. (quoted in Meyer-Thoss, p. 139).*



## Appendix A

### **Artist Biographies**

#### **Cecily Brennan**

1. Born : Athenry, Co. Galway 1955.
2. Art Education :  
National College of Art and Design Dip. Fine Art First Class Honours 1974-1978.
3. Awards:  
1982 Arts Council Bursary Award  
1984 Grumbacher Artists Brushes Award  
1988 Arts Council Bursary Award  
1990 Arts Council Bursary Award  
1991 Elected member of Aosdana
4. One Person Shows:  
1982 Project Arts Centre, Dublin  
1985 Taylor Galleries, Dublin  
1988 Taylor Galleries, Dublin  
1991 Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin
5. Group Shows:  
1978 National College of Art and Design, Staff/Student Show, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
Best Graduate Show, Project Arts Centre, Dublin.  
1979 E.V.A., City Gallery, Limerick.  
1980 Independent Artists, Municipal Gallery, Dublin.  
1981 Independent Artists, Project Arts Centre, Dublin.  
1983 University College, The Collection of the University College, Dublin,  
Banque National de Paris, Dublin.  
Guinness Peat Aviation Exhibition, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
Irish Art Week, Franklin Furnace Gallery, New York.  
Black Church Print Studio Exhibition.  
Paris Biennale (slides).  
Figurative Image, Bank of Ireland, Dublin.  
Cibéal Cincise, Kenmare, Co. Kerry.  
Independent Artists, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
Graphic Studio Touring Print Exhibition.  
1984 Represented Ireland at the 16th International Exhibition of Painting,  
Cagnes-Sur-Mer, France.





- Guinness Peat Aviation Exhibition, R.H.A. Gallery, Ely Place, Dublin.  
Group Shows, Taylor Galleries, Dublin.
- 1985 The Collection of the Contemporary Irish Arts Society.  
Group Shows, Taylor Galleries, Dublin.  
Milwaukee Irish Celtic Festival, Milwaukee, U.S.A.  
Invited Artist, Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Guinness Hop Store, Dublin.  
Edinburgh/Dublin Festival, Official Edinburgh Festival exhibition.  
Figurative Ireland, Bank of Ireland, Dublin.
- 1986 Independent Artists, Guinness Hop Store, Dublin.  
The Allied Irish Banks Collection of Twentieth Century Irish Art, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
Group Show, Taylor Galleries, Dublin.  
The Decade Show, Guinness Hop Store, Dublin.  
The Wicklow Connection, Exhibition of artists who have worked from Wicklow.  
The Bursary Show, Arts Council touring exhibition of seven recent bursary winners.  
Figurative Image, Bank of Ireland, Dublin.  
Personal Choice : The Collection of V.A. Ferguson, Sligo Art Gallery.
- 1987 Eighty European Painters, Palais de Congres, Strasbourg, France. Travelled Europe, U.S.A. and U.S.S.R.  
Irish Women Artists, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
Edge, 10 Irish Painters, Aorta Gallery, Amsterdam.
- 1988 Dublin Millennium Billboard Project, organised by the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
Figurative Image, Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin.  
International Art Exhibition, Haddam Art Centre, Baghdad, Iraq.  
Group Show, Taylor Galleries, Dublin.
- 1989 A Special Place, Arts Council Touring Show, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.
- 1990 Irish Art of the Eighties (Nature and Culture), Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
Images from Ireland, EEC, Brussels.

6. Positions Held:

- 1984 Committee Member, Independent Artists.  
  
Founder member and director of the Visual Arts Centre, Dublin.
- 84-86 Director, Project Arts Centre.
- 1986 Committee Member, Arts Action.

7. Collections:

The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon  
University College, Dublin  
Bank of Ireland



Allied Irish Banks  
 Allied Irish Investment Bank  
 Algemene Bank Nederland  
 Contemporary Irish Arts Society  
 Industrial Development Authority  
 Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland  
 Life Association Ireland  
 Office of Public Works  
 St. Patrick's Hospital, Dublin  
 V.A. Ferguson  
 Ronald Tallon  
 John Meagher  
 P.J. Murphy  
 Stokes Kennedy Crowley  
 Limerick Contemporary Arts Society

### **Dorothy Cross**

1. Born: 5 February 1956.
2. Art Education:

1973-1974	Crawford Municipal School of Art, Cork. Foundation Course.
1974-1977	B.A. Honours Degree, Leicester Polytechnic.
1978-1979	San Francisco Art Institute, Sculpture Programme.
1980-1982	M.F.A. Degree, San Francisco Art Institute.
3. Awards:

1977	Johnson Matthey Design Award, England. Taylor Arts Scholarship, R.D.S., Dublin.
1978	Fitzwilton Arts Trust Grant.
1984	Arts Council Bursary.
1985	Arts Council Bursary.
1986	Arts Council Bursary.
1988	P.S.I. Studio Scholarship, New York.
1990	E.V.A. Open Award, Limerick. Marten Toonder Award, Ireland. Pollock Krasner Award, New York.
1991	Arts Council Bursary. O'Malley Award, Irish American Cultural Institute.
1992	E.V.A. Open Award, Limerick. Elected member of Aosdana.
4. One Person Shows:

1980	Triskel Art Centre, Cork.
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- 1983 Triskel Art Centre, Cork.
- 1985 Hendriks Gallery, Dublin (*Contraptions*).
- 1988 Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (*Ebb*).  
Octagon Gallery, Belfast.
- 1989 P.S.I. Institute of Contemporary Art, N.Y.
- 1990 Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.  
Artpark, Lewiston, New York.
- 1991 I.C.A. Philadelphia, U.S.A. *Power House*.

5. Selected Group Shows:

- 1981 Diego Rivera Gallery, San Francisco.
- 1982 Emmanuel Walter Gallery, San Francisco.
- 1983 Artspace, Gutai, Koshienguchi, Japan (Volm Group).
- 1984 Hendriks Gallery, Dublin (4 Artists).  
Living Exhibition, Dublin (*Coronation Chair*).
- 1985 Volm, Kid-ai-luck Gallery, Tokyo, Japan.  
C.A.N. (Cork Art Now), Crawford Gallery, Cork.  
Sculpture in the Chair, Smiths Gallery, London.  
Irish Women Artists, Battersea Art Centre.
- 1986 Irish Art Now, Marginalia della Forme d'Arts, Turin.  
Six in the Sticks, Butler Gallery, Kilkenny.  
Guinness Peat Aviation Exhibition, Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin.
- 1987 S.A.D.E., Crawford Gallery, Cork.  
Irish Women Artists, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.
- 1988 Acquisitions Show, Limerick City Art Gallery.  
A Sense of Place, Battersea Art Centre.  
Sculpture Open, R.H.A. Gallery, Dublin.  
The Pillar Project, G.P.O., Dublin.
- 1989 P.S.I. Institute of Contemporary Art, N.Y.
- 1990 E.V.A., Limerick City Gallery.  
Volm, Tokyo, Japan.  
Irish Art of the Eighties (Sexuality and Gender), Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.
- 1991 Strongholds : New Art from Ireland, Tate Gallery, Liverpool.  
In a State, Kilmainham Jail, Dublin.  
E.V.A., Limerick City Gallery.
- 1992 Edge, Biennale, Madrid and London.  
Transmissions : Art Works for Somalia, Dublin.  
E.V.A. Limerick City Gallery.

6. Collections:

Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin  
 Arts Council of Ireland, Dublin.  
 Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast.  
 Crawford Municipal Gallery, Cork.  
 Butler Gallery, Kilkenny.  
 Hugh Lane Municipal Art Gallery, Dublin.



Vera List Collection, New York, U.S.A..

## **Alice Maher**

1. Born: Tipperary, 1956.

2. Art Education:

Crawford Municipal College of Art, Cork Diploma in Fine Art, 1981-1985;  
University of Ulster, Belfast, M.A. in Fine Art, 1985-1986;  
San Francisco Art Institute, 1987.

3. Awards:

1986 Peter Moore's Foundation Scholarship.  
1987 Fulbright Scholarship.  
1988 Arts Council of Northern Ireland Bursary and Arts Council Bursary.  
1989 Teaching Fellowship Limerick School of Art and Design.  
1990 Guinness Peat Aviation Award for Emerging Artists.

4. One Person Shows:

1987 *Transfiguration*, Kerlin Gallery, Belfast.  
1989 *Tryst*, Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick.  
1990/91 *The Thicket*, Triskel Arts Centre, Cork; Project Arts Centre, Dublin;  
Orchard Gallery, Derry; City Gallery, Limerick.  
1992 *Keep*, Old Museum Arts Centre, Belfast.

5. Selected Group Shows:

1984 Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
1985 Listowel International Print Biennale.  
C.A.N. '85 (Cork Art Now), Crawford Gallery, Cork.  
1986 Eight Artists from Ireland, Oxford, England.  
Graduate Print Exchange, University of Peking, China.  
Royal Ulster Academy Exhibition, Belfast.  
1987 Recent Work (with Paul Wilson) On the Wall Gallery, Belfast.  
Six Artists on the Go... Touring Exhibition Derry, Dublin and Cork.  
Five Belfast Artists Draw the Line, Grafton Gallery, Dublin.  
Selected Group Exhibition, Diego Rivero Gallery, San Francisco.  
Irish Women Artists, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
E.V.A., Limerick City Gallery.  
1988 Fort Mason Firehouse, San Francisco.  
Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.  
Guinness Peat Aviation Exhibition, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
1989 Art Beyond Barriers, The Frauen Museum, Bonn.  
Issues - Arts Council of Northern Ireland, four person touring exhibition.





- 1990 Irish Art of the Eighties (Sexuality and Gender), Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
Two Person Show with Louise Walsh, Arts Council Gallery, Belfast.  
Guinness Peat Aviation Exhibition, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin.
- 1991 Strongholds : New Art from Ireland, Tate Gallery, Liverpool.  
In a State, Kilmainham Jail, Dublin.
- 1992 Transmission : Art Work for Somalia, Irish Life Exhibition Centre, Dublin.

6. Positions Held:

- 1992 Full and part-time teaching position National College of Art and Design, Dublin.

## **Mary Fitzgerald**

- 1. Born : Dublin 1956.

- 2. Art Education:

- 1973-77 National College of Art and Design, Dublin.
- 1979-80 Osaka University of Foreign Languages, Japan.
- 1980-81 Tama University of Fine Art, Tokyo.

- 3. Awards:

- 1979 Japanese Government Research Scholarship.
- 1983 Guinness Peat Aviation Award for Emerging Artists.
- 1983/85 Arts Council Visual Arts Bursary.
- 1985 Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Banner Commission.
- 1986 Department of Foreign Affairs/Arts Council Travel Bursary.  
Patrons Award E.V.A., Limerick.
- 1987 Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Invited Artist's Bursary.
- 1988 Claremorris Open Art Exhibition Award.
- 1990 Elected member of Aosdana.

- 4. One Person Exhibitions and Installations:

- 1982 Painting - Drawing, Oliver Dowling Gallery, Dublin.
- 1984 Paintings, Oliver Dowling Gallery, Dublin.
- 1985 Paintings, AIB, Brussels.
- 1986 The Drawing Room, Oliver Dowling Gallery, Dublin.
- 1988 Image Afterimage, Arts Council Gallery, Belfast.  
Paintings, Oliver Dowling Gallery, Dublin.
- 1989 New Works, Riverrun Gallery, Limerick.  
New Works, Boole Library, University College, Cork.
- 1991 Counter/act, Oliver Dowling Gallery, Dublin.



1992 Orientation, Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork and Oliver Dowling Gallery, Dublin.

5. Selected Group Exhibitions:

1981 Maki Gallery, Tokyo.  
1982-87 SAD, Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork.  
1982-88 E.V.A., City Gallery, Limerick.  
1983 Guinness Peat Aviation Awards Exhibition for Emerging Artists, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin and Shannon.  
King's and Kings, Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick.  
1985 Dublin/Edinburgh Exhibition, Edinburgh Festival.  
18th Bienal de Sao Paulo, Brazil (rep. Ireland).  
1985-87 Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Dublin.  
'85/86/88 Personal Choice, Butler Gallery, Kilkenny.  
1985-87 Four Artists from Ireland, exhibition touring Ireland, Brazil and Argentina.  
1986 Lawrence Ross Gallery, Los Angeles.  
1986-88 Celtic Vision, exhibition touring Spain, Britain France, Ireland, and Canada.  
1987 Irish Women Artists, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
The Guinness Peat Aviation Collection, City Gallery, Limerick.  
The Silent Image, Boole Library, University College, Cork.  
'87/88/89 Claremorris Open Art Exhibition, Mayo.  
1988 Rosc, Guinness Hop Store, Dublin.  
Baghdad International Festival of Art (representing Ireland).  
Dublin Millennium Billboard Exhibition.  
'88/90/92 Gateway to Art, Dublin Airport Arts Festival, Dublin.  
1989 Europese Raaklijnnen, The Flemish Museum Ghent (rep. Ireland).  
National Self-Portrait Collection, National Gallery of Ireland.  
1989-90 E.V.A. Prizewinners' Exhibition, touring Ireland.  
1990 Images from Ireland - Modern Irish Painting, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels.  
Irish Art - The European Dimension, RHA Gallagher Gallery, Dublin.  
Contemporary Artists from Ireland, Austin/Desmond Fine Art, London.  
1991 Irish Art of the Eighties (Modernism and Abstraction), Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
Art Inc - Art from Corporate Collections, Cothy, Guinness Hop Store, Dublin.  
1992 Irish Abstraction, B4A Gallery and South Bank Gallery, New York.

6. Commissions:

1989 A&L Goodbody - installation commission.  
University College, Dublin - installation for Engineering Building.  
1990 Opera Theatre Co., Rape of Lucretia - set and costume design.  
1991 Dept. of the Taoiseach - design for hand-made stair carpet.





The Great Book of Ireland, The Clashganna Mills Trust.  
 Financial Services Centre, Dublin - design for hand-made carpet.  
 Algemene Bank Nederland, Dublin - painting commission.  
 1992 AIB, Financial Services Centre, Dublin - series of tapestries.

7. Collections:

The Arts Council  
 The Arts Council of Northern Ireland  
 AIB Bank plc, New York, Brussels, London  
 AIIB, Dublin  
 Rehabilitation Institute  
 Contemporary Irish Art Society  
 Guinness Peat Aviation  
 Institute of Chartered Accountants  
 KPMG Stokes Kennedy Crowley  
 Office of Public Works  
 National Self-Portrait Collection  
 NIHE, Dublin  
 University College, Cork  
 A&L Goodbody  
 University College, Dublin  
 Bank of Ireland plc  
 Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

8. Publications:

1986 'Japan', Education Supplement, Circa Art Magazine, March.  
 1988 The Puzzle Tree Ascendant, Dedalus Press (with Hugh Maxton).  
 Mix Moon, Dedalus Press, Dublin (by Macdara Woods).  
 1989 Member of the editorial board, Circa Art Magazine.  
 The Salmon Poetry Magazine, Graphics Award Winner.  
 Visions Poetry Magazine, Black Buzzard Press, Maryland.  
 1990 Thistledown - Poems and Paintings for UNICEF, Dublin.

**Gwen O'Dowd**

1. Born: 1957, Dublin.

2. Biography:

1975 Lived in Cadiz, Spain.  
 1976-80 Attended National College of Art & Design, Dublin.  
 1980 Travelled in West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago.  
 Joined Visual Arts Centre, Dublin.  
 1981-84 Organised art workshops.



- Took part in Arts Council Mural Scheme.
  - Visiting lecturer, National College of Art & Design.
- 1984 Travel grant to Barcelona and South of Spain.
- 1985 Visiting lecturer, National College of Art & Design and School of Art, Dun Laoghaire.
- 1986 Artist in residence, Aberystwyth, Wales.
- 1987 Artist in residence, Fishguard, Wales.
- 1987-88 Part-time lecturer, Limerick School of Art & Design.
- 1988-90 Part-time lecturer, Cork School of Art & Design.
- 1990 Part-time lecturer, National College of Art & Design.

3. Awards:

- 1984 George Campbell Memorial Travel Grant to Spain.
- 1985 Prize winner, International Print Biennale, Listowel.
- 1986 Irish/Welsh exchange, artist in residence, Aberystwyth.
- 1987 Irish/Welsh exchange, artist in residence, Fishguard.
- 1987 Awarded Department of Foreign Affairs grant.
- 1988 Awarded Arts Council Documentary grant.
- 1989 Irish/Canadian exchange, "Leighton Artist's Colony", Banff, Alberta.
- 1990 Awarded Arts Council materials grant.
- 1990 Prize winner, Oireachtas art exhibition.
- 1991 Elected member of Aosdana.

4. One Person Exhibitions:

- 1984 Project Arts Centre, Dublin.
- 1987 Fishguard, Wales.
- 1989 West Cork Arts Centre.  
Butler Gallery, Kilkenny.
- 1990 Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.
- 1992 Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.

5. Selected Group Exhibitions:

- 1984 Guinness Peat Aviation Exhibition, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin.
- 1985 Edinburgh/Dublin exhibition, Edinburgh.  
Group exhibition, Taylor Galleries, Dublin.
- 1986 Decade exhibition, Guinness Hop Store.  
Group exhibition, Taylor Galleries, Dublin.
- 1987 S.A.D.E., Crawford Gallery, Cork.  
Living Landscape, West Cork Arts Centre.  
Arts Council collection, R.H.K., Dublin.  
W.A.A.G., Guinness Hop Store, Dublin.
- 1988 Gateway to Art, Aer Rianta, Dublin.  
Return Welsh Show, R.H.K., Dublin.  
Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast.





- Celtic Images, Brittany, France.  
 Living Landscape, West Cork Arts Centre.  
 Two person exhibition, Sligo Arts Festival.  
 Two person exhibition, Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast.  
 Clean Irish Sea, Wales, Scotland, Brittany.  
 Group exhibition, Taylor Galleries, Dublin.
- 1989 Trees for Life, R.H.K., Dublin.  
 Landscape exhibition, Triskel Arts Centre, Dublin.  
 Claremorris Open, Co. Mayo.  
 Fools Gold, Galway.  
 Dialogue, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
 Group exhibition, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.
- 1990 Aer Rianta Arts Festival, Dublin Airport.  
 Nature and Culture, Douglas Hyde Gallery.  
 Living Landscape, West Cork Arts Centre.  
 Oireachtais, R.H.A., Dublin.  
 Claremorris Open, Co. Mayo.  
 Sense of Ireland, London Centre Space.  
 Irish Art of the Eighties (Nature and Culture), Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.
- 1991 Climats D'Europe, Strasbourg.  
 Parable Island, Blue-Coat Gallery, Liverpool and Camden Arts Centre, London.  
 Ice, RHA, Ely Place, Dublin.  
 E.V.A., City Gallery, Limerick.  
 Iontas, Boyle Arts Festival, Boyle.  
 The Fifth Province, Irish Art, touring Canada.
- 1992 Trinity collection, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
 Living Landscape, West Cork and touring.  
 Welcome Europe, Holstebro Kunstmuseum, Denmark.

6. Collections:

The Arts Council of Ireland.  
 Contemporary Irish Arts Society.  
 The Arts Council of Northern Ireland.  
 National Institute of Higher Education.  
 Educational Building Society, Dublin.  
 The Board of Works, Dublin.  
 Guinness Peat Aviation.  
 The Gibney Collection.  
 Aer Rianta, Dublin Airport.  
 Kilkenny Arts Society.  
 Allied Irish Banks.  
 Stokes Kennedy Crowley.  
 Trinity College, Dublin.  
 Works purchased by private collections in Ireland, U.S.A., Finland and Switzerland.



## **Kathy Prendergast**

1. Born: 5 September 1958.

2. Art Education:

1976-80 National College of Art & Design, Dublin Dip. F.A. 1st Class Hons.  
1980-81 Trained and worked as Studio Camera Operator, Radio Telefis, Eireann, Dublin.  
1982-83 National College of Art & Design, Dublin B.F.A. 1st Class Hons.  
1983-86 Royal College of Art, London, M.A.

3. Awards:

1981 Guinness Peat Aviation Award for Emerging Artists.  
1982 Alice Berger Hammerschlager Travel Grant.  
Arts Council of Ireland Travel Grant.  
1983 Guinness Peat Aviation Award for Emerging Artists.  
1984 Arts Council of Ireland Bursary.  
1986 Henry Moore Foundation Fellowship, Camberwell School of Arts & Crafts, London.  
Royal College of Art Major Travel Award.  
1988 Macauley Fellowship, Arts Council of Ireland.  
1989 Elected member of Aosdana.  
1990 Arts Council of Ireland Bursary.  
1992 Rome Award in Sculpture, British School in Rome.

4. One Person Exhibitions:

1987 Henry Moore Foundation Fellow Exhibition, Camberwell School of Arts & Crafts, London.  
Unit 7 Gallery, London and Rome.  
1990 Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
1991 Camden Arts Centre, London.

5. Selected Group Exhibitions:

1981 Guinness Peat Aviation Exhibition, Tulfarris, Blessington, Co. Wicklow.  
1982 Joyce Centenary Exhibition, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Trinity College, Dublin.  
Paris Biennale.  
10 on 8 Exhibition Space, New York.  
1983 Paris Biennale Travelling Show.  
Guinness Peat Aviation Awards Exhibition, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
1984 4 Women, Hendricks Gallery, Dublin.  
Christmas Show, Hendricks Gallery, Dublin.





- 1985 Drawings, Hendricks Gallery, Dublin.  
(2 man exhibition).
- 1986 Celtic Vision Travelling Exhibition.  
Decade Show, N.C.A.D., The Hop Store, Dublin.  
Living Art Exhibition, Dublin.  
Work from the collection of Allied Irish Banks, Douglas Hyde Gallery,  
Dublin.  
Bursary Show, The Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon, Dublin.
- 1987 Chisenhale Gallery, London (2 man show).  
Irish Women Artists, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.  
'Eighty' Les Peinteurs d'Europe, Strasbourg.
- 1988 Open Futures, IKON Gallery, Birmingham.  
A Sense of Place, Battersea Arts Centre, London.  
ROSC '88, The Hop Store, Dublin.  
Heads Exhibition, The Arts Council, Dublin.
- 1990- Irish Art of the Eighties (Nature and Culture and Sexuality and Gender)  
Douglas Hyde
- 1991 Gallery, Dublin.  
Strongholds : New Art from Ireland, Tate Gallery, Liverpool.
- 1992 Journeys, Winchester Art Gallery, Travelling Show.
- 1993 Three Person Show, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.

6. Collections:

Arts Council of Ireland/An Comhairle Ealaíon,  
Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery, Dublin,  
Allied Irish Banks  
Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin  
Arts Council of Great Britain  
Fitzwilton Ltd.  
Guinness (Ireland) Ltd.



## **Appendix B**

### **Representational Data**

The data compiled and presented in this Appendix is intended to provide the 'facts and figures' pertaining to the representation of women artists in :

- (i) Solo and group exhibitions throughout the country over a period from 1980 to date;
  - (ii) The collections of major art institutions such as the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery;
  - (iii) Institutional bodies such as Aosdana and the Royal Hibernian Academy;
- and
- (iv) In their differing capacities as both students and staff in the country's major art colleges.

The data presented was sought and obtained directly from each of the various bodies included and any inaccuracies in same are therefore referable to the actual source.

The information was sought by way of letter questionnaire sent directly to a representative range of private/commercial galleries, non-commercial galleries and art centres, and the major art institutions and art colleges countrywide and, owing to the varied nature and format of the information received in reply it has unfortunately not been possible to tabulate the data in a uniform manner. It was difficult to decide how to organise the information received but I have tried to present it as clearly as possible by compiling it separately in relation to each gallery/institution in order to provide a general impression of the background situation.

Clearly some galleries have, for example, a better record of exhibiting women artists than others and this is perhaps of greatest interest in relation to the public/non-commercial galleries and art centres which aim, amongst other things, to reflect contemporary arts activity both in their immediate local and in a wider national context. In relation to the galleries, I requested that they send me their exhibition lists from 1980/or the date of commencement of the gallery to date, including, if possible, projected future exhibitions; in





the case of Aosdana and the Royal Hibernian Academy I requested a breakdown of members and details of their respective election procedures; in the case of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, in addition to exhibition data, I requested details of all art acquired or purchased for the Museum's permanent collection since its date of inception, May 1991; and finally, in the case of the art colleges I requested a male:female breakdown of Fine Art graduates from 1975 to date, together with a breakdown of male:female staff members within the respective Fine Arts departments.

Material was requested from the following galleries and institutions most of which were co-operative and a very few of which did not reply at all :

1. Aosdana
2. The Arts Council Gallery, Belfast
3. The Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick
4. The Butler Art Gallery, Kilkenny
5. The Tom Caldwell Gallery, Dublin
6. The Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork
7. The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin
8. The Fenderesky Gallery at Queens, Belfast
9. The Guinness Hop Store, Dublin
10. The Hugh Lane Municipal Art Gallery, Dublin
11. The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin
12. The Kerlin Gallery, Dublin
13. The Limerick City Gallery of Art
14. The Narrow Water Gallery, Warrenpoint
15. Nuns Island Art Centre, Galway
16. The Oliver Dowling Gallery, Dublin
17. The Orchard Gallery, Derry
18. The Pantheon Gallery, Dublin
19. The Project Arts Centre, Dublin
20. The Riverrun Gallery, Dublin
21. The Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin
22. The Royal Hibernian Academy Gallagher Gallery, Dublin
23. The Rubicon Gallery, Dublin
24. The Solomon Gallery, Dublin
25. The Taylor Galleries, Dublin
26. The Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin
27. The Triskel Gallery, Cork



28. The Wyvern Gallery, Dublin
29. The Crawford School of Art and Design, Cork
30. Dun Laoghaire School of Art and Design, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin
31. Limerick City College of Art
32. National College of Art and Design, Dublin
33. University of Ulster, Belfast

For ease and accuracy of reference the information included in the Appendix is categorised under the following headings :-

- (i) Private/Commercial Galleries;
- (ii) Art Centres - Public/Non-Commercial Galleries;
- (iii) Museums and Institutions including Art Colleges.

### **Private/Commercial Galleries**

#### **Tom Caldwell Gallery, Dublin (established 1974)**

On the gallery records from 1974 women artists have been well represented both in one person and in group shows throughout the period in question and in fact a majority of the gallery one person shows in the years 1991 and 1992 were by women artists. These include Dorothy Carpenter, Mary Canty, Damaris Lysaght, Selma McCormack, Eithne Carr, Corinna McNiece and Alwyn Gillespie.

#### **Fenderesky Gallery at Queens, Belfast (established May, 1990)**

The Fenderesky holds approximately 14 exhibitions per annum, 4 of which are group/thematic exhibitions.

To date women have not been well represented either in one person or group shows at the Fenderesky at Queens.

In 1990 Mary McGowan and Eithne Jordan had one person shows, no women were included in group shows;





In 1991 Deirdre O'Connell and Kathy Herbert were each included in group shows of 3 and 4 persons respectively (i.e. there were two women in all included in two out of the four annual group shows) and there were one person shows by Chung Eun-Mo and Marie Foley (i.e. there were two one person shows by women artists out of nine/ten one person shows in the year);

In 1992 there were one person shows by Barbara Freeman, Jo Kelley and Rosaleen Davy (i.e. women were in three out of ten one person shows) while Deirdre O'Connell, Marie Foley and Chung Eun-Mo were included in a six person group show and Deirdre O'Connell was included in a seven person thematic show.

The gallery plans for 1993 include a projected exhibition entitled 'Women in History' which will include six Irish women artists yet to be selected.

#### **Kerlin Art Gallery, Dublin (established May, 1989)**

From the date of its opening to the end of November 1992 the Kerlin has had 69 shows in all, 53 one person shows and 16 (mainly annual Christmas and Summer) group shows. Of these there have been only 13 one person shows by women artists, three of whom, Anne Madden, Elizabeth Magill and Gwen O'Dowd have all shown twice, the other one person shows by women artists being by Adrienne Yarme (U.S.), Phyllis Mahon, Sophie Aghajanian, Catherine Owens, Dorothy Cross, Suzanne Treister and Sybille Ungers.

Women also fared poorly in the Kerlin group shows - usually included but in a poor ratio in the annual Summer and Christmas shows e.g. Summer 1988, male female ratio 9:4; Christmas 1988, 18:2; Revolution Summer Show, 1989, 17:1; Christmas 1989, 10:2; Summer 1990, 8:3; Christmas 1990, 12:3; Summer 1991, 11:2 and Summer 1992, 9:2.

#### **Riverrun Gallery, Dublin (established May, 1989)**

The Riverrun numbers approximately 30-32 artists on its gallery list and roughly 50% of these are women including : Vivienne Bogan, Rita Conway, Jackie Cooney, Jacinta Feeney, Eilis O'Connell, Helen Richmond, Vivienne Roche, Michelle Souter, Maighread Tobin, Maud Cotter, Grace Weir and Jackie Stanley.

To December 1992 the Riverrun has held approximately 28 one person shows and again roughly 50% of these have been by women artists. During the same period the gallery has



also held approximately ten group shows and women have also been well represented in these.

### **Rubicon Gallery, Dublin (established May, 1990)**

To December 1992 the Rubicon has held 24 solo shows, ten of which have been by women artists including shows by Mary Rose O'Neill, Poppy and Holly Melia, Anna Jefferson, Veronica Bolay, Carmel Mooney, Barbara Freeman, Brigid Flannery and Eithne Jordan.

In the ten group shows held by the Rubicon in the same period women have been included in all but one, but usually in a poor ratio to male artists.

### **Solomon Gallery, Dublin**

The Solomon gallery has approximately 25 gallery artists including approximately 10 women, amongst them : Elizabeth Cope, Noelle O'Keeffe, Mary Burke, Joan Mallon, Patricia Jorgensen, Tracey Quinn, Clíodhna Doyle and Rosemary Warren.

Each artist has a solo show approximately every two years and there are three group shows annually in which all of the gallery artists are included.

### **Taylor Gallery, Dublin**

While the Taylor Gallery represents in excess of 50 living artists there are in fact only 15 women included on this list. These are : Pauline Bewick, Cecily Brennan, Helen Comerford, Rosaleen Davey, Jill Dennis, Anita Groener, Mary Lohan, Melanie le Brocq, Jane O'Malley, Ita Quilligan, Maria Simonds-Gooding, Camille Souter, Nancy Wynne-Jones, Anne Yeats and Barbara Warren.

Each of the gallery artists has a one person show approximately once every two years and the gallery holds two group shows annually which include some, but not necessarily all, of the gallery artists.

### **Wyvern Gallery**

1991 to 1992 total solo exhibitions : 9, one solo woman show : Maria Clarke.

Total group exhibitions : 14, women artists included in 9 group shows.





## **Arts Centres/Non-Commercial Galleries**

### **Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast**

In the period from 1983 to 1992 the Arts Council has held approximately 49 solo shows, 11 of which have been by women namely Alicia Boyle, Sally Houston, Anne Carlisle, Mary P. O'Connor, Mary Fitzgerald, Alice Higgins Morgan, Evelyn Williams, Rita Duffy, Deirdre O'Connell, Kathy Prendergast and Una Walker. Women artists have also been proportionately well represented in the Arts Council's group shows although a numerical breakdown is not available for the larger thematic shows.

### **The Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick**

The Belltable has held approximately 10-12 exhibitions per annum since 1981 and in the years from 1985-1992 male and female artists have had an equal number of one person shows (23:23), and women have also been reasonably well represented in the Belltable's group shows.

### **Butler Gallery, Kilkenny**

In the four year period from 1987-1991 the Butler has held approximately 8 solo shows by women including Jill Dennis, Marie Foley, Barbara Freeman, Amelia Stein, Alicia Boyle and Gwen O'Dowd. Women have also been more than evenly represented in the Butler's group shows between 1983 and 1992 and included amongst the artists exhibited are Grace Weir, Tina O'Connell, Jackie Stanley, Helen Comerford, Elizabeth Cope, Anne Carlisle, Mary Fitzgerald, Eilis O'Connell, Cecily Brennan, Anita Groener, Eithne Jordan, Jill Dennis, Dorothy Cross, Jackie Twomey, Kathy Prendergast and Marie Foley.

### **The City Arts Centre, Dublin**

During the years from 1983-85 and 1990-92 (the gallery was closed for refurbishment between 1985 and 1990) the City Arts Centre held approximately 25 solo shows, 10 of which were by women artists. Women artists also tended to predominate in the centre's group shows.



### **Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork**

The Crawford tends to hold a wide range of exhibitions covering areas such as craft, pottery and archival material. It has also held a series of exhibitions featuring work of lesser known Irish women artists over the past 100 years.

The gallery has not in fact hosted many solo shows of contemporary Irish artists but in those held - both solo and group - women have been quite well represented.

### **The Narrow Water Gallery, Warrenpoint, Co. Down**

The Narrow Water Gallery was opened in June 1988 and averages 10 exhibitions a year. According to Maeve Hall, the gallery director, the ratio of male:female shows is entirely coincidental and, as appears from the gallery's catalogues, women artists have been well represented in both one person and group shows. The gallery operates a series of 'Artists Choice' exhibitions both from the work of graduate students of the Belfast College of Art and otherwise. The graduate student shows have been predominantly female and both Clement McAleer's '3 Years On' (a 1991 follow up show to the 1988 degree show) and Kate Robinson's 'What Would Noah Have Thought?' were in fact all female exhibitions. The McAleer show included Nuala Gregory and Pauline Meehan while the Robinson show included Carmel Benson, Carol Cronin, Patricia McKenna, Patricia Hurl, Pauline Cummins, Breda Mooney and Margaret MacNamidhe.

### **Orchard Gallery, Derry**

The Orchard Gallery which was opened in 1978 was at that time the first professionally established public arts facility in Derry, funded by Derry City Council with a subsidy from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. According to the gallery publicity sheet the Orchard, since it opened, has "developed a visual arts programme, both within and without its spaces which reflects current activity in contemporary art in the world as well as the region". However, while the gallery presents over 25 exhibitions and related events a year, "including work of local, national and international significance", in the years from 1983 to 1992 from the gallery records there appears to have been only one solo show by a contemporary Irish woman artist (Alice Maher, 1991), which in itself begs the question as to whether or not the gallery's programme actually reflects current activity in contemporary art in either a local or a national sense.

A small selection of women artists were included in some of the gallery's group shows, amongst them Ann Carlisle, Mary Fitzgerald, Eilis O'Connell and Barbara Freeman.





### **Project Arts Centre, Dublin**

A comprehensive list of figures for the exhibitions in the Project is unfortunately not available but, from the information furnished by the centre, it does appear that the Project has hosted a reasonably good selection of solo shows by women artists between 1980 and 1992. Amongst those to have exhibited with the Project are Veronica McDaid, Theresa McKenna, Cathy Carman, Gwen O'Dowd, Sally Houston, Jackie Twomey, Rita Duffy, Janet Mullarney, Marie Foley, Grace Weir, Aileen MacKeogh and Alice Maher. The Project also hosted an exhibition entitled 'Womens Images of Men', in June/July 1981, a show which was in fact first presented at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. The Project also hosted an exhibition entitled Womens Images of Men in June/July 1981 a show which was in fact first presented at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London and of course co-organised the 'In A State' exhibition held in Kilmainham Jail in 1991. This exhibition which invited artists to deal with their perception of national identity as it exists at the present time included 9 women artists out of a total of 21 artists in all including Liadin Cooke, Dorothy Cross, Pauline Cummins, Rita Duffy, Marie Foley, Alice Maher, Antoinette O'Loughlin, Louise Walsh and Geraldine O'Reilly.

### **The Temple Bar Gallery and Artists' Studios, Dublin**

In the years between 1988 to the end of 1992 women artists made up a total of 38% of the one-person shows and 44% of the group shows held in the Temple Bar Gallery. The list of artists in the attached studios is as follows : Robert Armstrong, Christine Bond, Michael Boran, Oisín Breathnach, Gerry Caffrey, Cathy Carman, Deirdre Carr, Paul Coleman, Cliff Collie, Mike Duhan, Sean Fingleton, Paddy Graham, Patrick Hall, Joseph Hanly, Patricia Hurl, Finbar Kelly, Margaret MacNamidhe, Anne McLeod, Joe Magill, Catriona Maguire, Berni Markey, Martin Mayler, John Moore, Michelle Souter, Margaret Tuffy and Irene Uhlemann (10 women : 15 men).

## **Museums and Institutions**

### **Aosdana**

Aosdana, established in 1981, is an affiliation of 150 artists engaged in literature, music and visual arts, established by the Arts Council to honour those artists whose work has



made an outstanding contribution to the arts in Ireland, and to encourage and assist members in devoting their energies fully to their art. The first 89 members were nominated by the Arts Council but as of the 1st of January 1984 the procedure for election has been through initial nomination by two members of Aosdana, which nomination is then considered by the Toscairi (the elected administration within Aosdana) and then by members of the relevant discipline i.e. visual arts, music or literature. The nomination is then finally put to a ballot of the general assembly of Aosdana and nominees who receive a simple majority of votes are elected members.

The current male:female ratio of membership in each of the artistic categories is as follows : Visual Arts 50:19; Literature 59:9 and Music 15:1. The 19 women artists now included in the Visual Arts category are Pauline Bewick, Cecily Brennan, Mary Fitzgerald, Eithne Jordan, Sonja Landweer, Melanie le Brocqy, Anne Madden, Helen Moloney, Carolyn Mulholland, Eilis O'Connell, Gwen O'Dowd, Kathy Prendergast, Maria Simonds-Gooding, Camille Souter, Imogen Stuart, Barbara Warren, Alexandra Wejchert, Anne Yeats and Dorothy Cross. As a matter of interest concerning the artists discussed in this thesis Cecily Brennan was elected to Aosdana in 1991, Mary Fitzgerald in 1990, Gwen O'Dowd in 1991, Kathy Prendergast in 1989 and Dorothy Cross in 1992.

### **The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin**

The Douglas Hyde Gallery was opened in 1978 and, as of 1984, has been funded jointly by Trinity College and the Arts Council. The gallery presents 8 exhibitions a year, 4 of which it originates itself, and 4 of which are negotiated abroad. According to the gallery's own publicity data it is the gallery's policy to promote exhibitions of the highest quality contemporary art of both foreign and Irish artists whose work has been to the forefront since the 1960s. In the years 1980 to 1992 of the approximately 26 solo shows by Irish artists only 5 have actually been by contemporary Irish women artists. The gallery has also hosted quite a large number of group exhibitions including, for example, the Irish Exhibition of Living Art (1978, 1980, 1981 and 1984), the Guinness Peat Aviation Awards Exhibition (1982 and 1983), Limerick's E.V.A. (1983), and other selected thematic exhibitions such as 'Directions Out' (which as mentioned in the text included no Irish women artists) and the 1990/1991 show 'Irish Art of the Eighties', in which latter show women artists were numerically well represented.

### **The Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin**

Of the approximately 700 known artists represented in the Hugh Lane permanent collection only approximately 74 are in fact women artists and approximately 14 of these





are contemporary Irish women artists, including Pauline Bewick, Deborah Brown, Helen Comerford, Dorothy Cross, Clíodhna Cussen, Melanie le Brocqy, Anne Madden, Mary Farl-Powers, Kathy Prendergast, Vivienne Roche, Camille Souter, Barbara Warren, Alexandra Wejchert and Anne Yeats.

### **The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin**

The Irish Museum of Modern Art was established in May 1991 and, according to Siubán Barry, the Museum's curator, there is no policy to exhibit male or female artists but because of the perception that women artists are such a strong force in the Irish art world it is felt that the Museum must reflect this situation. However, she also notes that because the big 'names' on the international market are all men (owing to market promotional trends) it becomes difficult for the Museum not to focus on male artists if it wants to have shows of known and established international artists.<sup>30</sup> As to shows organised by the Museum, contemporary women artists have been proportionately well represented with a collaborative show by Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh and a solo show by Alanna O'Kelly both in 1992, and Marie Foley scheduled to have an exhibition in the Museum in 1993.

In relation to the Museum's acquisitions policy, according to Ruth Ferguson, the Museum's Acquisitions Director, the attitude is basically : "if it is good, if it is interesting, then we will want it", and the Museum has now acquired work by 31 artists, including approximately 20 contemporary male Irish artists but only 5 contemporary Irish women artists, Dorothy Cross, Marie Foley, Mary Fitzgerald, Janet Mullarney and Kathy Prendergast.

The Museum's collection has also been augmented by the acquisition through donation of two private collections namely the Gordon Lambert collection and the O'Malley collection. The Gordon Lambert collection includes contemporary Irish women artists such as Cecily Brennan, Deborah Brown, Anne Carlisle, Mary Fitzgerald, Aileen MacKeogh, Anne Madden, Eilish O'Connell, Mary Farl-Powers, Vivienne Roche, Maria Simonds-Gooding, Camille Souter and Barbara Warren, while the O'Malley collection includes works by Evie Hone, Mainie Jellett, Nano Reid and Anne Yeats.

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<sup>30</sup> Note comments by the internationally acclaimed American artist Susan Rothenberg (*Vanity Fair*, December 1992, p. 166) where she says " I know there is something wrong if the *New Spirit in Painting* show in London had no woman. I know there's something wrong if I'm the only woman in the *Zeitgeist* show in Berlin. There's something wrong with who's making the decisions".



## **Rosc**

Rosc (meaning poetry of vision) was first established in 1967 as an international exhibition of modern painting and ancient Celtic art. In the years 1967 and 1971 the contemporary focus in Rosc was on international art and no Irish artists were included. Rosc 1977, however, included two Irish artists for the first time (both male) and in Rosc 1980, 7 male Irish artists were exhibited. In 1984 the exhibition included 10 Irish artists in order to "reflect the upsurge and improvement in contemporary art in Ireland" and for the first time in Rosc's history Irish women artists were included. Those exhibiting in 1984 included Deborah Brown, Anne Madden and Eilis O'Connell while in Rosc 1988 (the last Rosc to date) both Mary Fitzgerald and Kathy Prendergast were exhibited.

## **The Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts, Gallagher Gallery, Dublin**

Between the years 1989 and the end of 1992 the Gallagher Gallery has in the main exhibited group shows such as the R.H.A. annual exhibition, the Irish Watercolour Society of Ireland annual exhibitions, the Oireachtas annual exhibition and shows by the Dublin Sketching and the Dublin Art Clubs. In 1991 and 1992 the Gallery also hosted the annual degree show of painting students from the National College of Art and Design. As to solo shows, those hosted have been largely retrospectives. The only solo show in 1989 was a Tom Carr retrospective. There was no solo show in 1990. In 1991 the gallery hosted 6 solo retrospective shows, 3 by male artists and 3 by women artists including Hilda Van Stockum, Imogen Stewart and Anne Madden. In 1992 the gallery hosted 4 solo shows only one of which was by a woman artist, Nancy Wynne-Jones.

## **The Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts, Dublin**

Of the 28 academicians only 4 are women including Pauline Bewick, Carolyn Mulholland, Imogen Stewart and Barbara Warren; of the 9 honorary members, 3 are women including Brigid Ganly, Melanie le Brocq and Hilda Van Stockum; and of the 9 associate members again 3 are women including Eithne Carr, Marjorie Fitzgibbon and Alexandra Wejchert.

\* Note : The National Gallery was not included in this overview since it does not have a policy of collecting contemporary/living artists (note comments by Brian Kennedy in 'Art on Film' RTE 1, 6th January 1993).





## Art Colleges

### **Crawford College of Art and Design, Cork**

#### Fine Art Graduates, 1988 - 1992

<u>National Diploma in Art</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
1988	5	20
1989	9	14
1990	6	27
1991 (old)	11	20
1991 (new)	7	32
1992	7	23
B.A. (Fine Art)		
1992	6	16
Total	45	136

#### Staff, 1988 - 1992

<u>Year</u>	<u>Part-Time</u>		<u>Full-Time</u>	
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
1987/88	18	15	13	3
1988/89	13	12	15	3
1989/90	14	13	13	3
1990/91	12	13	13	3
1991/92	12	13	13	3



## Limerick College of Art, Commerce and Technology

### Graduates from Fine Art from 1975-1992

Year	NCEA B.A. DEGREE	N.C.E.A. NAT. DIPLOMA	Male	Female
1975				
1976				
1977		7	2	5
1978		6	4	2
1979		6	2	4
1980		9	6	3
1981		11	5	6
1982		20	10	10
1983		14	3	11
1984		12	2	10
1985		12	5	7
1986		20	4	16
1987		29	9	20
1988		20	6	14
1989		17	4	13
1990		35	8	27
1991		61	26	35
1992	10	45	22	33
1993	25	42	23 (projected) 44	
Total			141	260

### Staff 1992

Department	Part-Time		Full-Time	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Painting	1	1	2	0
Sculpture		1	1	0
Print			2	0





In the College as a whole the male/female staff ratio is approximately 70:30. All recent appointments within the College have been female i.e. 2 appointments in the History of Art Department and one in the Graphics Department.

The College also engages a large percentage (25%) of visiting staff which is evenly mixed between male and female.

### **National College of Art and Design, Dublin**

#### Fine Art Graduates 1981 - 1992

<u>Diploma</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
1981	16	14
1982	9	11
1983	5	10
1984	14	8
1985	12	10
1986	8	7
1987	7	5
1988	5	11
1989	9	15
1990	10	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>104</b>

<u>Degree</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
1981	4	5
1982	9	14
1983	4	8
1985	17	14
1986	9	19
1987	17	12
1988	16	18
1989	10	13
1990	12	18
1991	28	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>163</b>



Fine Arts Staff 1992

	Male	Female
Part-Time	8	5
Full-Time	9	1

**University of Ulster at Belfast**  
Faculty of Art and Design

1992 Male : Female staff ratio 8:2.

No. of graduates per annum - 40.

Percentage of female graduates per annum - 55%.

**SUMMARY**

It is interesting in summary to note that the poorest ratio of women artists appears in relation to what are arguably the most successful commercial art galleries such as for example the Kerlin and Taylor Galleries in Dublin and the Fenderesky in Belfast, however, women do appear to be reasonably well represented in the other commercial galleries listed.

Concerning the arts centres, most in fact appear to have a reasonably good record for exhibiting women artists, the most notable exception in this case being the Orchard Gallery in Derry, which is of particular significance given its high profile and its own stated objectives.

The most notably poor record for representation of women artists occurs in relation to the third category, namely museums and institutions, where, for example, the Douglas Hyde's poor reputation as discussed in the text is largely borne out by the figures detailed, women having been represented in only one-fifth of the gallery's total solo exhibitions to date and having also had something of a mixed history in the Gallery's group shows. Similarly, women are poorly represented in the collections of the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery, and the Irish Museum of Modern Art even though, for example, they have been very well





represented in one person and group shows organised and scheduled by the Irish Museum of Modern Art to date.

As already discussed, women are patently very poorly represented in Aosdana and the Royal Hibernian Academy, although, in the case of Aosdana, the introduction of a more democratic procedure for nomination and election of members as of 1984 may eventually serve to bring this to rights - the main difficulty in this regard being that the quota of members is now complete and unless extended any new members will obviously have to await election until the demise of already existing members. (Note that election data in relation to the Royal Hibernian Academy was not forthcoming).

As to the figures in relation to the art colleges, women have formed an overall majority of graduates in all cases for the years surveyed while at the same time being very poorly represented as full-time staff in all of the colleges. In Cork for example the ratio of female:male full-time members of staff is 3:13; in Limerick it is 0:5; in the National College of Art and Design, Dublin it is 1:9 and in the University of Ulster it is 2:8. Obviously the historical reasons for such imbalance require to be investigated in order that the present situation might be understood and adequately redressed.



## Appendix C

### **General Questionnaire**

1. Are you yourself in any way conscious of being a "woman" artist?
2. If so do you consider this as having a negative or positive effect on
  - (a) Your own perception of yourself as an artist;
  - (b) The public perception of your work;
  - (c) The actual nature of your work.
3. Do you think that there is any such thing as a "female sensibility"? If so, do you think that any such sensibility is inherent or is it imposed by social influences and constraints (Note : woman and nature debate - and conflicts within feminist art theory and practice on this issue. Note : also remark by Hilary Robinson, NCAD May 1992, that there has to be gender in art i.e. that a woman artist by virtue of being a woman brings her specifically female sensibility and experience to bear on her art. Do you agree with this position?)
4. Do you find that such an idea either limits or widens your scope as an artist?
5. Do you ever find your work being stereotyped and therefore in a sense sidelined as female or feminine or being categorised as such in a manner which you would query or contest? How, if at all, do you think that this can be avoided by the individual artist?
6. Do you feel that you have either any obligation or inclination to deal with specifically female or feminist issues? Would you see your work as having a social function/or as being 'issue-based' in this sense?
7. Do you think that this might result in your work being marginalized or in your credibility being undermined?





8. Do you think it important to identify yourself as an Irish artist or does this matter to you?
9. In the catalogue for the Douglas Hyde's A New Tradition Fintan O'Toole has written about the changes in Irish society throughout the 80's as having a liberating effect on the Irish art world in general and in particular for women artists who have had to in a sense carve out a place for themselves both within Irish society and within the Irish art world. Similarly Ailbhe Smyth in her writing and Eavan Boland in her poetry have written about Irish woman's need to forge her own identity and to carve out her own place in Irish society.

Do you see any of this as being relevant to your work or as having any influence on it?

10. In what sense do you see other social and political aspects of Irish life as affecting your work if at all?
11. Do you differentiate between the work of male and female artists in Ireland or elsewhere?
12. Do you think that you encounter any problems or advantages in the art world simply by virtue of the fact that you are a woman?
13. Do you think that women artists have any greater difficulties in securing exhibitions or representation than male artists?
14. To what extent do you have control over how your work is seen and exhibited? How important is this to you?
15. Do you agree with the idea of shows being held exclusively for women artists?
16. How relevant, if at all, is aesthetic theory/art history (post-modernism, feminist art history etc.) to your work?
17. Fionna Barber (*Circa* March/April '87) says that there is need for increased debate about the issues of womens art in Ireland. Do you agree?



18. Do you think that women artists have become more prominent, if not dominant in the Irish art world?
19. In what way does having or not having children affect your work if at all? Do you see this as being a relevant factor either in your own work or in the work of other artists either male or female?
20. How well or accurately do you think that your work is generally reviewed and understood by the critics? Do you see the situation of art criticism as being problematic in relation to your work?
21. Do you think it problematic that women are under represented in institutions such as the art colleges and Aosdana?





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