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An Irish Male artist in the Early Nineties

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
Title page	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of contents	iii
List of plates	iv
Introduction	v-vi
CHAPTER ONE: A History	1-10
CHAPTER TWO: Irishness	11-14
CHAPTER THREE: Male Identity	15-18
CHAPTER FOUR: The Artists	19-39
CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion	40-44
Notes	
Bibliography	







LIST OF PLATES

FIGURE 1	PAGE 45
FIGURE 2	PAGE 46
FIGURE 3	PAGE 47
FIGURE 4	PAGE 48
FIGURE 5	PAGE 49
FIGURE 6	PAGE 50
FIGURE 7	PAGE 51
FIGURE 8	PAGE 52
FIGURE 9	PAGE 53



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## INTRODUCTION

### INTRODUCTION

Gender and cultural identity are dominant themes for a great proportion of contemporary art, writing and conversation. As the title suggests, this thesis will be exploring these notions and will bring together some isolated entities of discussion, these being "Irish", "male" and "artists". This framework allows for the juxtaposition and exploration of "Irish male", "male artist" and "Irish artist". By defining these areas separately, one can then proceed to break down , analyse and comprehend each section in order to achieve an overall understanding of what constitutes "an Irish, male artist".

The early nineties contextualises this subject for this debate, allowing for preceding analysis and future anticipation. This setting implores an awareness of the "here and now". It is only with this consciousness of where, in time, one is viewing from, that one can comprehend what has gone by and foresee what is to come. It is through being aware of our contemporary gender and cultural identities that they can be adequately discussed and examined.

"An Irish, male artist in the early nineties" is a relevant topic for discussion as it demands that one re-assesses one's







## INTRODUCTION

identity in a particular cultural environment which is a necessary and valuable function. In a rapidly changing decade, amidst the age of "Post-Post-Modernism" and "Post-Feminism", gender has become a vital factor in re-evaluating one's role in society.

The term "artist" is one which inevitably imposes preconceived notions and the responsibility of this document is to deconstruct these myths. Andrew Kearney, (b.1961), and Ken Hardy, (b.1964), are two young and relatively undocumented Irish artists, whose work explores themes of male and artistic identity within the Irish context. Through their work, they visually refer to architecture and place, socialisation and environmental conditioning, thus, defining the individual along with post-colonial attitudes. It is with this in mind that this thesis will be making a thorough investigation of these artists and their work .







CHAPTER ONE

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the background for this thesis. Establishing the era and culture in which we live, it gives an outline of the technological age, briefly discussing the historical background that has moulded the Nineties. This is because it is just as vital to have an understanding of the past of something before considering its present in any great detail, as it is to understand the present context of anything before you can understand its past. It also includes an assessment of how the media influences our day to day lives and world-view and how advances in communication, technology, industry and the subsequent development of modern economics affect the human condition, both socially and individually. It is necessary to take into account such geopolitical factors as the unification of Europe which has a direct bearing on our cultural identity. Whether it will serve to strengthen or threaten this identity remains to be seen but it is important nonetheless. But especially, when considering Irish cultural identity one must examine the evolution of Irish identity and nationalism.

In the field of the Arts, a brief historical account must also be provided, which includes Modernist attitudes and Post-modern







theory, including a brief introduction to writers who are relevant to these respective theories. In discussing the state of the arts, it is necessary to acknowledge the way in which socialisation and how environment, situation and place influence the individual, as opposed to the Jungian idea that the internal self determines the individual. As these factors are all vital to the evolution of Irish culture, they must be explored and they also set up parameters by which it may be defined.

First of all one must establish the cultural background to the social environment we exist in today. Ireland's cultural identity is a post-colonial one, that is to say it is a hybrid culture with the subsequent necessary identity crisis inherent in such a society. To begin with, the most fundamental feature of any culture, language, presents a dilemma for post-1922 Ireland.

Since the late 19th Century, the functioning language of Ireland has not been indigenous, but rather, an imposed colonial language, this being English. Despite the fact that Ireland is officially a bi-lingual nation, (Irish being enshrined in the constitution, along with English, as our official languages) (1)., economic necessity has demanded that the pre-dominant language is English. This is especially the case since Ireland joined the European Economic Community in







1973. As the single-most defining characteristic of any culture is its language, this means that the idea of Ireland as an independent entity is subverted. Yet, Ireland possesses a unique brand of english, Hiberno-English, which sets it aside from all other English speaking cultures. However, as Ireland is trying to set an identity for itself that, of necessity, must be defined as something other than British, , a dialect is not quite as sufficient as a separate language would be in creating a strong post-colonial identity.

Similarly, much of what was previously traditional is no longer relevant. Most of Ireland's established traditions stemmed from a rural, folk culture which is not the same as the increasingly urbanised culture we are becoming today. Coupled with the American mass culture that is being spread to Ireland, (and the rest of the World), through the media, as communication is the most fundamental element required to participate in the modern urban economic system, Ireland's traditional self-defining concepts are being undermined. To quote Anne Kelly,

"The Irish identity crisis has also been accentuated by the growth of mass culture from America and Britain. English media, including radio and television, are widely used, thereby maintaining the strong cultural influence. ...At the positive







level, the growth of mass culture may decrease the urban rural divide, which is the result of rapid urbanisation, but a more negative interpretation is one that concerns the passive nature of television and video culture in particular".(2).

Thus, the influence of Britain is still very strong upon our culture, making it difficult to establish an independent identity.

Similarly, any newly independent culture establishes a cultural thesis by which it may be defined. This is clearly evident in recent Irish history. In order for a situation to arise by which a nation may opt for independence, it must view itself as something different from the colonising force. The Easter Rising and War of Independence would not have taken place were it not for the rise of the Gaelic League and similar organisations, who raised awareness of our distinct national identity. However, in post-independence Ireland, it soon became apparent that many of the conceptual, cultural constructs that the early nationalists ascribed as being part of our identity did not correspond with day to day realities in Irish life. We were no longer a Celtic country with unique traditions. We had been colonised, occupied by the British.

From this, the cultural antithesis, revisionism, was born. This is a natural process for any post-colonial culture to undergo, but like extreme nationalism, Revisionism did not







produce a true reflection of our identity either. The fact is, a new identity had to be discovered to produce a culture suitable to our new state of being, but the Hegelian synthetic phase is problematic for Ireland for a number of reasons.

One is the continued influence of Britain through our media mentioned previously, but a highly significant other is the fact that Ireland is being forced to see itself as part of a larger cultural entity yet again, with the drive towards greater European integration.

As Ireland is the only country, with the exception of Greece, of a post-colonial nature in the E.C., we are not entering into it with as clear a self identity as our partners. Even Greece is not so influenced by Turkey as we are by Britain, (through economic necessity as well as continued cultural influence), having an independent language and less cultural/ economic interaction with their previous colonials. Thus, Ireland is forced into a situation whereby it must recreate its identity without having established an identity for itself in the first place. As the E.C. is creating a nationalistic backlash in far more firmly culturally assured countries than Ireland, the problems it is creating for Ireland are thrown into perspective. Coupled with the need to co-operate more fully with Britain on account of the situation in Northern Ireland, it will be some time before Ireland has a clear concept of what







it is. However, as nationalism and protectionism are entering a new phase of popularity in the post-Cold War World, we may be presented with a new potential situation to re-assess who we are through enforced insularity.

The influence of the media is something that requires further development. The most popular cultural manifestations at the moment are television, video, film and popular music. All of these are dominated by consumer, global forces, with their roots in America. Ireland is far more susceptible to these, (as well as British and Australian equivalents), than many other countries as we speak the same language. Yet, there is a home-based adaptation of all of these forms. Irish film and television, while deeply influenced by outside cultural forces, have many qualities that are uniquely ours. It is vital to them that they reflect our circumstances or else they would not be able to compete. For example, if one looks at the Den, a very popular children's programme on RTE 2, several of the most popular features stem from factors that are peculiar to Ireland. The puppet character Dustin, is based on a type of person who, not only is unique to Ireland, but is, in fact, unique to Dublin. His dialect, accent and world-view stem from this. Similarly, the satirical humour of the programme is uniquely Irish. It either refers to Irish issues, or world issues from an Irish perspective. The popularity of the two







main characters, puppets called Zig and Zag, is based on their familiarity. It is interesting to note that they have not made the same impact on a British audience , despite being included in the massively popular new cult programme, the Big Breakfast show.

It is through inclusion of Irish history, geography, or current socio-economic/political/cultural elements that Irish television, film and, to a lesser extent, radio are successful and, even, economically viable. To a lesser extent, this is also true of Irish popular music, a field in which Ireland is regarded as having a special importance in, in international eyes, (mainly through the success of bands like U2).

Though this genre is essentially derivative of American consumer culture, bands like Thin Lizzy or U2 have achieved greater recognition by bringing an Irish element into their work, (both at home and internationally), either through discussing Irish issues like in Sunday Bloody Sunday, by U2, or incorporating or adapting Irish cultural features into their music, as with Emerald and Whiskey in the Jar by Thin Lizzy. This is taken a stage further by groups such as Clannad, who are very influenced by traditional Irish culture, though interestingly, not as popular as the two groups mentioned above who have, (or had), a greater "international" flavour.

With the "world in our living rooms" and the rise of the







"global village" resulting from the media and technological revolutions, the global culture this creates is impinging on our national culture, (or cultures, as "Irish Culture is heterogeneous, reflecting a complex and diverse social fabric"(3). ), and the consumer culture they necessitate. For example, there is no longer any respect for ideas such as that of national dress. Consumer culture, advertised through a global media has created an international dress code where Levis have replaced knee-britches, for example. Even our diet is international. We now drink Coke and eat McDonnells burgers rather than coddle, (though the consumption of tea and potatoes is still higher in Ireland than in most other Western countries due to historical cultural forces). Thus the popular media has a major influence on our cultural identity today at an individual and social level, but what is the influence of other less popular media such as the Arts, and how have world-wide movements been adapted or influential on our Culture ?

In an international context, Irish art, for many years, had taken a back seat to that of it's European counterparts. That is not to say that development did not take place, nor does it dismiss or underestimate the work of artists such as Roderic O'Connor, Jack B. Yeats or Mainie Jellet, to mention but a few.







It is justifiable to say that this is largely due our geographic isolation.

With the growth in communications came the accessibility to art from other cultural traditions. However, the visual arts in Ireland were not seen to be a viable economic proposition and their importance was, thus, neglected or ignored as a culturally evolutionary force. The arrival of the confrontational work of the international "art scene heroes" from the 1950s and 1960s at the ROSC exhibition of 1967, can be regarded as a turning point for Irish art. Never before had Ireland experienced such a diversity of international art.

The New expressionist movement of the late 1970s and 1980s placed Irish art on the international map. Much of the work of artists in Ireland from that period was expressionistic and figurative in content. Hence, a recognition took place of our "home-grown" artists.

The past decade or so, has proven to be the most formative period for Irish Art which has surpassed itself in its diversity and pluralism. (This coincides with the late revisionist period and the beginnings of the questioning of this concept, when our identity was being re-assessed).







With the opening of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, a challenge has arisen for Irish art, encouraging the assessment of Irish art as a cultural activity in its own right.

It helps to place Irish art in an international context while also making a statement about Irish identity. The home for the museum is the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham, once a retirement home for old British soldiers. A transformation of a colonial building into a cultural centre creates a national awareness at a post-colonial level.







CHAPTER TWO

Chapter two has as its subject matter the first component of the title, this being "Irish". First included is a historical and social background to our culture, the effect of Ireland becoming an Independent Republic had on this, how new a country we are in this respect and the effect of external cultural influences on us throughout the past. It will ultimately attempt to try and establish aspects of our cultural identity including such important details as the stronghold that Catholicism has had in Ireland and how this facet of our traditional culture is being deconstructed and forced to adapt to a changing culture. It is interesting to note that this is one of the most prominent features of our culture in the eyes of the international community. In fact, Ireland's self-analysis with regard to this issue has been greatly influenced by the opinion of the world community. Thus, it is important to recognise the effect international opinion on our culture, especially European opinion. However, in order to to establish an overview of Irish culture, the first determinant that must be taken into account is, quite simply, the geography of the Island.







Ireland's island temperate geography is one of the chief factors that encourages concepts of independence. As our linguistic separateness from England has been undermined, the fact that we live on a separate land mass has been used as a reason for applying an individual identity to ourselves.

Though initially being an island meant that we were less insular than many other European countries, (especially in pre-Elizabethan times), as the easiest form of travel was by sea at that time, now being an island protects us from external influences to a greater extent than many of our neighbours, necessitating an inward looking quality that is more accentuated than that of our continental counterparts. This is further accentuated by the fact that we live on the very fringe of Europe. Even Britain, an island as well, is closer to the continent.

But Britain is also an ex-imperial nation. Therefore its population is more used to dealing with other nationalities. Indeed it has become a cultural "melting pot" as a legacy of its colonial past. As Ireland was colonised rather than a colonial power, this has not become such an issue for us. Thus there are far less external cultural imports at this level yet.

Ireland has never had the identity that the early nationalists ascribed to it completely. However, the influence of our Celtic and to a lesser extent Viking, past have had a certain legacy,







both linguistically and with regard to many folk traditions and artforms that have survived.

Though Hiberno-english is no more of an independent dialect than a geordie accent, for example, Ireland has had a different folk ethos to England as it remained rural for a longer period. This difference was emphasised by the British, or more specifically, the English, as a colonial power and thus, was a contributing factor that led to the rise of nationalism and was later used as a basis for the expanded Irish identity that the nationalists ascribed.

However, Scotland shares many of these cultural traits and, to date, has remained in the United Kingdom. However, what really differentiated Ireland from Britain was our separate religion and this became the dominating cultural division between the two countries. Initially, though Ireland was technically under the British crown, the original colonials, the Normans, had become fully integrated into Ireland's culture. It was only when Britain became a Protestant nation that re-colonisation and oppression from outside began. The protestant community in Ireland, (who were initially very independent themselves), were set up as a ruling class connected to, and dependent on, the British like the Indian Muslims. The repression of the Irish Catholics became the main focus of our current breed of nationalism and it was this







identity that was most obviously in conflict with the British, (though other aspects of our indigenous culture were also).

Thus, with the foundation of the state and beforehand, Catholicism became a very important feature to the independent Irish Identity. This is why the Protestant Unionists in the North feel alien to the identity the Republic formed initially. But this is now changing. Religion does not have the power that it had in the first few decades of the State's life. Thus, an integral feature of our cultural identity as previously defined, is disappearing. Yet, the Priest remains a powerful figure in Irish life.

The disappearance of religious fervour can be partly ascribed to the influence of external attitudes to Ireland, (especially from Europe). In fact, Ireland's desire to be approved of by the outside world has become a major influence on the development of our culture and identity. Thus, many of our traditional self-defining elements are being subverted, as Ireland wishes to have an image that is compatible with an American dominated, Western world.

Hence Irishness is a difficult concept to define at the moment. It is, perhaps, through the work of our artists that we may be able to re-assess what it is.







CHAPTER 3;

This chapter explores masculinity. It is not the intention or wish of this chapter to act as a counter-revolutionary polemic against Feminism, or to try and extol the patriarchal concepts that Feminism has undermined. Rather, it acknowledges the Feminist revolution, but seeks to find a male gender identity within this context, in other words, stepping beyond Feminism exploring the social expectations of men in the Post-Feminist world. However, it must be acknowledged that change is far from complete. Hence, the masculine identities it will be exploring are firmly rooted in the present Irish situation.

To substantiate, and indeed, to understand such an exploration, it is obviously vital to discuss the history of perception of the male as society defined it through the ages by looking at how the male was portrayed through myth and in the context of social order. It will explore the development of the patriarchal order.

Issues confronted will include such factors as the position of the male within the family and subsequent expectations of them. Also, It must be acknowledged that from birth, objects experience and landscape condition man, and as this thesis is primarily concerned with the Irish man, the objects, experience and landscape that are relevant are those to be found in







Ireland. Juxtaposing "Irish" and "male", an exploration will be made of the masculinity of the revolution that lay the basis for the State and how it was the male revolutionaries who were remembered and had the most influence on the evolution of the nation and the legacy that these patriarchal male founders left the left this generation, which has grown up through the "Troubles". We are now living as part of a consumer culture which influences are perceptions of nationalism. For example, though we grew up with the "Troubles", are only tangible awareness of them has been transmitted through the media. Thus, the implications of Consumerism and its technological revolution for Irish male identity in the Nineties will be looked at.

Since the Renaissance, the modern-age, British based, patriarchal order that existed up to well into this century, and is not fully dead, has laid down parameters that are as strict for men as they are for women. For example, by the Victorian period, men were not allowed to express emotion openly, as this was seen as a sign as weakness. Emotion was seen as the preserve of women, as their role was domestic whereas men were seen as the provider for the family, therefore they had to be invulnerable. By expressing emotion, one opens one's inner self making oneself vulnerable, and, in the eyes of this order, weak. Thus, men had to be strong in order to provide, both on the familial front as well as the social







front, (men as providers were, naturally, those who held power in this order).

In a rural, capitalist society such as Ireland, where men were providers and rulers, figures such as the father, the Priest, the male Teacher and the eldest, inheriting son achieved a certain dominant cultural status. This was lent further weight by the early nationalists who harkened back to a Celtic, warrior culture as the basis of our national identity, conveniently forgetting the fact that women had a far greater role and right under Brehon Law than they did under Catholic, Irish, post-Victorian rule. The influence of the Catholic Church, a Judaeo-Christian patriarchal Religion did nothing to help this situation. As women were not allowed any position of authority in the Church, the concept that these cultural definitions of what a man should be were given the authority of God's word, (God, of course, being a man).

However, the feminist revolution has undermined this view of man's position in society. This has forced men to reconsider their own position and their identity has been forced to a point of re-appraisal. The modern man has not lost all of his patriarchal identity, but this now conflicts with the compassionate man he must now be, to a certain degree. The idea of mother and father has been replaced by the idea of parent,







no fixed roles being ascribed to either by law, yet socially there is still confusion here.

Similarly, homosexuality, though still illegal, is far more widely accepted than in previous generations. Homosexuality demands a greater awareness of Jung's Anima and as it becomes more socially acceptable, heterosexual males are being made more aware that they have an Anima, if not being aware of it itself.

Media developments have encouraged the propagation of the more integrated man, but to the point of it, recently, becoming commercially viable. The male physique is just as manipulated by advertising as the female is now. The male physique has not enjoyed such celebration since the Renaissance, and perhaps even since Classical times.

It is with an awareness of outside influences, along with a Jungian investigation of oneself, that the male can proceed to confirm his identity. The male must be aware of both his feminine and masculine sides. There has been investigation into the female side of the male in recent times, more so in America than Ireland. Less importance has been applied to an exploration of the male side of the personality. Brandishing a sword does not necessarily imply aggression, it can be used in celebration.







## CHAPTER FOUR

Chapter five seeks to establish the importance of of the young artist in the context of the stated thesis. It asks questions, such as why an artistic energy turns into a complacency, a regurgitation of old themes and mediums with time? Thus, the importance of being self-critical and an awareness to challenge and change becomes a fundamental issue. The young male artists chosen as the main examples to draw from while discussing these issues are Andrew Kearney and Ken Hardy and the chapter will examine the nature of their work and their attitudes towards their gender, cultural and artistic identity.

It highlights the importance of documenting the art of these artists , while questioning the role of documentation of the art itself; (for example, catalogues, critical reviews etc., though it has been stated that there are more good books than being good art). It asks why the recorded image, (e.g. poster, post-card, catalogue), of the artwork is often enjoyed more than the piece itself.

This raises another interesting issue with relation to the work of these two artists. Their installations are often so







constructed that they could not be acquired. They are often of a temporary nature. Hence, they do not fit into a consumer culture by any standard definition, though parts of the work, such as the photographs in Andrew Kearney's Arc exhibition in the Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick, would be marketable. Yet, the viewers of these works often feel what has become a human requirement to attach themselves to the work. As a result, gallery owners who exhibit their works could often find themselves in the happy position of selling souvenir or explanatory material related to this art, as "art appreciators" cannot possess the pieces in question, but need to express a personal bond to it somehow.

Andrew Kearney and Ken Hardy have a sensitivity to the materials they use. They are also knowledgeable of the seductiveness of these media and so, can manipulate these media. Both artists possess both similar and different qualities, but both have a deeply rooted sense of awareness and a conscious, transcendent quality.

Their work lends itself to the concepts of site specific, and installational work. This awareness of using time as a further deterministic factor, (along with "site specificity" and "Installationalism"), raises questions about literal criticism and of documentation of their art. For example, who should criticise the work, them or an 'objective' other ?







However, despite these questions, Ken Hardy and Andrew Kearney are not well documented artists, as they have only been working for a number of years. Thus, this thesis is breaking what is, essentially, new ground and, hence, is not inhibited as much by other third-party documentation. If another, more established, artist had been chosen, there would be a lot more critical material available to be included as secondary material. This is not to say that there is not a lot to write about concerning Andrew and Ken. There is, but as no other critic has set definitive parameters for their work, there is greater freedom to speculate and interpret. This creates an energy of anticipation. In a sense, we are exploring virgin territory. An analysis given after a one-to-one relationship has developed, leading to a worthwhile uncoloured discussion of "an Irish male Artist in the Early Nineties". Through first-hand experience of the work and the artist a pure dialogue develops, making important such a selection of fairly undocumented Irish Male Artists. The freshness with which both of these artists address their work questions the complacency with which certain artists channel their creativity as they get older, more inhibited and limited by critical documentation, leading to an imprisonment in a cage of regurgitated themes and re-occurring media.(1).

Both artists produce work that, while differing from each other's work, also differs from other work of their own.







Bearing this in mind, there is definitely a continuity of content, but with each piece saying a little more than the previous one, but both the medium and presentation are constantly being re-assessed. This does not suggest that the artist is still looking for an identity. It claims that he is "fundamentally self-critical"(2). They are not falling into the trap of 'regurgitation' we discussed previously; they are fresh in their approach. Considering all this, we will now take a closer look at each of the individual artists.

#### SECTION ONE: KEN HARDY:

Ken Hardy spent some time in Derry, Northern Ireland, and during this time he produced a work for the Orchard Gallery, (a noted exhibition space in this city), entitled Of Art and Soccer. (See fig. A ). Initially, the title conjures up humorous images because of the comic juxtaposition of "art" with "soccer". However, the concept behind installation is actually more serious than the title suggests.

Ken wanted to create a piece that was a meeting point between his perceptions of Northern Ireland, its politics, history and culture, and soccer. The reason he chose soccer was because he







wanted to counterpose his perceptions of Northern Ireland with something that was very accessible to the local community.

The installation makes use of a slide projection of the Wembley Arena. On the two columns, there are separate maps, one being the area in London immediately surrounding Wembley and the other, the area around the Brandywell stadium in Derry. There is a small mound of coal stretched in a line between the two columns, which is surmounted by a line of five footballs. Each pillar is framed on all sides by a scaffolding structure. On the wall of the room were the words "Victor" and "Valour".

Wembley stadium is a very Teutonic building, suggesting power and social control through its structure. This stadium completely contrasts with the Brandywell, which is basically, "just a hole in the ground with some grass"(3). The contrast of these two images is important in the context of Irish culture. Derry is primarily a Catholic town, but has been ascribed an association with London, firstly as Northern Ireland is governed from London and secondly, as in certain circles, it is called "Londonderry". This is where the piece works best. There is a political juxtaposition inherent in this work which is a very relevant constant in the day to day lives of the people of Derry. Ken, not only highlighting this cultural conflict, has also included the socially all-encompassing feature of soccer, which is something that the







people of Derry share in common with the people of London. The source from which both the stadia originated is football, a feature of working class, industrialised culture. This is further emphasised by the arrangement of coal on the floor, as football was invented during the industrial revolution so that workers would have something to do during their breaks. Thus, the coal gives a background, a social context, to the footballs that are placed upon it; the football/ working class relationship is defined by this feature.

The text on the wall refers to the language of stadia, the words "Victor" and "Valour" also having the sort of Imperialist connotations that would seem appropriate to a structure such as Wembley. These words of eminence and valiance, are also connected with masculine traits of conquest and possession. These words strengthen the divide between the stadia, enforcing the imperial structure inherent in the relationship between London and Derry, while also providing a bastion to support the imperial nature of English football.

In many ways, however, the stadia are fundamentally the same. First of all, each stadium has an arena-like quality, but there are dualities of opposition to be found. This is quite a complicated statement that may seem paradoxical. What is meant by duality of opposites in this context is that there is a duality between both stadia in that both require a binary







opposition in order to exist. In order for a football match to take place, there must be two opposing teams. The football match is defined through opposition. Each team exists, or may be defined only because other teams exist in opposition to it. This opposition becomes a unifying feature for all football as it both provides a unifying social phenomenon for the respective communities, (football), but also, this binary opposition is required for both Wembly and the Brandywell to exist in the first place. This concept of binary opposition is central to the whole piece.

Ken Hardy's of Art and Soccer clearly demonstrates social divisions and discusses the concepts of ownership and control. It explains a struggling event, football, that becomes an image of another struggling event, the political oppositions that constitute day to day life in Derry. By demonstrating these divisions a showing and openness takes place, whereby a consciousness and acceptance of divides may be realised. Through his awareness of cultural and structural opposites, Ken has physically constructed a tangible representation of a bond and connection that is historically applicable to two opposing, cartographically (4). defined social systems, highlighting both what is common and what is different.

Ken Hardy, (B. Mullingar, 1964), like most artists started off painting, attending the National College of Art and Design for







one year in 1982-'83. He then continued his education in the Dun Laoghaire College of Art and Design, from 1983-87, graduating with a Diploma in Fine Art. He enjoyed the process of painting but as he had begun to think conceptually he found painting to be limiting.

"I just abandoned painting deciding that the only way for me to work was with installations and temporary pieces, pieces that could be installed and later destroyed and if have any philosophy, that's it." (5).

At this stage, the influence of Ciaran Lennon was to be seen in Ken's evolving work as Ciaran introduced Ken to concepts of installation and time based work.

Ken Hardy's investigation of the nature of impermanence can be seen in his early works such as Remembrance One and Remembrance Two, (See fig. *B* ), and Talisman, (see fig. *C* ). However, he has always had an interest in the Irish situation and his work has become an investigation of historical conditioning.

Ken Hardy's recent exhibition in the City Arts Centre in Dublin is entitled Customs and excise. The location of this building is integral to both the content and understanding of this work. The Centre is situated on City Quay and immediately opposite is the mock-Grecian colonial Customs House. Adjacent to this is the newly built International Banking Centre.







There is , in the work, a physical knowledge of the area, containing something old, something new (and maybe something borrowed and something blue!). The exhibition was on the second floor of the Arts Centre and was contained within two rooms, one of which overlooks the respective structures mentioned above.

It was a site-specific installation where Ken used slide projections, a curragh and a map. The windows were obscured with a dark cloth in order to allow an un-interrupted viewing of the projected images, yet also being transparent enough to overlook the determining architecture, thus framing the appropriate structures. On entering the space, the semi-darkness has an enveloping effect and the curragh stretches out before the viewer in the first room. projected onto this over-turned sixteen foot long, Irish, sea-faring vessel was a circular projection of of a section of a frieze taken from the Customs House. In the same room, there were two more circular projections of different areas of the aforementioned friezes displayed on opposite walls.

Stepping into the second room, one was confronted by a hand drawn map of the area surrounding the City Arts Centre on the wall, which was lit by circular spotlights, so that the wall appeared to have portholes. There were continuous slide projections on the the wall to the left hand side of the map







that are taken from a model for the newly constructed banking centre. To the right of the map, a still slide of men sailing in a boat down the Liffey was projected onto an alcove which is a permanent structure of the room.

As with Of Art and Soccer, a presentation of contrasts was evident. There were conflicting images and a juxtaposition of different times in history. The curragh was the only object in the exhibition and is a relic of the past. The curragh is a symbol of survival, (as the curragh was a vital feature, necessary to the existence of island communities in the past), and of Irish culture.

"It has been the carrier of people to this island,  
as well as being a method of subsistence economy  
and a method of information exchange between  
islands." (6).

The projections of the frieze from the Customs House onto the curragh realises the historical issue of colonial cultural imperialism. The projection becomes like a tattoo, in that an act of permanency takes place. The curragh, is no longer able to sail, it is overturned and on dry land which becomes a metaphor for the of imperialist suppression of Irish culture.







"Colonial rule resulted in the indigenous population

being rendered culturally and politically speechless".(7)

In the first room, the contrasts that were shown in the piece, gave an example of cultural confusion resulting from an opposition of cultural criteria. The curragh, unlike the harp and the shamrock, has not been as a commercially manipulated as an Irish cultural "product". It symbolises what Ireland actually was and the projections around it determined what happened to that culture. This array of contrasts tends to incite a confusion and dislocation, but this confrontation of images makes one aware of the cultural and chronological point from where one views, realising the Irish Nineties to be a period of post-colonial conditioning.

The early Nineties becomes the context for interpretation of Irish history and the future. The darkened space physically incites this awareness of the present as it evokes fear, therefore requiring the viewer to respond to the immediate. The fact that the piece is site-specific and time based ensures that the installation realises that, not only does art reflect society but society reflects art. As the immediate outside of the City Arts Centre is reflected in the work, its content can be seen in the immediate structures.

Dublin, as it was the focal point of the show, has physical historical evidence of the Pale and the Easter Rising.







Therefore, it has visible, tangible evidence of our pre-colonial past and the birth of our present cultural order. This precedent is fundamental to aspirations for Ireland's future condition, (from a historical deterministic viewpoint), and its current representation as a nation among nations. The point is that Dublin's identity is derived from a juxtaposition of eras. It is a post-colonial capital with a modern history socially uncomparable to any other state in Western Europe. This condition is inherent in Customs and Excise through the historical contrasts it displays. These contrasts culturally dislocate the viewer. Irish identity is questioned. However, the map of the surrounding area as it is now, re-locates the viewer, establishing the present point in time. In this second room, there are future aspirations. The projections of the maquettes of the Banking Centre, do not seek to determine that the Centre is a gateway into a new Ireland. They invoke an anticipation of what may be to come and help to enforce the concept that Ireland is a young country and still at the "Maquette" stage itself.(8).

The projection of the men boating on the Liffey onto the alcove highlights a characteristic of the room. This shows how Ken is conscious of using the space as opposed to just placing an art piece in a room as the Liffey flows past just outside the window. As he states himself,







"It always amazes me that people can view things innocently. How, possibly, can a gallery be viewed innocently? There is absolutely nothing innocent about it. It's a cultural construction and it's got roots going back a few hundred years anyway. A gallery is a box that you go to to look at art.(9).

Ken consciously works with the gallery and uses it as a home place for all of his installations and the projection, in this exhibition, on the alcove gives a straightforward description of this process of special manipulation of a space.

In this piece, as with Of Art and Soccer, the use of the map lends itself to ideas of ownership and possession, while also further emphasising the concepts of location and dislocation in the piece.

"My function of drawing this [map] is that I don't own any of it, because I haven't got the money, but I also do because I've drawn the map and so does the viewer because they look at it." (10).

Ken Hardy's Custom and Excise does not manufacture identity. It questions our present state. This present moment in time, Ken remarks, has only elapsed because of what has happened







before and what is speculative. He says that this is the reason for the piece.

"This area of Dublin, generally speaking, it's culture generally speaking, is about being in between there are future aspirations and there is also a very long history of being silenced by colonialism. "(11).

Another very important feature of both installations discussed in this section is that both, while questioning Irish identity, have, what has been viewed as, an essentially male pre-occupation at their core. Both explore the ideas of ownership and control, concepts at the centre of the modern-age patriarchal order. Therefore ownership and control are seen as male concerns, as up to this century, women's rights of possession were negligible. (For example, when a man married in Victorian England, his wife's possessions automatically became his). Thus, through being denied access to the concepts of ownership and control which are fundamental to all Western socio-economic structures, feminists have ascribed them a gender quality that is male. Whether this is a species reality or not is highly debatable, but in terms of the pre-feminist patriarchal order, it is true. In a Post-Feminist age, the concept that ownership and control are pre-dominantly male concerns has been completely subverted, however. (After all,







was the feminist revolution fundamentally about women being allowed to own and control their own destiny?). Though the issue is problematic. Perhaps the meta-narrative behind ken's work is partly that, as well as Ireland being a post-colonial nation in the sense that it is struggling to find a separate "post-British" identity, it is also confronting post-colonial issues of ownership and control in a society where women may no longer be colonised by men ?

On a more practical note, the male identity of Of Art and Soccer can clearly be seen by Ken's use of the metaphor of soccer, which is still predominantly a male-dominated feature of modern society. One could make a feminist critique about practically every feature in Ken's work. The curragh was a tool of the "Male Provider", for example, and the confrontational nature of soccer also could be de-constructed in terms of male aggression etc., but this would require a thesis of far greater length. Therefore, it is enough to say that these two issues of soccer and ownership and control are two examples of the very "male" quality of Ken Hardy's work.







SECTION TWO:

Andrew Kearney:

Andrew Kearney, (b. Limerick, 1961), was educated at the Limerick School of Art and Design, graduating in 1985 with a Diploma in Fine Art. His father was a painter, so Andrew was aware of art and painting from an early stage. He remarked that he had difficulty reading in school and felt, at an early age, that he was not good at the so called "important" school subjects. He remembers the sense of achievement he felt when he started to paint at home and that his father's example was important. (1). In the rough, working class secondary school that he attended, Andrew became, as he says,

"quite slick and competent in using the school's

rough medium of powder paint". (2)

There was nothing in the school ethos that was designed to encourage self expression or sensitivity. He learned how to copy other works of art, but found that there was no expression in such a process.

When he went to art college, he relished its freedom,

"School repressed things whereas in art college







you were expected to express ideas of yourself

and your work and to be prepared to defend them ." (3).

In his second year of college, Andrew started using plants, especially exotic and unusual plants, as part of very large constructions, though previously, sculpture had no connection with his past. He found dealing with the third dimension very exciting, bringing his ideas closer to reality. He felt that the physical act of making things was really important. Painting was too much a reminder of his past and had too many ghosts for him. Sculpture was almost like speaking a new language.

The Limerick School of Art and Design rented an old convent school building where Kearney was given a very large space to himself. This enabled him to make large works at an early stage. He treated this space as a space to walk around in, where things were larger than himself. He made installations where it was possible to walk through pieces as well as around them.

In his third year, he shared a covered yard with other students. This meant that he had less privacy and space. (His work got smaller and more personal). He began incorporating a greater range of materials in his pieces instead of creating works of greater space and scale and he became interested in







colour, in particular, the effect that colour can have on materials.

After graduating, Andrew Kearney worked as a full-time photographic technician in the college. During these three years, he did comparatively little artwork. He could not switch on and off from sculpture to working "nine to five". He was glad to have a stable income, but Andrew, in retrospect, regards it as a time for looking back at what he did in the past and what he might do in the future.

Being a technician kept him in touch with art at an educational level. He was constantly stimulated to think about what his future plans for his work were.

During this time he was involved with setting up a co-operative studio space, named All + Ten Sorts, in 1985. In 1987, he was offered a place in a travelling exhibition, which went to seven venues around the country, both North and South. Andrew assembled and mounted his pieces of work at each venue, the process of which increased his capacity for self analysis,

"I was constantly reappraising the work. I felt that certain work of mine didn't make a particular coherent statement. I was determined to refine my work." (3).

Andrew Kearney went to Chelsea College of Art and Design in







1990, graduating in 1991 with a Masters in Fine Art. Nigel Rolfe, an English born artist who has spent a long time working in and about Ireland, was one of Andrew's tutors at that time. At a lecture during Random Access, Rolfe discussed Andrew Kearney in connection with site specific installations, commenting on how promising Andrew was as a young Irish artist (4).

In 1991, Kearney was invited by Ruairi O' Cuiv to create a site specific work, (Untitled, 1992), for the Temple Bar gallery. Since then, Andrew has won the prestigious Barclay's Young Artist Award with this installation.

"There has been a consistent progression in his work, both in quality and content. Much of Kearney's work has been concerned with installation, which, by its very nature, is both temporary and transient. Yet, structures which are intended to have a certain span of durability and resistance are a central theme in his work.". (5).

In this exhibition, Andrew Kearney constructed a galvanised steel structure in a shape like that of a castle (see fig.E ). It was approximately ten feet high and made use of the whole gallery space, making it difficult to walk around it, as the







distance between its towers and the walls of the gallery was about three feet, (see fig.F). The exterior was sealed, with a protruding, pink, internal structure just making itself visible to the viewer, (see fig.F). The galvanised, shell-like structure was raised slightly off the ground by casters and appeared to hover in the containing space. The steel reflected the viewer, making them an object to be viewed themselves. The work was physically confrontational, lending itself to certain characteristics of a castle.

Fortification protects what is within, and keeps out what is external. This concept is evident in the work, as the internal structure demanded the viewer to know more about its character. The inside was untouchable and barely visible. Thus, the steel structure encouraged the process of desire to know more, in that the viewer was physically stopped from forming a contact with the inner object. The point that the viewer was kept outside the work, was realised through the reflective quality of the steel. Although the exclusion incited a coldness initially, a feeling of warmth arose about the work, which was caused by the technical quality of the piece. The bewilderment as to how the structure was produced added a human quality to the work. In questioning how it was built, images of the artist constructing it were evoked. These thoughts occurred because of







the size of the piece, (which would naturally make the viewer wonder how it was constructed), giving an invitational quality to the work. A tactile investigation took place, the viewer being compelled to touch the exterior.

The human quality of the work was enhanced by a postcard that was available at the exhibition, (see fig. *G* ). It displays a rose placed over the naval of a male body. This, in turn, is placed beside a line drawing of the steel structure. (Andrew's interest in the juxtaposition of images can be also seen in other photographic work (See figs. *H & J* ).

Andrew compares parts of the body to objects such as potted plants, high pressure water pipes and a castle. These are all containers, thus Andrew is making a commentary on the inner space of the self. This body and object juxtaposition conveys a sense of inner structure and how the internal psyche can be compared to a functional object. What is inside can be conceptually regarded as what is external, drawing attention to Jungian concepts.







## CHAPTER FIVE.

### Conclusions;

Both Andrew Kearney and Ken Hardy react to social issues that determine an Irish male artist in the early nineties. Ken challenges our post-colonial state, giving a description and contrasts of opposing social criteria. in Ken's work, external issues determine the self. His investigation of external colonisation becomes an exploration of national and personal invasions and hence, the social conditioning of the individual.

National culture was coveted when Britain governed Ireland, which led to the suppression of the indigenous culture. In Of Art and Soccer, Ken gives an example of social and cultural contrasts and oppositions in the form of a sporting event. He shows this male dominated event and compares it to the social contrasts of Derry.

Customs and Excise initially appears to be a completely different work to Of Art and Soccer. This is because of the use of materials and his ability to self assess, enabling each work to appear to be unrelated, yet maintaining a consistency within the content. Ken's installation in the City Arts Centre, pinpoints an area of Dublin that has vivid structural examples







of a post-colonial era. Juxtaposed with indigenous Irish post-colonial phenomena. This work becomes like an essay as Ken proceeds by outlining the area on which the viewer stands, thus enabling them to anticipate for the future in a post-revisionist context. Ken gives cultural contrasts in order to determine what Ireland is as a nation, thus enabling him to personally view what has conditioned him. His work is a reaction to the perpetual crisis of national self identity. There is a need within the Irish condition to give historical accounts in order to clearly create an Irish identity. This process of searching has been a consistent factor in the history of modern Ireland.

As a viewer within the Customs and Excise installation, a realisation of cultural conditioning occurs. The slides, curragh and the amp are all external imagery, thus inciting an awareness of external conditioning. Ken remarked that it is only when the viewer is within the installation that the work becomes complete.

There is a distance between Ken and his work in that the only real evidence of his participation is the hand drawn map of Dublin. The impersonality of the piece allows the viewer to fully experience concepts of contrasting cultural ideals as there are no personal symbols, or idiosyncratic language developed by Ken through previous work. Through his work, Hardy







allows the viewer to surmise for themselves what there condition of being is as Irish people in the early Nineties.

"Exterior" and "external" have been words associated with the male condition. Throughout history, and with attention to Feminist critique, women have been viewed as the ones in touch with their inner selves on account of their cycles and the physical principle that women take men into them during the act of love-making.

Andrew Kearney's Untitled Installation (1992), in the Temple Bar Gallery, has a pink structure protected by a blue steel construction. The fact that Andrew is in touch with both sides of his gender identity can be seen through his use of these colours. Andrew, who is gay, shows that he has an ability to address such issues as masculinity and Irishness. This installation is a good example of such an exploration. The initial impact of the work is that it is, primarily, a masculine piece with its defensive, blue castleline structure. After walking around the piece, the viewer realises that physically entering the structure is impossible, so a conceptual investigation takes place. The internal structure is then viewed, forcing a realisation that it is a feminine structure. It is silent and protected by the male exterior. It represents the hidden enigma. It provides a balance of gender in an Irish context. Defending, protecting and invading are







terms associated with Irish history, as well as being words commonly held to be in the male domain.

It is by understanding the content and nature of Andrew and Ken's work that Irish culture and gender identity can be addressed through art. There is a freedom and freshness in their work that incites the viewer to realise the present state of the Irish people. Their work is not underlined by any tiresome message about what an Irish male artist in the early Nineties must be. Their anticipation of the future enables the viewer to reconsider themselves and their respective roles without being turned off by a tasteless meaning.

An Irish Male Artist in the early Nineties is a discussion about gender and cultural issues within the context of Irish art. the end of the century and the conjugation of Europe assisted in the inception of such a thesis. This final decade requires one to re-evaluate the previous ninety years as the fastest moving century yet. Technological, industrial and communicative developments have made life physically easier for the human. The media, consumerism and scientific developments such as genetics have affected the human condition immensely.

Ireland, being an island, has an unparalleled history, culture and conditioning. Our colonial past, coupled with the foundation of the state, and later revisionist theories, add to the confusing crisis of Irish identity.







In this thesis, I have broken down what constitutes an Irish male artist at this time and have tried to anticipate what lies ahead. The most important factor in this thesis are the artists, though the background is, unarguably, important. Both are vital to the awareness of what constitutes an Irish, male artist and with this in mind, I have explored the work of Ken and Andrew. I have intended to leave this thesis somewhat open ended. This has been a governing factor for me since its inception as many of the areas discussed, which have been concerns of mine since secondary school, are still developing. Between the process of the thesis and the content, there is a parallel. The artists are, themselves, developing as the thesis has assisted in my development. This thesis is an accumulation as my concerns. I can proceed with a direction in my own work and a consciousness of knowledge supporting me. This open-endedness does not contain the feeling of an unresolved thesis. There is a resolution but it incites an energy and not the complacency I uphold to oppose.







FIGURE NO. *A*









FIGURE NO. B

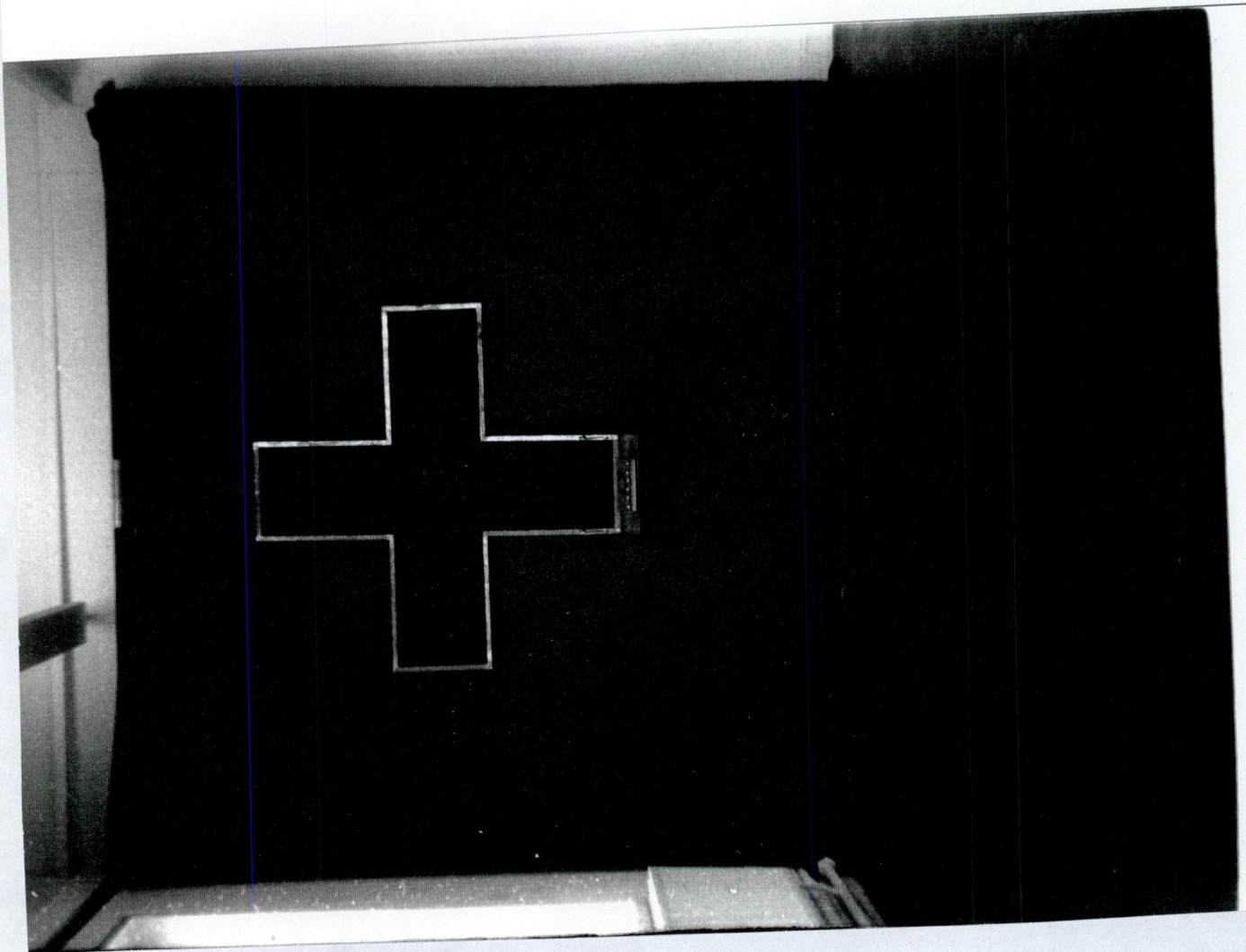
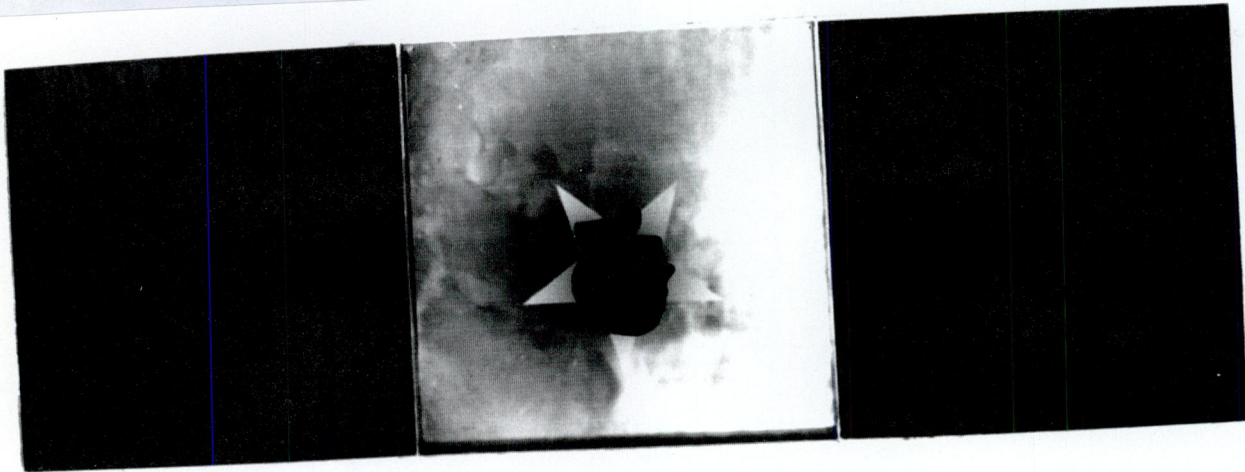








FIGURE NO. C

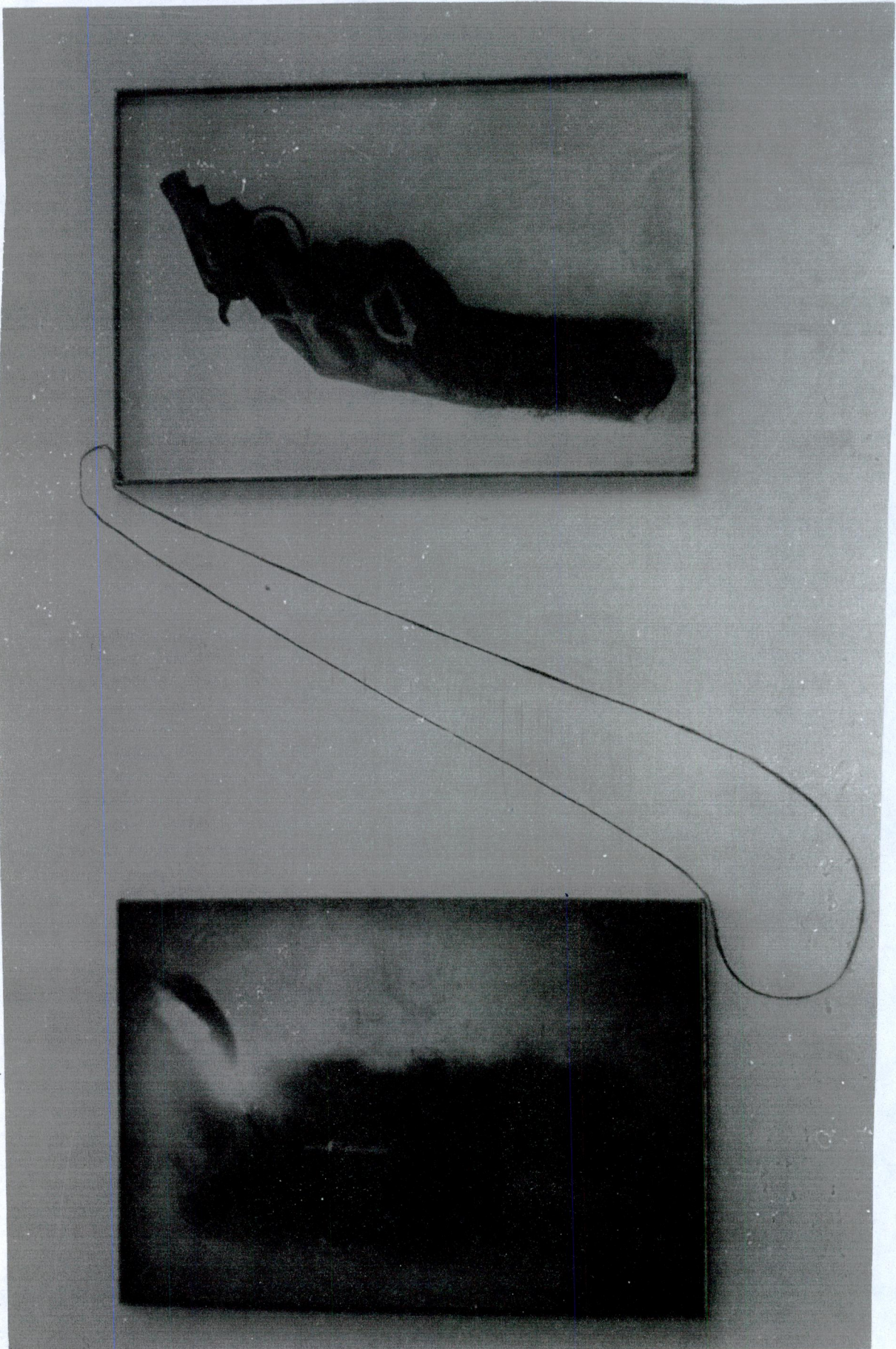








FIGURE NO D

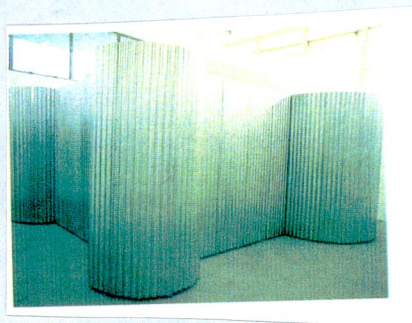
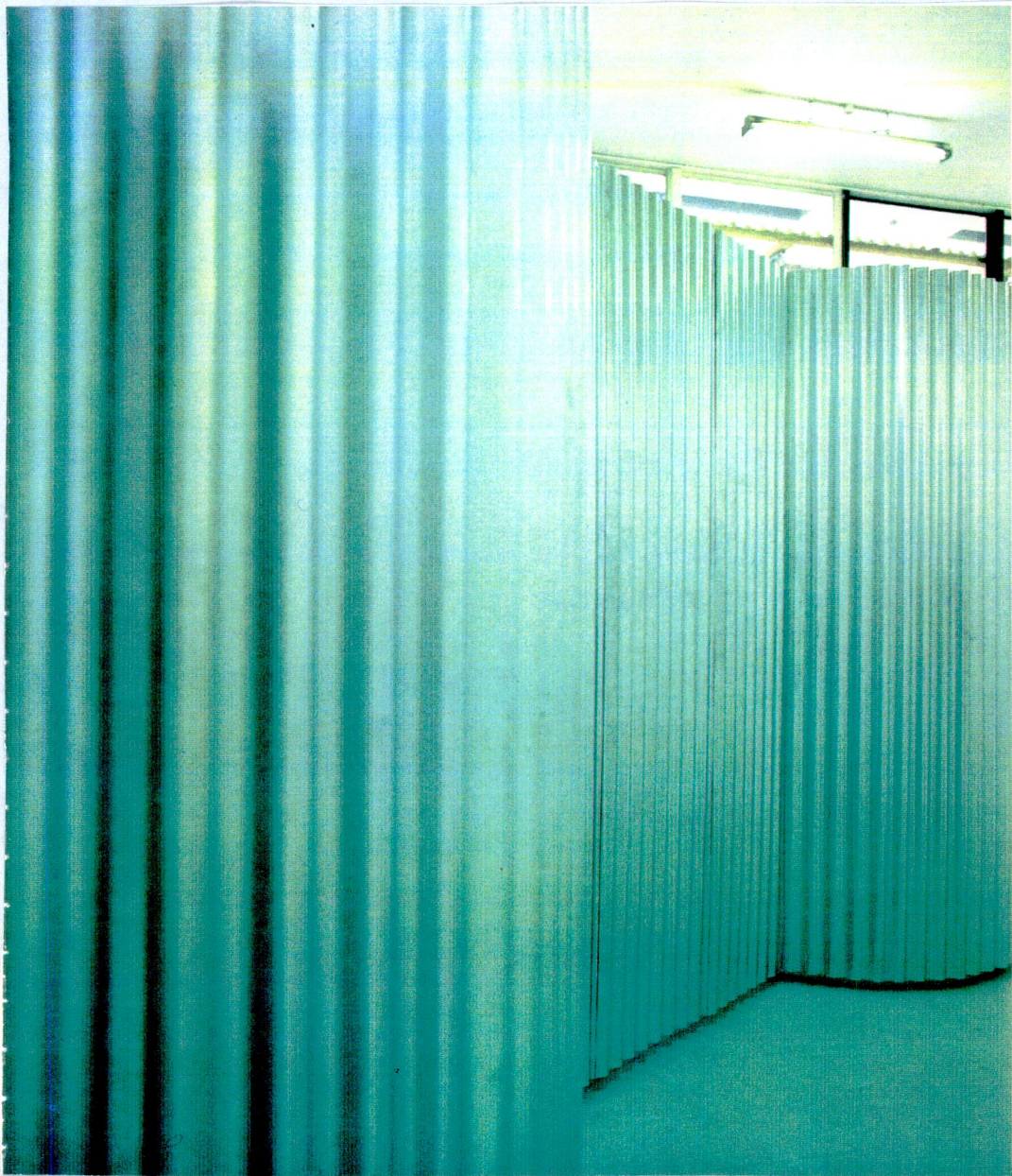








FIGURE NO E





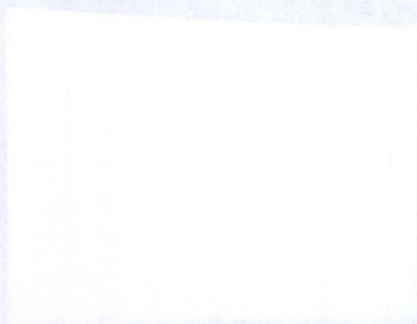
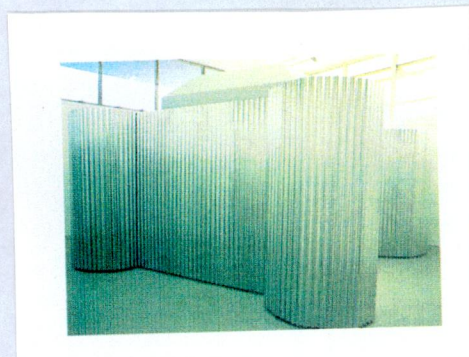
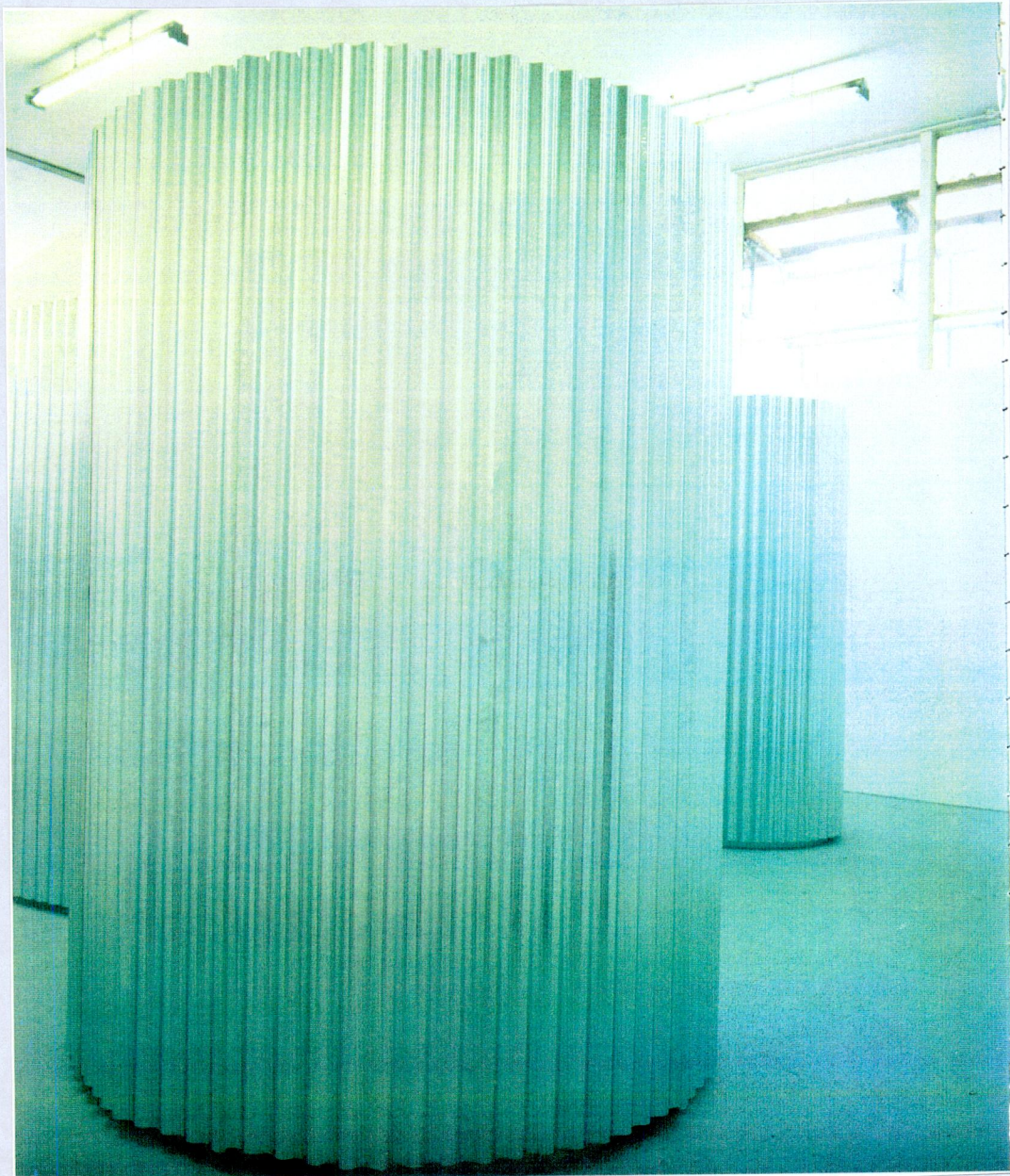




FIGURE NO. F





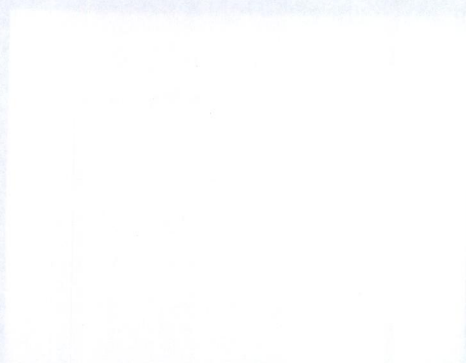
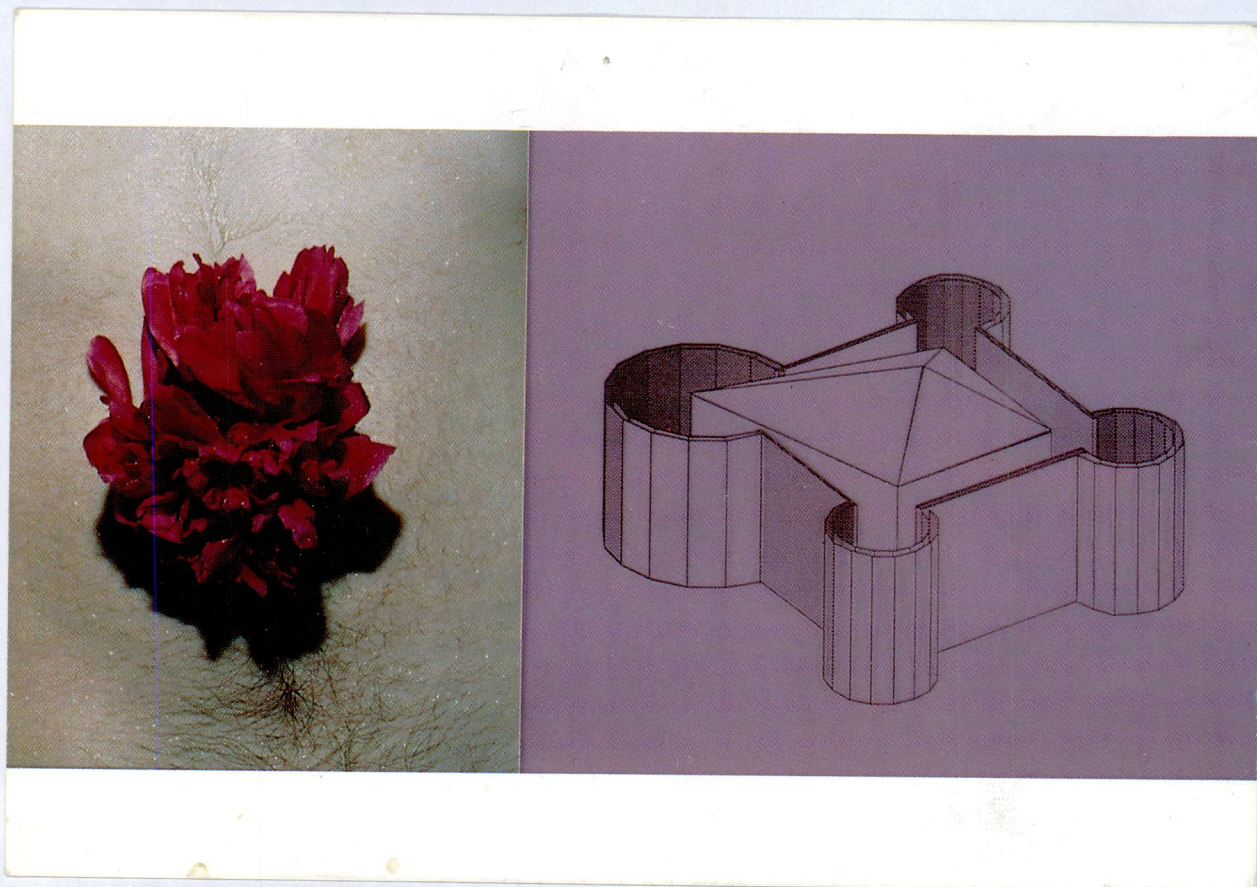




FIGURE NO. 6





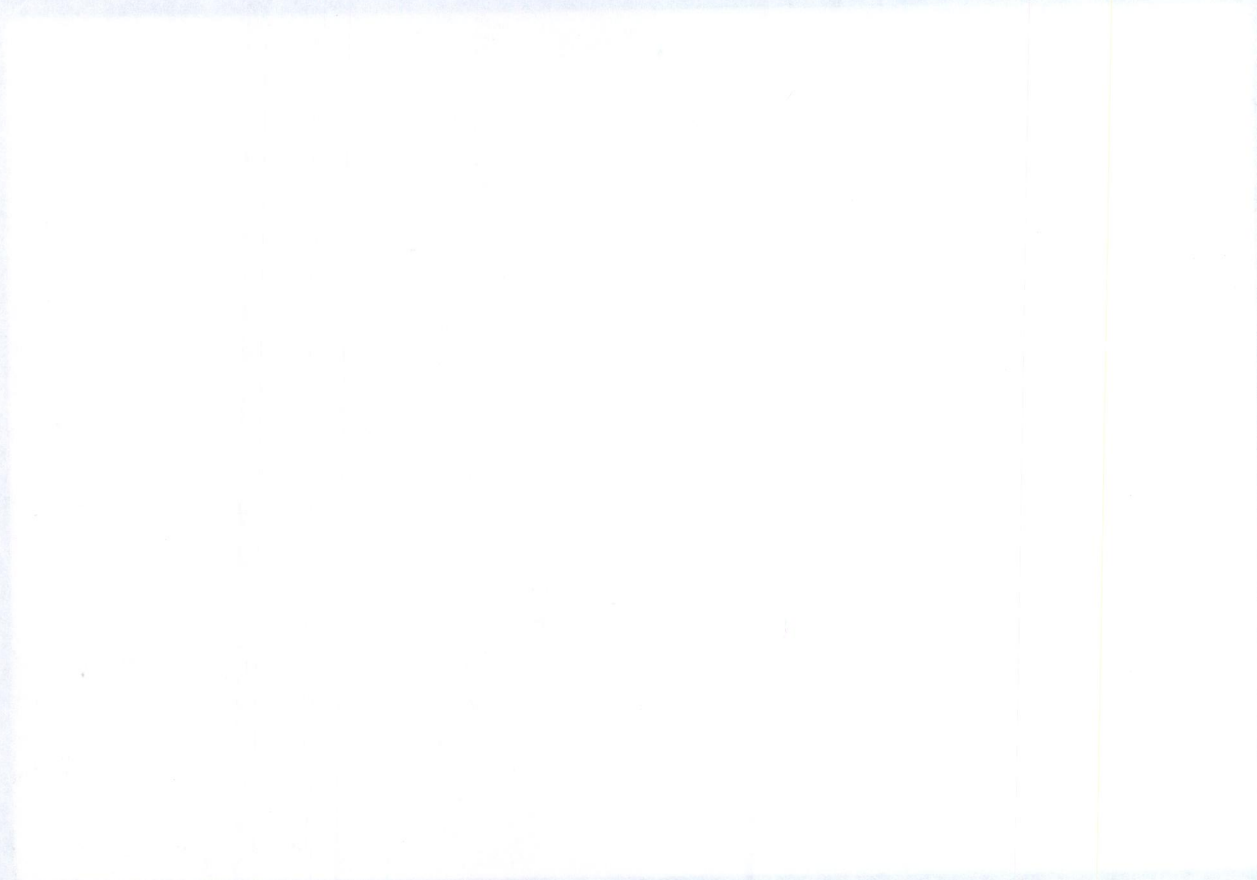
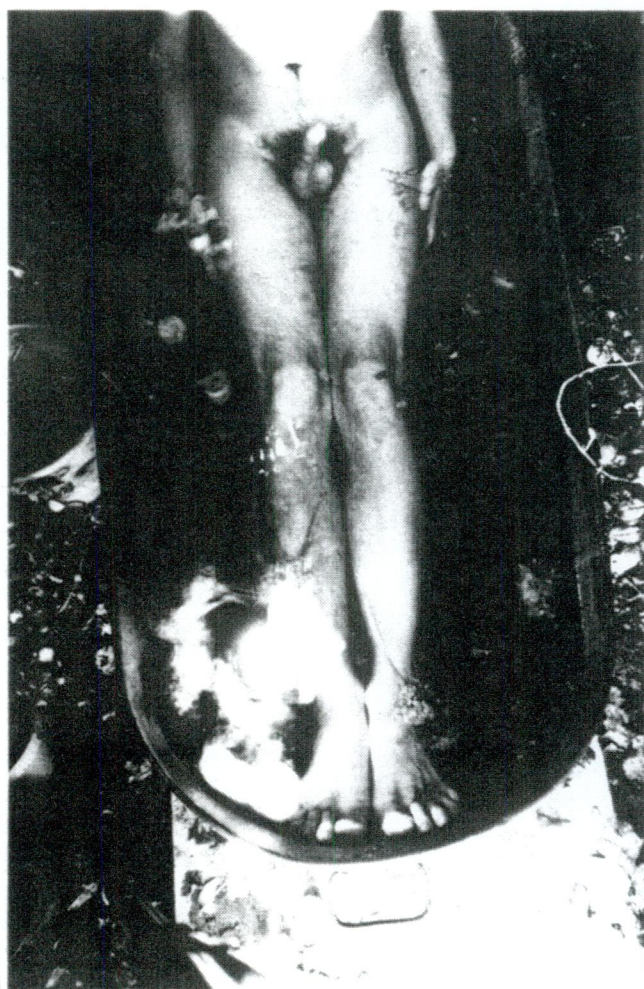




FIGURE NO. H





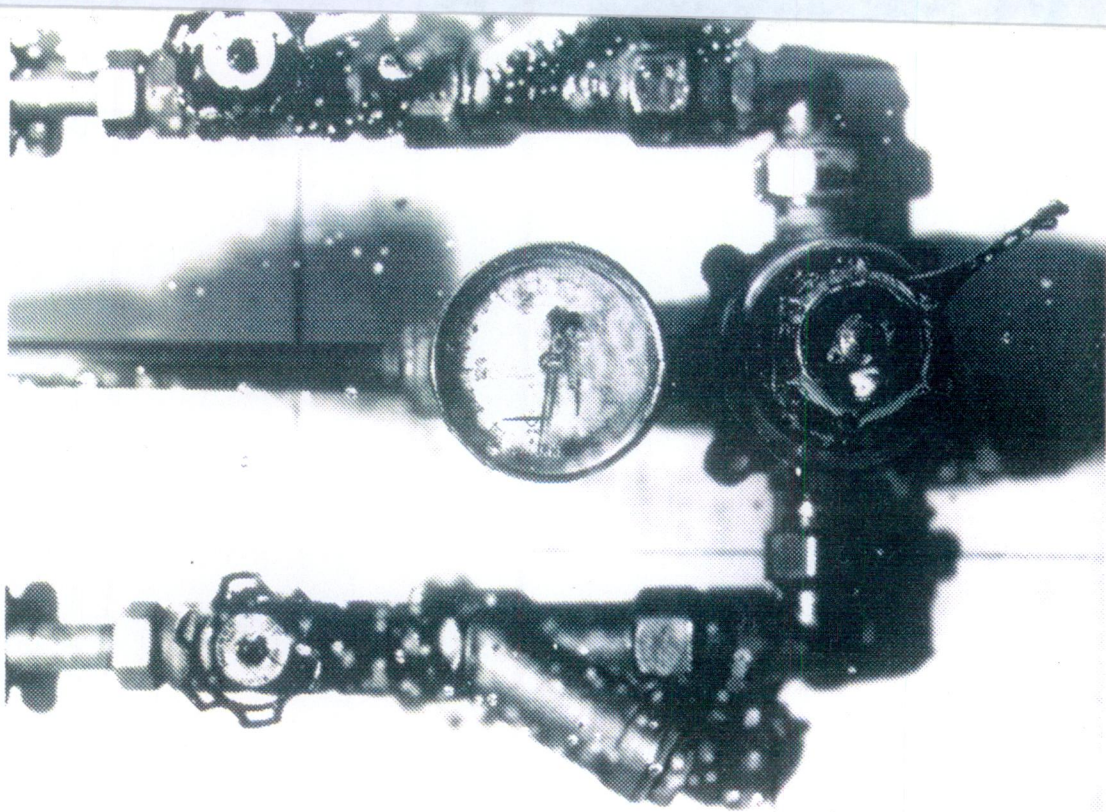




FIGURE NO J







NOTES:

CHAPTER 1;

(1). Thus the an identity crisis is inherent in the Constitution. Ireland has two official languages.

(2). Kelly, Anne, Cultural Policy in Ireland, p.8, 1989.

(3). Access and Opportunity, p.12, 1987..

CHAPTER 4;

Section one;

(1). A safety in re-working old concepts is not only the artist's fault. It is the whole conditioning of documentation. The artist has been seen to be one thing and been documented, thus having responsibility to that literal myth.

(2). From an interview with Ken Hardy, Jan. 8th, 1993.

(3). Ibid.

(4). Maps, of course, become symbols of ownership themselves, which is vey relevant to this piece.

(5). Hardy, Interview, op. cit.

(6). From information leaflet during Customs & Excise

(7). From an interview with Ken Hardy, Jan. 21st, 1993.

(8). Interestingly, this Banking Centre is designed to assist our further integration into Europe.

(9). Hardy, Interview, Jan.21st, op.cit.

(10). Ibid.

(11). Ibid.







Section Two;

(1). Though Andrew was to later work in three dimensions.

(2) Andrew Kearney, interviewed by John Logan, Sculptor's Magazine no. 4, 1990

(3). Ibid.

(4). From an unpublished lecture by N. Rolfe, Random Access Conference, I.M.M.A., 1992.

(5). Surveying & Containing, Temple Bar Galleries, p.3, 1992.







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