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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FINE ART SCULPTURE

THE WORK OF JOHN KINDNESS: ORIGINS AND INTENTIONS

By

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"Anyone Who listens to an Artist Talk
Should have their eyes examined"

- Hans Olendorf

- Do you Want to Make Art

Or Just Talk about it?

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INTRODUCTION

JOHN KINDNESS is a Belfast born Artist whose work, as one may expect, reflects his origins. It is understandable that he may be considered a 'Northern Irish Artist', yet I can regard the wide variety of works he has produced and claim to benefit more from the experience of them, than from the work of any other of his contemporaries who have emerged from a similar background in the last decade.

I do not intend to be dismissive, yet certain elements present in Kindness's work seem to confront directly a range of issues that often tend to the marginalised, to a certain extent, in the work of his contemporaries.

In other words his background does not necessarily pre-occupy him but serves as a base for issues which concern all of us, whether we live in Belfast, Dublin or New York.

The postmodern era is upon us and John Kindness is very much aware of this. He refuses to submerge his concerns in the locality pertaining to Northern Ireland only. He also resists the temptation to succumb to the internal concerns of the Art-world as the presence of a global vision in his work demands also the presence of an all-inclusive social vision that entails more than just the consideration of those who inhabit the Art World.

Yet his awareness embodies still more than that. It embodies the consideration of the very nature of this era itself. It is the awareness of this, which I see present in his work, combined with the actual physical nature of the work itself, that has resulted in my decision to write this thesis.

Hence, I shall examine particular aspects of the Artists's background in order to reveal the origins to the ideologies that permeate his work. This will culminate eventually in the consideration of his work as it functions for someone like me within my own environs.

The environment of the city where I live as well as the many other cities constantly evolving on this planet, is something which naturally concerns me, and the issues which Kindness's work highlight are those particular issues which I often find myself thinking about.

I shall, therefore, commence the discussion by considering the very physical nature of Kindness's work itself.

CHAPTER 1 : Art and work, how Kindness challenges the Gallery

Marx's Theory of Art

The human essence is defined by "the ability and potential to act consciously and with the use of abstract thought and imagination, to change the nature of its surroundings" -

This provides the basis of Karl Marx's theory of Art and enabled him to argue that "Creative practical activity, engaged in transforming the material environment, is one of the major features distinguishing humans from animals".

Our creativity, that is the labour that arises out of this unique ability, serves our human needs and intentions and, as we exercise it upon the object, we consider it a constructive and transformative process.

Inclusive to this theory is the concept of Artistic Creativity, itself bearing a similarity to labour. As A. S. Vasquez's argument, expanding on the Marxist Theory states, this similarity represents a shared relationship to the human essence.

Therefore, both Artistic Creativity and labour represent the means by which man produces objects that express him and speak for and about him (17, P.15)

In effect, the Marxist Theory of Art and Vasquez's subsequent reflections on its content indicate no essential opposition between art and labour. However, at the risk of tarring all with one brush, a visit to any Art Gallery in Dublin City would do little to justify this argument to the layperson.

To enter one of these art-sanctuaries is, for most people, on a par with a visit to a church, or, within the context of this country, a Jewish synagogue, a Hindu shrine or any other of the many religious minority centres in Dublin city.

Brian O'Doherty in his book "Inside the White Cube" describes the modern gallery space as "constructed along lines as rigorous as those for building a medieval church", and it is from this source that my analogy originates (11, P. 15). He maintains that in the modern gallery space the outside world must not come in so the art can be free "to take on its own life - untouched by time and its vicissitudes".

After all, if one, on entering the gallery space, must leave the outside world at the door in order to experience the art-object, how is one then expected to consider this testimony to the work of the Artist before their eyes, as much part of the human essence as the work of a site labourer, a social worker or computer programmer, for example?

For such reasons I would have a certain reluctance to visit a gallery on a frequent basis. For art, within such a context, can prove intimidating. Therefore, on discovering the work of John Kindness I found myself more than usually interested as I perceived his work to address these very issues, among other things.

His one-man show at the Douglas Hyde Gallery in January 1990 was a representative cross-section of work completed up to that point in time. I was immediately attracted to the colour and variety of materials, media imagery and format the work reflected. However, the common denominator to all of this was an undeniable sense of craft and understanding for the materials embodied in the work on show.

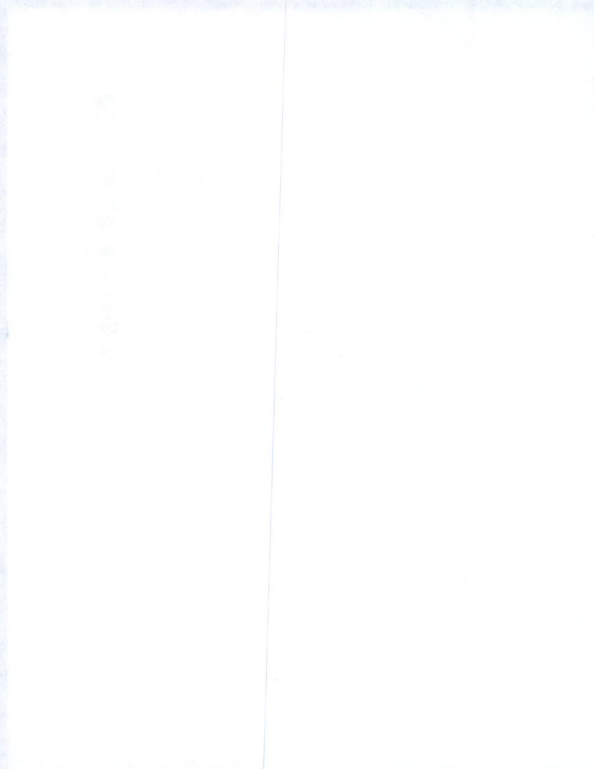
For example in 'Big Ornament' (Fig. 1) broken ornamental crockery is carefully reconstituted and grouped together to form a 'superornament', the 'Syybreaker' (Fig. 2) project is a series of durable images worthy of any signwriter, executed appropriately in acrylic on Fascal Vinyl; and 'Night Canvas' (Fig. 3) embodies all the finest techniques of mural and stage painting, while everyday advertising formats such as billboards, newsboards and advertising space on train carriages (Fig. 4) are expertly and subtly manipulated within their graphic form, and all to the intention of the artist.



1 'Big Ornament' - John Kindness (fragmented ceramic ornaments) 1989



2 'Skybreaker' Series - John Kindness (acrylic on Fascal Vinyl) 1987





3 'Night Canvas' - John Kindness (Acrylic on Canvas) 1987



4 'Art on the Dart' series - John Kindness (chalk on paper) 1988

In other words, what was most definitely in evidence here was as much labour as it was artistic creativity and the artist, whether consciously or otherwise, was making no attempt to hide this fact. By using processes and materials that signified in their particular ways, labour and work in a wider social sense, Kindness was defiling the chapel, to return to the analogy, and the work refused to allow the viewer to leave the outside world at the door.

Processes were in evidence here. Processes which, in the normal run of things, serve very definite means to an end, 'ends' which would not, within their normal context, be considered art. In other words Kindness was displaying the necessary interaction that must occur between his work and society. His work can be termed a product of society, and that which Janet Woolf refers to as 'a complex product of economic, social and ideological factors owing its existence to the particular practice of the located individual' (17, P. 13).

In 'The Social Production of Art' Woolf goes to great lengths to demonstrate the mutual interdependence of practical activity and creativity with social structures. One example she presents in the course of her argument is the poet Vladimir Mayakowsky.

She cites the writings of Mayakowsky in his discourse 'How Verses are Made', and, I found, emerging from this a variety of agreeable metaphors paralleling the work processes of the artist with those which we engage in every day. Work is, more often than not, a long and laborious process of production, the very word suggests something which requires effort over time. Also, it most likely entails the use of tools, and it is this, the idea of the tool, that Mayakowsky considers in his piece.

The tools for writing verse, according to Mayakowsky, not only include language techniques and material equipment but also, he maintains, alongside pen and paper, one must also include 'a bicycle for trips to the publishers' and 'an umbrella for writing in the rain'.

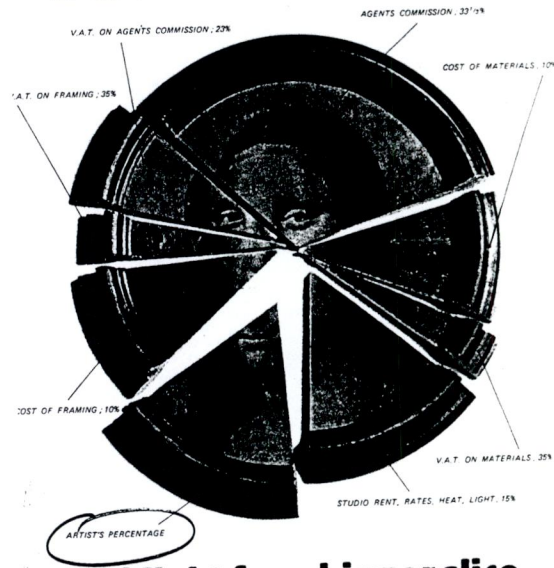
In more practical terms I wish to consider momentarily the price of an artwork that may be viewed at a typical commercial Dublin Gallery. To the layperson, quite often such a price may appear to be unacceptably high. However, in real terms, considering all the economic factors, the average price of an artwork in a Dublin Gallery is generally quite reasonable. Notwithstanding this, the layperson would consider the price to be somewhat representative of the proverbial 'work of art' as it appears before them, and would ultimately therefore, fail to recognise the extraneous costs such as framing, hanging fees, and a host of other financial contingencies that effectively represent the bulk of that price and also therefore, the 'tools' which Mayakowsky refers to. (see Fig. 5)

This is an often lamented issue within art-circles in places such as Dublin and brings me to the point I aim to make, for effectively, among other things, this is an example of that which engenders a certain opposition between art and work. Because of the 'unfathomable' nature of its pricing the art-work remains 'free' from reality, if such a term may be used.

Returning to Kindness at this point, it would appear that his work capitalizes on these considerations by eliminating such "limbs and outward flourishes"¹ and incorporating them into the physical piece itself. His 'Night Canvas' (Fig.3) for example, is not graced with a gilded frame nor does 'Big Ornament' (Fig.1) stand on an elaborate plinth.

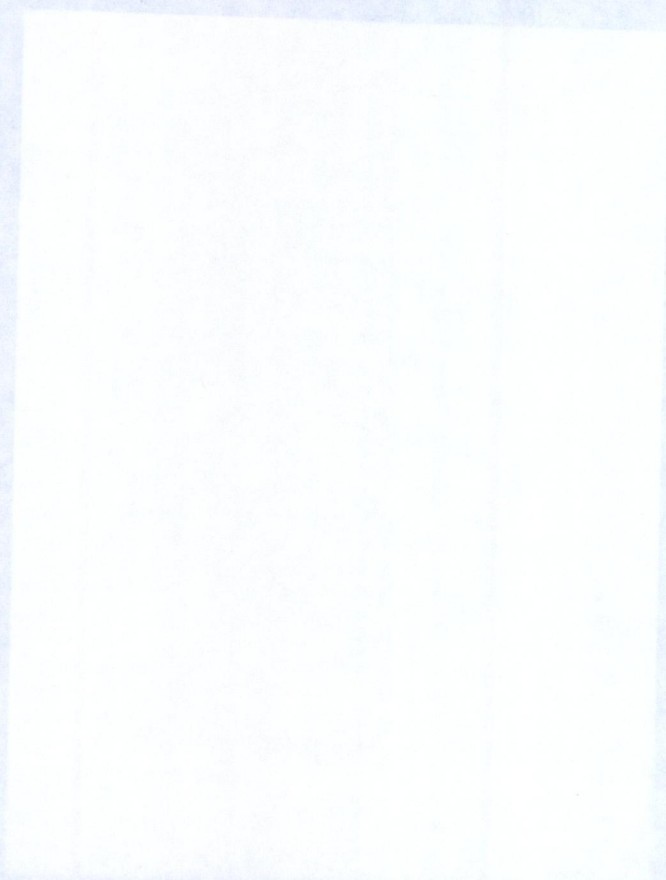
By incorporating the tools, devices and features generally accepted as essential to an art work, to the point that they cease to exist in any independent sense, Kindness could concentrate instead on perfecting the various techniques he used in these separate pieces, without endangering the artistic integrity of the work. This allowed him to remove that which the viewer rarely notices anyway (how often have you considered the framing of a picture?) and replace it with processes and modes of representation more akin to life outside the gallery. Essentially he applies as much care and attention to his work as any good crafts-person would.

JOIN THE AAI



and fight for a bigger slice





This does lend some degree of insight into Kindness's artistic intentions for ultimately his intent lies in yet another factor which Mayakowsky considers vital to the work of the artist, this factor represented by response to an external stimulus such as "The presence of a problem in society".

Combined with the nature of the work itself, such a consideration ensures the prevention of the manufacturing and technical processes inherent to the work becoming ends in themselves, something which Mayakowsky warns against. Ultimately, the combination of these factors indicated on the whole, a much more active function for the work of John Kindness, beyond the limits of the gallery.

This function and the issues it embodies involve a closer examination of Kindness and the circumstances from which he emerged to produce the work that has resulted.

Notes to Chapter One

¹ See Shakespeare, Hamlet

CHAPTER TWO: Art and Life, Why Kindness challenges the Gallery

Kindness's work may compromise and almost negate the 'sanctity' of the gallery. Yet this does not make him a pioneer in this field as, in a more international sense, many have in the past taken on board the issues which his approach may also embody. Since "The White Cube" first surfaced within the pages of Artforum Magazine in the mid 1970'S, much progress has been made in these terms and this progress is exemplified by such examples as Martha Roslers 'If you lived here' project, undertaken between 1987 and 1989 to highlight issues such as homelessness as existed in New York and other urban centres of the U.S.A. (12).

In more local terms specific to Ireland however, Kindness does represent a challenge to the art-world particular to this country. Again, he does not stand alone in this respect, yet his efforts do appear to have gained more mature and parament standing than many of his contemporaries. In simple terms, one may only need to consider the numerous public commissions he has gained in recent years, the very nature of at least one of these being a permanent, installed public sculpture in the truest tradition of a public commission. In Ireland the attainment of a public commission is, in itself, often taken to imply success in the eyes of the art world. However, an examination of this particular commission, his 'Waterfall of Souvenirs' (Fig.6) at the Ulsterbus Depot in Belfast¹, reveals a sense of personal success for Kindness, as he has managed to preserve his own intentions intact, functioning and firmly grouted together, within what would otherwise be considered a very traditional context.

The 'Waterfall'

When I first saw this work it appeared to me to be a big ridiculous joke. It looked like a multicoloured helping of molded jelly and I found it hard to come to terms with, as a public sculpture. It was a joke which, at the time, I did not really 'get', but as a joke it had a punchline in relation to the full picture which fitted its location in Belfast where it was soon to be installed. I forgot that viewing this work in a warehouse in Dublin was viewing it out of context and removed from its functioning environment.



6 'Waterfall' - John Kindness (ornament mosaic) 1991



The warehouse, incidentally, was the old site of a foundry², a foundry which I had visited previously, when it was in operation producing works which represented, ironically, public sculpture in its most typical traditional sense. Works in various forms, quite often figurative and cast in bronze that fitted very much into the concept of public sculpture and all it demanded from such art-forms.

The limitations of this concept are similar to those of the gallery, and again, Kindness's work was challenging these. However, he was challenging much more by implication, than the definition of public sculpture.

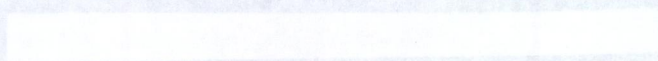
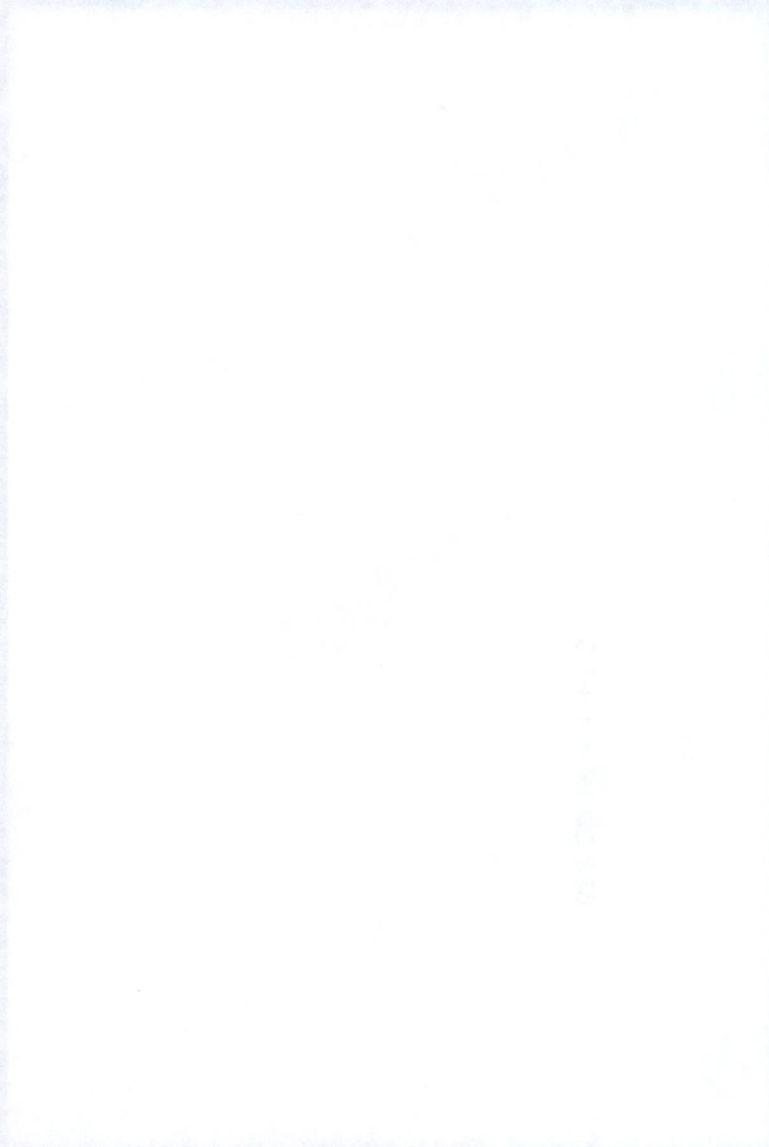
We are all by now quite familiar with those wonderful urban paradises that proliferate across the centres of the Western World and are represented in Ireland by such consumer utopias as the Stephens Green Shopping Centre³ (Fig. 7) in Dublin or Castlecourt in Belfast⁴. It is for such locations that much 'public' sculpture may be commissioned these days. For the most part, however, much of this is easily interchangeable with other 'architectural follies' such as the 'Waterfall', for example, and it is this that is the Punchline of Kindness's joke. I shall now explain why this is so.

The 'Waterfall of Souvenirs' is not, in actuality, a waterfall. It is a sculpture located in a shopping mall. In this context it may be viewed to serve its sculptural function as a parody of a waterfall, it represents the waterfall that should really be there in place of this excuse for one. The very fact that it is there forces the viewer to consider why it is not a real waterfall and why, for instance, it is made up of a lot of smashed up, cheap ceramic souvenirs from various parts of Ireland.

These souvenirs represent the ornaments that were and still are part of the households which people like John Kindness grew up in. They generally consisted of "cheap tokens of other dimes or romanticized visions of the homeland" (1). The fact that these very 'household' objects were re-invented to form this public work of art demands that the viewers recognise themselves or more importantly, recognise the reflection of their homes in this artistic effort.



7 View of Stephens Green Shopping Centre



Public Art?

Kindness's identification with the viewer in this piece, is a plea to the viewer to consider the urban environment. He asks that the city is regarded on the same basis as a personal living space such as a front-room, so that public spaces can be reconsidered as superstructures which are so carefully accentuated by 'alluring' features such as waterfalls and exuberant bronze castings, obscuring the very real problems existent within any typical developed or even 'revitalized' late twentieth century urban centre.

In her essay 'Alternative Space' Rosalyn Deutsche cites the neoconservative critic Eric Gibson on his views concerning this issue. Gibson applauds sculpture "that accommodates itself to" as opposed to that which "takes over its site", in his writing on public art. (12. P.45). This view seems reasonable in its apparent acknowledgement of the needs and desires of city residents. However, in actuality it sets up a false alternative that embodies a strategy enabling him to avoid a consideration of the character and function of the urban site itself. He sees public art indeed, not as function of art, but as a function of urbanism, thereby attempting to identify public art in relation to, rather than autonomous with, the numerous other functions, activities and imperatives that condition the fabric of city life.

Ultimately this suggests what may be termed a 'technocratic' viewpoint, a viewpoint which regards the deployment of technical expertise as the answer to the objective needs that determine the character of a city. In these terms, artists too, are perceived as among the ranks of the cities technocrats.

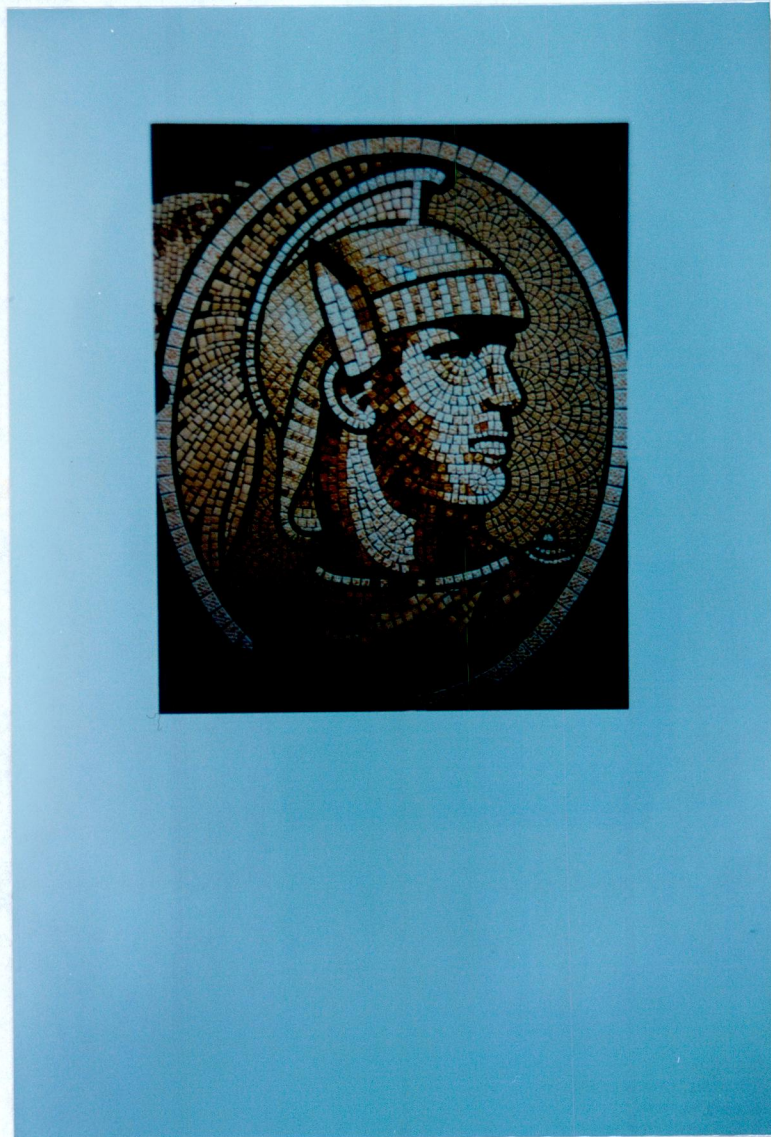
'Biscuit Head'

This, in theory, places John Kindness among the designers and planners of such superstructures including a phenomenon such as the shopping mall which may be regarded as representative. A phenomenon which is, in itself rapidly becoming a centre of social life, a center which effectively embodies space emphatically removed from the public sphere and ultimately quite removed from its physical locale. (12. P.19).

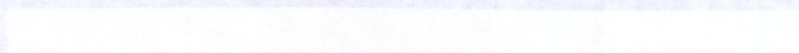
I frequent shopping malls as seldom as I would galleries and the reasons for this, in general terms, are not dissimilar. The shopping mall can generate the same sense of unease as a visit to a gallery. It is as physically removed from its locale as the art gallery and the character of city, wherever that city may be, becomes ultimately submerged in the multi-national chainstores, each with their distinctive marks and merchandise vying for the lucrative trade their 'identities' engender.

Combined with my not very flexible budget, my cynicism once again, effectively keeps me from the lures of such 'paradises' and rarely do I venture into the realms of Stephens Green Shopping centre, for example. This time however, I am the victim of such stubborn resolve. For right there in that very location, as I discovered in the papers after the event⁵, John Kindness constructed, before the eyes of passing shoppers, a giant image based on the classical profile one may find reproduced on every American Express Card out of none other than various assortments of biscuits. (Fig.8)

This time my conscientiousness denied me the opportunity to witness this intriguing person actually create a work in view of all. However, this event, in the light of the discussion, does raise some interesting questions, namely - what is the precise function of Kindness's work if he insists on such terms within which he constructed 'Biscuit Head'? What intentions does such work aim to serve and what, ultimately, might it suggest, to refer back to Mayakowsky, as "the presence of a problem in society"?



8 'Biscuit Head'- John Kindness (Biscuit mosaic) 1980



In short, just what is it that incites Kindness to situate and construct his work in locations as theoretically disparagent as the Stephens Green Shopping centre and the Douglas Hyde Art Gallery?

As with 'Waterfall' some interesting points may go towards satisfying such questions by considering this particular event and the resultant product.

Food for Thought

By taking the widely recognised symbol of American Express as it appears on the credit card itself being one of those keys to consumer paradise, Kindness, in constructing this image from biscuits, was perhaps, aiming a line of criticism at certain values people may aspire to.

By constructing this image in full view of the 'consumer' public he aimed to exemplify the human process in the making of this piece. This sets up an opposition to the thoroughly automated mass production which normally brings such an image to us on the face of a credit card.

Alongside this emphasis on human process, the use of biscuits also emphasises a certain suggestion of transience, not so much relying on the perishable nature of biscuits but more so on their appearance. No matter how hard the manufacturers of this particular foodstuff strive to impart a sense of "home baked by the hearth" on such a product, biscuits still bear a closer resemblance to the foodstuffs one may find on an astronaut's 'dinner plate', or, more to the point the foodstuffs depicted in visions of dystopian science fiction such as 'Soylent Green' or 'THX 1138'.⁶

Basically they imply that this great 'biscuit cake' was there for the taking, something for everyone. But take away the parts and the whole disintegrates to nothing, the seemingly permanent symbol of comfort and stability we all so strive to aspire to vanishes without a trace. Never mind the ever-so-tasteful classical roman profile, not even crumbs remain.

BOND

Guaranty Bond

I don't think anyone actually 'took the biscuit' if you excuse the phrase, when the piece was constructed, however, the implication was there. What Kindness was implying through such an event, as a whole, again involved a calling for return to a more human regard of things, a regard that might just allow for the reality of life today.

In certain terms this reality is a reality that no longer guarantees the comfort of class, for example. You no longer are guaranteed to remain within the class bracket you were born into as your stability depends effectively on financial terms, terms which perpetually fluctuate upon the shaky foundations of superstructural systems such as the International Stock Exchange, and terms which can confiscate your mortgage, your car, and indeed, your American Express card, not leaving you so much as a crumb to nibble. This is, perhaps, the warning embodied in 'biscuit head' and it is such a warning that forms part of Kindness's call for a re-assessment of our circumstances and aspirations in the lives that we lead.

His call for a reconsideration of our sense of 'human essence' sets him apart, therefore, from the technocratic perspective and the dehumanizing processes of technocracy. This of course, presents an opposition to Eric Gibson's views, views which embody a perspective which seeks ultimately a removal of human activity from the sphere of social practice.

It is not the first time Kindness has taken this particular approach to these issues when one considers other works such as 'Big Shoe Dog' for example (Fig.9). Such works, and the very nature of their execution by the artist, imply an emergent sense of ideology behind Kindness's work. But where does such a sense of ideology originate?

Returning to the Marxist Theory of Art, I will indicate, in the following chapter, the relevant factors that may formulate an answer to this question. It takes me to specific elements inherent in the artist's past, elements which, for the most part, were accentuated by the predicament which existed in his home town of Belfast.



9 'Big Shoe Dog' - John Kindness (shoe leather mosaic) 1989



Notes to Chapter Two

- 1 The Ulster Bus Depot, Queen Street, Belfast, was redesigned and reopened in 1991.
- 2 This foundry, since relocated to the liberties in Dublin, was originally located at the site of the warehouse used for the construction of 'Waterfall', on Church Street in the Bridewell area of Dublin.
- 3 The Stephens Green Shopping Centre, located on the corner of South King Street and St. Stephens Green, Dublin was completed and opened to the public in 1988.
- 4 The castlecourt Centre on Royal Avenue in Belfast opened to the public around the same time, along with a proliferation of others in the city.
- 5 John Kindnes constructed 'Biscuit Head' on the 27.1.1990 at the Stephens Green Shopping Centre during opening hours.
- 6 'Soylent Green', directed by R Fleischer, in 1973
'THX1138', directed by G. Lucas in 1971

BOND

SMITH BROS

CHAPTER THREE: Kindness at the Belfast College of Art - 'The Conceptual Consciousness'

'False Consciousness'

There is essentially no opposition between art and labour, as John Kindness's work, at this point in the discussion, may be ascertained to exemplify. The ideas and beliefs people have are systematically related to their actual material existence.

However, that with which we may distinguish ourselves from the animal kingdom, in other words our unique capacity to communicate linguistically and interact socially, has in reality, resulted in some degree of trouble. For this, in giving rise to our ability to abstract from the immediate, has ultimately resulted in the division of labour and the ability of one section of the population to feed and sustain the rest.

Now, while certain sections of the population are busy feeding and sustaining the rest, the rest are busy becoming intellectuals who constantly appear to strive towards the emancipation of consciousness from the world. This can be referred to as the 'Separated Theory' and the trouble begins here. It has been the tendency, in the past, of the striving intellectual element in a society to formulate a dominant ideology and such an ideology is allowed to take hold thanks to the 'Separated Theory'.

As logical as this may sound it becomes worrying when one considers the 'systems of thought' that result from ideologies that develop in this way. Very often, as the past has illustrated in various examples, these 'systems of thought' can, in many ways, be considered inappropriate. However, they remain to become the uniform mode of thought and ideology in a society as those who formulate them include the ruling classes, and represent their interests, interests which for the ensurance of self-preservation, maintain the nature of the 'Separated Theory'.

These systems soon represent a successful claim to universality. In truth, however, this 'universality' represents only a partial perspective namely

that of a group in power and its intellectuals and ideologies. Effectively they represent a 'false consciousness' as this consciousness is developed from beyond the process of material production. This consequently results in the super-imposition of distorted ideas by the economically and politically dominant sections of society as a whole. (17, P51, S2, 33)

It is this that worries John Kindness and has determined much of the underlying agenda in his work since his time as a student at the Belfast College of Art and Design. This 'consciousness' was indeed, in more ways than not, very removed, almost literally emancipated from reality, and the reality of Belfast city at the time demanded more than such a consciousness could offer and very little of what it had already superimposed on the city and its people.

Activities at the College itself during the early seventies serve as glaring example to this effect. The College building, a shabby perspex and steel affair reproducing with mercenary insensitivity the purist canons of architects such as Mies Van der Rohe¹, so typical of the 'International' style at the time, reflected so many other examples of 'lego-brick' architecture proliferating around Belfast and indeed all other major urban centres of the globe (7).

From within this building on the upper levels one could observe such examples quite easily with the view such a vantage point offered. However, such views often afforded a rather more urgent spectacle that tended to distract one from the finer points of modern architecture.

Kindness likes to describe how he and his colleagues would often look out beyond the windows and attempt to predict where the next column of black smoke would rise from, itself serving as marker to the latest bomb-site. Then, with the excitement over for the day, they would return to their assorted strivings and struggles in the studio (7).

He also speaks of regular interruptions resulting from bomb alerts within the college building, and, as disturbing as this situation may sound, it becomes all the more disturbing when one considers, on another level, what the students were struggling with and the nature of the activities that were constantly disrupted by such incidents as described above.

It is here perhaps, that the root of Kindness concerns may be traced. For he began at this stage to realise that the concerns his fellow students were struggling with actually, after considering that indicated above, bore little relevance to the very real struggles the people of Belfast were and still very much are, caught up in.

Abstraction was considered to be the ultimate in sophistication, representational work was shunned and international art magazines were regarded as a more legitimate reference than what was happening right outside the college walls (1).

For Kindness, himself very much a native of Belfast, this internal/external contrast of worlds was a problem he perceived and could not ignore. By embracing the principles of modern art so thoroughly, his fellow students, encouraged by the tutors, were learning the language of Modernism².

The complex test this language embodied was what they strove to illustrate in their paintings and other works, while, at the same time aiming to keep up with the latest progressions in this text as dictated from 'Cultureburg' across the Atlantic. For it was truly the word as laid down from within the realms of 'the' Art world in such centres as New York, and drawn from within the exegesis of theoreticians such as Greenberg, Rosenberg and Steinberg, that his fellow students were concerned with, and not what they saw happening around them in the immediate environs of Belfast. (16, P.71)

The Science of Art

In effect, most of Kindness's fellow students were studying the science of art, for modern had become truly scientific,(8, P4) as "the paintings and other works existed only to illustrate the text" (16, P6). Its text was as specialized as modern science and this placed it comfortably within that technocratic perspective so favoured by Eric Gibson, a perspective so much in evidence not only in the galleries but also in the many unavoidable examples of architecture in the Modernist style, as I have previously indicated, were abundant in Belfast.

As a native of Dublin city I need not be reminded of the insensitivity modernist architecture represents to the nature of cities such as Dublin or Belfast. I am sure this too was the case with John Kindness's colleagues. For surely, like any good student of the arts and humanities, they were busy challenging the very forms and laws engendered by Modernism, which, as a dominant ideology, was so prevalent in their society at the time.

This may be the case however, this time around it was not Greenberg, Rosenberg or Steinberg who provided a textual basis, for they were taken over by the revisions, innovations and challenges presented by figures such as Smithson, de Maria and Andre³, the emerging engineers of conceptualism.

The Myopia of the Avant-Garde

Basically the inward retreating specialized dialogue of the avant-garde⁽³⁾ remained very much intact with the 'progression' conceptualism represented to Modernism, and the students in the Fine Art Department at the Belfast College of Art were yet very much pre-occupied with the scientific terms of Art.

These terms represented that which concerned John Kindness and, in terms of his predicament they lay at the root of the problem which led to the contrast he perceived between activities at the college and activities in the city. For effectively, the 'systems of thought' existent at the college ensured a predominant sense of Myopia when it came to a consideration of the immediate environment within which the college was located and the very human essence which characterized it.

This 'Myopia' is outlined more accurately in Richard Cork's essay 'The Art Obsessed Myopia of the Avant Garde' which he wrote as part of a series for an English newspaper in 1974. At this time much of the controversy surrounding modern art was focussed on works such as Carl Andres "Equivalent VIII". The Tate Gallery's acquisition of this work for the sum of £4,000 engendered energetic public reaction and much of it negative, as the extreme nature of this piece ensured its bouyancy as a newsworthy subject with the press literally pouncing on it. (Fig.10) (15, P.65).

Cork's remarks, though severe, were justified and served to highlight the potential problems the ambiguity in modern Art could present to those unfamiliar with the scientific terms, terms which were carried by conceptualism, as Andres piece proves.

In the case of Belfast the myopia generated by such pre-occupation with these things was to John Kindness the equivalent to the manifestation of a 'false consciousness'. Modernism was effectively the root of this and conceptualism a mere descendent. It was still very much part of that 'specialized dialogue' which Cork maintained artists preferred to conduct with each other "commenting not on their attitude to reality but to art itself" (3).

Recognizing this Kindness understood that an attempt to reconcile the external reality of Belfast College of Art would have to be based on terms other than that of Art, as his intentions would not be resolved merely by struggling with the finer points of conceptualism, which represented such terms at the time.

Willie Doherty and Phototext

As a case in point to the discussion a contemporary of John Kindness, that is Willie Doherty, serves as an interesting example. Willie Doherty's work may be considered on one level as a challenge to conceptualism itself. The format which persists through his portfolio is phototext, a format

FROM
SHIRLEY
DAVIES in
Kimono

BUTYEN members have been systematically vanquished from their last outpost in Angola.

One Salvador, where they were to have fought a last ditch battle, was now taken—without the slip of a toe having been made.

I saw comrades in a place which was to have been the last stand to the six Marxists and 100 African troops of the pro-Soviet People's Liberation Front in NLA.

These Marxists are thought to be the very same who in other places have been vanquished.

The last contact with them was in Saturday when a supply plane

Battle

The mercenaries were reported to seize the battle within seventy-two hours.

They intended to hold out for two or three weeks, and then fight their way into Manila.

But they made a futile attempt with thirty 50's to eliminate, capital of Sabu, near the coast.

On the forty-minute flight yesterday, the Portuguese plane was captured, tried to refuse to land, but was shot down, but there was still no reply.

As we approached the island, we saw many empty buildings. There were some of the mercenaries.

One building, the mercenaries' HQ — had been blown up.

Continued on

A TOP art gallery was under fire last night for spending taxpayers' cash on . . . a pile of bricks.

They are now under lock and key at London's Tower of London, where the government has ordered them to be held.

Bizarre

He said "The Tash Pash was once trusted and liked by their own dealers."

"I do not know if they ever made a bracelet even as particular purchase but I shall certainly look into the matter."

American galleries and art dealers have shown no interest in the bracelet which has a dark history.

It began in 1916 when a steamman Carl Anderson decided to launch his own brand down to earth in the year.

He bought the bracelet and traced them in a few years to the floor of his studio.

Price
They've dropped a \$2,000
per bag on them. But there
are no sellers.
The cheapest rougher was
furnished not to be out of
oil, so the last few crates
will be the last one, and
it'll be a long haul.
Then, in 1975, the officials
of a photograph of the
last one. They promptly
drove to buy it for \$100.
By then the market had
gone down. But
unfortunately, Ours found 120 more
barrels.
He ended them up at \$100
per, drove up 100 barrels.

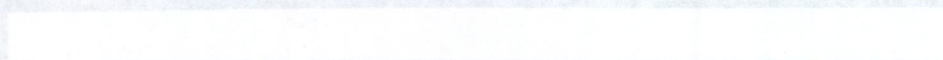
WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH

How the Tate dropped 120 bricks

[illegible]

Mirror SOS saves old John

SES!



favoured by English conceptualist artists such as Hamish Fulton and Richard Long (Figs. 11,12)

His particular manipulation of phototext, however, often embodies specifically political implications with regard to landscape, for example, whereas the work of Fulton and Long is more concerned with a sense of spirituality and 'great wilderness'. Hence Doherty regards his approach as an "Ironie use of their form" (2, P 16) serving his intention which he considers an attempt to "try and reflect how terrain creates an understanding of place". (Fig.13)

So effectively Doherty feels the need to address the very process of artistic production to communicate his intent in his approach to phototext. There is an echo, again of Moyakowsky's remarks here as he warns that "You must not make the manufacturing, the so-called technical process, an end in itself" (17, P.13), as despite his intention, Doherty is effectively participating in a 'specialized Dialogue'.

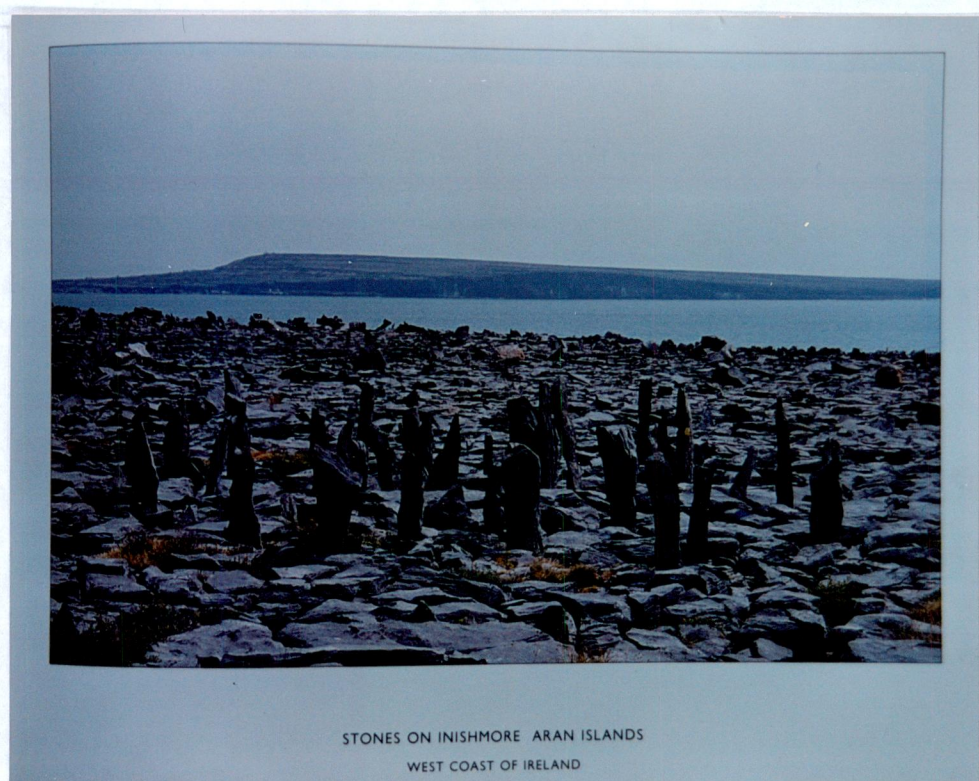
I cite him as a case in point as his approach to the subject matter embodies similar concerns to those of Kindness. This is unsurprising as both artists originate from the two major urban centres of Northern Ireland, Doherty being from Derry. Despite the obvious contrast that exists between their very separate styles, they each comment on the human element in an urban centre.

However, Doherty's works show ultimately bleak, faceless and unpopulated landscapes which depend on this very aspect so we may consider the human presence in such a centre, by its very absence in his work. He too highlights a sense of 'false consciousness' within such situations yet it is my opinion that the ironic strength of his intentions may ultimately fail to communicate due to the intimidating nature of the specialized dialogue implicit in his work.

Kindness's work, however, intimidates few as he refused to be submerged by such 'false consciousness' that may be found in the art world. He outwits such traps by resorting instead to dialogues we are familiar with in the everyday lives we inhabit. Leafing through the catalogue to the show at the Douglas Hyde, for example, one receives fair impression of



11 'Drum' - Hamish Fulton



12 'Stones on Inishmore Aran Islands' - Richard Long



13 'Golden Sunsets' - Willie Doherty



1950-1951

this as he exploits anything from billboards to postage stamps, from mural scale paintings to bus advertisements, from large-scale public sculpture to near mantelpiece-scale constructions in his call for alertness to that which may superimpose itself so insensitively on the humanity of our living spaces.

Perhaps resulted from that which he experienced at College he has gained an awareness of its existence in society as a whole, and so such works embody the very sense of 'false consciousness' he perceives also in society. Again, his intentions to impress upon us this problem existent in society originates within elements specific to his past, as is much in evidence in his work. For the situation existent beyond the confines of the college very much accentuated and re-enforced that which lay within. Kindness, in perceiving this, found himself out of the frying pan, perhaps, but very much into the line of fire, as he set about confronting it.

Notes to Chapter Three

- 1 The architectural style espoused by Mies Van der Rohe, le Corboisier and others, came to be known as the 'International' style. The rectilinear facades and spaces embodied in such buildings as Mies Van der Rohe's Seagram Building in New York, were reproduced by other Architects in cities worldwide, and often with great insensitivity, as they strove to adhere to the latest developments in architecture.
- 2 Kindness referred to the tutors of Fine Art as people who were very much detached from the situation in Belfast, and indeed, in Northern Ireland. Many of the tutors were not native to the city or indeed the province, having progressed from other institutions in England such as Manchester Polytechnic. In most cases they simply could not understand the emergent situation at the time and were not prepared in any real sense for this. Hence they themselves were only too glad to turn to the international scene and promote it as a legitimate base for studies, thereby effectively avoiding any real attempt to understand issues indigenous to Northern Ireland and the city of Belfast at the time. (7).
- 3 Robert Smithson, Carl Andre and Walter de Maria embodied in the nature of their work a challenge to the concept of the gallery, the 'white cube' as Brian O'Doherty defines it. Their works represented the fragmentation of Modernism.

CHAPTER FOUR: The presence of a problem in Society - The 'Imperial Consciousness'

We see, in chapter two, how Kindness deconstructs the symbol of American Express, itself among many icons of wealth and stability we are supposed to aspire to. His message is a warning of sorts, it implies the danger of placing faith in such seemingly tangible clear cut icons which effectively espouse, in concrete terms, whatever idealized concepts one may find being cultivated in a potential 'false consciousness'.

In chapter three we see how Kindness experienced the effects of such a false consciousness and the systems of thought it generated in his fellow students at the Belfast College of Art. We see also how the prevalence of its ideology and the pretext it engenders can limit and restrain the intention of Artists such as his contemporary, Willie Doherty, intentions which otherwise are not so dissimilar to those of Kindness.

In this chapter I wish to examine precisely where such intentions originate in order to analyse closer John Kindness's approach to the iconographic and symbolic paraphernalia that permeate and are so readily accepted by us in our everyday lives. Northern Ireland is an extreme example of this in terms of the Western world as we know it, and this makes it an ideal case-in-point as to the potential power of a dominant ideology. For idealized iconography truly clutters and complicates the lives of people in such urban centres of duality and division as Belfast and Derry, thus explaining the origins of Kindness's interest in such a phenomenon.

Kindness and 'The Troubles'

Today, the situation as it stands in Northern Ireland appears to us to be one of irresolvable and self-perpetuating conflict, a situation which is stabilized on the outside by influences represented on the one hand by the internal hierarchical structure of the United Kingdom, leading to a pervasion of social and cultural inequality in Northern Ireland due to neglect; and, on the other, by the Government of the Republic whose policies, steeped in church and state conservatism, constantly evade any real progressive legislation. (13, P.33-39).

In the late 1960's the problems generated by Unionist discrimination against the Nationalist community¹ came to a head and it was at this point that "The Troubles", as we know them today, came into existence. Effectively they began as various manifestations of street violence in Belfast and it was at this same time that John Kindness along with the other citizens of Belfast observed "the ever running sore of religious/political division become a fully opened bleeding wound" (1).

He saw his home undergo a nightmarish transformation for the 'sleepy province of town' he considered it to be (7) to what may now be considered the most extreme example (and indeed perhaps the only) of a firmly entrenched and long running urban conflict in the Western Hemisphere. Naturally, coming from a neutral background within Belfast he was bound to ask himself how and why such a terrifying predicament came about. Precisely why had the innumerable bombings of Belfast city centre become so much part of his life as he studied for his degree and just what was it that sustained and stabilized this otherwise intolerable situation?

It was his neutral perspective which enabled him to gain a full picture, a full picture which he scrutinized until he happened on an aspect of life in Belfast that offered some sort of logical insight into the existing state of affairs. For Kindness recognized that the people of Northern Ireland embroiled in this conflict were, to all intents and purposes, immersed in myth, or its manifestation in present day Northern Irish society.

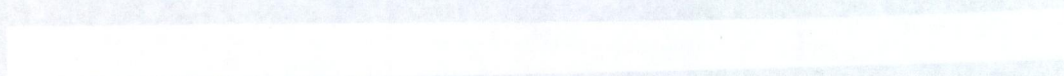
The 'Imperialist' Consciousness

Like the theoretical aspects of Art so much in evidence at the College in 1974, these myths, these idealized visions and conflicting claims to a 'universality' originated from outside influences which represented the more Nationalist aspects of British and Irish culture. In real terms they were hardly indigenous to Northern Irish culture specifically.

The images in which such visions were manifest cut across the usually distinct categories such as those distinguishing between illustrations of history, works of art and media imagery, and tended to end up in what



14 Decorated Wooden Plaque made by an internee at Long Kesh in 1977



would seem to be the more unlikely nooks and crannies of everyday life in terms of normal urban centre in the Western World.

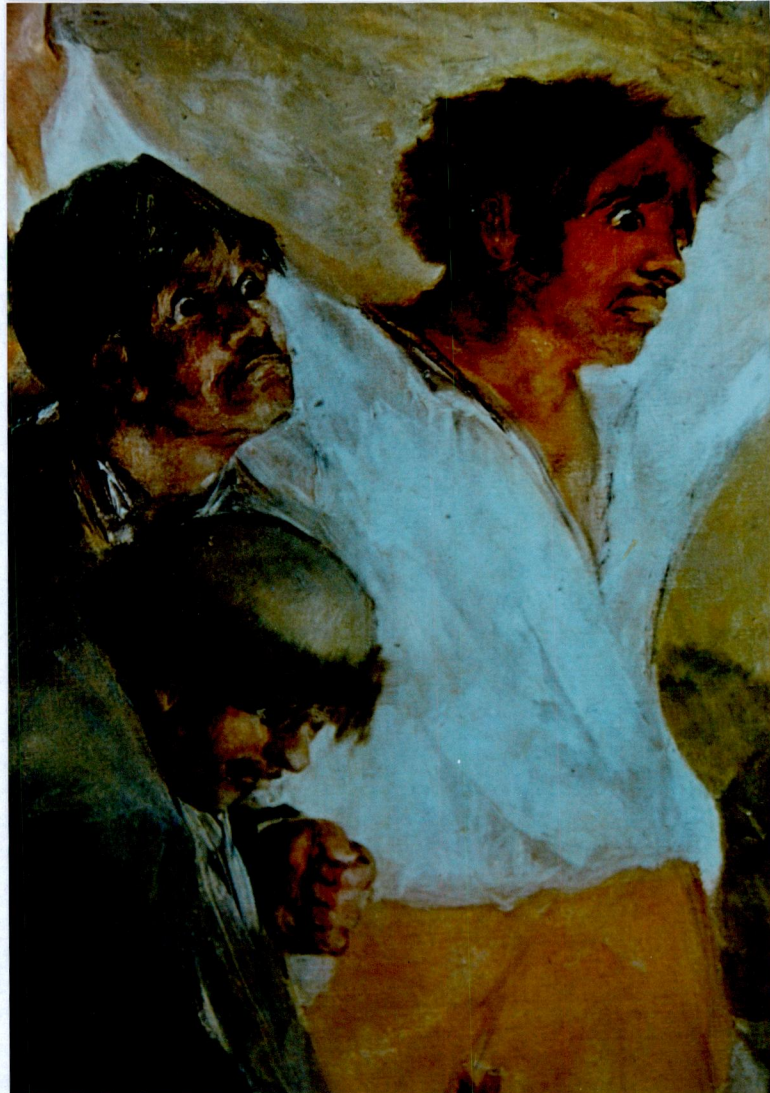
They effectively permeate Northern Irish life in other words, and this ensures that the myths they may carry are constantly exposed to the consciousness of the people, vying for and re-enforcing their faith in whichever of these two universalities their particular traditions aspired to.

Consider for example, the various interrelated roles of visual **imagery** in the life of a man who lives in Derry, paints Orange banners and Catholic statues, displays his own paintings of Irish landscape on the sitting room wall, has access to books reproducing Dutch oil paintings and medals of William III, makes a ritual effigy every year, attends a Church of Ireland Cathedral, walks in Apprentice Boys processions and, therefore, may be photographed by the British Army and various Irish newspapers, has a house-painters training and reads the Newsletter, the Londonderry Sentinel and the Orange Standard. For such a man visual images are very much part of his involvement in Society and politics, and divisions between Fine Art and popular imagery are virtually meaningless. (9, P.14) (Fig.14)

Belinda Loftus, in considering the life of the average Northern Irish citizens as outlined above, is imparting to us an impression which suggest the levels of inter-activity that exist between art and life in Northern Ireland. Considering this it becomes very easy to comprehend Kindness's characteristic approach to visual art and its multi-disciplinary nature. It is within this that his billboards, postage stamps, mural sized paintings, news-stand broadsheets etc. examine the subject matter which carry the myths that backdrop and fuel the conflict.

Kindness's Critique

Like Belinda Loftus he is not directly criticizing those who embody such myths to such an extent in their lives. The people of Northern Ireland are not the targets of his intention. The caricatures that appear in 'Night Canvas' (Fig.3) are helpless, whether it be the driver, the gunman, the father, mother or child, they all carry that same wild look in their eyes.



15 'The Third of May' (detail) - Francisco Goya



1. The first part of the book is a history of the city of London, from its earliest times to the present day. It is written by a learned and experienced author, and is full of interesting and valuable information. It is a book that every one who is interested in the history of London should read.

There is a sense of Goya's 'Third of May' here, as both paintings seem to share the same suggestions of fear, pain and pitiful humanity (Fig.15). Ortega Y Gasset in his writings on Goya comments that the people Goya introduces into his paintings

are transformed into puppets, easily exchangeable for one and other. The faces are not faces, they are masks - there is no one dominant figure. Everything in them is equalized and transformed into a mere part of the composition. In Goya the protagonist is the picture itself. (18).

A comparison between Goya and Kindness is all the more appropriate, as Kindness refers to Goya (7) and in his works too the figures are mere parts of the composition, so much so, in fact, that sometimes he is prone to a substitution, in Orwellian fashion², of animal for human, as is the case in 'Monkey Town besieged by Dogs' (Fig. 16)

For we are not so far removed from the animal kingdom it would seem, as we exist surrounded by the cluttered trappings which form the other parts of the composition in 'Monkey Town,...' and 'Night Canvas'. Such paraphernalia, as subverted by Kindness, are direct references to the iconographical formats that carry the mythological ideals which the divided communities of Northern Ireland, it would seem, myopically aspire to.

Again however, they too are not the direct target which Kindness ultimately sets his sights on, they lie merely in the outer rings of the bullseye. He re-interprets these symbols and other such paraphernalia in terms of food, playing them down in order to neutralize them as icons which are otherwise vital to the identities of both Nationalist and Unionist communities. The weighted myths they embodied become carrots, bananas, bones and peanuts among other things. For food is a common denominator, as common as the staple diet of iconography any native of cities such as Derry or Belfast may digest every day.



16 'A Monkey Town besieged by Dogs' - John Kindness, 1985



Hence Kindness's multidisciplinary approach and sense of sheer craftsmanship combine forces here and act as insurance as they mobilize to target the real problem. For the Art Object he has so carefully crafted becomes pure function and leaves us to consider the object itself for what it is. It is at this point where we may now grasp the true sense of it.

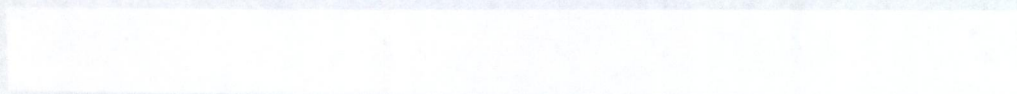
His criteria does not lie ultimately with the people of Northern Ireland or even with the ancillary iconography and other such superficial devices that clutter and so obviously complicate their lives. We have seen that. They are ultimately blameless as dogs who dig up flower-beds to bury their bones.

The media that deploy the images and devices of iconography inherent to Northern Ireland are nothing to the people who continue to bury their bones. Bones which are continually dug up and chewed over time and time again. It is Kindness's targeting of the media that aims to expose that which ensures the seemingly perpetual nature of the Northern Irish predicament and that which maintains the existence of a 'false consciousness' in our societies in general.

For this critique of the media lies in his intention to expose it as a vehicle of 'false consciousness' and again one may say that he is not exactly a pioneer in this field. Consider his multidisciplinary approach for instance, combined with such a critique one would be tempted to draw close parallels between his work and that of a prominent pop artist such as Richard Hamilton, for example.



17 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?'
Richard Hamilton



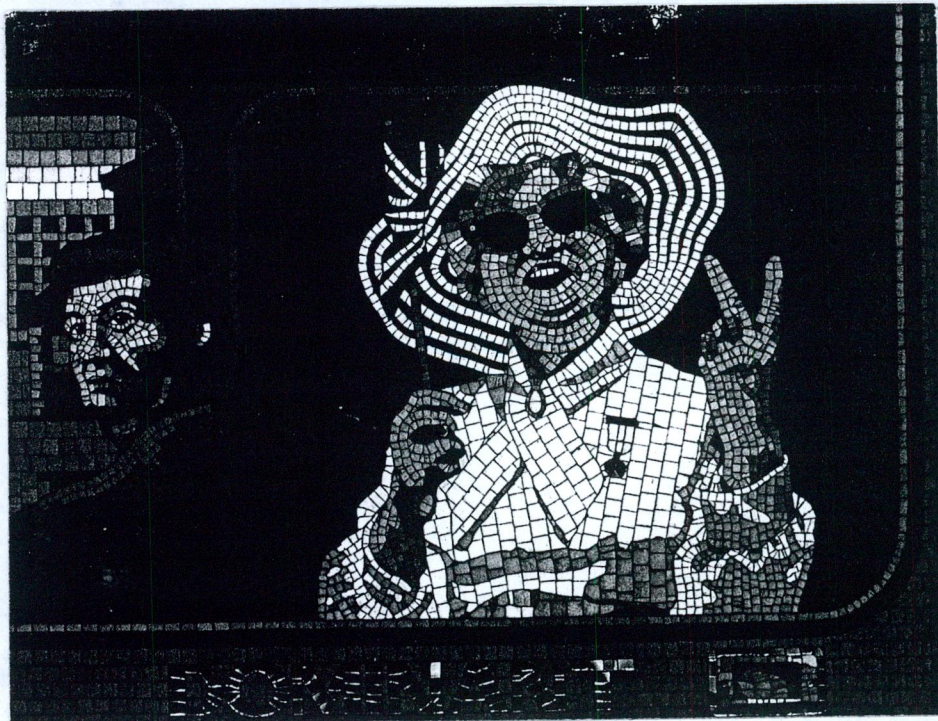
Richard Hamilton and the Icon

The comparison again, is not entirely incidental as Kindness again, would refer to someone like Richard Hamilton (7). Indeed one may observe very interesting similarities between their work. Consider the 'outside looking in' perspective on the living room setting in 'Night Canvas' (Fig.3), the mother's bare breast, the furnishings, wallpaper and carpet, all carefully attended to, and then regard Hamilton's 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?' (Fig.17). Consider also his mosaic commission for an Ulster Bus project in 1981 (Fig.18) and then take a look at Hamilton's beautifully crafted vignette for his 'Swinging London '67' series. Comfortable comparisons can be observed here. (Fig.19)

However, just as Hamilton may be simply exemplifying the iconic function of the image inclusive to 'Swinging London '67' or more to the point, the image which haunts his controversial painting 'The Citizen' (Fig.20) which itself indeed concerns the Northern Irish issue, Kindness is not content to take such images and merely restate them in expressive terms in order to highlight their in-built iconography. His work is not simply an idolization of Richard Hamilton.

'The Citizen' is based on an image from a news excerpt concerning hunger strikes in a Northern Irish prison at the beginning of the 1980's. Hamilton pins it down and presents it to us in order to exemplify its allusions to stereotypical images prevalent in Irish mythology, mythology which is synonymous with the Nationalist movement. This exposes the under-hand methods the media attempt to use to force an image upon us.

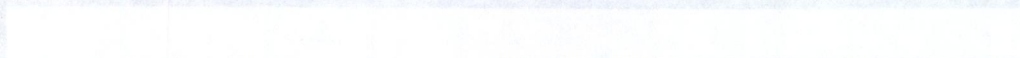
Kindness pushes this a step further by re-activating such images as vehicles to his intention. In the mosaic for example, he not only kidnaps the image of the Queen Mother (an acknowledged and readily recognized icon within the terms of Northern Ireland) and takes her away on a 'common' double decker bus, but he also goes on to defile this icon further by cleverly altering the well-known gesture she makes with her fingers to another just as well known gesture which means, be assured, something quite different. Note also the subtle manipulation of the bus manufacturers logo.



18 Mosaic for Ulsterbus Project 1981 - John Kindness



19 'Swinging London 1967' - Richard Hamilton





20 'The Citizen' - Richard Hamilton



Hamilton was interested in reproducing an icon with all the respect an icon such as a religious ornament deserves, alluding dangerously to O'Doherty's assumptions about the gallery space, whereas Kindness aimed to reproduce such icons with as much disrespect as he could possibly get away with in order to satisfy his intentions.

For Kindness intends that we recognize the Queen Mother, King Billy, Mother Ireland and Cuchulainn⁴ and anyone or anything else in this conspiracy, as devices of imperialism, that particular false consciousness characteristic to Northern Ireland. More importantly, he wishes that we recognize the very media that exploit such devices for it is these that ultimately stand culpable and ensure the preservation of Unionist/Nationalist Protestant identities and prejudices, prejudices which effectively co-operate in order to preserve imperialism, itself after all, being a co-operative venture (14, P.9)

Referring back to 'Night canvas' Kindness regards this work as 'the newspaper photograph that never was' (7). This perhaps sums up his critique, a critique which embodies Marshall McLuhans reflections on the "medium as the message".

"The Medium is the message" 'because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of association and action' (10, P.9) and Kindness asks us to maintain a more critical awareness, a more active critical awareness of the scale and form of 'human association and action' especially within such precarious and vulnerable situations such as Northern Irish society represents. 'Night Canvas' highlights the medium. It forces the viewer to look literally behind the headlines by caricaturing reality, and aims to deconstruct the idealized visions in peoples heads, visions which, too often people associate with and act upon, despite their less than ideal manifestations in reality and despite their ultimately aloof position above human conditions.

Notes to Chapter Four

¹ As a consequence of historical events, there are two generally recognised sides to the conflict. There are, on the one hand, the Unionist faction who tend to align to the Protestant religious identity and on the other the Nationalists, who generally identify with Catholicism.

Unionism promotes the much debated political ties with the United Kingdom surviving from the days of the British Empire, when Nationalism alludes to a Northern Ireland as a functioning political and cultural part of the Republic of Ireland, ultimately divorced from the United Kingdom and thus generating the debate concerning the sovereignty of this province.

In terms of the twentieth century, Unionist monopolization in various areas of public life discriminated against nationalist communities chiefly for their refusal to recognize the British colonial state. This led to political unrest which soon deteriorated to conflict, heralding the beginning of 'The Troubles' as they have come to be known today. (13, P.33-39).

² See 'Animal Farm' by George Orwell

³ In the late 1970's, with their 'no wash protest' failing as a means to gain 'political prisoner' status, prisoners at the main Northern Irish prisons such as Long Kesh and The Maze resorted to a further tactic, the hunger strike. As the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher refused to acknowledge these protests, one by one daily republican prisoners refusing to eat were dying in an attempt to achieve the objectives of the long protest. The hunger strikes received widespread media coverage.

⁴ These are some of the main mythological characters typical to the iconography of the respective communities.

Chapter Five - Plays within plays - detachment and the 'Post-modern Consciousness'

We now know what makes John Kindness work tick and we know also that his work intends to set our thoughts in motion, encouraging them to travel along paths which may heighten our social consciousness. We have seen that his work originates from a background rooted in the Northern Irish predicament and we have seen also that this too provides the origin of the dominant ideology inherent in his work.

Considering this in view of remarks made by the American critic, Lucy R Lippard, it would seem that there is, contrary to Ms. Lippard's assertions, at least some example of 'political' or 'activist' art on this Island, as Kindness's work would serve to prove. (5, P.17).

For, if Lippard considers political art to be socially 'concerned' this is indeed the case with Kindness as his work has been proven to exhibit a sense of concern for the society from which he emerges. If she considers activist art to be socially 'involved' this again is the case as his work has also proven a very active involvement within the social sphere.

Kindness's work does not represent his specific critique, per se, of Northern Irish life itself. He is not necessarily presenting us with a critique of any dominant ideology as it exists anywhere, be it Belfast, Dublin or indeed New York, and it is this essentially that places his work sufficiently within Lippard's definition, for his work presents us with that Hamletesque "Play within the Play" view of life, in order so that we just may observe the true roots of a problem within society as life goes on.

Shakespeare's 'Plays within the Play'

In Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' the King murders his brother in order to inherit the throne, and take the hand of his brother's wife, the Queen Gertrude, who is also Hamlet's Mother. It is Hamlet's task, as assigned by the ghost of his father, to reveal the King's plot to his mother, thereby to justify an act of vengeance.

In order to reveal that "something (which) is rotten in the heart of Denmark" Hamlet capitalizes on a group of visiting minstrels and commissions them to re-enact (unknowingly) the King's 'foul and murderous deed'. It is within this playlet that the truth of the matter is revealed and the King realises that his deeds do not go unknown.

The characters, events and objects within Kindness's work enact unknowingly the rituals which are so much part of their lives that they almost fail to recognize the nature of their deeds. It is not until Kindness's images and objects confront us that we see ourselves within these masques. For he reveals to us that which is rotten in the state of Northern Ireland and indeed, in our lives in general.

The characters in Hamlet's playlet are masked just as Kindness's caricatures are masks for us. Hamlet's playlet serves to enact the deed itself and for the general audience, no one is being implicated yet an uneasy sense of implication remains. In Kindness's work this uneasy sense of implication serves for us all, all of us who accept so readily what we should consider a bit more.

This is where his work becomes 'activated' as it has at least as much intent as Hamlet did have in orchestrating the play. Like the play he removes himself from the reality he is depicting. He removes us from this reality also so we may scrutinize it from a detached position. Capitalizing on his neutral background he displays for us, within the terms of his work specific to Northern Ireland for example, the Yin and Yang so essential to the perpetual cycle of violence that exists, and personifies them. (Fig., 16).

"Sitting in the Fence" as opposed to on it is how he phrases his approach, and the approach of many of his contemporaries, in his response to

Lippard's remarks (6, P.25). For it is this viewpoint that has enabled him to step outside "Planet Ulster" (1) and present it to us from a detached point of view in order to highlight such petty squabbles and those who perpetuate them.

His work calls for us to join him at his observation point so that we too may observe Planet Ulster and all the other isolated yet interconnected planets that make up this world.

The 'Post-Modern' and Modernist legacies

Even though we live in a 'post-modern' world today, as we have been told by so many from philosophers such as Frederic Jameson¹ to the cute presenters on MTV², and even though Architects like Michael Graves³ have succeeded in giving the public building back to the public, almost literally I might add, in the form of a present, very much in the world remains far from the ideal.

Kindness, like many other of his contemporaries, as again he is not alone, remembers and still perceives the legacies of modernism in our societies and remains vigilant. Modernity may be dead but the technocrats are still there, considering crowd control elements and other such factors that must eventually be considered in the glorious creations they have learned to attract us to since the days of 'lego brick' architecture.

This is where I may measure fully my appreciation of his work as it now begins to collude with certain concerns which occupy my mind. In terms of cities, which Kindness's work has been shown to address, Dublin and other similar urban centres world wide are now experiencing what is theoretically defined as "gentrification"⁴. In cities such as Los Angeles this process is best exemplified by the vast new Bunker Hill complex, which practically walls off the increasingly third world, working class city below. (12, P.16). In Dublin too, these ominous seeds have been sown as they manifest themselves in the form of our very own financial services centre.

We have been sold such ventures lock, stock and barrel by such terms as 'revitalization of the inner city' however, the reality of this particular

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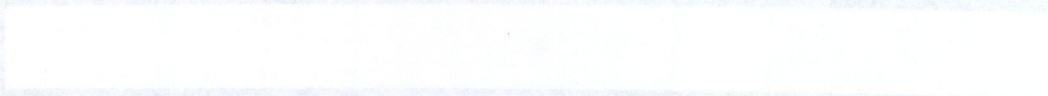
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Emel & Wherney
First National Bank of Chicago
Lord Day & Lord, Daniel Smith
Ogden & Mather
Paul Weiss Ruskoff
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Warren, Schaeffer & Co. Inc.

21 From the 'New York Times Real Estate Report', Sunday Supplement,
14.5.1989



1000

situation is altogether different, for what we have here may prove to be a veritable wolf in sheep's clothing. (Fig.21).

Fortresses such as that which bunker hill represent signify the 'New Urban Frontier' of the late twentieth century. At the edge of this frontier can be found the 'natives' to which such a frontier manifests a very real threat, this threat being their imminent displacement by the fabulous megastructures they, the 'urban pioneers' have planned (12, P.17). Again in terms of Dublin city, these pioneers have just recently attempted to evict the residents of Sherriff Street flats⁵ in order to accommodate their financial services centre.

Considering such incidents the term 'revitalization' becomes vacuous, lifeless, robotic and in short, technocratic, within this context of use. It becomes part of the devices so typical of those who wish to sell us these empty visions. It may imply a city centre 'vital' with life and teeming with the young, the eager and the determined, however, the reality of it is a nine-to-five reality that admits only the corporate wheeler-dealers, and a reality tightly supervised, day and night, by walkie-talkie toting security guards.

'Gentrification' being the more impartial term for such urban 'redevelopment', is actually only represented in its infancy by such phenomena as the Financial Services Centre. In Los Angeles and New York for example, it has become more than just a nine-to-five reality with the professional strata who can afford the property rates 'vital' to such redevelopments, moving back into the centre to live as well as to work. Considering visions such as the residence of 'Max Rand' in Ridley Scotts film and veritable vessel of postmodernist consideration "Blade Runner"⁶, one may receive a potential insight into the implications of this.

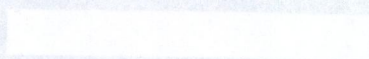
Despite the science-fictionalized nature of such a vision it tends to implicate a disturbing view of the future within our urban centres, and the thoughts set in motion by the intentions inherent to John Kindness's work serve to accentuate the potential legitimacy.

After

all this 'future' already, to all intents and purposes, exists as we have seen, in controversial cities such as Los Angeles. The images of riot, chaos



22 'Blade Runner', 1982



and destruction⁷ flashed across to us by satellite last summer are close to the urban atmospheres, implied within the sets and scenarios of "Blade Runner", Los Angeles itself serving as the very location for the film. (Fig.22).

Due to the vigilance of John Kindness as expressed through his work my conscious awareness of the issues in and around such events and phenomena as above has been heightened and it is Kindness's activities as recorded by his works that partly engenders and maintains such an awareness within me and perhaps many others.

This 'awareness' most definitely does not represent a 'false consciousness'. It encourages us to remain vigilant in these times of change. For these changes, despite that sense of revitalization, renewed, redevelopment and whatever else they may suggest, may ultimately only mean that same old wolf in slightly re-fashioned sheep's clothing, concealing itself temporarily until we realise that such wonderfully pleasant creations such as our new shopping malls are just reiterations in disguise of the old order of technocracy, itself perhaps 'new and improved' yet in the most ominous ways.

Perhaps this is what Kindness's 'Howling Dog No.3' proclaims in vain (Fig 23), for that beautifully crafted surface which covers the animal so sumptuously, seduces us, and the dog, almost completely deprived of its senses, just about becomes a seductive object of beauty. Yet it howls for us so we may hear from within, its cries of warning. The trouble is, how often do we actually stop to consider just what it is a dog may be howling at?



23 'Howling dog No 3' - John Kindness (Mosaic)

Notes to Chapter Five

- 1 Frederic Jameson is a recognized literary theorist who is regarded as 'one of Americas foremost Marxist intellectuals'. His discussions on Postmodernism are often referred to and may be found in works such as 'Postmodernism or, The Cultural logic of late Capitalism', London, Verso, 1991.
- 2 MTV, music television, has become part of practically every household in the Western World, especially if such a household includes any number of adolescents. With wall to wall music video, it has, in the recent past, broadcasting all that may be considered 'MTV Postmodern'.
- 3 Michael Graves as designer of the Portland Building, Portland, Oregon, seems to have achieved the same status as Architects such as Mies Van der Rohe. Yet, an examination of the Portland Building reveals a completely different sense of architecture. It embodies as opposed to excluding elements of the city in which it is sited. As well as a ribbon frieze on its sides suggesting its appearance as a gift-wrapped parcel, it also includes a pastiche of elements synonymous with the International style.
- 4 Martha Rosler, in her essay 'Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint' quotes the urban geographer Neil Smith on his considerations of the frontier as a metaphor for urban growth. Smith writes "Gentrification and urban redevelopment represent the most advanced example of the re-differentiation of geographical space towards precisely the same end." See bibliography (12).
- 5 The Sherriff Street Flats which lie at the edge of the redevelopment zone for the Financial Services Centre, are the base for a community of people who have, in many cases been tenants since its completion in the late 1950's/early 1960's. As a Dublin Corporation housing scheme development this combines with the underprivileged social status of its tenants thereby militating against them as a community when faced with the threats presented by large corporate undertakings such as the Financial Services Centre is typical of.

⁷ On the 30 April, 1992, with the widely publicized beating of a black man by a number of policemen acting as incitement, widespread rioting was sparked off in Downtown Los Angeles. Sensational media coverage worldwide bore testimony to the resultant chaos and destruction. The imagery such coverage carried signified a great sense of unease existent in many urban centres throughout the United States as riots ensued in other places such as Little Rock in Alabama, and other specific southern locations.

Conclusion

I have benefitted perhaps, from my experience of the work of John Kindness. I would like to think that the message of awareness and vigilance his work embodies may successfully communicate to others too. I consider myself lucky that I can share such a viewpoint it demands without having to wade (as I must admit I did attempt) through pages of 'textural exegesis' and theory in order to arrive at this point.

Ultimately his work communicates an intent which is also personal to my concerns. Rosalind Krauss proposed the 'grid' as emblematic of Modernism and in this day and age, as Kim Levin goes on to suggest, we should perceive such an era thus, and then to perceive the Post-Modern era as signified within the same such terms, by a map.

This is a message I would receive from the work of Kindness and a message which I myself would hope to espouse. I would hope to see that the city where I come from and the people who inhabit, maintain and interact within it, remains firmly part of a map affected and characterized by the very things which make us human, above all, the humanity we must maintain between us.

Grids, networks, trans-global frameworks, superstructures and ideological systems of thought cannot do this on their own. The Human Essence cannot be ignored if some sort of stability is sought within such terms. Such grids can only box us off, leaving us insignificant and unheard yet maps can interact to show the places we live in, the city where those places are, the country where those cities have evolved and the planet on which it all, as a whole revolves upon.

Within such a context I see John Kindness's work as an embodiment of the local yet as that which also alludes to the universal. It proves that issues pertaining to the local may be approached in such a way that allows for universal consideration, and indeed, as is the case with John Kindness, embodies considerations which are relevant to each and every one of us whether we may study art or work nine to five in an office downtown.

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