NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

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TITLE : "NATIONAL IDENTITY"

BY

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LIST OF PLATES

INTRODUCTION

The question of National Identity is in many respects as pertinent today in Ireland as it was at the turn of the century. In 1990 Jobst Graeve, Curator of the Project Arts Centre conceived the idea of holding an Exhibition comprising twenty-one Irish Artists' response to the theme of National Identity, to be held on the very ground where the men and women who forged our Nation were imprisoned and sometimes executed. The idea was for the Artists to react through their work to the extraordinary history of Kilmainham Gaol. A history which has contributed to the forces that shaped modern Ireland and, therefore, offers a wide view of the most disturbing and inspirational themes of Irish history.

This dissertation is an attempt to explore the circumstances surrounding the formation of the Exhibition, the response of the Artists to this extraordinary challenge and the similarities found in the response of four Artists to the theme of National Identity, from Central Europe. It is important that an understanding of Ireland's relationship with Britain, with the mainland of Europe and with its partitioned selves, combined with a knowledge of the development of its visual tradition is understood, before one can define a concept such as National Identity.

In Chapter One, the dissertation opens with a brief history of our relationship with Britain and the effect it had on the development of the visual language in Ireland. It then proceeds to outline the formation of the concept for the Exhibition in Kilmainham Gaol and introduces the Artists and the space to which they must accommodate their work.

Chapter Two, introduces the women participating in the Exhibition, whom Graeves believes were the more outspoken in their response to the theme of National Identity, it then proceeds to give an overview of the role played by the Northern Irish Artists in defining National Identity.

Chapter 3, comprises a detailed review of the three consecutive European Exhibitions which were held simultaneously with the "In a State" Exhibition and identifies some of the parallels which exist between Ireland and a number of the small Nations which have recently redefined their role within the new Europe.

CHAPTER 1.

AN OVERVIEW HISTORY OF THE VISUAL LANGUAGE IN IRELAND AND THE FORMATION OF THE "IN A STATE" EXHIBITION.

1.1 History of the Visual Language in Ireland

The Republic of Ireland was dominated by a Gaelic, catholic, nationalist, political orthodoxy. Brown points out that in 1926, 92.6 per cent of the population of the Irish Free State were returned as catholic in the census (1). Religion came to be known as the significant divide in Ireland from 1798 up until the end of the Civil War and remains so in Ireland today. It was after the famine years that the Catholic Church established a more stable relationship between the idea of national identity and Catholicism, a relationship which offered the people of Ireland a collective which set them apart from the English inhabitants. The overwhelming numbers of catholic people in Ireland during the thirties put the Roman Catholic Church in a position to preach on the meaning of Irish morality condemning Cinema, English Newspapers, cheap Magazines, new dances and provocative female fashions, claiming they would destroy those virtues which are essential to maintain that true Gaelic identity. (2)

When De Valera came to power in 1932 it was felt that his authority would restore some hope of Ireland becoming an independent self-sufficient rural Republic. Regrettably the 1930s showed similar conservatism as the previous decades in dwelling on the past and expressing distaste for what would have been perceived as the dangerous symptoms of Modernism. The population was protected from alien modern thought and Art forms through the enactment of a Bill to

censor certain publications however it is important to note that the powerful support given to the enactment of this Censorship Bill came from the Irish Vigilance Societies and the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland. This was the Church's attempt to suppress all forms of Modernity in order to keep intact that Catholic Gaelic tradition in Ireland. Imported popular Newspapers and Magazines which recommended or provided information on birth control for instance was withdrawn from publication through the Censorship Bill. (3)

The Arts were also distrusted often censored and certainly never promoted. Rural Ireland was seen as the emporium of all that was truly Irish. Irish Painters of the twenties and thirties were touched by the prevailing Rural understanding of Irish identity. This poetic response in Painting had its origins in the image of Ireland, promoted both at home and abroad, of a Rural people immersed in a Folk Culture and living in a beautiful landscape. Painters, such as Paul Henry, William Conor, Sean O'Sullivan and Maurice MacGonigal comprised a School of Irish Academic Realism and produced Paintings of natural primitive beauty of the West of Ireland ; a Country in other words that has taken a refuge from the problems of Modern Life. (4) (see pl.1)

During the 1940s Irish Academic Realism was promoted and practised by the Members of the Royal Hibernian Academy

Plate 1. Paul Henry, (1876-1958) Dawn, Killary Harbour, 1922-23, Oil on Canvas, 69.1 x 83.3. Collection : Ulster Museum.

(R.H.A) which directed Art into the pursuit of traditional forms of excellence. The dominant influence of the R.H.A. on teaching techniques within the National College of Art (N.C.A.) contributed to the ongoing insularity of Irish Art. However in the first three decades of the twentieth century Artists such as Mainie Jellet, Nora McGuinness and Evie Hone went to Paris, studied under Andre L'hote (see pl. 2). Finally in 1943 they formed The Irish Exhibition of Living Art (I.E.L.A.)an annual platform which challenged the reactionary academicism of the R.H.A. by opting for Modern often non-representational styles. (see pl.3). Jellet and Company were the first to alert Ireland to the rise of Modernism, even if their personal contributions were scarcely major. (5) (see pl.4)

McAvera suggested as, as a result of the partition of Ireland real changes had occurred in the development of the differing visual languages in the South and the North. In the North Provincialism and Colonialism were reinforced while in the Republic Partition resulted in a new-found self confidence ; a sense of liberation. The consequences of which was a Colonisation of the visual vocabulary of internationalism. The more conservative North had no equivalent to the Irish Exhibition of Living Art. (6)

Rosc founded in 1967 was another concerted endeavour to bring international work from abroad to Irish audiences. It was in 1977 that Irish Art was included in this

Plate 2. Maine Jellet, The Three Graces 1921.
Oil on Board, 40.5 x 28. Dublin Private Collection.
Lhote's teaching emphasised on simplification of the human figure into cubes, cylinders and cones.

Plate 3. Norah McGuinness (1903-80), Garden Green 1952,
Oil on Canvas, 102 x 71.

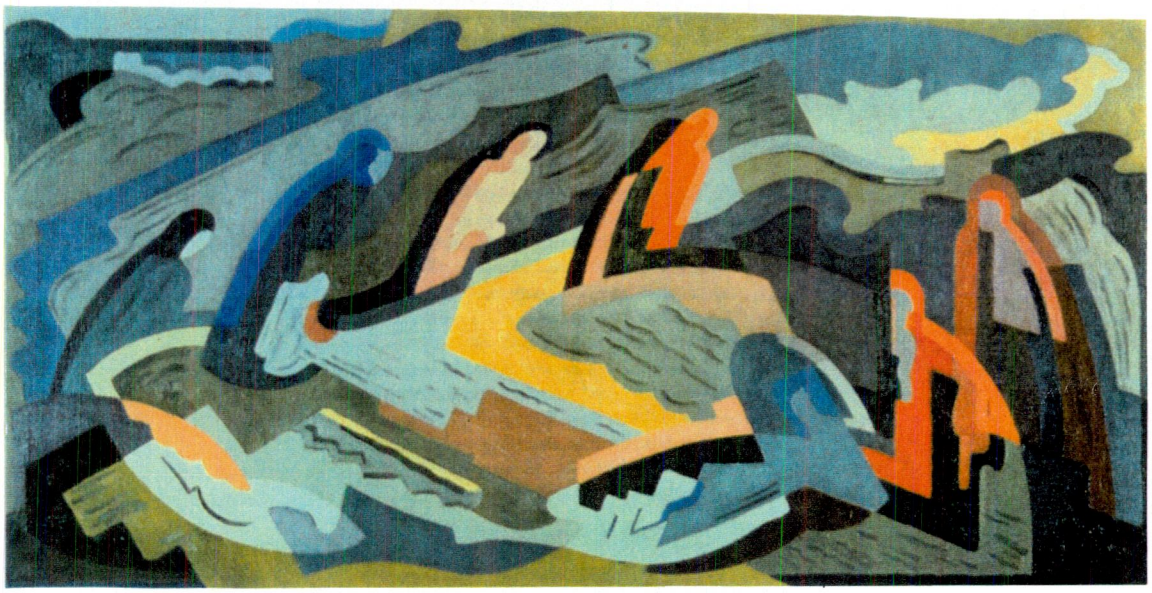

Plate 4. Maine Jellet, Western Procession 1943, Oil on Canvas, 43 x 86.5, Dublin, Private Collection.

International Exhibition for the first time (see pl 5).It was argued at this time that Irish Art had established its credentials and merited inclusion in an International Exhibition. The Exhibitions encouraged a new level of debate about issues in Art and also encouraged Artists to become more adventurous, Collectors more daring and the public more appreciative and critical. One of the main consequences of Rosc was undoubtedly to influence the provision of Third Level Art Education in Ireland. However not all of the Artists who responded to this outward looking development were working abstractly. Robert Ballagh was one of the first Irish Artists to use a brash urban style echoing the international pop movement

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Ballagh remembers when he began to paint seriously he found he had little in common with a mode of painting which was then seen by many as being truly "Irish". Patrick Collins was one of the leading Painters of this genre, a Painter who never described but indicated, hinted and suggested by half hiding Forms in veils of colour. (7) (see pl.6)

Ballagh believed that this poetic genre of Painting, however strong the claims made for its inherent "Irishness", had little to say about the reality of the Irish social condition during the 1950s. The economy of the fifties was stagnant with consequent unemployment which led to a high percentage of people emigrating to both Great Britain and the United States, yet there was no reflection

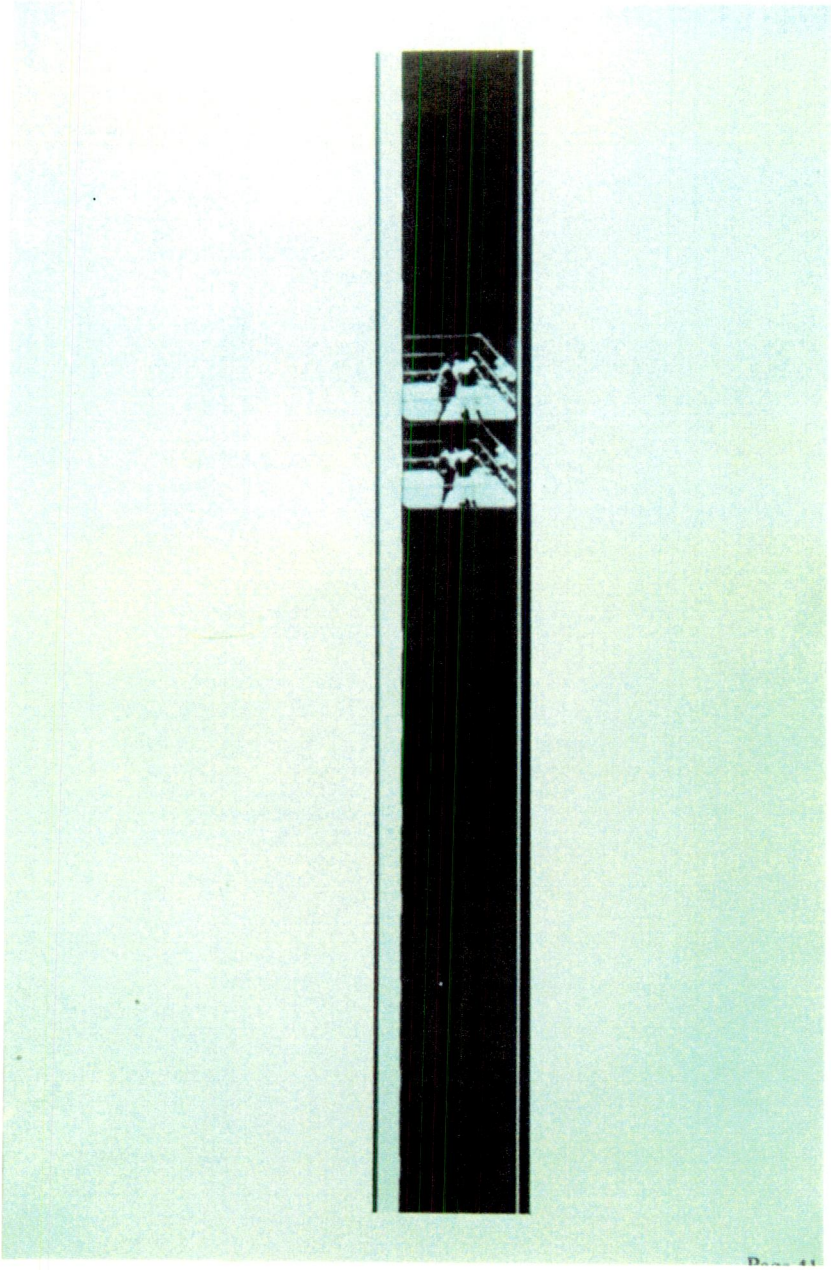

Plate 5. James Coleman 1977, Clara and Darioagain, Slide Projection accompanied by Sound Transmission. Work which was especially created for the Rosc Exhibition.

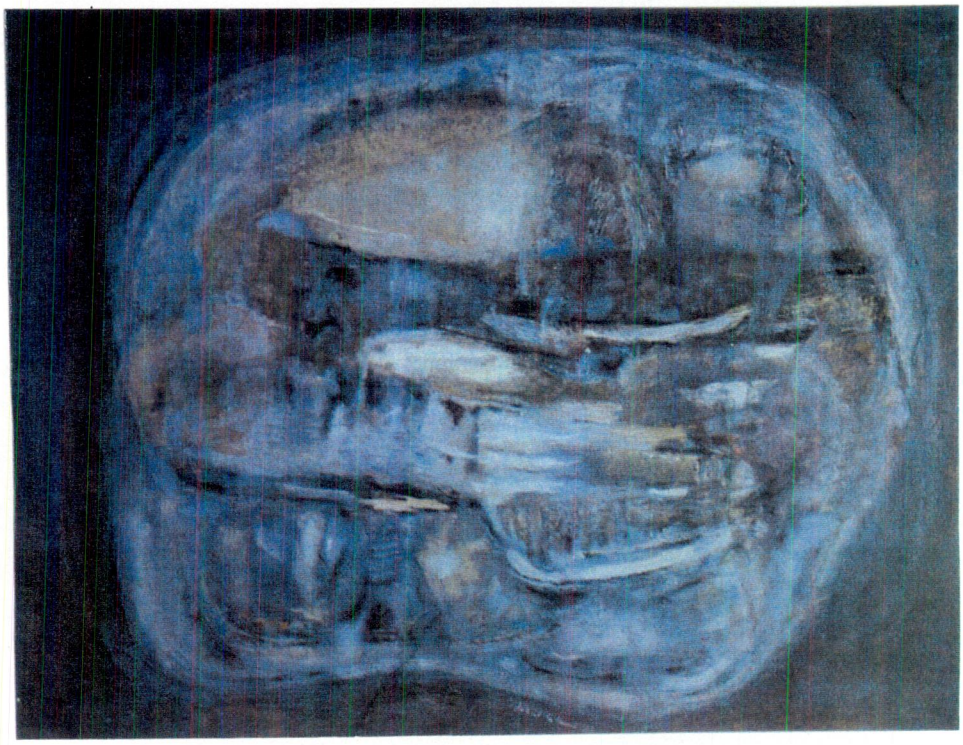

Plate 6. Patrick Collins, Bogland 1956, Oil on Canvas 69 x 84.

of this social tragedy in the Painting of this period. This romantic response to rural Ireland had been a dominant feature of Irish cultural life for quite a considerable time (8)

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Ballagh felt that his work was an honest response to his urban background -formed by the movies, comic books, popular music and television - rather than native Gaelic culture. Although there were obvious similarities between his work and that of Artists in other Western Countries he knew there was a difference between his work and the work of Painters in the United States for instance. He realised the meaning of this difference through the discovery of an Irish sensibility in the writing of Laurence Sterne. Ballagh refers to Sterne's conversational style of writing, commenting on the sense of irony, humour and frisky digressions present in his work which all go to create a book, that however un-irish it may appear on the surface, has at its core a real "Irishness". Irishness cannot be imposed on a work through Celtic ornament, for instance, but is explained by Ballagh as an attitude to life, consisting of a sense of humour, irony, satire or metaphor and above all a healthy scepticism. Robert Ballagh is one Artist who put Irish irony into practice through his well executed Paintings on cultural criticism. (9)

According to McAvera around the 50s and 60s the Visual Arts continued to lag behind. The Arts Council of Northern

Ireland, formed in 1948, had conditioned Northern Art into a sensual Painterly and Provincial Art. With the onset of the Troubles of 1969 onwards the question arose of where the reality was in Northern Irish Art. The assimilation of the daily tensions of the Troubles was generally absent from the work of Northern Irish Artists. (10).

It was in 1968 that Robert Ballagh turned his attention to the Northern Troubles. He began a series of Paintings inspired by the Civil Rights Campaign, then just beginning in the North. The Campaign collapsed under Sectarian attack in 1969, resulting in the violence which continues to this day. Ballagh attempted to express his feelings on this situation through quoting some of the most famous examples of Political Paintings from the past. As recent as 1984 Aidan Dunne suggested Irish Art had shown little interest in Political Social or Religious themes. Fortunately times have begun to change in Northern Ireland. Various Artists from the mid-seventies onwards have begun to explore their contemporary heritage, while in the Republic, Artists like Paddy Graham, Brian Maguire and a number of others were affected by the tensions which developed during the 80s, for example Dublin became the Heroin Capital of Europe. 250,000 were unemployed, 50,000 emigrated and the National Debt was at 25 billion, yet there still remained that deep rooted Catholic tradition which stood its ground during the Referenda on Abortion and Divorce resulting in a two-to-one majority for the

conservative position. The important role these Artists played in helping Ireland lose its old identity and enter the modern world through the visual language is quite evident in the outcome of the work presented in the Kilmainham Gaol Exhibition in 1991.

1.2 The formation of the Exhibition on National Identity.

Jobst Graeve in his Journal for the Catalogue explained the circumstances surrounding the formation of the concept of the Exhibition. He had recently visited an Exhibition in Belfast by Rita Duffy which included two central pieces, Sieve 1 and 11 showing the Peace Wall dividing the Catholic and Protestant Communities. In the same year 1989, the Berlin Wall, which divided the citizens of Berlin into separate worlds had at last been pulled down. When a piece of the Wall was sent to Graeve it reinforced the idea of the Exhibition which was to become part of a Programme, namely the 1991 Visual Arts Programme, which would concentrate on the question of National identity. The Programme was to be held in two parts. The Irish component was to be shown in the spacious East Wing of Kilmainham Gaol, while a number of consecutive Exhibitions from Continental Europe was to be shown at the Project Gallery. After the Exhibition had been approved by the Office of Public Works and it had been awarded a major Grant by the Arts Council, Graeve proceeded to select the participating Irish Artists. He selected Artists who were presently

living in Ireland so that they could familiarise themselves with the space and the concept of the Exhibition. (12)

The Title given to the Exhibition 'In a State' was deliberately ambiguous giving the Artists an opportunity to address the diversity of the theme. 'In a State' suggests many meanings, a triple entendre, as it were. It is evocative of the experience of Nationhood on a political level, a political entity with its own independent system of Government. According to Fintan O'Toole it is also an expression of flux and chaos, to be in a state is to be emotionally up in the air. Furthermore, the term "State" is used in the Lithographic Studio to describe an imprint taken from a plate at a particular stage of its progress which is recognisable by its special marks. The contradictions resulting from the meanings of the title are central to this Exhibition. (13)

While all of the Artists addressed the theme differently, most of them focused on political interpretations. This was, to some extent, inevitable given the location of the Exhibition ; a location with an active history which spans the struggle for Irish independence. Consequently most of the images produced were ones suggestive of anger, despair, irony, amusement, fear and hope.

1.3 History of Kilmainham Gaol.

Pat Cooke (Kilmainham Gaol Curator) describes the Gaol as a symbol of Ireland's tradition of militant and constitutional Nationalism from the Rebellion of 1798 to the Civil War of 1922-23. Leaders of the Rebellions of 1798, 1803, 1848, 1867 and 1916 were detained, and in some cases executed, there. The first of a long line of political prisoners, whose willingness to face death testified to the yearning of these brave men for Irish political independence, was Henry Jay McCracken, who was later hanged at Down Patrick Gaol for his part in the 1798 Rebellion. Other names such as Thomas Addis Emmett, his brother Robert Emmett and other leading United Irishmen are also associated with the Gaol. (14) Two leaders of a group of young Nationalists calling themselves the "Young Irelanders", Francis Meagher and William Smith O'Brien, were detained in Kilmainham Gaol in the year 1848 for their part in a Rebellion at Balingary, Co. Tipperary.

With the failure of the potato crop in 1845 the Country was consumed by an appalling human disaster which led to the death of upwards of a million people "The Great Famine". At the height of the Great Famine the Gaol was crammed with starving men, women and children arrested for petty food-related crimes. Ordinary people imprisoned for acts of survival which ranged from stealing loaves of bread to more serious crimes of murder for instance. At this time the Gaol also functioned, as it had since 1800s, as a place where convicts were held for brief periods before being

shipped to Cork and onwards to Australia. The Gaol also accommodated Fenian prisoners comprising of Irish Officers and men who had fought in the American Civil War and in 1867 made a bid to establish the elusive Republic. In 1881 Charles Stewart Parnell was imprisoned in Kilmainham during the Land Agitation for Tenants' Rights and was not released until seven months later under the terms of the "Kilmainham Treaty" which had been negotiated with William E. Gladstone, Leader of the English Liberal Party.

The Easter Rising of 1916 thirty years later was the next eruption of Irish Nationalist passion when fourteen of its leaders were executed in Kilmainham Gaol. The Anglo Irish War in 1919-21 followed by the outbreak of Civil War in 1922 saw scores of Republicans imprisoned in the Gaol. With the release of the last Republican Prisoner in 1924 Kilmainham Gaol shut down. (15)

Touching in so many ways on the people and forces that shaped modern Ireland, Kilmainham Gaol offers a wide view of some of the most disturbing and inspirational themes of modern Irish history. It has enshrined the heroic efforts of the Irish to resist English oppression. It has also presented the Artists of the "In a State Exhibition" with a comparison of Ireland's past and the actuality of the Country in its present state. In a wider context it provokes a parallel with Europe which has changed dramatically in the past few years with the crumbling of

power structures, which were created by the allies at the end of the second world war, with Nations re-emerging into political independence.

1.4 The Artists and their Space.

The Artists who participated in the "In a State" Exhibition and their work are listed in the Appendix. The twenty-one Artists invited to take part in the Exhibition were specifically asked to react through their work to the extraordinary history of Kilmainham Gaol since 1796 and in so doing Jobst Graeve led the Artists to comment on the idea of National identity and to reflect on contemporary Irish culture. The Artists found that the meanings and the contradictions inherent in the title were central to their Exhibition. The contradictions which they identified included imprisonment and freedom, life and death, darkness and light, Catholicism and Protestantism, heritage and contemporaneity, idleness and forced labour, dignity and degradation. You might say that these contradictions, and other tensions, evolved out of the realisation of a major National identity problem in Ireland. (16).

The Exhibition took place in the East Wing of Kilmainham Gaol. One or more cells were allotted to each of the participants, allowing each work to be produced in situ. Alice Maher researched the definition of the word 'cell' and in so doing discovered, in the Irish language that the word 'cillin', meaning cell is very closely related to

'cill' the word for Church. Thus Cill Mhaighneann (Kilmainham) means Mhaighneann's Church (Monastic Cell).

The enormous space in the centre of the Gaol was left uneasily neglected except for a suspended chrysalis by Artist Pauline Cummins. During an interview for a televised programme on the "In a State Exhibition", which was shown on R.T.E. January 1993 and on B.B.C.1, February 1993, a spectator commented on the absence of installation in the extraordinarily exciting space of the hall ; he noted that most of the Artists elected to exhibit their work in the cells which may be interpreted as a statement on the undeveloped nature of Irish Art today. (18).

1.5 The Kilmainham Madonna.

The majority of the Artists chose to exhibit their work in the individual cells, taking advantage of the powerful impact which a single image can have when seen against a small concentrated white space. In a neighbouring cell one can witness the enigma of Grace Gifford and the profound effect of her romantically naive Painting of the Madonna (see pl.7). The Kilmainham Madonna was painted by Gifford on the wall of her cell during the time she was imprisoned in the Gaol in 1916, the year of the Easter Rising. The Painting has since been retouched by Thomas Ryan (President of the Royal Hibernian Academy) because of damage it

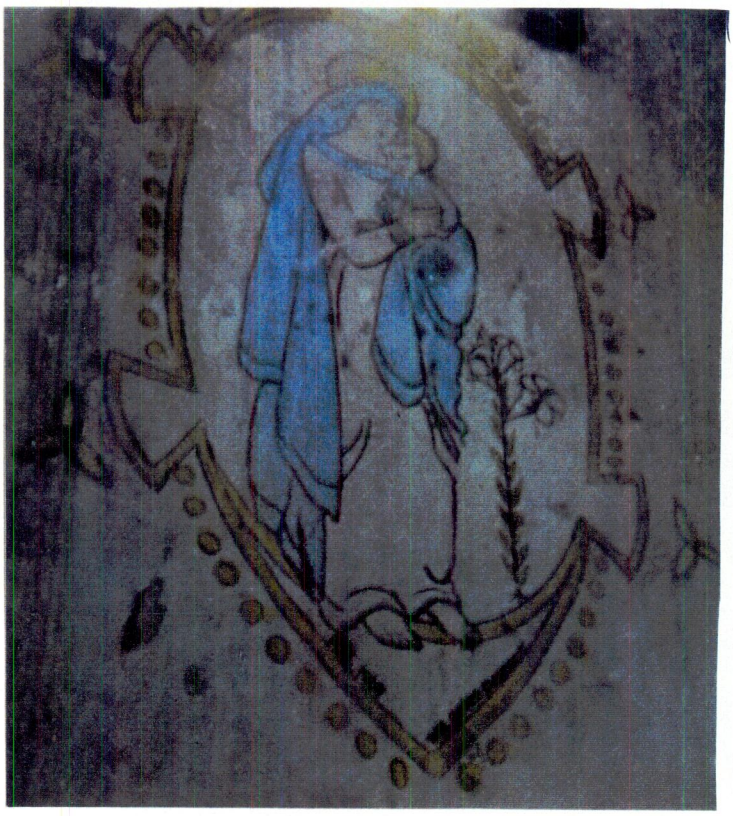

Plate 7A. Grace Gifford, Kilmainham Madonna 1916, Water Colour on Plaster, Original version.

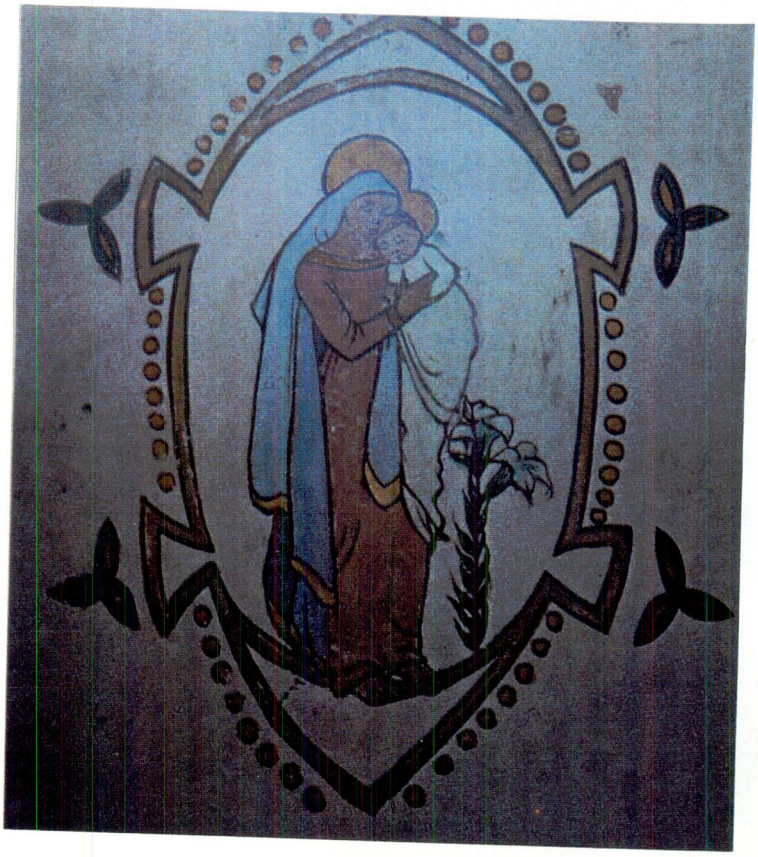

Plate 7B. Thomas Ryan, Kilmainham Madonna 1960. Restored version.

received due to exposure and neglect. The Painting is a memorial tableau, a woman's testimonial. The story of Grace Gifford is that of a young woman confined to a tiny cell, who married Joseph Plunkett on the eve of his execution. A Painter, gifted Caricaturist and feminist, she participated in the political life of the times through her cartoons and satires. As a feminist she spoke strongly on the question of equality. Although women undoubtedly contributed to the National cause their efforts were seen as subordinate to the heroic young men who sacrificed their lives for the National Cause. Gifford discloses , in the Painting of the Madonna, not only the death of her husband, the death of friends, the drowning of her sister but her own tragic life. (19)

The essential ingredients present in Gifford's work - talent, vitality and special purpose -echoes in the Art of a number of the women Artists who participated in the "In a State" Exhibition. It was the opinion of Graeve that women Artists were "some of the most outspoken" in their response to living "In a State". It could be that to some extent, their inspiration came from the efforts of Grace Gifford and her extraordinary Memorial, the Kilmainham Madonna. Many of the women voiced their opinion on National identity through issues touching on feminism, civil rights, discrimination, sexual freedom and gender. The majority of them were not exploring this area for the first time. Alice Maher, Louise Walsh, Pauline Cummins, Dorothy Cross

and Rita Duffy were specifically chosen by Graeve because of their past experience in dealing with issues relating to gender and National identity.

CHAPTER 1. REFERENCES.

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6. Brian McAvera, Parable Island, Bluecoat Gallery, School Lane, Liverpool, 1991 pg. 10.
7. Robert Ballagh "The Irishness of Irish Art". A personal view written by Robert Ballagh, pg.1.
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12. Project Arts Centre, In a State, Project Press, Ireland, 1991, pg. 9.
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CHAPTER 2.

THE FEMALE AND NORTHERN IRISH CONTRIBUTION TO THE "IN A STATE" EXHIBITION.

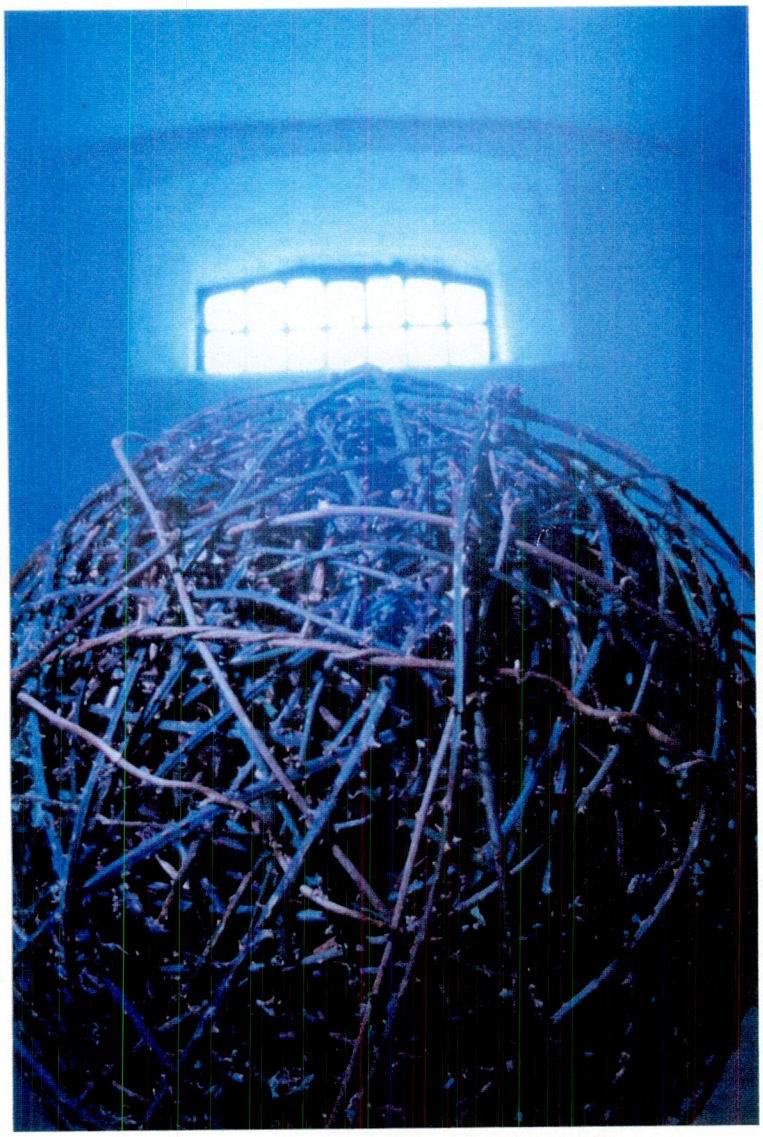


Plate 8. Alice Maher ; Cell installation 1991.
Brambles.

2.1 The Female Contribution to the Exhibition.

Alice Maher's installation, 'Cell' comprising a large woven ball of brambles and briars that fills the dimensions of the confining walls so that you can hardly squeeze by, (see pl.8) is a simple direct powerful image.
She collected the brambles from a number of places, including the grounds of the Gaol. Maher refers to the brambles as the Prisoners' thoughts, which trapped in a small place wind round and round each other, heard by none, until they become a huge knot of memories or plans that one can protect or crucify. In an interview for the Programme "The State of the Arts" Alice Maher referred to her "Cell" piece as addressing myriad identities : Women in Ireland ; the identity of Rural people in the City; the identity of Catholicism ; the identity of Irishness. (19) In previous work she has raised issues of personal relationships and sexual politics. Self discovery is a central theme running through her work. Maher's large scale mixed media drawings, which were exhibited in 1990 at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin. "The Thicket", which reflects the life of the Artist as a young Country girl growing up exploring the world through playful, awkward or sometimes violent situations projects a strong feminist slant. (see pl 9). Again in her installation "Trust", shown in the Douglas Hyde Gallery, the Artist covers three cotton tents of elegant medieval style with childhood themes. The work is theatrical and examines themes such as Religious ritual seen through a child's eye. Emer

Plate 9. Alice Maher, Drawing from 'The Thicket' 1990.
Mixed Media on paper, 1400 mm x 1120 mm.

McNamara (1990) is of the opinion that few Artists in this Country produce work which reflects Irish culture, yet she feels Alice Maher is one who shares real things, real time, real space with her audience through images from both her physical world and the world within her, formed of childhood memories. (20)

Pauline Cummins is one of the few women who decided to take a positive approach to Kilmainham Gaol in the "In a State" Exhibition. Cummin's contribution to the Exhibition took the form of a cocoon or pupa, some thirty feet long, made of tissue paper and muslin stretched on a metal armature. (see pl.10). It hung from the top of the rafters resting against the caged stairway and was surrounded by images of flight. Her idea developed from the notion that "the staircase suggested uplifting and escape", yet most of the lower half of the stairway is caged-in hence the cocoon shape. (21). The images of flight, which were printed on clear plastic and hung at different levels under the glass ceiling were developed to continue the theme of evolution, escape and hope. Cummins represents Kilmainham Gaol in the form of a chrysalis because she sees the Gaol as a confining but necessary space towards our evolution as a Nation. (22). The idea is for hope of new life and new ideas to emerge from the history and knowledge that Kilmainham Gaol represents.

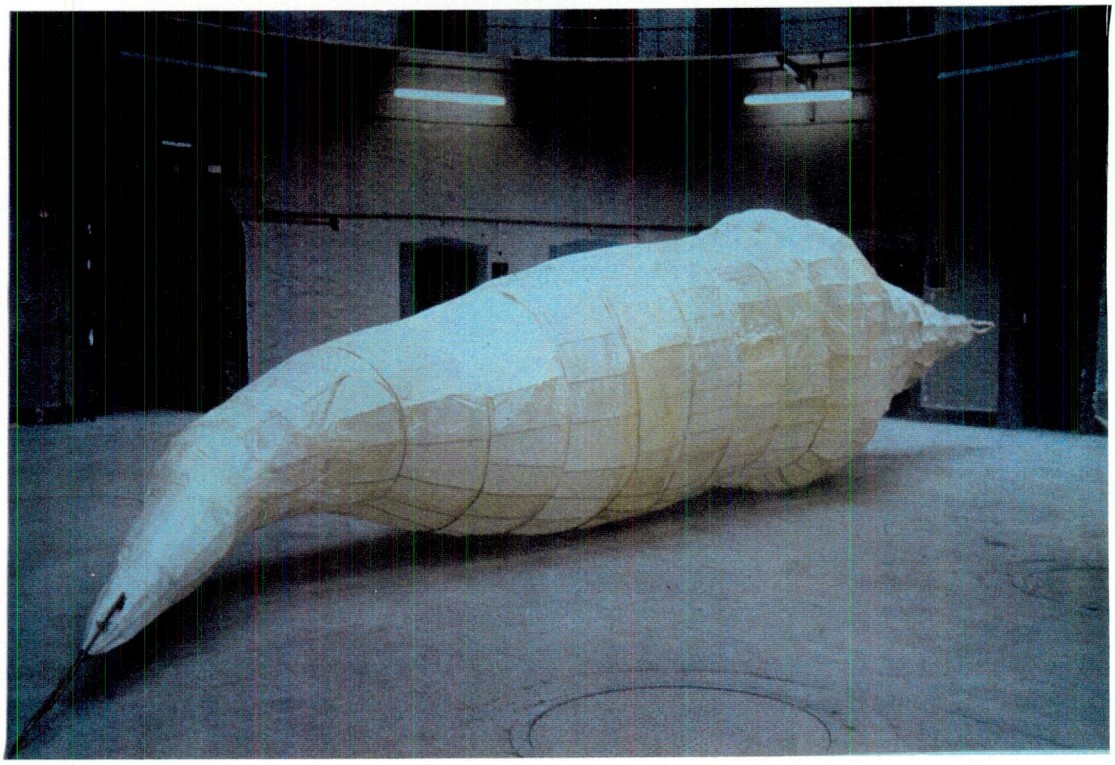
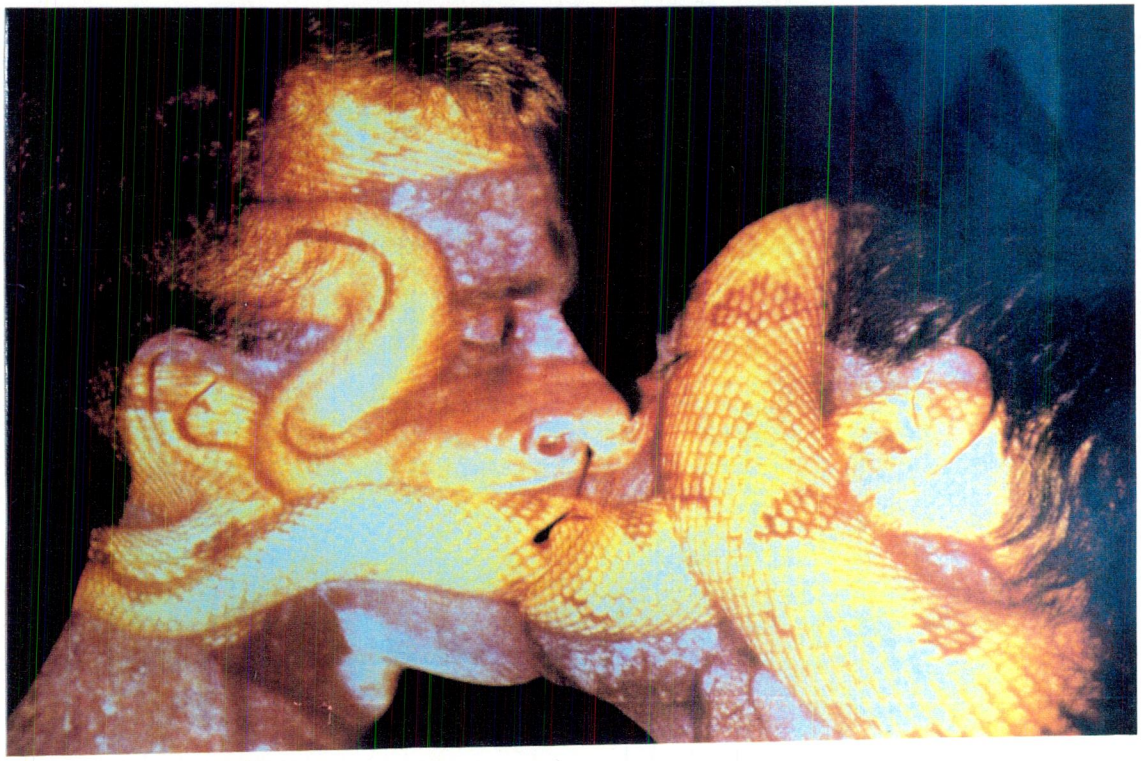


Plate 10. Pauline Cummins : Changing States ; 90 cm long stretched tissue paper and muslin on metal arature.

Louise Walsh is more outspoken in her concerns for justice. She links the Gaol to the 1916 uprising which fought for an independent Irish Nation, resulting in the 1916 Proclamation part of which "guaranteed religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens. Walsh comments on how she found herself disillusioned by the fact that "in 1991, when Dublin was the European City of Culture, the Irish Government still continued to break the European Convention of Human Rights, as the Irish State upholds antiquated English Laws that criminalise and oppress Irish Gays and Lesbians". (23).

The first half of her installation for Kilmainham Gaol consisted of dozens of carved serpents interwoven on flagstones, which she lay at the threshold and on the floor of her cell. The flagstones are linked to moralistic carving which one passes under as one enters the Gaol, which shows the serpents of crime being restrained by the chains of law. The second half of her installation composed a projection of people of the same sex kissing each other, overlaid by a visceral mass of snakes. (see pl.11).

The serpent being a symbol of creativity, rebirth, sexuality and power became an important image for Walsh. She used the snake as a metaphor to link National identity and the repression of gays and lesbians in Ireland. The link being, Irish legend denies the existence of snakes,



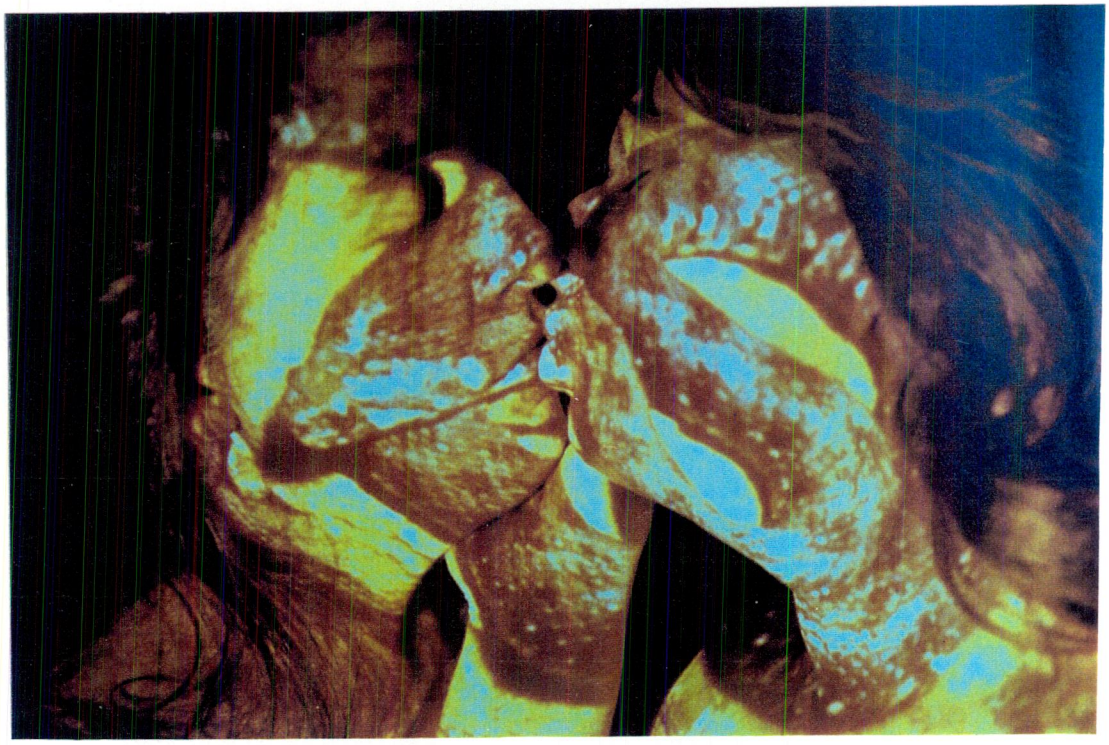


Plate 11. Louise Walsh : Out-Laws, In-Laws ;
Installation : Plaster, Photographs.

depicting them as banished ugly things, squashed under Saints' feet and Ireland also denies the existence of homosexuality, criminalising all gays and lesbians. Walsh attempts to encourage sexual freedom through her image of numerous struggling and unchained serpents. (24).

Louise Walsh had previously explored similar themes, exploring the continuous constraints and control the Irish State exercises over women in particular. In 1992 an Exhibition held in the Irish Museum of Modern Art (Royal Hospital, Kilmainham) "Sounding the Depths" brought together the work of Louise Walsh and Pauline Cummins. Both Artists had previously encountered censorship and created public debate through their Art. Belfast City Councils' Park Committee rejected Walsh's 1989 proposed "Monument to unknown Women Workers". The controversial Sculpture raised a range of issues including the glorification of prostitution, religious morals, feminism, as well as local politics. In Dublin 1984 Cummins executed "Celebration - the beginning of Labor", a Mural on childbirth on the wall of a hospital, which also caused a considerable stir. Although it was painted over by the hospital administration a week after it was completed, extensive media coverage allowed thousands of people to see it. Both Cummins and walsh eventually got their work seen and it is this sort of oppression which makes Artists like Cummins and Walsh active. They felt coming together would give them more strength to voice their opinions. As Louise

Walsh puts it "we won't shut up. We'll not be silenced. We'll find the strength to open up - let the energy flow enabling women not only to speak, but to shout, to roar with laughter, grief and joy.". (25)

For "Sounding the Depths" Cummins and Walsh have considered questions of sexual as well as public politics. Cummins reflects on the words of Virgina Woolf "as a woman I have no Country" and replies by saying "as a woman my body is my country". (26).

Cummins believes the body is the only thing one really owns. In trying to give a voice to the body, they projected an image of an open, vulnerable mouth/hole on the belly of the woman. The image evokes the notion of a more open attitude to womens' sexuality and desires. (see pl.12) (27).

2.2. <u>The Northern Irish Contribution.</u>

In choosing the Exhibitors for the Show, Graeve exercised a bias towards women and Northern Irish Artists. Some of the Northerners were less than eager to participate, having strong reservations about the implications of exhibiting their work in a space so strongly identified with Nationalist issues, but they were persuaded by Graeve, who believed the Northern Artists played an important role in defining National identity.

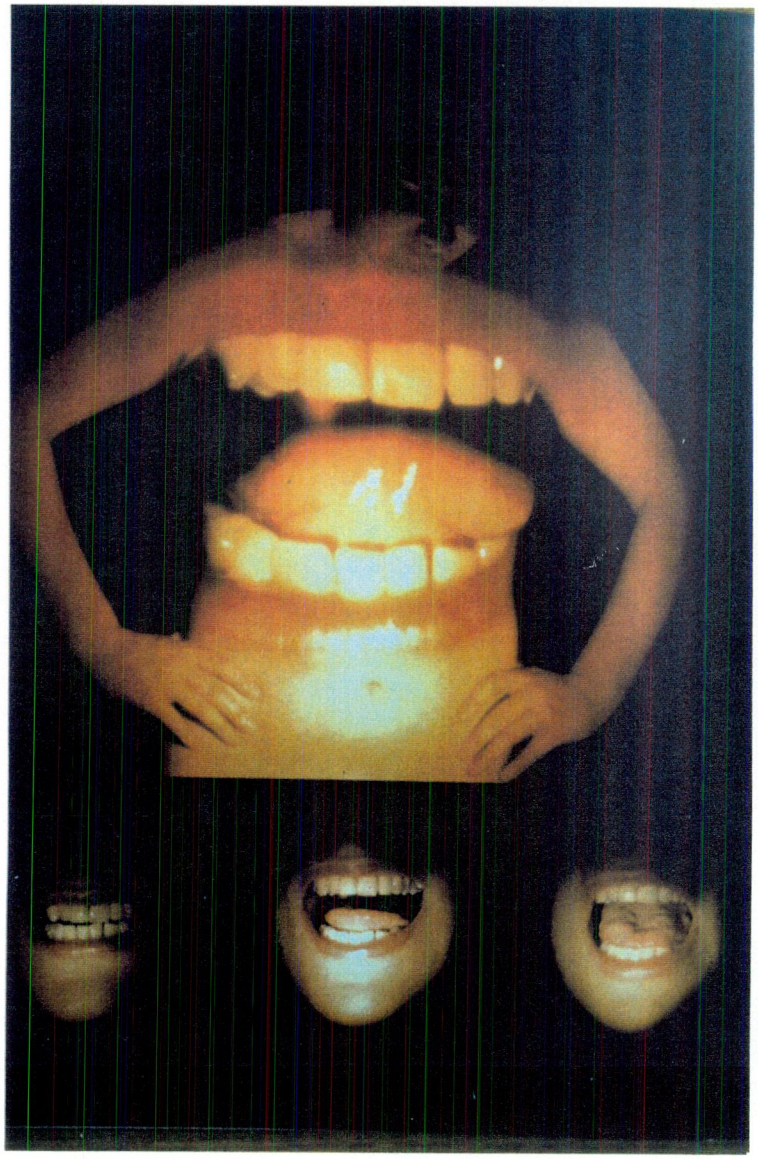


Plate 12. Louise Walsh and Pauline Cummins ;
Sounding the Depths, Installation,
Photographs.

Rita Duffy falls into both categories, being female and Northern. The unifying theme surrounding her work is her long standing analysis of the private and public roles played by women and children intermeshed with the politics of Northern Ireland. The child is born into a world where its identity is already shaped by class culture and religious differences. Her work often focuses upon specific political incidents which she develops expressively through her own distinctive style of distorted imagery, which conveys a moral anger and an emotional force. "Emerging from the Shamrock" was first inspired by a film called "Mother Ireland" made by the Derry Film and Video Group. She describes the Painting as a Portrait of Irish womanhood taking a step into the twenty-first Century disillusioned with ideals of Republicanism and the macho-heroes of Nationalism ; the panels, left and right, represent State and Church with symbols of death, emigration and bigotry. (28) (see pl.13).

Duffy deals with the present situation in the North, she depicts incidents as they are happening ;marching figures, religious statues, knee capping, rubber bullets. She explores its violence, its politics and its frequent tragedies depicted through an Art which informs and incites anger.

Generally speaking, imagery generated by the Troubles, is not as outsiders would expect. John Kindness is another

Plate 13. Rita Duffy : Emerging from the Shamrock ;
180 cm x 240 cm. (3 panels) ;
Oil on Canvas.

Belfast Artist who deals extensively with the Northern Troubles but, in doing so he uses the language of Commercial Art. His trick is to disarm the viewer with humour and then drive a serious point home. In an Article for Circa (July/Aug 1984) Lucy Lippard commented on the lack of Activist Art in Ireland to which Kindness did not hesitate to reply. In his view Lippard misunderstood the nature of Irish political Art. She refers to the explicit Activist tradition which she did find in the Republican and Loyalist Murals and Prisons, and suggests a crossover between the political references in high Art and the grassroots passions of the street Art. (29).

Kindness believes that to engage in the sort of activism she describes, the Artist needs to be committed. She needs to take sides, to make a choice ; this is the choice that most Artists find impossible to make in the Irish situation. For one to take sides would mean to enforce ideological attitudes which results in Art becoming propaganda. Irish Artists are not interested in propaganda, but in an Art which criticise and reflects their Society. (30).

Kindness sees himself as a witty observer of the Irish Religious Wars. He does not act on the world's problems but images them.

He chose to make images that directly reflected the society he was living in, and to do so in a way that would be accessible to ordinary people. From the beginning, Kindness had concerned himself with reaching and communicating with as wide an audience as possible and in as direct a manner as possible. For the Kilmainham Gaol Exhibition, Kindness used satirist weaponry on our relationship with the past. He presented the viewer with a cruel Museum Exhibition titled "Ninja Turtle Harp", a ceramic Irish harp made of mutant ninja turtles - the most rubbishy popular image of our time - and in so doing, Aidan Dunne remarks, (1991) he raises the question of whether it makes sense to be still caught up on the notions of National identity and Nationalism in an era of multi-national marketing and mass consumerism. (31). (see pl.14).

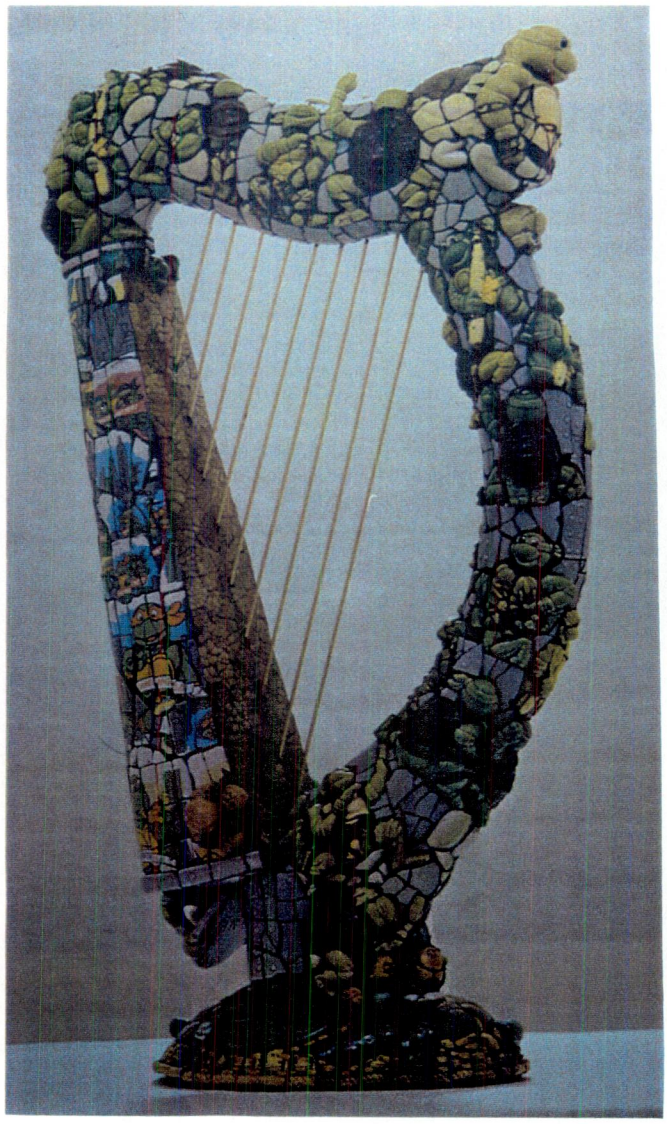


Plate 14. John Kindness ; Ninja Turtle : Harp ;
80 cm high ; Ceramic Mosaic.

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CHAPTER 3.

THE EUROPEAN EXHIBITIONS.

3.1. The European Exhibitions.

As already stated the Exhibition held in Kilmainham Gaol was not intended to be viewed in isolation. Graeve wanted to give Dubliners the chance to judge the notion of Ireland as a case study. He therefore conceived the idea of holding three consecutive Exhibitions from Europe in the Project Arts Centre simultaneously with the "In a State" Exhibition in Kilmainham Gaol. This gave the general public a chance to discover similarities of National identity between Ireland and Europe.

While Eastern Europe has been experiencing the re-emergence of a number of Nations into political independence many States of Western Europe were engaged in joining together in a united political and economic system. Ireland could offer some insight into these dramatic changes which have been taking place in Europe in the 1990s since Ireland in some respects is part of both the new Europe and the old. It is part of the European Community of the Single European Market, but is also part of the unsettled Europe that is still struggling with the implications of nineteenth century Nationalism. Because of its neutrality Ireland stands in a somewhat parallel position to those Countries attempting to merge from the past in order to redefine their role within the new Europe. In 1904 Arthur Griffith wrote an Article entitled "Resurrection of Hungary", Parallel for Ireland" in which he looked to the independence of Hungary within the Austrian Empire as a model for Irish independence. When Jobst Graeve came

across a very fragile copy of this Article in the Archives of the Prison he was finally able to link conceptually the Irish and European components of the Exhibition. His choice of German, Hungarian and Austrian Artists echoes Griffith's historic parallel. (32)

3.2. "Meditation about the world"

The first Exhibition in the Project Arts Centre held in coalition with the "In a State" Exhibition was a joint one by husband and wife, Katherina and Volker Wilczek, both ex-Master students with Professor Beuys and Professor Sachenheim at the Kanstakademie, Dusseldorf, During the eighties they produced twenty-four films including "Enternter Schauplats" which stars Joseph Beuys. This multi media Exhibition titled "Meditation about the world" is Ireland's first view of their work. In an Article for the Sunday Tribune (9 June 1991) Aidan Dunne suggests an overlap in the work of Joseph Beuys and that of his ex-students but it is clearly his philosophies and not his strategy of techniques that has influenced his students, like their Mentor they deal with large themes. (33)

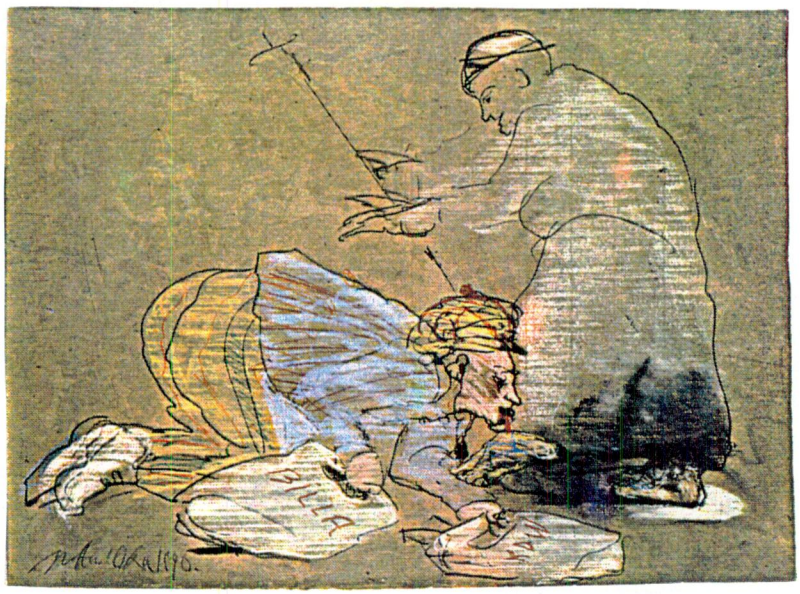
Both aspire to break down received impressions of reality. Katherina employs a symbolic iconography in her Paintings. She uses various symbols and signs which emerge from or are imposed against flat backgrounds. For Volker how we interpret reality depends on our own individual perception which, in turn, is influenced by history, personal

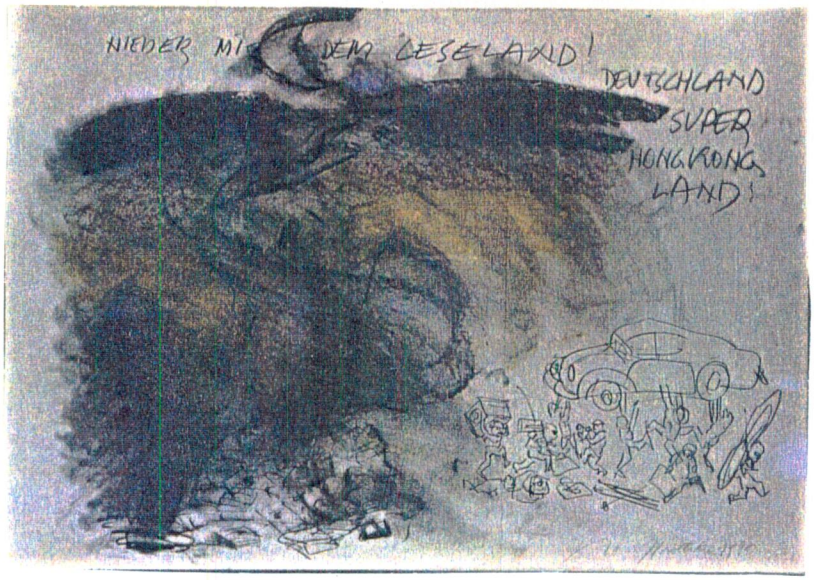
experiences and cultural background. He employs conventionally processed imagery which are frequently photographic in origin, but in the negative where black becomes white. These works are concerned with subjects such as the Third World, poverty and the malaise of modern, urban man, amongst others. (34)

3.3. "Der Anschluss"

The second European Exhibition is that of Alfred Hrdlicka. He is an Austrian who studied Painting at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and later studied Sculpture under Fritz Wotruba from 1952 to 1957. He expresses himself through multiple media, including sculptures, paintings, drawings, frescos, etchings and lithographs. Hrdlicka's sole theme is man and his destiny on earth. (see pl.15). He is in search of the answers to chaos, while being a moralist and critic of human society of past and present. In the Irish Times (1991) Brian Fallon refers to the Exhibition in the Project Arts Centre as being one-dimensional and propagandistic with plenty of anger and polemic but little humour or verbal wit. He continues to say that the Exhibition made an effective statement, direct, simplistic and dramatic but in the end lacked subtlety. (35).

In an Article "The Chaos of our World", Dieter Ronte quotes Bertold Brecht who believes it is the vigour and vehemence of his work which demands the public's attention. "With





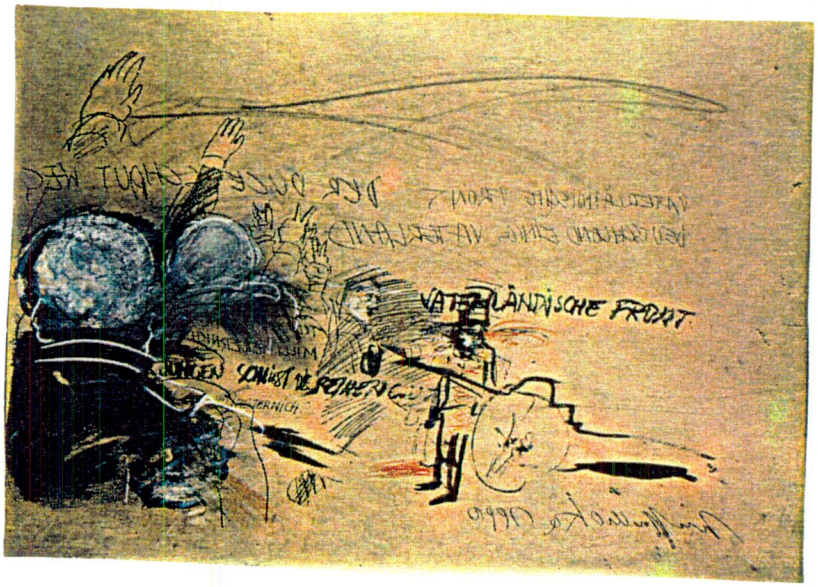


Plate 15. Alfred Hrdlicka.

seeing comes a learning process from which questions arise, uncomfortable and direct questions which provoke us, that arouses aggression, that continue to probe until answers are found, answers that touch our consciousness and minds, that test us and that long remain with us as a reminder of our responsibility. (36) It is Brecht's view that Hrdlicka does not preach but visualises historical incidents as seen from a modern viewpoint and he then leaves the viewer at liberty to judge for himself. It is repeatedly asked if Hrdlicka exaggerates history in order to excite attention or can this exaggeration be seen more as a view of mankind without any glamorisation. For example, when Hrdlicka was commissioned to create a Sculpture to mark the celebration of Hannovers 750th anniversary he caused havoc with his Sculpture of a notorious mass murderer. Hrdlicka shows the murderer slitting open the stomach of a victim which the townspeople perceived as being the height of bad taste. Glorifying sexual violence and a man who murdered twenty-four youths, cutting up their flesh to sell to a Restaurant in the City during the depression years of the early 1920s. At his Trial Lawyers claimed he had eaten some of the victims before throwing their mutilated bodies into the canal from which five hundred pieces of corpses were later recovered. Hrdlicka said the statue raised important questions concerning how Harrmann escaped arrest for years because he was a Police Informer and was, therefore, protected by

the system. The Museum Director described the Sculpture as a "Think Piece" not a memorial to the man. (37)

Hrdlicka has spent his Artistic career exploring taboo subjects. He has a particular preference for creating cycles of work which concentrate on specific themes. He tries to discuss a subject and reveal all its facets to his audience. He is concerned with reality, with the state of the world around us, with the masses, with violence ; he is compelled to bear witness to everything he sees, without sparing the viewer the most minute of details. The cycle "Randolectil" is an attempt to fathom the unreal world of the mentally sick. For this, he concerns himself with the oppression in psychiatric institutions, with the phenomena of hospitalisation, alienation of the self and destruction of the ego. (38

He also explores themes including transvestites, the massacre in the Palestinian Camp in Lebanon and prostitution, specifically the German-American Martha Beck, who was the central figure in one of the great New York Trials after World War 11. Martha Beck killed for motives of love. For the Exhibition in the Project Arts Centre he confronted power structures - from socialism to capitalism - in the context of both National and individual identity. His images are created through expressive strokes, predominantly in black lines with figures emerging from the

background and transforming into physical sensual forms. (39)

3.4. "Layers of Time"

The final Exhibition in the series of three European Shows is "Layers of Time" by the much acclaimed Hungarian Sculptor, Marta Nagy. Born in Budapest in 1954 she grew up during a most sensitive phase of Hungarian history. Her work is never overtly political but is concerned with the healthy emergence of individuality.

Nagy is involved in a personal spiritual journey in her Art. She talks of travel between phases of one's life and between souls. (40). This journey she represents visually through a ship figure, the shape of which was inspired by a half sprouted palm branch she saw floating in the Adriatic. Her Sculptures have the appearance of being small, slender and fragile and they take on moonlike shapes, slender whirled columns and elongated discs. (see pl.16) Her surfaces appear rough and smoky, which she finds appropriate to her thoughts, materials and circumstances. Nagy uses porous clay from Hungary's volcanic mountain. She has never used glazes since she has no access to them. She claims that she would like to see Hungary enter the new Europe, but yet she is wary of the consequences. She believes it would swamp their National identity. She sees Hungary on a parallel with Ireland, both situated at the

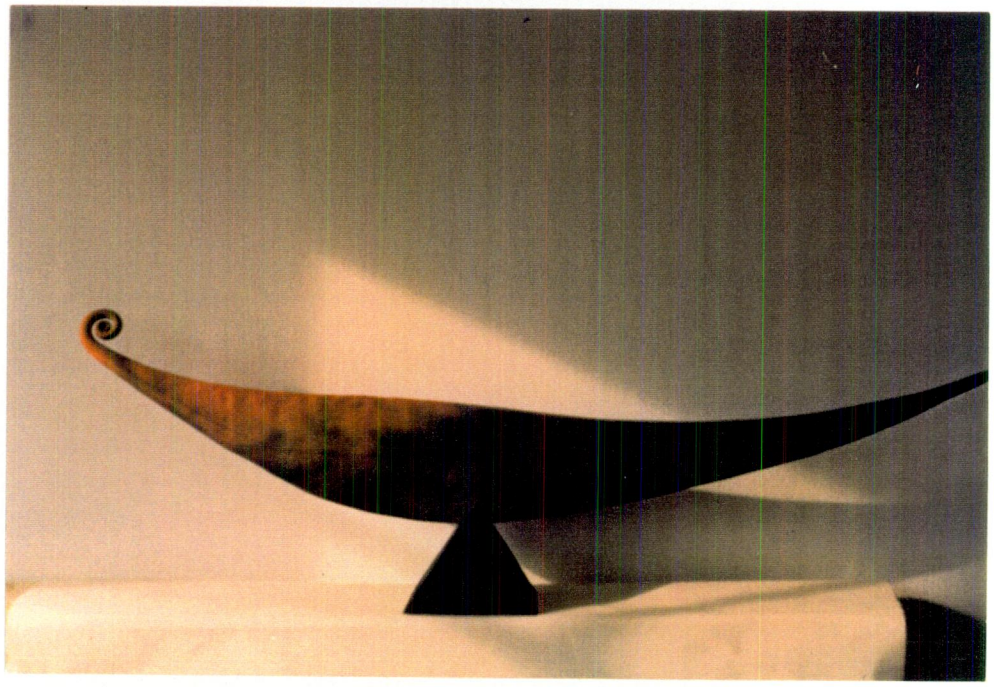


Plate 16. Martha Nagy.

edge of the new Europe and surrounded by the great Nations. (41)

Imre Schrammel. Hungarian Sculptor (Irish Times 1991) writes of Nagy's strange mythological beasts "the objects on show prove that all the quivers of her character are within them and speak of heroic struggle". (42) A struggle to make advantages of her disadvantages and not allow the State constrain her work, "to remain soft-spoken, subtle, honest and -I dare say- feminine is a brave engagement". (43)

It is a case in which once again, understatement pays better then overstatement, resulting in a most individual Exhibition.

This final Exhibition was also part of an exchange between Marta Nagy and Marie Foley. with the help of Jobst Graeve, Marie Foley travelled with her work to Budapest. The work of Nagy and Foley appears to have a great deal in common with each other, both seem to travel the same sort of spiritual path of thoughts and meditation. Foley believes her work follows a "growth pattern" which, in turn, follows the same sort of laws that you find in Nature. She recounts, in an interview in the Irish Times (August 1, 1991), how initially when approached by Jobst Graeve about participating in the Exhibition she was concerned that her work would not be relevant since she found it extremely

difficult to break from this "growth pattern" to create political Art. However, "Turntable of Life" and "Last Judgment" came to occupy two of the old Gaol cells for the "In a State" Exhibition.

Her piece "Last Judgment" shows a weighing scales, which symbolises the idea that people judge each other in ways which would have no relevance to how we are perceived on Judgment Day. (see pl.17). Her work is concerned with stereotypes ; male versus female ; black versus white; - Catholic versus Protestant. She also deals with laws created in order to constrain or divide. This she symbolises through the use of two planks, dividing an area in space, which represents every area in human life. (44).

The titles she gives her work makes one feel she is dealing with the eternal questions of life, life that is full of beauty but also of pain and death. What comes after death - Is there anything after death? Her answer is a definite yes. The Sculptures take on either horizontal or vertical axes. The horizontal can be perceived as the physical being, while the vertical is the ideal, the supernatural. "Turntable of Life" is an ambiguous image representing the imprisoned body and the free soul, a circular image in black and white porcelain, ringed around with barbed wire with the characteristic Foley feather at its centre. The characteristic bird feather incarnates physical -mental, earthy -heavenly qualities.

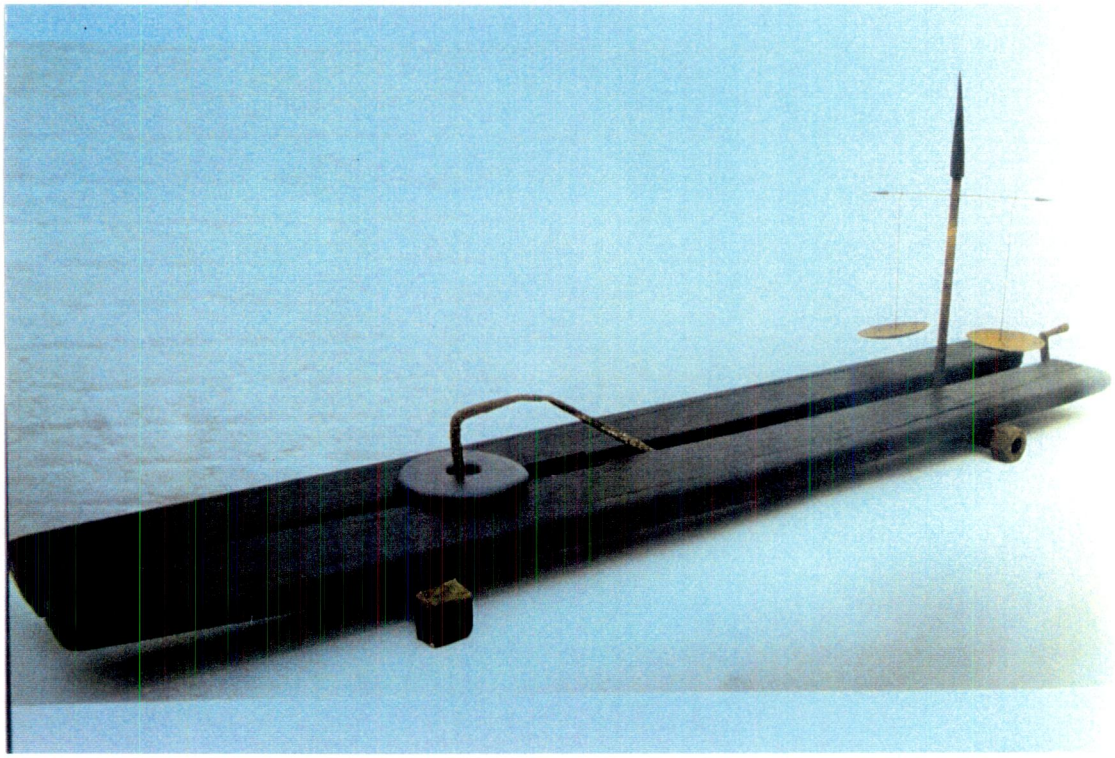


Plate 17. Marie Foley : The Last Judgment, 50 cm high x 150 cm. x 35 cm ; Bog Oak, Metal, Stone Porcelain.

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44. Idem.

CHAPTER 4.

CONCLUSIONS

4.1. Summary of Main Points.

The Arts were distrusted and often censored during the thirties, which resulted in a poetic genre of Painting which had little to say about the reality of the Irish social condition. This romantic response to Rural Ireland became a dominant feature of Irish cultural life for quite a considerable time. During this time rural Ireland was promoted abroad and at home as the emporium of all that was truly Irish. Little of Ireland's turbulent history was registered, let alone explored in the visual Arts, since these areas were not considered the legitimate province of Fine Arts. It was not until the late sixties / mid seventies various Artists began to explore their contemporary heritage. The efforts of these Artists have played an important role in assisting Ireland to free itself of its old identity and enter the modern world through the visual language.

Jobst Graeve Curator of the Project Arts Centre conceived the idea of holding an Exhibition concentrating on National identity in Kilmainham Gaol. The subject matter drawn upon by the Artists participating in the "In a State" Exhibition reflects the more topical themes, of local as well as secular politics, which now concern the contemporary Irish Artist. The Artists responded in utterly differing ways, ranging from the directly political Art of Jack Peckenham and Robert Ballagh, the broadly religious works of Brian Maguire, Patrick Graham and Antoinette O'Loughlin,

the sexually political work of Louise Walsh and Rita Duffy to the formal Art of Marie Foley and Liadin Cooke . All the Artists addressed the theme of National identity directly and imaginatively, a lot of whom tailored works exclusively to the unique location but none as effectively as Alice Maher. Her cell piece is powerful, direct and simple in its capacity to conquer emotions of pain, anger and suffering.

Graeve believed the Northern Artist also played an essential role in defining National identity, yet the resulting response from the Northern Irish Artists are not as one would have anticipated. John Kindness and Rita Duffy are two Artists who deal extensively with the Northern Troubles, yet Rita Duffy does so through humorous Paintings of Belfast street life comprising an expressively distinctive style of distorted imagery, while John Kindness uses the language of Commercial Art, employing jocularity to drive a serious point home.

Graeve felt it was essential to have an understanding of Ireland's relationship with the mainland of Europe before attempting to define a concept such as National identity.

In 1991 Ireland celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the 1916 Rising, which raised questions examining the significance of independence, Nationality and neutrality in an era approaching European integration. Similar questions began

to arise in central Europe with the breaking up of the power structures and the re-emerging of many Nations into the new Europe.

In order to give Dubliners a chance to judge the notion of Ireland as a case study Graeve invited two German Artists, an eminent and political controversial Austrian and a Hungarian Ceramic Sculptor to produce three separate Shows also concentrating on the theme of National identity to be shown in the Project Arts Centre.

4.2 Assessment of Results

A number of the Artists participating in the Exhibition departed from their habitual means and methods to produce works tailored completely to the location and there were those whose work was applicable with the least adjustments to the situation. The work produced by the participating Artists following the Exhibition may give us an inclination of the consequence of the Show. For instance, Louise Walsh and Pauline Cummins came together a year later (1992) to produce an exceptionally powerful Exhibition "Sounding the Depths". Both Artists had previously worked with themes of secular,as well as public politics, yet they felt coming together gave them more strength to voice their opinions. "Sounding the Depths" resurfaced themes similar to those Louise Walsh dealt with for the "In a State" Exhibition.

When it came to reviewing the work of the Northern Irish Artists participating in the "In a State" Exhibition it was not what had been anticipated. The subtle yet effective approach of the Northern Artist in the Exhibition illustrated to the public the real nature of Irish political Art. It was certainly a far cry from the icons of Nationalist martyrdom with which most people would associate the Gaol. Joseph MacWillliams and Lucy R. Lippard are two critics of many who have questioned the reflection of the political and sectarian violence in Ulster Art. According to McWilliams, with few exceptions Northern Irish Art is unrelated to the present problems in Ulster.

The "In a State" Exhibition gave the public a chance to view some of the more serious political Artists whose Art is extensively involved with the socio-political tensions in the North. Mc Williams suggests the problem may be that Art emerging from the "eye of the storm" might very well produce propagandist pictures owing more to politics than to Painting.

It is for this reason Artists such as Rita Duffy and John Kindness employ humour, wit, irony and jocularity, to their political themes so that their Art may be accessible to ordinary people without reflecting particular tribal or political viewpoints.

APPENDIX

LIST OF ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK

1. Robert Ballagh Pages from History ; 50 cm x 60 cm ; Paper.
2. Liadin Cooke : Behind the Eyes of Sound ; Installation ; Steel, Bronze, Sound.
3. Dorothy Cross ; Caught in a State ; Installation . Mixed Media.
4. Pauline Cummins ; Changing States ; 90 cm long ; Stretched Tissue Paper and Muslin on Metal Armature.
5. Mickey Dennelly ; Relics ; Installation. Bin Lids, Crates.
6. Rita Duffy ; Emerging from the Shamrock ; 180 cm x 240 cm; (3 panels) ; Oil on Canvas.
7. Marie Foley : The Last Judgment. 50 cm high x 150 cm x 35 cm ; Bog Oak, Metal, Stone, Porcelain.
8. Graham Gingles : Conceit of the Dead ; 68 cm high x 42 cm x 27 cm ; Mixed Media.
9. Gerry Gleason : Saint Joseph's Dream ; Installation. Mixed Media.
10. Paddy Graham : Te Deum 11; 83 cm x 113 cm; Mixed Media on Board.
11. Patrick Hall : The Death of the King ; 180 cm x 390 cm ; (2 panels), Oil on Canvas.
12. John Kindness : Ninja Turtle, Harp ; 80 cm high, Ceramic Mosaic.
13. Brian Maguire : Tradition (in small streets) ; Installation in Print and Image from above Painting ;

210 cm x 150cm; (courtesy of Edward and Nancy Reddin Keinholz).

14. Alice Maher : Cell; Installation ; Brambles.

15. Colin McGookin : Kilmainham Suite No. 1, United Irishman's inciting view from a condemned Cell ; 300 cm x 85 cm ; Acrylic on Collage and Paper.

16. Antoinette O'Loughlin ; Masks ; 30 cm x 40 cm; Acrylic on Canvas.

17. Jack Pakenham : National Identity Crisis : 360 cm x 210 cm; Acrylic on Canvas.

18. Geraldine O'Reilly : Register 2 ; 52 cm x 70 cm ; Ink on Paper.

19. Dermot Seymor : Three Hundred and Seven Years ago His Forefather Stole Sheep ; 94.5 cm x 126 cm ; Oil on Canvas.

20. Louise Walsh : Out-Laws, In-Laws ; Installation; Plaster, Photographs.

21. Chris Wilson : Interior - Rathfarnham, Dublin 11 (1988) ; 81 cm x 76 cm ; Mixed Media, Map, Leaves, Gold Leaf, Autumn Leaves ; 70 cm high ; Sheet Metal, Cement.

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