

COLAISTE NAISIUNTA EALAINÉ IS DEARTHA
NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE ART CLASS

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Education
in
Candidacy for the

DIPLOMA FOR ART AND DESIGN TEACHERS

by
ANITA GOGARTY

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Introduction

Why teach art? This is a question which almost every art teacher will be asked during his career. One thing art education is not about is the production of wonderful pieces, of pottery or paintings. Victor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain write, of art in Creative and Mental Growth,

Rather it is the values of these experiences to the child that is important. If the youngster has increased in awareness of the environment has found joy in developing skills, has had an opportunity to express, feeling and emotions then we have succeeded. The field of art is constantly changing and the laborious learning of particular skills or techniques that seem to be presently in vogue may be meaningless to youngsters and no longer in vogue ten years from now. It is not these transient skills that are important but rather the development of a sensitive creative involved and aware child that is the goal. (1)

Art education deals with a wide area of development in the child . This dissertation deals with one area : environmental awareness. The relationship between the child and his/her environment is extremely important. How does the student see the world around him? Does he understand and appreciate the complexities of all the elements which combine to make it what it is? Painting drawing or constructing is a constant process of assimilation and projection: taking in through the senses a vast amount of information, mixing it up with the psychological self and putting into a new form the elements that seem to suit the aesthetic needs of the artist at the time. (2)

Art is a subject in which the student can explore and examine his environment in a new way, rather than learning facts and information about the world around him, the student can become aware through increased perceptual sensitivity of the complexities of his environment. Our senses are very important in the educative process. The ability

to see, feel, hear, smell and taste provides the contact between us and our environment. The art class is an ideal place to develop this contact with the environment and to increase the student's awareness and sensitivity to it. Environmental education should be an active process on the student's behalf. They should be encouraged to question, to seek answers, to find form and order, to rethink and restructure and find new relationships within the environment.

Through increased perceptual awareness, the student can gain a deeper awareness, appreciation and understanding of the world around him. Art, I believe, is the subject most responsible for this development. It should not be used as a crusade for ecological reform, rather as a means to opening the student's consciousness through increased perceptual analytical and critical skills.

We all influence the quality of our shared environment : the way we relate to each other and to nature creates the patterns within which we live and work. The natural and built environment affect each other, therefore careful consideration of their combination is essential. Restoration and recycling of older buildings and streets and new developments also must be harmonised with the life-styles of people and the natural environment. The quality of the environment depends on people's ability to use their design sensitivity, their social responsibility and their ecological concerns together to solve environmental problems. (3)

It is therefore important for the student to gain an acute visual and sensory awareness and understanding of the world in which he lives: to appreciate the forms, shapes, patterns, textures and colours that make up this world. In order to gain this understanding the student must have had experience of looking critically. As Gyorgy Kepes writes in Arts of the Environment: "To be fully aware of what we lose in the

undisciplined, reckless exploitation of technique we must experience the missing qualities.” (4) How can someone truly understand the beauty of the sun if they have always lived in the smog. Likewise how can someone appreciate the freedom of space if they have always lived in a crowded environment. (5) Similarly with an art student, we cannot expect him to have a knowledge and appreciation of the natural environment if he has never experienced running through a wild meadow or fishing in a bubbling brook, or exploring the majestic branches of an oak tree. Environmental education however should not just encompass the natural world but should also widen the student's experiences of the urban environment. Students from rural backgrounds should, I believe, be introduced to the myriad of textures, patterns and forms in cityscapes and to the bombardment of shapes and colours which are part of urban life. Through the knowledge and understanding of the environment the student can then come to conscious critical and analytical conclusions about it.

Chapter One of this dissertation deals with environmental education : how it relates to art and how it is important in dealing with the affective side of learning. Art and the Built Environment by Eileen Adams and Colin Ward is a rich source of information which is based on The Schools Council Project in London in 1982. The aim of this project was to, “enlarge the student's environmental perception and enable them to develop a 'feel' for the built environment.” (6) It also had other aims such as increasing the student's critical and visual appraisal of their environment.(7) This chapter also deals with the importance of “seeing”. This is dealt with extensively by McFee and Degge in Art, Culture and Environment : A Catalyst for Teaching. (8)

Chapter Two looks at visual awareness and how increased perceptual skills can be developed. Elliot Eisner deals with this topic in Educating Artistic Vision. He also explores the expressive content of form: how we feel about the things we see. Arts of

the Environment by Gyorgy Kepes is also a very relevant text which deals with the relationship of all the senses to the environment : the importance of first hand experience in visual education.

Chapter Three looks at the new Junior Certificate Syllabus to see how it facilitates environmental education in the art class. In this chapter I have also included a sequence of lessons carried out by second years based on an environmental theme. It also contains examples and analysis of the students work.

Footnotes Introduction

1. Victor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain, Creative and Mental Growth, (Seventh Edition, New York, Macmillian, 1982) p.(ii).
2. Ibid.
3. June King McFee and Rogena M. Degge, Art ,Culture and Environment : A Catalyst for Teaching (Iowa U.S.A., Kendall/Hunt, 1980) p.10.
4. Gyorgy Kepes, Arts of the Environment (London : Aidan Ellis,1972) p.170.
5. Ibid., p.171.
6. Eileen Adams and Colin Ward, Art and the Built Environment (London : Longman,1986) p.13.
7. Ibid.
8. McFee and Degge, Art, Culture and Environment, pp.12-81.
9. W. Elliot Eisner, Educating Artistic Vision (New York, Macmillian, 1986) pp.65-113.

Chapter 1

Environmental Education

Environmental Education is a field of school activity which has grown steadily throughout the 1970's. The phrase itself can apply to the use of the environment instead of the classroom as a source for a variety of school subjects. It can also apply to education about the environment treated as a classroom topic like any other or it can imply to the direct use of the environment as a means of understanding, appreciating and conserving it. (1)

In the early 1970's a widely accepted definition of environmental education (Nevada Declaration) was that it is,

...the process of recognising values and clarifying concepts in order to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the interrelatedness among man, his culture and biophysical surroundings. Environmental education also entails practice in decision making and self formulation of a code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality. (3)

At that time, for most people including most teachers, environmental education was interpreted as education about the natural world which is "good" and the threat to it from the built environment which is "bad", or it was considered to be concerned exclusively with the conservation of natural resources, the crisis of energy consumption or with pollution and its effects on wildlife and their habitat. (4)

In Ireland with the growth of urban populations many more children live and attend school in towns and cities. Surely environmental education should be equally concerned with this urban landscape. Students should have a chance to examine their

local area; how it came to be, how it is run, the social problems which occur as a result of its design (whether good or bad) and what can be done in the future to improve it. Almost every school subject can cover some aspect of environmental education.

In Britain in the 1970's, there was a growth of environmental studies as an examination subject in the secondary schools, a growing emphasis on environmental geography and environmental aspects of history, English, social studies and community studies. However when Peter Berry conducted a survey of 400 schools for the Conservation Society, London in 1974 in which among other things he asked which departments were involved in this aspect of education, the answers were; geography 73%, biology 59%, science 52%, general studies 37% and history 33%. A small percentage of other departments were involved in environmental education, including home economics, English and art. (5)

This indicates that art and school subjects in general have put very little emphasis on the environmental aspects of education. In my opinion, art and all the arts subjects have a very important role to play in educating our young people about the place in which they live. Through art, students have a chance to increase their perceptual and visual awareness of their environment as well as exploring their affective relationship with it. They can learn to look carefully and see elements in their surroundings which they were unaware of. They can explore the area of sentiments and feelings; what they feel about different environments. In the art class, the student has a chance to look closer at his environment and discover new aspects of it as well as recalling his childhood relationship with it. Through both analytical and imaginative work the student can become much more aware of his relationship with the world around him. Art, I believe is unique as a subject in its ability to deal with both the affective and analytical sides of education. It gives the student a chance to explore aspects of the

environment which could not be covered to the same extent, in any other subject.

Traditionally, in schools certain subjects such as geography and biology have put a stronger emphasis on this type of education. These subjects emphasis the classification and quantification of environmental elements. In the art class however, the teacher is more concerned with a qualitative analysis. (6) The student should have an opportunity to make judgments about his surroundings. These judgments can be based on aesthetic experience as well as emotional response. In my opinion this affective approach is extremely important in art, design and environmental education.

In schools in the United Kingdom the tendency has been to promote environmental study as an objective, scientific, geographical, historical or sociological study. According to the Schools Council Project (1980-82) children are rarely asked to draw conclusions or make judgments on the basis of their own experience of the environment. (7) They are seen as collectors or recorders of information and rarely as sources, interpreters or critics. The environment is thus seen (in the context of academic study) as involving only measurement and quantification. (8)

Yet the ways in which each of us interprets the environment are much more complex. David Wilson is quoted in Art and the Built Environment as saying,

We can perceive the environment in a number of ways: as a static reality - a coal hole cover, a cat on a fence; as a dynamic reality - a series of systems, finance, transport; a changing reality - it used to be like this and could be. These can be studied through established disciplines - the static reality through art; the dynamic reality through urban geography and economics; the changing reality through history and social studies (9).

Individual subjects already provide useful means of analysing various aspects of environmental experience. I do not agree however that these subjects can be so clearly defined into different aspects of education. Surely art education can cover much more

than the “static reality”. In the art class the student can also explore the dynamic reality through design and develop the ability to analyse and criticise their environment with a view to improving it: “the changing reality”. There must be greater attention paid to the child’s developing ability to understand his world and opportunities made available for him to make personal judgments about it.

Environmental education should not only involve knowledge of the physical world but should be concerned with how people feel about their environment, how they relate to it and how they are affected by it. George Martin and Keith Wheeler define this aspect of learning in Insights into Environmental Education,

... a progressive development of a sense of concern for the environment based on a full sensitive understanding of the relationship of man to his surroundings ...it provides rich educational opportunities to think, compare, analyse, synthesise and research. (10)

The relationship between humans and their physical surroundings is fundamental to the design process. How and why things are made the way they are should be a major subject for development in the art class. Students should be given an opportunity to give their own opinions and to come to constructive conclusions as to how our environment can be improved.

UNESCO has stated that one of the goals of environmental education is

to provide every person with the opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes - commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment. (11)

Environmental education is also about values which we all develop individually and personally from childhood to adulthood through our interaction with the environment. Students should be prepared to play a more creative and participatory role in shaping this environment. However this participation demands higher levels of awareness,

interest, concern and understanding. The art class, I believe, is the ideal place for this development to take place.

In 1978 in Britain a final report was issued by the Working Party on Environmental Education. For this working party Professor Peter Hall and Sally Burningham interviewed sixty people active in all areas of environmental education. They reported that urban environmental education is made up of many components. The aesthetic and emotional responses formed one of the most important yet most neglected areas. (13) Those who were interviewed showed a total lack of attention to visual education. The report found that this is,

...one of the most worrying features of our educational system and one that has had disastrous consequences. The fostering of a sense of place and an awareness of roots was seen as particularly vital today when so much experience is secondhand. (13)

I believe this fostering of a sense of place is extremely important. In Ireland we are fortunate in that our natural surroundings are relatively unpolluted and unharmed. However with the increase of urban growth and industrialisation and the decline of many rural populations, increased visual awareness is needed to foster this sense of place.

Why should we be more visually aware of the world around us? The reasons for learning to see are many. Most children and indeed many adults will have certain words they use to describe and communicate ideas and objects. These derive from things we have heard and felt. If our perceptions of things are not entirely correct to begin with, if we have never looked properly at something or only have secondhand information of it then all the words we use to describe it will be vague and perhaps misinformed. So visual awareness not only helps the student in art but also in literature. (15)

So many people miss so much that is intriguing, beautiful and exciting in their environment simply by failing to see. As Frederick Franck writes in The Zen of Seeing,

We do a lot of looking: we look through lenses, telescopes, television tubes... Our looking is perfected every day - but we see less and less. Never has it been more urgent to speak of SEEING. (16)

Seeing means to look carefully at something; to discover aspects previously unnoticed. To truly see something is different from looking at something. Many people look but see only the most essential and obvious aspects of what they are looking at. Therefore people with limited eyesight can sometimes see better than people with good eyesight.

Another reason why we should be more visually aware of our environment is because people who pay little attention to visual details can pass by ugliness until it is so bad that they are forced to see it. It is important that we all have a social conscience with regard to our environment. We are all responsible for how our world looks. If we cannot evaluate it with regard to its appearance, we cannot make judgments about how it can be protected, preserved and improved.

Most people develop cognitive maps: mental images of the layout of their surroundings. (17) They can walk through their living quarters in the dark having an image in their minds of where things are. Some people have quite clear maps, and others are quite vague about how things are laid out in space. People who can draw their images or cognitive maps can compare them with the outside environment and thus improve their ability to map mentally. (18)

Drawing improves visual awareness because when you draw you have to look very carefully. (19) Through drawing you can become aware of subtle differences which

would not have been obvious in a passing glance. It can also communicate many subtle and emotional qualities which are difficult to communicate in words. A sensitive drawing can communicate the quality of the student's experiences in viewing things. Drawing can be based on our inner lives, on the unique ways in which we see things and the particular kinds of experiences we remember. (20) Therefore the richer the student's perceptions and visual awareness the richer his work will be.

Footnotes Chapter 1

1. Adams and Ward, Art and the Built Environment , p.20.
2. Ibid., p.20.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p.21.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. George Martin and Keith Wheeler, Insights into Environmental Education (Edinburgh : Oliver and Boyd, 1976), p.45.
11. Adams and Ward, Art and the Built Environment, p.21.
12. Ibid., p.22.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p.23.

15. McFee and Degge, Art, Culture and Environment, p.14.
16. Frederick Franck, The Zen of Seeing : Seeing/Drawing as Meditation (London: Wildwood House, 1979) p.3
17. McFee and Degge, Art, Culture and Environment, p.16.
18. Ibid., p.16.
19. Ibid., p.17.
20. Ibid.

Chapter II

How Increased Awareness of the Environment Occurs

According to Eisner, in Educating Artistic Vision, artistic learning deals with the development of abilities to create art forms; it deals with the development of powers of aesthetic perception and it deals with ability to understand art as a cultural phenomenon. (1)

All these aspects of artistic learning are important when dealing with environmental education in the art class. To understand artistic learning we must understand how people learn to create visual forms which have aesthetic and expressive character. We must also understand how people learn to see visual forms in art and in nature. These three aspects of artistic learning are named by Eisner as the productive, the cultural and the critical. (2)

Over the years there have been a host of different beliefs concerning the role of art education and the responsibilities of the teacher. A belief that has been widely accepted in the past twenty years has tended to view the child as an unfolding organism whose talents in art come to fruition with sympathetic but unobtrusive teaching. (3) I do not follow this belief. The child needs guidance and help for artistic learning to occur. If the child is allowed simply to mature of his own accord, there would be very little need for art education or indeed any other kind of education. Artistic learning is a very complex process in which the child learns to make, appreciate and understand art through the guidance of a teacher.

One of the most useful concepts of artistic learning has been developed by Gestalt

psychologists, especially by Rudolf Arnheim. (4) The Gestalt theory of perceptual development argues that, as people mature, their ability to discriminate among the qualities that constitute the environment increases. Thus an adult in this theory is able to perceive qualities and relationships between qualities that are much more complex and subtle than those that most children perceive. This process of being able to perceive, compare and contrast qualities is what Gestalt psychologists call perceptual differentiation. (5)

Children also develop in their ability to perceive qualities. They might not see unless it is pointed out to them that a field of grass, for example is not simply green but contains a wide variety of shades of green and many other colours as well. They might not note that a particular form a building for example, is slightly longer than it is tall. Their ability to perceive relationships develops as they learn and this ability is affected by the type of experience they have.

It has been found that children coming from low income minority groups, especially children of the poor, do not develop some types of perceptual abilities at the same rate as children of more affluent parents. (6) The experiences they have or do not have in their homes or local areas tends to hamper their ability to distinguish subtle aspects of certain parts of their environment. This low perceptual ability has been found to handicap these children in school tasks which require perceptual abilities beyond those they possess. (7) This research was carried out in America. It has relevance to Ireland in my opinion. Children from low SES family backgrounds may have less visual stimuli in their immediate surroundings than children from high SES family backgrounds. In many cases parents of children from poorer backgrounds have very little education themselves, visual or otherwise. In the home the child learns his first skills of communication. It has been found that middle class mothers talk more to their

children, therefore giving them an advantage as regards communication skills in the first years of childhood. It must also be expected that the child from a higher social background will probably have better perceptual skills due to both physical and social environments.

Perceptual differentiation, as well as general cognitive differentiation, becomes increasingly more complex and refined as a person increases his expertise in an area. (7) For example, a skilled cabinet-maker can perceive aspects of furniture construction that most of us do not see. You can become increasingly perceptually differentiated in all of the sensory modalities, but in art education the primary concern is with the development of the visual sense. (8)

The ability to see visual qualities in the environment does not simply develop in a linear fashion from the least differentiated to the most highly differentiated skills. The visual world is exceedingly complex and as we mature we learn to reduce the visual world to certain visual symbols for these qualities. For example if we were to look very carefully at the form and colour of a tree we would see a very complex three dimensional form, a wide array of shapes, textures and colours. Normally we do not take time to view a tree in this way. It is in the essence of perception that we become selective. After all, we could not take the time to look intensively at every object we see during the day. The frame of reference we use at the time we view the tree affects our perception and as a result determines what we see. The general overall colour and shape of the tree is generalised from the numerous trees we have seen. (9)

As a result of these visual generalisations, it becomes more difficult to make a thorough analysis of our surroundings. This is very evident in younger students who tend to draw what they think a face, a house or a tree looks like. In fact their drawings

are generalisations of every tree, house or face they have ever seen. These visual generalisations can interfere with artistic learning and increased visual awareness. Students should be encouraged to look carefully and increase their ability to differentiate between visual qualities in the world around them. This is very important in my opinion, otherwise they may continue to draw these generalised symbolic pictures without any learning involved in the process. These visual generalisations are referred to by Eisner as visual constancies which replace what we see with what we know. (10)

There are ways of helping children to look more carefully. Using a view-finder is one such way. This allows the student to see what he is drawing in a different context. By framing the subject matter the student can concentrate on drawing just what he wants to draw. It also allows him to forget everything to either side of this. This helps to avoid confusion. For example, if a student says a still life is too difficult to draw this may be because he is looking at everything at once rather than concentrating on one small area. The view finder helps by shutting out everything each side of the chosen area to be drawn. By selecting a close up area the student can look at the subject matter in an entirely new context. For example a close up section of a flower is no longer seen by the student as a very complicated arrangement of petals, instead it is a selection of shapes and colours. With a viewfinder these can be recorded with greater clarity. This method of drawing helps the student to avoid visual constancies. He will have learned that not all petals are the same size and they are not all arranged with geometric precision around the centre of the flower as is the case in many younger student's drawings.

Using a viewfinder should not simply become a mechanical process. It also gives the student a chance to make a personal, affective decision as to what part of the

landscape or still life, for example he will draw. By trying several views and angles he can critically analyse different areas of the subject matter in order to choose a pleasing composition.

Another way to help the student to see more accurately is by the use of a pencil extended at arms length; as an aid to measure the subject matter with. This helps students to work out proportions. Through measuring a landscape the student will realise that the tree, for example is much taller than the building or that the building is much longer than it is tall. This again helps the student to avoid drawing without actually looking carefully.

Visual constancies are not the only things which affect visual perception. Our past life history, our immediate needs and our own personalities affect what we perceive in a visual field. (11) Everyone learns to see in terms of where they grew up, what was around them to look at and how much attention they paid to their surroundings. If we grew up in a busy city and paid attention to everything we saw we would be overwhelmed by the flood of information, to avoid this confusion we learn to pay attention to only what we need to get around. (12)

This daily experience builds habits of "seeing" in us all. We learn to see things in terms of "word labels": cars, lights, trees, buildings, signs, people. It becomes much easier and faster to recognise what a thing is and label it than to develop a clear visual image of how it looks. In the fast pace of the city labelling is often all we have time to do. (13)

McFee writes in Art, Culture and the Environment.

If we grew up in the slower paced country where the same things are repeated over and over, trees, fields, fences, desert expanses we do not have to block out so

much detail and we learn about things in terms of how they appear. We develop habits of seeing by depending more on what things look like than on what kind of things they are. (14)

McFee also states that because rural people encounter aspects of their environment at a different pace, they notice more and consequently they include more detail in their drawings. Urban dwellers, on the other hand, tend to shut out certain details in order to function in their environment and as a result their drawings are not as detailed. (15) I believe you cannot make such broad general statements about the visual awareness of people from different geographical backgrounds. Naturally the different visual experiences we have had in our childhood will effect our ability to draw certain things, to some extent. However from my own experience in the classroom it would not be possible to pick out the drawings of a student from an urban background simply because of lack of detail in his work.

As children, we give names to things in our environment and make visual descriptions of them, but we lose much of the information we have learned through observation. (16) A detailed drawing in my opinion is much closer to the reality of our visual experience than even the most detailed written description. If the student draws an object he must look very carefully over and over again to see every detail.

Many students still see art in terms of an end product; making pots, printing fabrics or painting portraits. Instead it should be a means of discovery, understanding and communication of ideas. Of course the student should learn how to paint or print but most importantly he should learn how to see. In my opinion the teacher plays a very important role in this development. Through this learning, the student can understand and display his affective relationship with the environment.

Perception of visual qualities is not merely achieved by noting visual relationships. The way we perceive things also tells us a lot about our feelings towards these things. We all have different opinions about the things we see. For example, we may decide we do not like a certain building; something about it does not appeal to us. Many people, if asked, would not be able to explain in detail exactly why they like or dislike the look of something. It is important that the student is able to criticise constructively his environment if he is to make informed decisions about it. In order to do this he must fully understand why he likes or dislikes a certain aspect of the environment.

According to Eisner in Educating Artistic Vision all visual forms have some expressive character. (17) Psychologists call such characteristics psychognomic qualities. There are two theories as to why forms make us feel a certain way. One theory is that we respond to particular forms emotionally because we have learned to associate these forms with other experiences that have particular emotional meaning to us. (18) The other theory is that the character of the form itself and its relationship to the surrounding area determines the quality of feeling we experience when we see it. The materials used and the relationship between the forms themselves evoke feelings within us. (19)

To explain these theories Eisner gives us two examples: 860-880 Apartments (a large apartment block built of steel and glass), the other Robie House (a domestic building). (See fig. 1)

According to the first theory the reason we have different feelings about both buildings is because of the actual forms themselves. One is a very tall building which gives a great feeling of precision, the other a long building which gives a feeling of horizontal thrust. According to theories of association we know what materials were

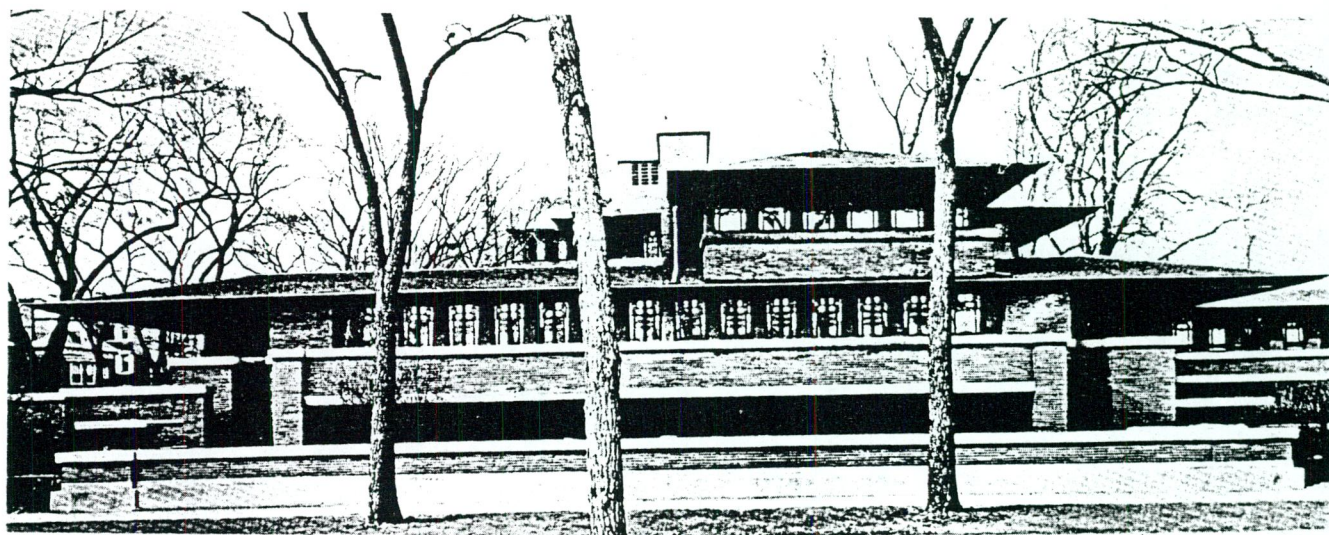
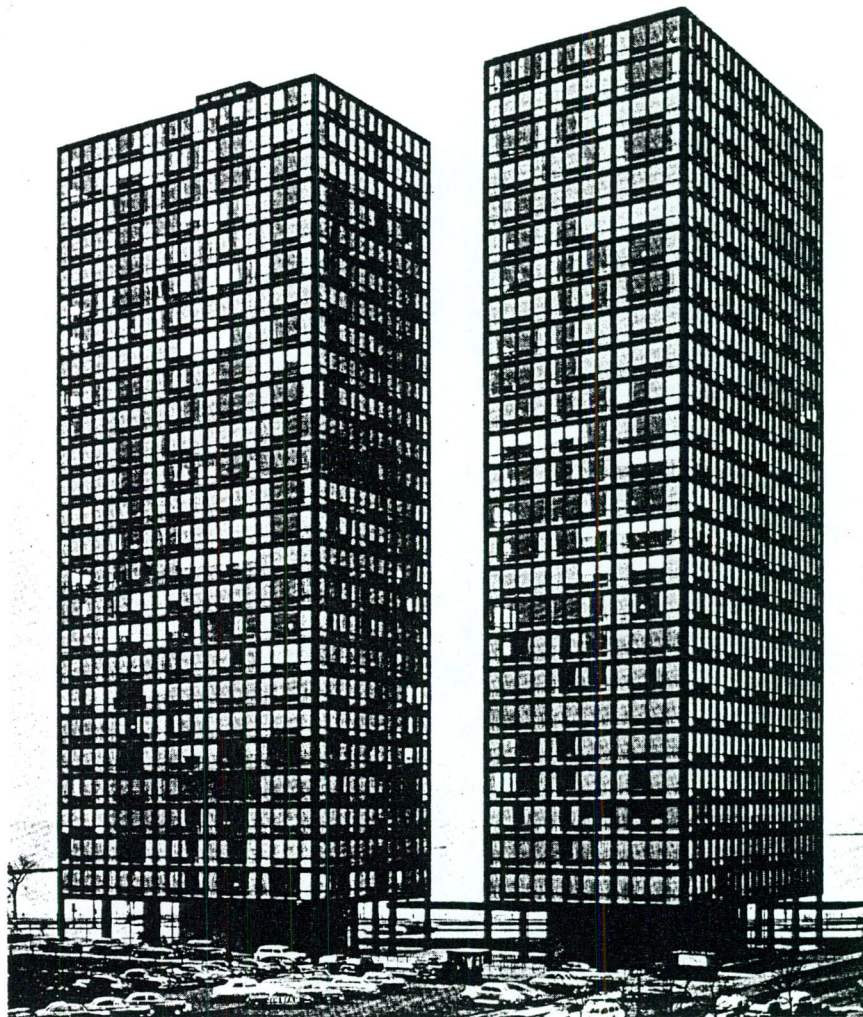


Fig 1 Robie House and 860 - 880 Apartments

used in the apartment building and the need for great skill and accuracy in building with these materials. As a result we associate this building with this feeling of precision. The Robie House on the other hand could be associated with a hill form because the roof slopes close to the ground and also because natural materials were used in its construction such as brick and slate. (20)

It is important to realise that there are reasons why we like or dislike certain things that we see. Our initial reaction is our own individual response to the expressive content of the form. After that we should analyse critically what we are looking at and try to come to conclusions as to why we feel this way about it. Does it express or convey feeling or emotions of strength, tranquillity, tension or melancholy? Initial responses are sometimes totally altered after a thorough critical analysis. (21)

For instance, many students may initially find very little to appreciate in modern architecture. Their response to the form may be one of disinterest. However after a thorough analysis of the planning, construction and design involved modern architecture may express something totally new and exciting to them.

For the productive, critical and cultural content of form to be experienced it is important to have first hand experience. For a student to come to his own critical conclusions about a piece of modern architecture, he needs to actually go there and see it from the outside and also from the inside; climb to the very top and also viewing the surrounding area. In my opinion, for the best analysis the piece must be viewed in its natural setting. (22)

Frederick Franck in The Zen of Seeing emphasis the need for a relationship between the artist and his subject. Drawing for him is a kind of meditation where the artist is at one with his environment. To do this the artist must experience the atmosphere and

surroundings in which the subject of his drawing is situated. He calls this seeing/drawing, a means of meditation; a way of getting into intimate touch with the visible world around us. (23) According to Franck,

A "non-creative environment" is one that constantly bombards us, overloads our switchboard with noise, with agitation and visual stimuli. Once we detach ourselves from all these distractions, find a way of "inscape", of "centering", the same environment becomes "creative" again. SEEING/DRAWING is such a way of inscape from the overloaded switchboard. It establishes an island of silence, an oasis of undivided attention, an environment to recover in.... (24)

This is a very interesting and worthwhile concept: the idea of drawing as meditation. For him the end result is not as important as taking time to stop and look carefully. The act of looking carefully, seeing and drawing can become a sort of contemplation. It can lead us out of our own worries into a discipline of awareness and unwavering attention to the world around us which is alive and full of unexpected visual wonders. In a troublesome world, full of stress and worry, for many people students alike the act of drawing may be the only time they actually sit quietly and come into intimate contact with their environment.

So much of the information we receive today is second hand. When we are examining the environment it is important that the examination is not just visual but also involves the other senses. Edward T. Hall writes in Arts of the Environment,

...it has been demonstrated that man cannot see at all unless all the other senses are involved, this means that the process of design can quite effectively deal man out of the equation. This is why so many objects of daily use give the impression of not having really been made for the user. (25)

It is important that in an environmental art programme the students learn to analyse the man-made environment in terms of functional design as well as aesthetic and expressive qualities. We learn not only from looking and differentiating perceptually,

we also learn from actual experience. Hall writes,

...one must begin with the senses and how they function and how man uses them consciously and unconsciously. Man is not the passive recipient of external stimuli that most people think he is. The reader can demonstrate this for himself if he considers that a mountain viewed from a distance is a very different mountain after it has been repeatedly climbed and then viewed from the spot where it was first seen. (26)

Man not only perceives visually but also experiences space with all his senses. The perception of space is deeply relevant to man's basic need for internal unity as well as harmony with his environment. (27)

Artistic learning is a very complex process which should involve all the senses. It is, I believe vital in developing a better awareness, appreciation and understanding of the world we live in. Through art the student should become more visually aware of his environment, he should be able to make informed critical analysis of it and very importantly he should develop his affective relationship with the environment: an area which is very often neglected.

Footnotes Chapter II

1. Eisner, Educating Artistic Vision, p.65.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.66.
4. Rudolf Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception: The Psychology of the Creative Eye (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1954), p.20.
5. Ibid., pp.20-22.
6. Eisner, Educating Artistic Vision, p.67.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p.68.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p.69.
12. Jerome L. Bruner, R. Rose Olver and Patricia Greenfield Studies in Cognitive Growth (New York : John Wiley and Sons, 1966) p.109.
13. McFee and Degge, Art, Culture and Environment, p.21.
14. Ibid., p.27.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p.19.
18. Eisner W. Elliot, Educating Artistic Vision, p.71.
19. Ibid., p.75.
20. Ibid., p.76.
21. Ibid., p.77.
22. Ibid., p.79.
23. Ibid.
24. Frederick Franck, Zen of Seeing, SEEING/DRAWING as Meditation, p.(xii).
25. Ibid., p.(xii)
26. Gyorgy Kepes, Arts of the Environment, p.57.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p.58.

Chapter III

My Experience in the Classroom

For my first class of teaching I had a second year group. The lesson was based on texture . As a visual and tactile aid I put a lot of textured items on a board for the students to feel. One section of the board contained spiky seeds, sometimes called “robin-run-the-hedge”.(Fig. 3) I am very familiar with these, having lived in the countryside. However one student came up at the end of the class and asked me what they were, as she had never seen them before. She found them fascinating to touch, with there unusually textured surface. I was quite amazed but decided that this was to be expected as the girl was probably from the city and had never played and explored in the country side as a child. I later discovered that this girl does in fact live in a rural area and commutes to school every day.

The fact that we live in a rural or urban area does not necessarily mean we have a better awareness or “feel” for the environment around us. A student from an urban area who is very aware visually may well find natural sources as easy to draw as a student from a rural area. In order to draw something, one must have seen it at some stage. Children today have plenty of secondhand experience of different sources from television, films, books and magazines. However drawing from memory of secondhand sources or actual secondhand sources is no replacement for drawing the real subject matter . It is only by looking at the real source that you can properly experience what you are drawing. In this way all the senses can be involved in the experience, not just vision. The tactile qualities of the source can be explored and subtle differences can be observed and recorded. The student can also become aware of the spatial experience



Fig 2 Textured seeds



when drawing outside. (1) It is important to see the source from all sides and observe its position in the immediate environment. Drawing from a real source also allows for a development of the affective relationship between the viewer and the source. The student can analyse the expressive content of the form and come to his own conclusions.

Leaving the classroom to draw from an actual source is of course the ideal situation. Whenever possible I believe this opportunity should be taken. The new Junior Certificate Curriculum encourages more local emphasis and more personal research by the students in all subjects. (2) In other subject areas such as history and geography projects relating to the local area are encouraged. Through art, however, a different aspect of the environment can be explored. Rather than collecting facts and specific information about the environment, more emphasis should be placed on the student's feelings towards the place they live in and how they could improve it visually.

Unfortunately it was not possible for me to take my class outdoors to draw. Figures 3 to 7 show a sequence of lesson plans which I designed to improve the student's ability to differentiate perceptually certain aspects of the natural and man made environments. The aim of the sequence was to increase the students awareness of form and pattern in their environment. I set up two still life studies: one based on natural sources: fungi, bark, pine cones, seeds, leaves, and mosses. The second consisted of man made sources: locks, rusted metal, a car mirror, pipes and chains. Over two lessons the students drew in detail a section of each still life. I gave each student a viewfinder to help them isolate an area and concentrate on drawing this area only.

As a support study for the natural environment I showed the students a painting

Lesson Plan 1

- Theme :** The Environment Natural/Manmade
- Source :** Objects from the natural environment ie. pine cones, bark, branches, fungi, leaves.
- Aim :** To develop the students awareness of form and pattern in their environment.
- Objective :** To increase the students awareness of form and pattern through the isolation and drawing of a section of still life of natural sources.
- Introduction :** Ask the class to draw a section of the still life they see on front of them. Use a view finder to isolate an interesting section. Draw using pencil. Where can you see form in the still life? Which forms do you think are most interesting? Why? How do you show form when you are drawing? Have you seen all these objects before? Can you see pattern in the still life? Where? Can you see pattern in side objects? What other forms in nature have interesting patterns?
- Visual Aid :** Show the students a pencil drawing of fruit and leaves that shows form and pattern. Does the fruit look real? Can you see light and dark areas? Where? Can you see pattern in the drawing? Point out some patterns.
- Support Study :** Show the class a painting by Klimt, "Woods at Night". Do you like the painting? Why? Is it a typical painting of a wood? Has the artist emphasised anything in particular in this painting? What has the artist emphasised? Point out some areas of pattern.
- Evaluation :** Which drawings show an interesting section of the still life? Why are they interesting? Which drawings show the most interesting forms and patterns? Do you think these objects from nature are a good source to draw from? Is nature a good source for pattern? Why do think so/not think so?

Fig 3 : Lesson Plan 1.

Lesson Plan 2

Theme : The Environment Natural/Manmade

Source : Objects from the manmade environment ie. locks, pipes, chains, car mirror, door handles.

Aim : To develop the students awareness of form and pattern in their environment.

Objective : To increase the students awareness of form and pattern through the isolation and drawing of still life from a manmade source.

Introduction : Ask the class to draw a section of the still life in front of them. Use a view finder and draw in pencil. How is this weeks still life different to last weeks? Do you prefer to draw from a natural or a manmade source? Why? How are the forms different to those from a natural environment? Which do you think are most interesting? Can you see pattern in any of the objects? Where? Where else in the manmade environment can you see pattern?

Visual Aid : See lesson 1.

Support Study : Show the students "Facade of a House" by Egon Shiele. Can you see pattern in this painting? Point out some patterned areas. Do you like the painting? Why? Do you think buildings are a good source of pattern? Why?

Evaluation : Point out a drawing which has an interesting section of the still life. Why do you think it is interesting? Point out some patterned areas in the drawings. Do you think the manmade environment is a good source for pattern. Point out some interesting forms in the drawings. Why do you like them?

Fig 4 : Lesson Plan 2

Lesson Plan 3

Theme : The Environment Natural/Manmade

Source : Drawings from lesson 1 and 2.

Aim : To develop the students awareness of form and pattern in their environment.

Objective : To further the students understanding and awareness of pattern through the combination of natural and manmade forms and patterns to make a new pattern.

Introduction : Ask the students to design a poster for an art exhibition entitled " Art and the Environment". Use forms and patterns from both manmade and natural sources. Try several ideas, pick one and work it up large and in colour.

Visual Aid : Show the students the original visual aid. Then show them two poster ideas based on the original drawing. What elements of pattern were taken from the original drawing? What forms were used? Do the two poster look very different? Why do they look different when the same forms and patterns were used? Can you think of another way to arrange the pattern? Do you think scale and colour are important? What other forms and patterns could have been used?

Support Study : Show the students posters from the London Underground. Is pattern important in these posters? Which patterns have been taken from natural sources and which from manmade? Do you think they are eye catching? Is it important that the message is instantly conveyed by the image or can it be abstract/ semi- abstract? How has pattern been used differently in each poster?

Evaluation : Which pattern would be most eye catching on a poster? Why? Point out a pattern which effectively combines manmade and natural sources. Why is it effective? Is the arrangement of the forms on the page important? Why? Point out some forms which have patterns within them. Which pattern has the most effective use of colour? Why is it effective?

Fig 5 : Lesson Plan 3

by Klimt. Initially the students showed very little awareness of pattern either in the painting or the still life. However after more questioning, and more careful observation on the part of the students, they became more aware of subtle patterns within forms themselves such as patterns in the bark, the pine cones and the leaves. See figure 6.

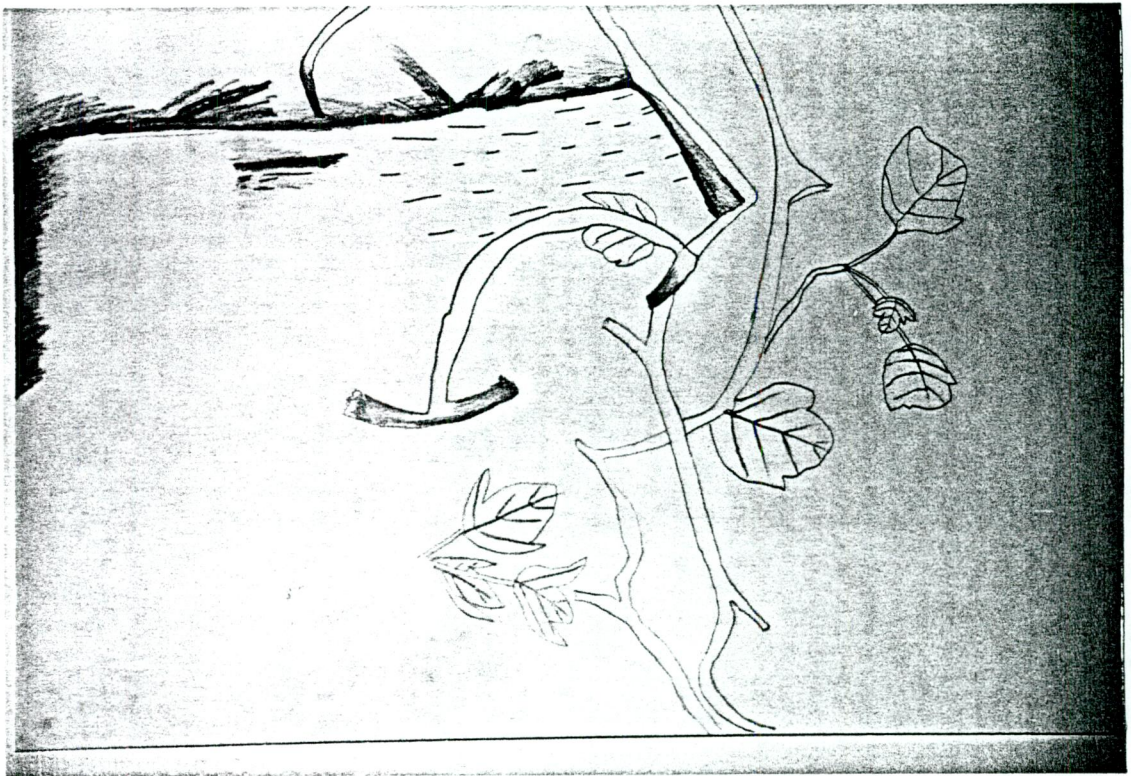


Fig 6 Drawing of natural still life by one of the students showing an awareness of pattern within forms.

The following week when the class were observing and drawing the man made objects, they found pattern much easier to identify. They found the man made sources easier to draw. Perhaps this is because the outlines and patterns are generally much easier to define in a man made object. It has also been discovered in research on the visual cortex of the brain that the brain sees more clearly in terms of edges (3). Figure 7 shows two drawings by the one student. One shows natural sources, the other man made. The student has defined the forms and patterns much clearer in the second drawing, from man made sources.

While my written objectives were cognitive, I also had hidden affective objectives. These objectives are concerned with the area of feelings and emotions. Through drawing natural and man made sources the students became aware of subtle differences within forms which many of them were not aware of before. They were also introduced to sources which they were not aware of before such as bright red fungi forms and textured minty green lichen. Using a viewfinder not only helped the students to see but also gave them a chance to make a personal decision as to which section of the still life they would draw.

After collecting visual information the students then used forms and patterns from both drawings and combined them to make their own patterns. This pattern was used to illustrate a poster for an art exhibition entitled "Art and the Environment". Figure 8 shows two examples of the finished patterns.

The students enjoyed the task perhaps because their finished pieces were not figurative drawings. Instead the students had discovered a new way of using their environment as a source for design. The combining of both sources gave the students a chance to look and analyse their drawing and pick out forms and patterns which

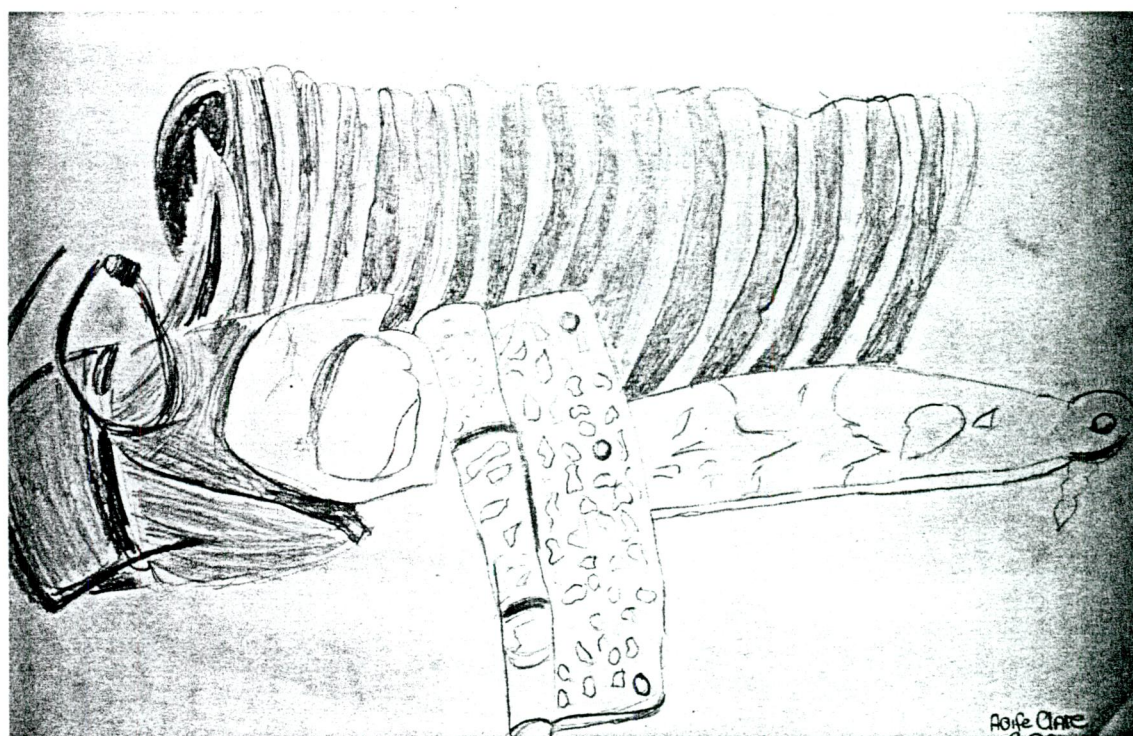


Fig 7 Two drawings by one student: one of natural sources, one of man made sources.



Fig 8 Two examples of finished patterns by the students which combine natural and man made elements.

appealed to them. Figure 9 shows the drawings by a student which were developed into the pattern which is also shown.

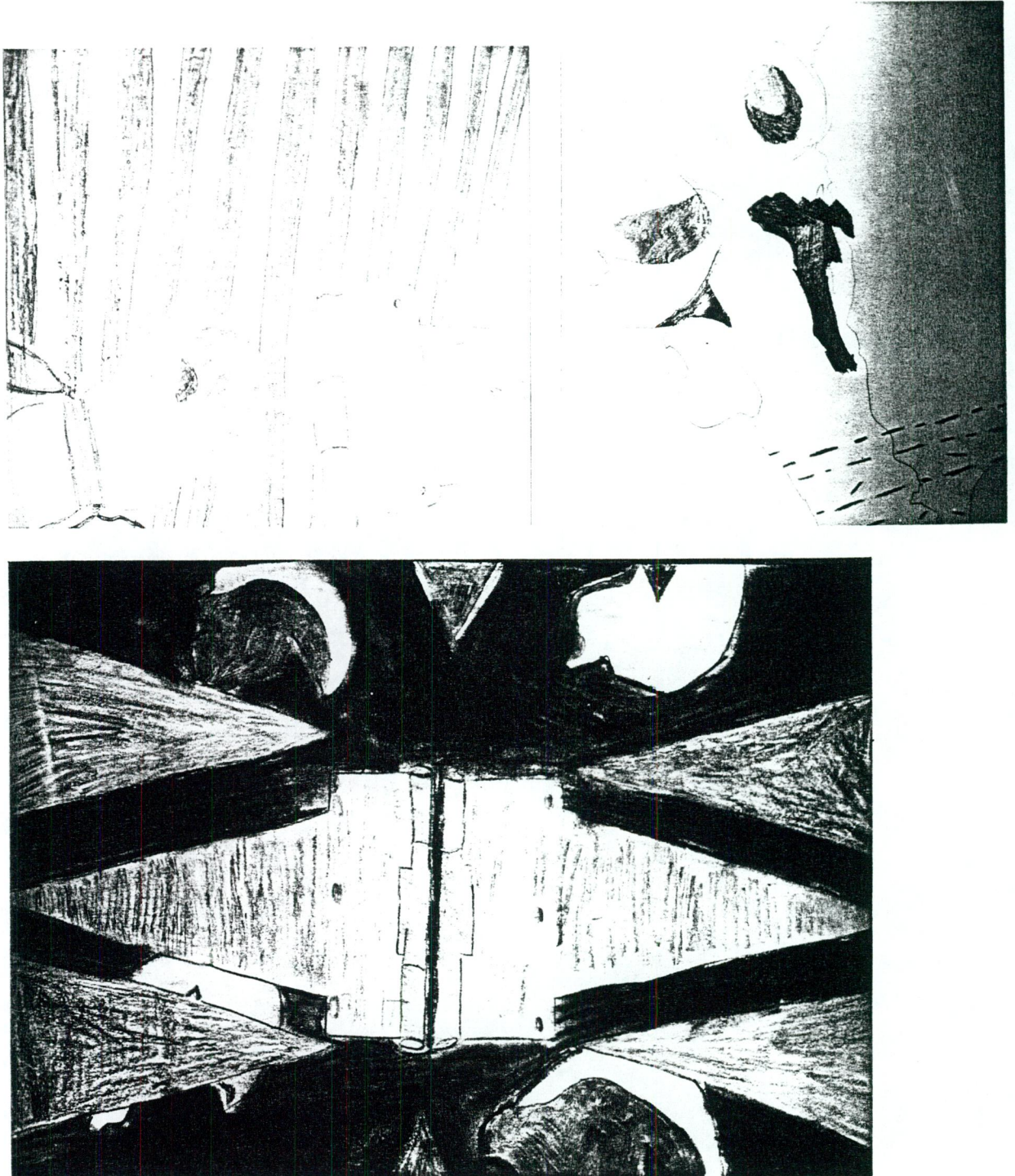


Fig 9 The source drawings and the final piece by a student.

I found little difference between the work of students from urban or rural background. Students from rural backgrounds who had seen all of the natural forms before had never carefully observed them through drawing. I did not find more detail in the drawings of rural students as suggested by McFee and Degge in Art Culture and the Environment (4).

The students learned a lot about pattern in the environment and have as a result an increased ability to differentiate perceptually. They enjoyed the project and discovered that their environment both rural and urban is full of wonderful detail which many of us never take the time to look at.

Footnotes Chapter III

1. Gyorgy Kepes, Arts of the Environment, p. 59.
2. Roinn Oideachais, Art, Craft and Design : Junior Certificate Syllabus, 1989.
3. Kepes, Gyorgy, Arts of the Environment , p. 58.
4. McFee and Degge, Art Culture and Environment, p. 27.

Conclusion

This thesis puts forth the idea that environmental education should form an important part of the school curriculum especially in the art class. Here the students have an opportunity to explore their environment in a new and exciting way. Environmental education in the art class gives the student a chance to see the positive aspects of their environment, as well as giving them a chance to express their own ideas and feelings about it. Herbert Read writes in Readings in Art Education, that,

One thing that has been demonstrated beyond any doubt is that the aesthetic faculty is present in every child as a birth right and it can be made to blossom in the most unlikely surroundings, in gloomy industrial slums, no less than in the beautiful precincts of a school like Eton or Winchester. (1)

Through art students can gain a better appreciation and understanding of their surroundings : rural or urban,' gloomy' or 'beautiful'. The art class, I believe should give the student a sense of pride and responsibility towards their environment which may help to protect and improve our world so that future generations can enjoy it's beauty.

Footnotes Conclusion

1. Herbert Read, "The Aesthetic Method of Education" in Readings in Art Education, ed. Elliot W. Eisner and David W. Ecker (Waltham Mass. :Blaisdell, 1966) p.262.

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