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**NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
CRAFT DESIGN: CERAMICS**

BOGLANDS - A NEW BEGINNING

Artists paving the way for a new ecological awareness

**BY
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Fig 1. Bogland, Co. Wicklow.



Fig 2. Bogland, Connemara , Co. Galway.

INTRODUCTION

Our man-made environment has shrunken living space, dimmed light, bleached colour and relentlessly expanded noise and speed. We have contaminated our rivers and lakes through the unrestricted dumping of human and industrial wastes, and poisoned the sky, sea and land with radioactive waste. We have shaved barren the mountains and the boglands of peat, and exterminated their birds, fish, beasts and flora. But it is not only the destruction of the physical environment that is involved. Disregard for nature's richness leads to the destruction of living forms and eventually to the degradation and destruction of man himself.

"Shaped by the blighted spirit of cornered man...our cities and countryside are our collective self portraits.....images of our own hallowness and chaos" (ref. 1). Man has begun to realise that if not properly guided, our potent technology may totally upset the balance of nature with fearsome results. But man-made circumstances can have positive aspects. Man has begun to take the first timid steps towards utilising this potent technology. In technically advanced countries, development has reached the point where the traditional purposes of human work - to house, clothe and feed man - can be transcended, permitting man to take responsibility for the future shaping of human consciousness. This freedom has allowed people like conservationists, David Bellamy and Eamonn de Buitleir, and environmental artists like Chris Drury, Catherine Harper and Cormac Boydell to highlight the danger of further destroying the landscape particularly the boglands of Ireland. Bellamy who began his crusade over twenty years ago in Ireland has campaigned tirelessly for their preservation, not only for future generations but for the benefit of today's world. By walking in the bog, man can experience the vital link between his present day surroundings and that of the past. The boglands allow us to enjoy one of the world's last great wildernesses, where we can find space to communicate with nature and re-evaluate the link between man and his environment. In Ireland such an experience is available within a thirty minute drive of any inhabited area. While conservationists are working on protecting our boglands, artists are responding to such environmental problems and through their work they are causing people to re-asses the familiar and to look at their surroundings with a fresh eye.

Inbuilt in today's unguided technology material accomplishments is the danger that life may be drained of its spirit, belief and personal meaning. To inject human sense into the external achievements of the man-shaped world, this world must touch the individual "with all the warmth of sensory intensity" (ref. 2) The world of each person is sense-bound. Man's contact with the outside world is through sensorial experiences,

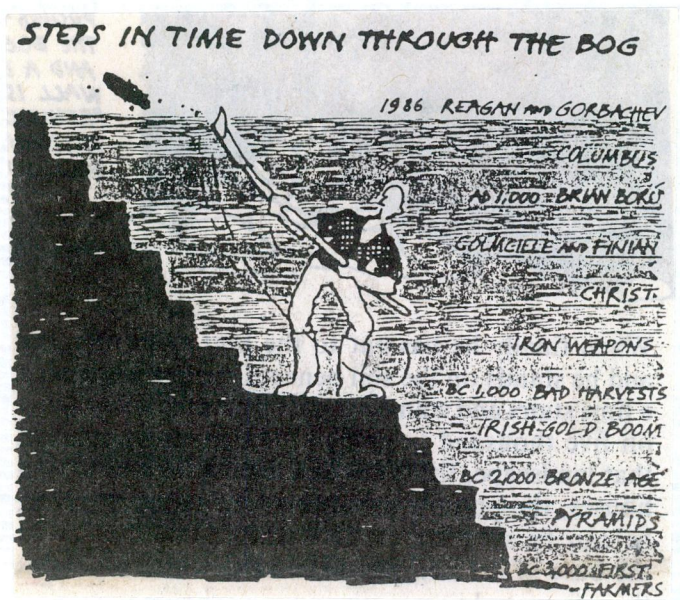
giving the individual his sense of himself. The artist Chris Drury believes that "alienated from nature we are split off from ourselves, for we are part of nature, the part that is natural in, and for us" (ref. 5)

A cornered man is compelled to look into himself and gauge his own strengths and weaknesses, examining closely his relationship with fellow man and with the world. For Catherine Harper as an artist, to walk into the bogland is to "open the senses to a subtle battering"(ref. 3) and she uses the bog not only as a metaphor for life and death but feels the bog, like ourselves, is living, active and vital and at the same time treacherous, unstable and devouring.

Our unresolved and troubled lives compel us to re-asses ourselves and nowhere is our questioning of goals and means more evident than in the visual arts. The common denominator in twentieth century art relates not so much to what is present as to what is missing: cohesion, completeness, the link between man and man, and between man and his environment. Artists have come to realise that their creative imagination and sensibilities are neither self-generated nor self-contained; they belong to the larger environmental field of nature and society.

In this essay I will show how the artists' role is not only to highlight the need for conservation as in the dilemma of the Irish boglands, but to provide a way for an emerging ecological consciousness.. The values the artist uncovers which lie behind the familiar surfaces of our lives, are the values for us all - giving sharpness and definition for the need we sense for union and intimate involvement with our surroundings. The artist has moved from a marginal role to a more central position.

The complex relationships between humans and nature has been the energising force behind the work of many artists and crafts-people in Ireland today. In this essay I will discuss the work of ceramicist Cormac Boydell, and artists Chris Drury and Catherine Harper. These artists work directly with living materials, often on site, exploring different energy flows and power structures in the relationship between humans and nature. Another group of artists that I will discuss has chosen to enter the landscape itself, use its materials and work with its salient features. Their pieces known as "earthworks" or "land art", these artists often working in Symposia, are attempting to reconcile humans with the natural environment and "its implicitly sacrosanct nature" (ref. 4).



All these artists are creating work not for isolated appraisal but fully engaged elements of their respective environments, providing an inimitable experience of a certain place, time or feeling for both the artist and the viewer.

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Fig 3. "To walk into the bogland is to "open the senses to a subtle battering"
(Intro. Ref. 3)

CHAPTER 1

THE LANDSCAPE

Landscape is the result of both natural processes and human activities. It is a consistent unity, whose different components influence each other. Landscape is used by man as a habitat, as a source of raw materials and as a reference frame. Because it is "a unique part of the world's living heritage" (ref. 1), the peatlands or boglands of Ireland have an intrinsic value for the people of this island. Throughout the ages our ideas of nature have continuously shifted. In the pre-industrial era and up to the 19th century in Western Europe, the belief in the interdependence of human beings and the natural world was revered. Industrial capitalism destroyed this wonder, and disenchantment set in. This new world brought about the rationalisation of industrial production and of everyday life. In England during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the impact of industrialisation was already leaving ugly scars. Shelley (1792 -1827) and other poets agonised over man's corrupting touch on the richness of the natural world. Blake (1757-1827) raged at the degrading labourer's work in "those dark satanic mills". The painters Turner (1775-1851) and Constable (1776-1837) seeing nature defaced by smoke and dirt, projected in their paintings the missing link of light, colour, space and movement.

The relationship between man and nature is a central issue in the honouring and preserving of what is left of the Irish bogscape. On a broader scale, the world problem of pollution and the exhaustion of natural resources are connected with the fact that man has lost touch with reality, through the frenetic greed and ecological recklessness which elude rational control. Much of this attitude was brought on by the Industrial Revolution and the post industrial revolution, where economics and utilitarian attitudes prevailed. With no direct influences of an industrial revolution to produce a reaction against city life, no large and respected class to lead changes in taste or thought, no distancing of urban people from everyday uses of the land, Irish attitudes to nature remained utilitarian. What was it "good" for?

So prior to the 20th century growth of national sentiment, the "inspirational" value of Ireland's bogland scarcely existed. To most Irish people the bog was synonymous with hardship and the poorest way of life. When the poets of the new Ireland came to praise the native small farmer, they saw him as a vanquisher of nature - as when Padraic Colum (1881-1972) for example, extolled the ploughman as a "brute tamer" urging on the horses



Fig 4. Paul Henry, *Lakeside Cottages*, oil on canvas, 40x60cm. , 1923

"Earth savage, earth broken, the brutes, the dawn man there is the sunset,
And the plough that is twin to the sword, that is founder of cities" (ref. 2)

The Irish had missed the reaction against industrial urban living that sent the English out "to wander lonely as a cloud" on their boggy hills.

But the romantic feelings of the new Irish nationalism tended to focus on the same sort of landscape as that of their English colleagues. Nathaniel Hone (1831-1917) was a landscape painter noted for natural realism and "plein air" painting of the Irish landscape. Paul Henry (1876-1951) moved to the West of Ireland in 1912 where he painted bogland scenes and views of people saving turf, giving on aesthetic quality to a life which up until then was regarded as hard work and drudgery. (Fig. 4)

Today artists like those I have mentioned in my introduction have chosen to work in and with the boglands of Ireland, not only to portray their special beauty but also to highlight the danger of totally destroying this unique landscape.

A survey between 1809 and 1814 shows that something between one sixth and one seventh of the total land surface of Ireland was covered by peat. Today the figure is less than 4%. Unless the cutting of turf commercially for fuel and horticultural uses is not stopped, Ireland's unique peat resources could be lost by the year 2030.

The scientific definition of peat is "partially decayed organic matter mainly of plant origin" (ref. 3). In everyday language, peat or turf, as is called in Ireland is made of partly rotted roots, stems, leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds and tiny pollen grains and spores, but the most important factor is water. There must be an average rainfall of 1250 mm between 225-250 days a year. (ref. 4). As the layers of peat grow, they seal off any nutrients from the mineral soil below, and plants growing on the peat soon became dependent on the meagre supplies of minerals brought in by the wind and rain. Many plants found on the bogs have novel ways of supplementing their mineral intake, such as the pitcher plant which traps and digests insects.

The flora and fauna produced by this unique type of vegetation are worth conserving as are the sight and scent of the turf, and the wilderness of treasures that the peat bogs hold in their untamed depths.

The evidence faithfully recorded in sub-fossil form in the uncut pages of the bog's history book, not only preserves in detail the objects buried there throughout time, but



Fig 5. The dead brown scenes of the cutaway bog, the central Irish Plain.



Fig 6. A regenerated bog, at Turraun, is again attracting wildlife formerly displaced by peat exploitation. Here a family of whooper swans can be seen arriving.

also what has occurred in the environs of the bog. The evidence comes in all shapes and sizes, from tree stumps and trunks, great antler and bones, human bodies and hoards of precious art objects down to the minutest pollen grains and spores. Such pure detailed history is of great interest to all, but especially to archaeologists, scientists, historians and artists.(Ch. 3).

Without them " a unique part of the world's living heritage could be lost forever" (ref. 5). David Bellamy first became interested in the bogs of Ireland while studying for a PHd in Botany in 1959. By that time the Boora complex of peatlands which stretched from the Shannon estuary almost to Dublin had disappeared. The great Bog of Allen has by now been swallowed up by major midland towns and the Irish economy's need for electricity. The signs of the national turf board, Bord Na Mona's great machines electricity sub-stations and grid lines dominate the dead brown scenes of the cutaway bog, (Fig. 5) once a carpet of russet coloured bogland of the central Irish plain.

In the past fifty years, manpower and technology has succeeded in destroying much of our natural heritage by the exploitation of the boglands for economic purposes. However a few small individual sites have been conserved through the co-operation of Bord na Mona, An Taisce, The National Trust for Ireland, the Irish Peatland Conservation Council and the Wildlife service. Because it is an internationally unique ecosystem, the European Parliament called for " an overall strategy for conservation" (ref. 6) in 1985. To ensure that Ireland's peatland heritage does not disappear, Bord na Mona is presently researching and negotiating the future of the cutaway (used bog). It now has the opportunity to turn back the clock to the late glacial times , recreating rivers, ponds and lakes full of fish and waterfowl. The scientific peat records tell us in graphic detail that mixed forests once thrived on many bogland sites. Today some of the cutaway bog sites are being reforested and redeveloped into natural amenity areas. Life on the boglands " an intimate part of the personality of the island" (ref. 7) may return, not in its original harshness but as something to be enjoyed and cherished. (Fig. 6)

Even though it epitomises the cultural in apposition to the natural, "technology is not the enemy of nature, the problem lies rather in the efficient and exploitative use of technology" (ref. 8)

The role of the artist in collaboration with the scientist or engineer is to stimulate us to a new awareness of and involvement with our surroundings (see Ch. 2) - man's only hope of survival under the threat of new technology.

^ M
The remaining bogs of Ireland should be designated and managed as a world heritage site. Because of the bog's uniqueness of wildlife, wilderness and cultural heritage, it deserves to stand alongside Mount Everest, the Californian Redwoods, the Pyramids and the South West Tasmanian Wilderness, basking in the recognition and the protection they deserve" (ref. 9)

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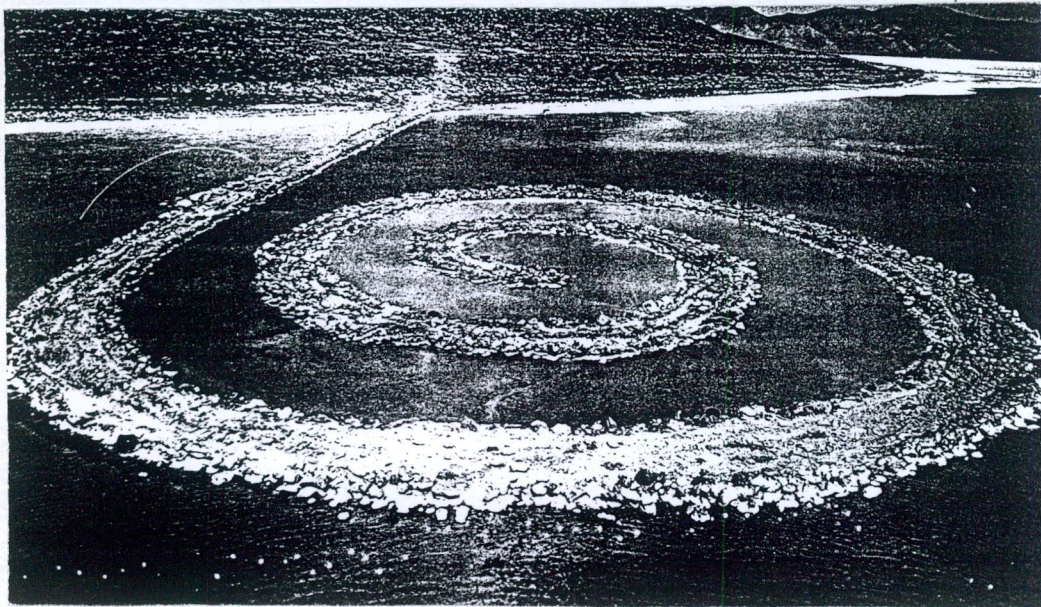


Fig 7. Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* 1970



Fig 8. Richard Long, *A line in Ireland*, 1974.

CHAPTER 2

BOGLAND SYMPOSIUM, WICKLOW, 1992.

While the landscape and the bogs of Ireland have been the subject and inspiration for a number of artists, since the beginning of this century, e.g. Paul Henry (1876-1958) and Barrie Cooke (1931 -), the environmental art movement has seemed a natural progression for many Irish sculptors.

In the 60's a group of artists in the U.S.A. began to make statements about man's relation to nature. For e.g. Robert Smithson's 1970 *Spiral Jetty*, built on the Great Salt Lake at Utah, (Fig. 7) or Michael Heizer's *Complex One/City*, made in a flat empty desert in Nevada, 1972 - '76. Using earth, rocks and plants, their work was constructed outdoors on natural sites. Although these artworks refer to nature, the artist's methods, styles and intentions varied widely. Similar art movements soon emerged in England, e.g. a sculpture project was established in Grizzdale Forest, 1977, primarily as a working environment for sculptures. At one end of the spectrum, the idea of monumentality, of earth-moving was made possible by industrial tools, bull-dozers, dump trucks etc.; built to speak for themselves, not the land they occupy. At the other end of the spectrum there are artists pursuing the idea of co-operation with the environment, which they see as necessary because of the threat of its destruction., for e.g. Richard Long (1945 -) (Fig. 8) and David Nash (1945 -).

The term environmental art, came to have a meaning that conjured up images of earth art or art forms involved with ecological investigations"(ref. 1) But today a closer look at environmental art reveals dimensions that are as much cultural as natural. The focus may change from one artist to another, but environmental art today deals with all the external conditions, physical and socio-cultural, which can influence an individual or a group.

Sculpture and Environmental Art in Ireland.

Some of the Sculpture, made over the past 5,000 years is visible in the landscape of Ireland today. However after the 12th century, the tradition of excellence in the design and execution of sculpture declined due to continuous warfare. In the 18th century in Europe, many rich landowners commissioned the building of follies to adorn the landscape, objects of fantasy which gave aesthetic pleasure, where the functional aspect was a secondary consideration. The social and artistic climate at the time resulted

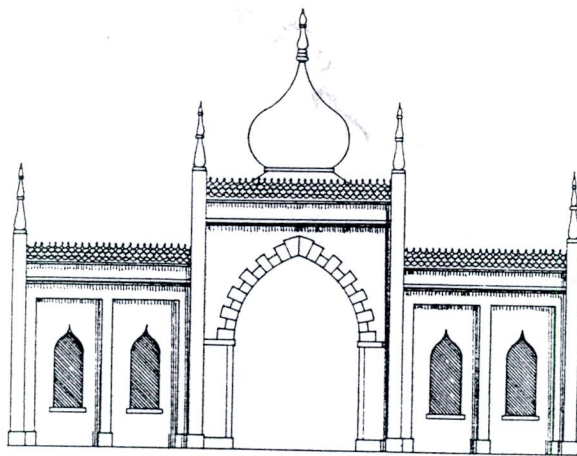


Fig 9. Hindu Gothic Gateway, Dromana.

in radical change in the way man perceived his relationship with nature, leading to a new form of artistic expression manifested in garden design. In the early 18th century the situation in Ireland was different. Throughout the preceding centuries, Ireland had experienced continual turbulence and bloody campaigns, as English planters established a foothold on the island. "By the early 17th century only 15% of the land in Ireland was left in Irish ownership. As stability returned and the population started to grow after the famine, in the mid 18th century, and after years of deforestation for shipbuilding and charcoal smelting, Ireland's woodlands started to regenerate. By the late 1700's, confident estate owners were starting to build houses with large windows, through which they could admire the newly planted trees in their demesnes. With its varied topography, potential for rich vegetation and a ready made supply of romantic ruins, Ireland was ideally suited to exploit the mania for the new style of gardening and its adornments. Building of many contrasting styles and fantasies grew up side by side with strange architectural hybrids such as the *Hindu Gothic Gateway* at Dromana, Co. Waterford. (ref. 1) (Fig. 9)

The nationalist revival in the mid 19th century produced a certain amount of memorial pieces, mostly bronze statues of heroic political figures. However due to lack of patronage, an Irish sculptors group was set up in the 1970's to allow sculptures to work in funded workshops. The Sculpture Society of Ireland was founded in 1980 to give young sculptors a chance to practise their craft and get going in the realm of public sculpture.. Their strategy to persuade local authorities of the availability of sculptors able to produce good work, has been successful. The setting up of symposia has given sculptors a public profile and enabled them to work in groups or as individuals in remote and urban areas throughout the country. There is a re-awakening and revitalisation of the ancient art of sculpture. Over the past twenty years many successful symposia have been run by the Sculptors Society or with their help , many of which come under the title of land art or environmental art.(ref. 2)

Sculpture Symposia

Sculpture symposia are not new, especially in Europe. In 1959 the first Symposium of sculptors was held in a disused quarry at San Margarethan in Austria. A working definition of a Sculpture Symposium is a group of sculptors coming together to either work on their own individual sculpture or collectively work on one individual project. (ref. 3)

A symposium is dictated very much by circumstances - for e.g. by holding a symposium every year in the same location, results in a sculpture park of different works by individual artists as in Villány in Hungary, Lindabrunn in Austria and Firma Viva in Yugoslavia, to mention a few. Also in America and Japan, sculptors have moved into urban areas to landscape wastelands, make new town squares and develop play areas for children.

Regardless of situation, each Sculpture Symposium in its essence is unique in that a group of sculptors come together with a common interest and work towards a common goal. The word 'symposium' originates from the Greek meaning 'drinking party', providing through the emphasis on group participation the vital opportunity for philosophical discussion, and exchange of ideas, during the working period. The artist need no longer feel isolated. Only in recent times have Sculpture Symposia been given publicity, through the documentation of the various annual symposia world-wide. The great art of ancient civilisations such as the Aztecs, Incas, Egyptians, grew out of a specific social and cultural context. Sculptors are again getting opportunities to work in group projects, through the sculptors symposia. For example, during the Tir Saile symposium (Ch. 6) in the summer of 1993, twelve sculptors were based for three to four weeks in the village of Ballycastle in Co. Mayo and were directly involved with the local community during the project. There is a revival of the idea that art has more than an aesthetic function in society again. Sculpture has moved from galleries to parks, motorways, seashores, wastelands and deserts. In these new contexts sculptors are interacting with communities, with industry and with the environment.

Sculpture Symposia in Ireland.

"Nil neart go cur le cheile" - no strength without co-operation - is an ancient Irish proverb. Sculpture symposia began in Ireland when what was called "Meitheal 78", took place in a stone quarry in the Dublin mountains - a workshop in stone carving organised by the Arts Council in association with a group of Irish sculptors. "Meitheal" is an Irish word meaning group of workers. Prior to mechanisation it was the tradition in the Irish countryside that farmers gathered together and pooled resources to help one another with harvesting, turf cutting, potato picking etc.

To ensure a broad spectrum of participants every Symposium has been by open submission and where possible provision is made for guest sculptors from abroad. To date the boglands have been amongst the locations for many of these successful

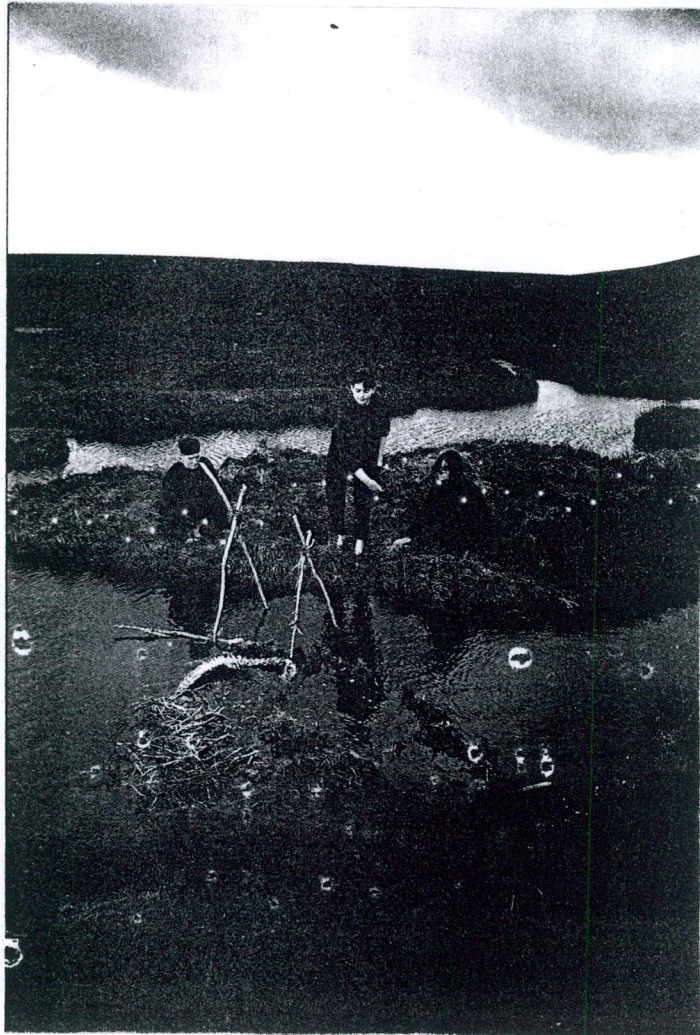


Fig 10. Catherine Harper Bogland Symposium, Co. Wicklow, 1990

symposia- in 1990, The Wicklow mountains , and in 1993 the Tir Saile on the north Mayo Coast.

Bogland Symposium , Wicklow 1990

Rainforest, moorland, prairie, bush and bogland, mystical regions that once signified the areas beyond man's understanding, now read like a catalogue of destruction as the Irish bogs remain one of Europe's last great wildernesses. It is an invaluable instructive part of our past and constitutes "the artistic consciousness of the nation" (ref. 4)

These are some of the reasons why both Catherine Harper and Chris Drury were anxious to work with a team of sculptors on the Bogland Symposium on August 1990. Organised by the Sculptors Society of Ireland, the aim of the symposium was to heighten people's awareness of the historic and contemporary importance of Irish bogland. It was hoped that the bog would impose its shape, colour and textures, form and history onto the artists. Artistically it aimed to focus on the sculptors' reactions to a living wilderness rather than the manipulation of material and the building of monumental sculptures. The artists assembled in the Wicklow bogs. They worked there for three weeks, brought few tools and no materials. Forced to rely on their own responses their reactions were varied. Some thrived upon the strange surroundings, some were bewildered by them, and some chose to interpret them in relation to their own background and origins.

It made the sculptors think in a new way. Some came with a preconceived notion of what they might build or make but found that without the usual tools and materials to rely on, they were forced to explore new ideas and new media.

While in the Wicklow mountains, Catherine Harper wanted to focus on the womanly aspect of the bog what she sees as the feminine quality, the softness of the bog. She began working with found twigs and bushes to make a figurative female form but later abandoned this idea for a triangular form, using it as a symbol for the female. Using her image of the bog as a place in a continuous cycle of life and death, she chose to do a performance piece which only her colleagues on the symposium watched at the end of the three weeks. The large triangular shape about six feet in height made of branches with a woven centre of reeds and plants was lowered as a ritual by three people dressed in black, into a bog pool and then pinned down by two upright fork shapes just as the bog bodies were pinned into the bog, a ritualistic response to the site. (Fig. 10)



Fig 11. Chris Drury, Bogland Symposium, Co. Wicklow, 1990

Chris Drury chose a place to work in the mountains which required him to walk for one hour each day across the bog. This daily walk became very much a part of his work. While walking he picked up plants and sticks and wove them into bundles. He chose two words for each day and related these words to the bound bundles, for e.g. rain, mist. He liked the "isness" of the place, the fact that the plants and sticks grew in the area and each word was immediate for that time and day. Near the top of Djouce mountain he built a stone shelter into an existing stone wall. He called it a cloud chamber. It was dark inside with a small hole in the roof. As the clouds pass overhead, this hole acts like a camera obscura. Like reversing nature, Chris Drury stresses that the work is about an idea, not something pretty to look at. (Fig. 11)

Chris Drury's work is concerned with the environment but more with the environment as experience, as idea, as well as it being part of nature. He allowed the Wicklow landscape to speak to him, to impose its character on his work. He touched it in a very delicate and unobtrusive manner.

As a result of this symposium, both Chris Drury and Catherine Harper hope to continue to explore not only the question of art and nature but have also become more involved in a crusade to bring art to the people. In the following two chapters, I have discussed the work of both these artists and shown how through their art work they are moving into a more central role.

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CHAPTER 3

CATHERINE HARPER

The bog landscape around her family home in Co. Derry has been a constant source for Catherine Harper's work. A multi media artist, she first specialised in textiles at the University of Ulster, graduating in 1987.

Born near the foothills of the Sperrin Mountains, her choice of bogland as a source is not a kind of romantic attachment. It is the Irish landscape most familiar to her. "The bog encompasses a pagan spirituality a rawness and darkness, a kind of microcosm of life and death." (ref. 1) The bog has also become a symbol for the need for us to preserve our environment against unchained commercialism. Her interest in the natural history of her homeland, the archaeology, ecology and mythology of that landscape has grown and developed encompassing the physical and spiritual aspects of bogland. Early works were a response to the physicality of the bog. Time spent walking and recording visual references provided her with a range of material; the moisture, the slimy sensuality, the dry crumbings, the incredible flora, the elusive fauna. A casual observer of the bogland sees an apparently barren monochromatic wasteland with the potential only for yielding fuel. For Harper to walk into the bogland is to "open the senses to a subtle battering". (ref. 2) The monochromatic overview gives way to a range of delicate and striking purples, reds, saffrons and greens coating the brown black peat. Seasonally, the colour changes are dramatic. The unviolated and cut areas of the bog reveal dense deep colour and a variety of tactile experience. Harper's early works recorded this physical wealth in media from fibre and hand-made paper to oil and water based paint and pastel. While the early work based on the bog appraise it in terms of its physicality, Harper's more recent work explores its spirituality.

"Melting and opening under-foot,
Missing its last definition
By millions of years" (ref. 3)

Influenced by Seamus Heaney, the South Derry poet who has written extensively about the bog, Harper's interest grew in the people ritualistically drowned and submerged in the bogs of Ireland, Britain and Scandinavia, believed to be part of an Iron age, deference to a certainly female earth deity. This linkage of mother/female and the earth/bogland is for Harper an influencing metaphor. Bogland with its folds, faults,



Fig 12. Catherine Harper, *That Treacherous, Lecherous One*, Projects Arts Centre, Dublin, 1993.

intrusions, rifts and crevices of sod and clod hidden places, wombs and layers is certainly female, producing life, growth and eventual decay in the continuous cycle of life and death. "The image of people being swallowed into the black bog ditches and being held there preserved is a vivid one" (ref. 4) In 1989 Harper travelled to Denmark to see in reality the Danish bodies of Tollund and Granballe, to England to see Lindow man, and to Czechoslovakia to see human and equine remains. Harper found the experience of seeing these former human beings a curious one. In the figurative work which resulted from this sensual experience she explained her feelings towards them. She tried to communicate the emotion of facing her ancestors' bodies, that had she lived in the iron age times, might have been her father, sister, lover, child or even herself. For Harper the seeming violence of their death and submergence into the bog echoes the evidence of their rude exhumation into a world two thousand years older but only superficially a little more sophisticated. The details which have been preserved on these bodies had an enormous effect on Harper's attitude. The little plaits in Arden Girl's hair, the tiny leather hat carefully made for the Tollund body, the mystery of the shaven head and blind folded eyes of Windeby girl, the perfect blood red fingernails spanning two millennia, are humanising elements, reminding us that these bodies are primarily and essentially people.

Such imagery, with its exploration of the emotional as well as the physical, resulted in a radical change in Harper's concerns. In her quest for an understanding in what these bog men and women might have been like, she sought parallels of human experience in her life. The source of such experience has been found in her personal knowledge of the human condition and in particular the issues that might affect her and all women in society today.

A curiosity about who the bog people were, who they loved, fought with, were hurt by, bore children to, has led Harper to appraise and question her own human condition within the framework and relationship of family, friends and society. In investing the bog people of her own images, with emotions, feelings and experiences, she has drawn upon her own, just as Seamus Heaney's poems look at bog bodies and talk of human landscape mirrored in the bog landscape,-

"She tightened her torc on him
and opened her fen
Those dark juices working
Him to a saint's kept body" (ref. 5)

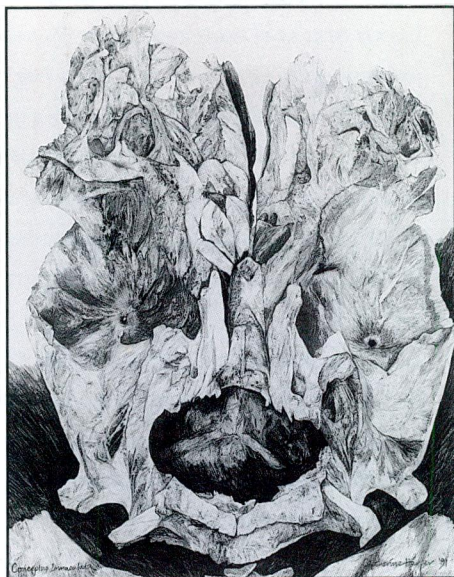


Fig 13. Catherine Harper, *Conceptua Immaculata*, Project Arts Centre, 1993.

For her exhibition at The Project Gallery, Dublin 1993, Harper states in the catalogue that her work is "speaking to my condition" (ref. 6) The rush of emotion on seeing the actual bodies as opposed to her perception of them through books and Seamus Heaney's poems, was very strong. Looking so vulnerable as though they were sleeping and as if their innermost thoughts were on display, they prompted her to start to make pencil drawings, very detailed and analytical, studying every pore. (Fig. 12) These drawings led to a series of paintings using watercolour and gouache built up to create a kind of light-filled effect, reminiscent of the skin of some of the bog people which had curious tinges of blue, orange and green.

Having analysed the different "bog people" she had seen, she began to construct bog figures from imagination, first collaging existing images, then developing new "personages" rendered as bog people. Within the past two years she has used a wide range of media. The last exhibition included works of sculpture collage and drawing using natural bog materials, paint, glue, fibre and pencil. Differing from previous work, today Harper's work is largely figurative or relating to the figure, the 'personages' are invested with specific characteristics and emotions relating to her own experiences within and outside her family. She is using the new bog people to explore the territory of relationships, using herself as the source, the work also deals with unspoken issues within the family and relationships. However she is very cautious and careful about people's feelings, but with such a compelling urge driving her on, she needs to make the work and so, is progressing tentatively.

Just as the bog is used as a metaphor for life and death, it also symbolises the raw potency of our sexual energy, one of the most basic motivating factors for our actions. (ref. 6). Procreative and vital, it is also treacherous and consuming. This duality Harper testifies in her work. At ignition, life begins a journey deep within the womb. *Conceptua immaculata* 1991, (Fig. 13) a very detailed pencil drawing on card showing a womb like form conceived in the bog vegetation, suspended above the surface, just as the bog people are held in the bog in a state of suspension. The title meaning preserved immaculate without stain, Harper draws a similarity between the ejection from the womb or the tearing of a body from the bog, when the unreal state of suspension is shattered and the "staining" begins. In another pencil work titled *Nerthus*, Harper made a strong triangular shaped drawing again showing vegetation, undergrowth, bones and gnarled wood. She then created a sculpted piece of the same title using the natural materials of the bog, including wood and bones, creating a powerful image symbol of womanly fecundity and strength. *Nerthus*, 1990, is a pagan deity, a

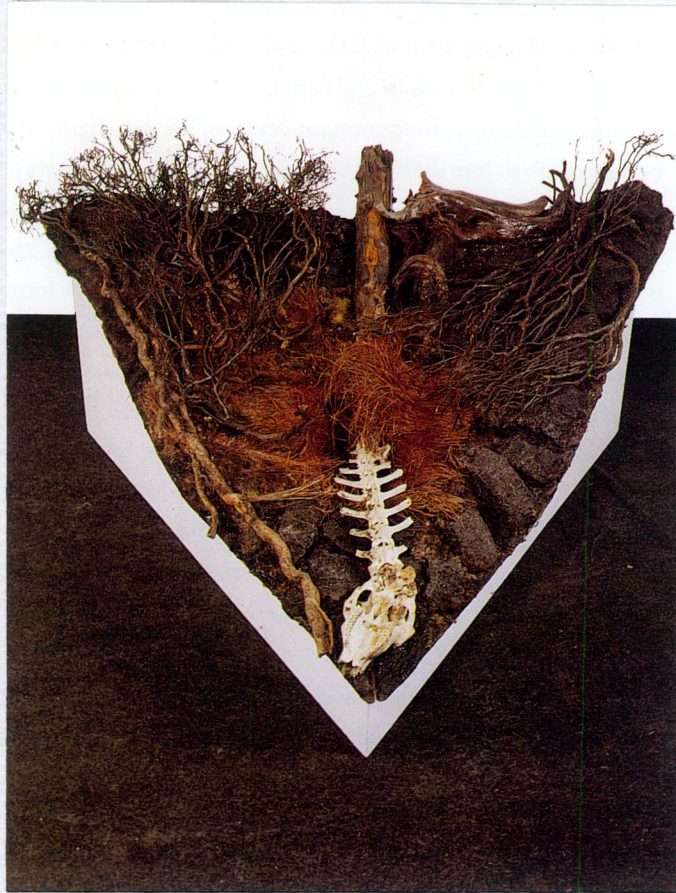


Fig 14. Catherine Harper, *Nerthus* 1990, Mixed media, Project Art Centre, Dublin 1993.

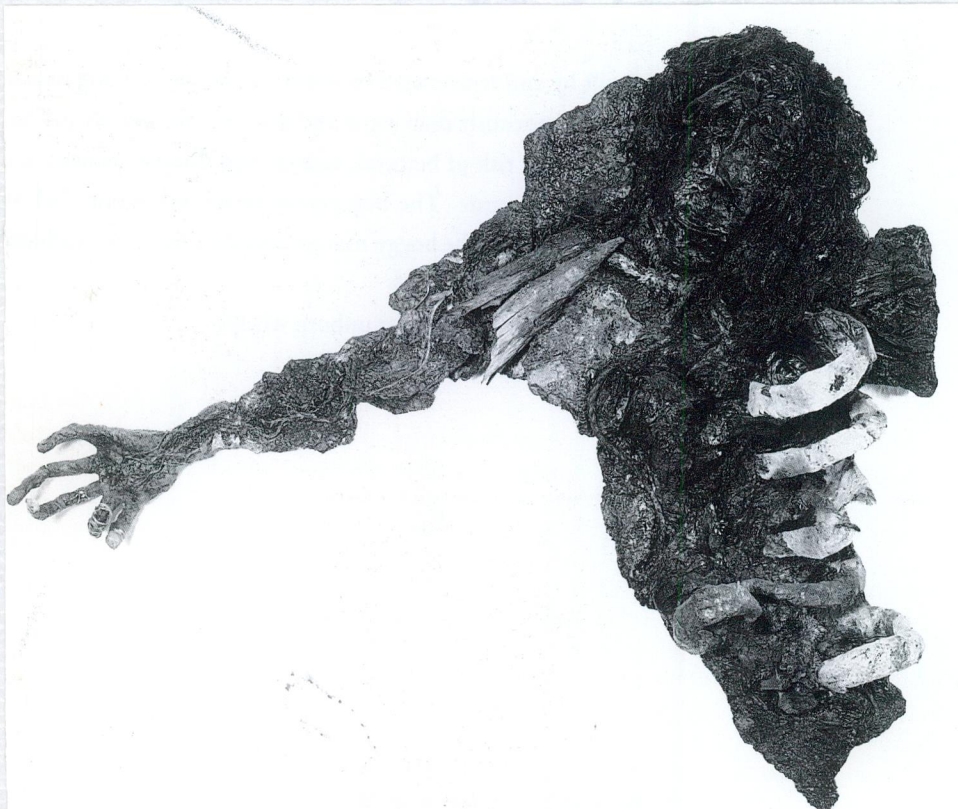


Fig 15. Catherine Harper, *Post coitum omne animale triste est*, 1990. Project Arts Centre, Dublin 1993

progenitor without responsibility. As Earth mother, her fertility nourishes us, and she in turn is nourished by our eventual and inevitable decay. Our role, however, in that circle of birth, procreation, and death is more complex. It is that territory of emotion within human relationships that this latest work explores. (Fig. 14)

Optimism and pessimism are juxtaposed in the young woman's discovery of her sexual power in the piece *Come on Smile*, and the embrace of *The Lovers*, speaks of hope and energy. Both wall relief panels using mixed media such as wool, bones, paper, glue and wood, their rich juicy colours looking like those of the "bog people".

The possibilities for betrayal, treachery and jealousy, waiting to suck us in like a big bog hole are always there. The *Immaculate Conception* so blissfully brought about as in the mixed media work of the same title, inevitably decays and all is eroded. Webs of guilt settle silently within relationships never being fully articulated but always poisonously present. The bog becomes symbolic for Harper of our black despair. As in the mixed media wall sculpture *Post coitum omne animale triste est*, 1990, the feeling of abandonment, misery, disappointment maybe tells us of broken relationships. (Fig. 15) The gnarled outstretched arm and hand, broken wood, rope and bones of the body give a feeling of desolation.

Bog like ourselves, is living active vital and at the same time treacherous, unstable, devouring. The Iron Age people, closer to their raw sensibilities, appeased that malevolent power with human and material offerings. Although we are further removed from our basic instincts, we are still aware of a spiritual blackness hovering beneath the surface of our own psyches and of our universe.

However just as the bog is built by and rejuvenated by death and decay, pushing new life to the surface while simultaneously drawing in and digesting the old, all humans have an instinct for survival and so even at the risk of betrayal, continue to live, love and procreate. The bog people in her exhibition "lick the wounds, drag themselves out of the boggy morass, and find their own catharsis". (ref. 7)

Most of the work for her last exhibition was made in the studio, which she fills with bog material, heather, fleece, bones and peat, to create the right ambience. While she feels her work was successfully shown in the project Gallery, Harper is very conscious of being restricted by a studio/gallery trap, where you have to produce a certain set of work with commercial criteria such as restrictions of size, media, subject. Being employed by the University of Ulster has given her the financial freedom where she can produce work that fits only her own criteria. In 1990 the Bogland Symposium

allowed her work to be made in the landscape and installed in the bog. Keen to produce some permanent works outdoors in the future Harper is again looking forward to spending more time out of the city.

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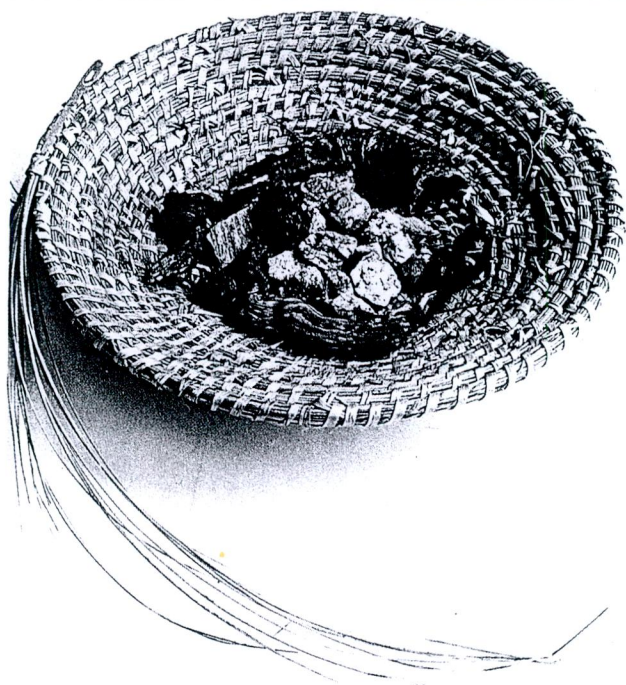
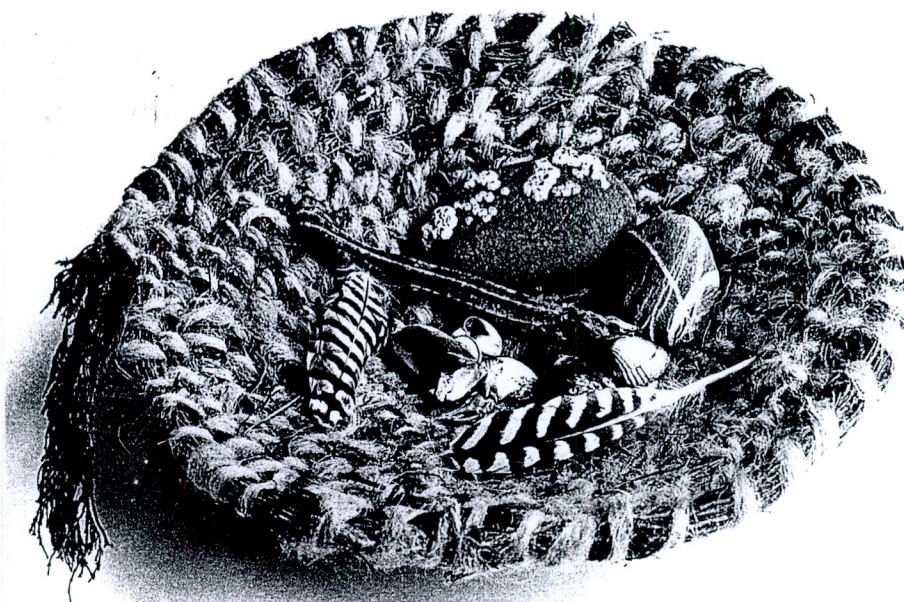


Fig 16.

Chris Drury, *Sea Basket, from the mountains to the sea-
Mountain Basket, from the sea to the Mountains*

an exchange of objects between Dingle Bay and the Macgillycuddy Reeks, Co.
Kerry, 1987.



CHAPTER 4

CHRIS DRURY

In this new world a spirit of calculation has replaced the older moral economy and mystery has given way to a belief that everything is intelligible. Social relationships have changed from dependence on one another to being managed, and politics have become separate from everyday life. With this cosmological disintegration came the separating of the inner and the outer life.

In his work, artist Chris Drury, constantly deals with the problem of the separateness of the inner and the outer life. Drury believes that alienated from nature we are split off from ourselves, for we are part of nature, there is a natural in, and for us. Born in 1948, Drury became fascinated with landscape and nature when he moved out of London to a remote cottage in the country in 1971. However it was the meeting with British land artist Hamish Fulton in 1974 and a walk which he made with him in the Canadian Rockies in 1975 which radically changed the course of his work. "Many strands of my life merged here, particularly my interest in Eastern philosophies and my passion for nature". (ref. 1) In 1982 he abandoned his figurative mode and began using objects and materials from nature. He made his first of many visits to Ireland in 1984 "a country whose people, land culture, music and humour strike a chord". (ref. 2)

Because Drury is continuously trying to explore his place in nature and the place for nature in him, he has evolved, through his art, the means to represent the significant stages in this journey of self discovery. To come in contact with his work is a sensuous experience. His pieces entitled *Baskets and Shelters* have come to form the axis of his work. These pieces express a compassionate understanding of the vulnerability of human beings in a world whose destiny is beyond our control. Trashing the environment is accompanied by a general impoverishment of our imaginative and spiritual lives. (Fig. 16)

Chris Drury identifies with the writing of Heidegger who said, "to be at home in the world is to dwell in the world " (ref. 3) To search for this personally fulfilling sense of dwelling is Drury's mission in life. This involves, he believes, the elaboration of moral attitudes, of a philosophy, of a cosmology which denies human beings any privileged position in the overall scheme of things.



Fig 17.

Chris Drury, Adharc Exhibition, IMMA, Dublin 1992

The various sciences have enriched our understanding and significant aspects of the world, but their conclusions cannot be infallible, and there is much human significance that falls beyond their competence. For this reason I would like to summarise the pre-scientific cosmology of Shamanism, particularly in relation to Drury's work.

Shamanism "presupposes an elemental force in all objects which can be dominated by a greater force, namely that of a magician".(ref. 4) The shaman is masterful and in that respect is akin to the Western will to mastery, as Nietzsche diagnosed and the sciences embody. The difference is that shaman's mastery is remedial and restorative, not intent on remaking nature but committed to maintaining a proper balance of forces in nature. "All that exists in nature is imbued with awareness and power/all events in nature are manifestations of this power".(ref. 5)

Openness to the particularities of place and people is central to Drury's art. When he is out in a landscape, often camping he watches and listens to the events that surround him. He also listens clearly to the thoughts and dreams which are prompted within him. It pays to take your dreams seriously "as do all who own up to their uncertainty and vulnerability" (ref. 6)

When building a shelter as a symbol or somewhere to sleep, Drury always uses the materials characteristic of the site. When using plant materials the shelter will be built over a frame of twigs for example - looking like a large basket upside down. The shelter may be burnt and the ashes placed in a basket made from local vegetation, like a funerary urn, or dismantled and reconstituted in a different form. These baskets and shelters are constantly brought into transformed and transforming relationships with each other as a gathering place, basket and shelter, each a container of people and their needs.

In his exhibition and workshop at IMMA, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, in July 1992, Drury used both indoor and outdoor spaces to explore our place in nature and ideas about home as a shelter. His work stems from his deeply felt conviction that the inner nature of human beings is in essence nature itself and that this is reflected in what we call outer nature -landscape, boglands, wilderness, mountains and deserts. The inspiration for his sculptures comes from walking and working in nature. Any aesthetic is minimalised and comes from need and the land itself. This land is in essence "the catalyst for the insight into the totality of life and the possibility of a whole, unfragmented human existence".(ref. 6)



Fig 18. Chris Drury, *Cloud Chamber*, IMMA, Dublin, July, 1992

The exhibition entitled "Adharc" *meaning, horn*, after a three-sectional bronze horn found in the bogs of Wicklow and thought to be 2000 years old, was all about nature and people's interaction to it. Drury's instinct is to make objects that may not necessarily be perceived as art. A shelter is what the name implies, made simply from what is to hand and to be used. Like an early Christian time-machine, parked in the quadrangle, Chris Drury's "cairn" structure in the IMMA exhibition contrasted sharply with the classicism of the surrounding architecture. (Fig. 18) Behind the cairn's three foot high door in a silent chamber into which grey lunar light leaked through a ceiling hole, visitors showed little tendency to share the tiny space, often lurking in the cloisters awaiting an opportunity to occupy the cairn alone, or maybe in twos. Called a *cloud chamber* its minimal, penitential feel seemed to promise some holy experience or some inner communion. Once when I tried the door, someone inside shoved it firmly shut, as though I had unwittingly interrupted a secret seance or some dank desperate prayer. On another occasion, a middle aged man emerged bleary eyed, nodding his head in disbelief, muttering to himself, "if that is what they call art". This old age pensioner was on one of his many cultural trips to the capital. From the Kerry coast, where the original 'beehive' huts built by monks in the seventh century are still intact. I wonder did he make the connection? Perhaps he will now look at them in a new way? Perhaps, like Drury, he had never found the need to separate the object from nature?

If everything is interrelated and man and nature are one and the same thing, then an object is a microcosm of the land it inhabits. Hence simple stick bundles made on the day (Ch. 2.p.) in the place are carried in a rucksack as a talisman. Similarly a photograph of a shelter or a cairn is a talisman of a time and place.

He makes art in the quiet, wild, secret places of the world. He loves to work in the boglands of Ireland and an area in the south west near Allihies is one of his most secret and special places. He returns there a couple of times every year to re negotiate his contact with nature. Much of his work disintegrates, goes back into the land. Some he dismantles; some, if it is unobtrusive, is left for others to use and enjoy.

For Drury art is about communication, to be enjoyed by communities - "That is why I bring objects and photographs into the cities and gallery spaces of the world" (ref. 7) A shelter built in a gallery is a building within a building, a heart beat of what (has been) outside, inside, a world within a world.

Also in the exhibition, in a nearby series of rooms, Drury constructed what seemed like assiduously faked Bronze Age artefacts, crude vessels and baskets of peat

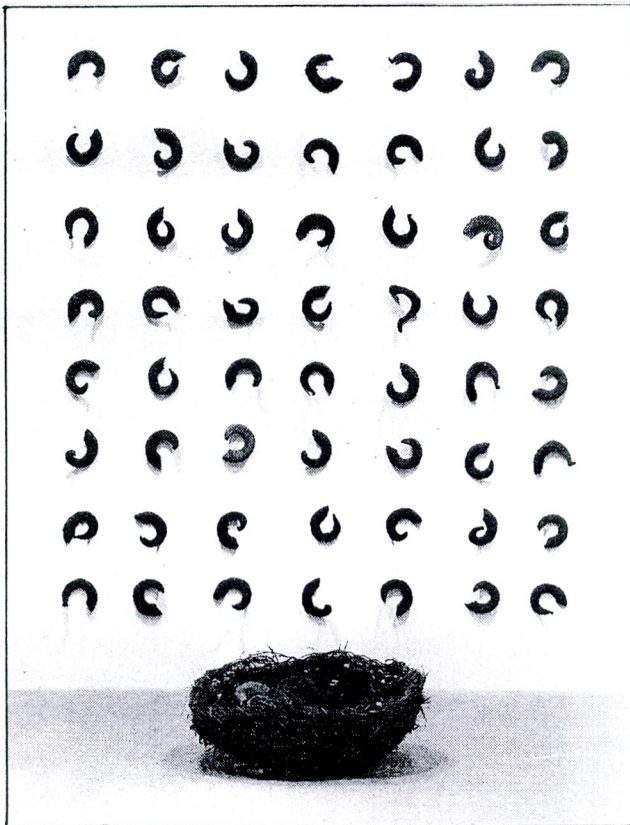


Fig 19. Chris Drury, fragments of an ancient past.

and twigs. A turf built hut hovered over a totemic mossy rock. Isolating such things in nature, bringing the outer to the inside, helps us to realise the purity and beauty of just a mossy stone. It simplifies life for me, helps to put things into perspective and to live without some of the unnecessary trappings of today's world.

The image of the ram's horn recurred in many ways during this exhibition, both real and fashioned in peat or bronze, some creating a pattern of spiral shapes in a peat dust carpet, others wall mounted in runic arrangements. The simple repeat of such objects and patterns gave an almost demoniac affect. These pieces also looked enigmatic, like fragments of an ancient past, artefacts whose use and precise meaning had become obscured through time, mysterious clues to rituals of another time and place. (Fig. 19) Such obsessive reworking of natural and historic landscape gave the exhibits an earthly dimension, each tidy piece reading like an abstract marking of a solitary moment.

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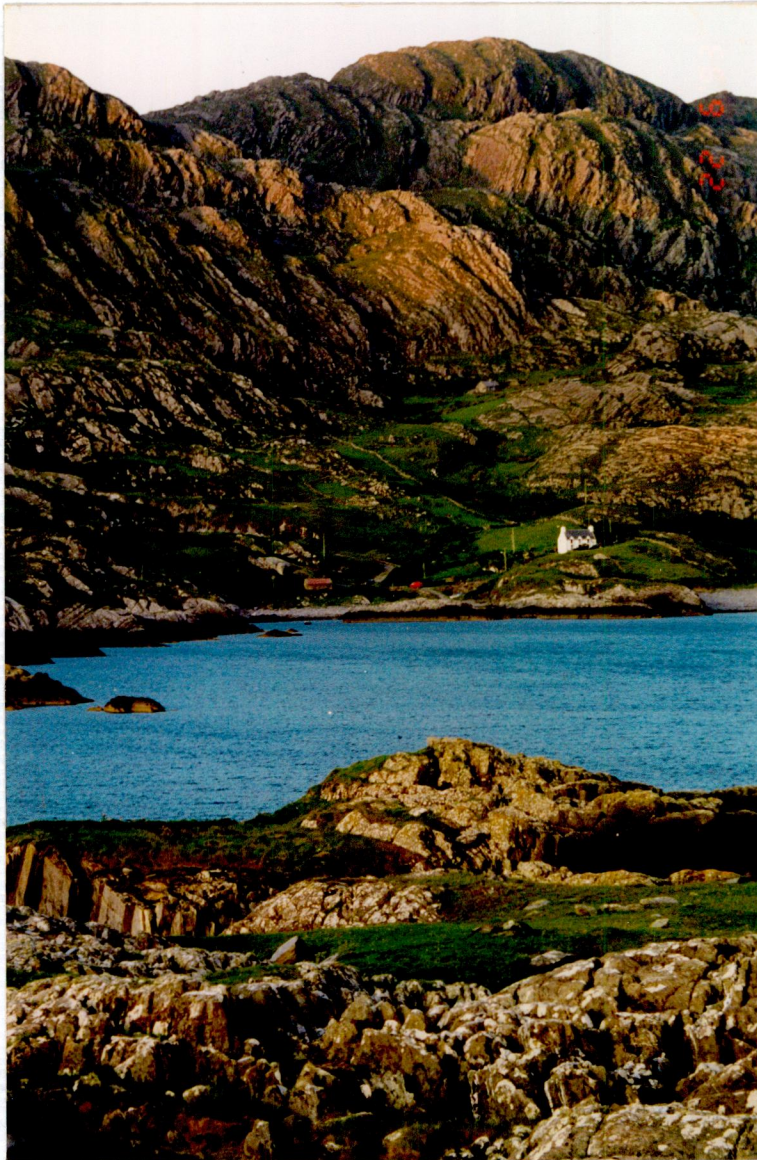


Fig 20. Allihies, West Cork, home and a source of inspiration for Cormac Boydell's work

CHAPTER 5

CORMAC BOYDELL

The comple relationship between humans and nature and the contrasting emotions evoked by the landscape are the driving force behind the work of Ceramacist, Cormac Boydell in Allihies, in West Cork.

"Sitting in ditches making mud pies" (ref. 1) is one of Boydell's longest memories. Only four years of age, even then, clay had a magic association for him. Childhood holidays were spent at the home of Grattan Friere, Co. Mayo, a traditional potter of the Leach school, and one of the few Irish potters working at that time using local clay. Friere often fired his work in "turf kilns" which further enhanced the enthusiasm of young Boydell.

Inspired by the natural world around them, humans have shaped clay from a common malleable material into sculpture since the Ice Age, modelling it into images of the bison , they hunted or carving a lump of clay into a hand sized female image or vessel. Today many artists are creating sculpture whose forms remind us of the fragility of our planet earth, making us aware of the beauty of the ordinary and the value of protecting it.

Cormac Boydell lives close to the land and says that the earth is a direct medium for a spectrum of experiments. Concerned that we have lost touch with the natural rhythms of the world, Boydell shares many of the concerns of other artists, particularly 'land artists' who are striving to show not only the vulnerability of the earth but how man and earth/clay are constantly affecting each other.

On leaving school, Boydell studied Geology at Trinity College, Dublin and then went to south west Australia as an exploration geologist. Ceramics is like "speeded up geology" (ref. 2), the earth formation, lava flow, molten rock cooling and forming is reflected in the form, the glaze and the firing of a piece of pottery. Boydell always had a romantic vision of returning to Ireland and setting up as a potter on the West coast. For the past twenty one years, the rocky slopes of Allihies on the Beara peninsula, have been his home, and the surrounding landscape a constant source of inspiration for his work. (Fig. 20)

Rich fiery, highly glazed, like active volcanic lava , it seems that Boydell's work arises directly from a fascination with materials and a celebration of the waywardness of

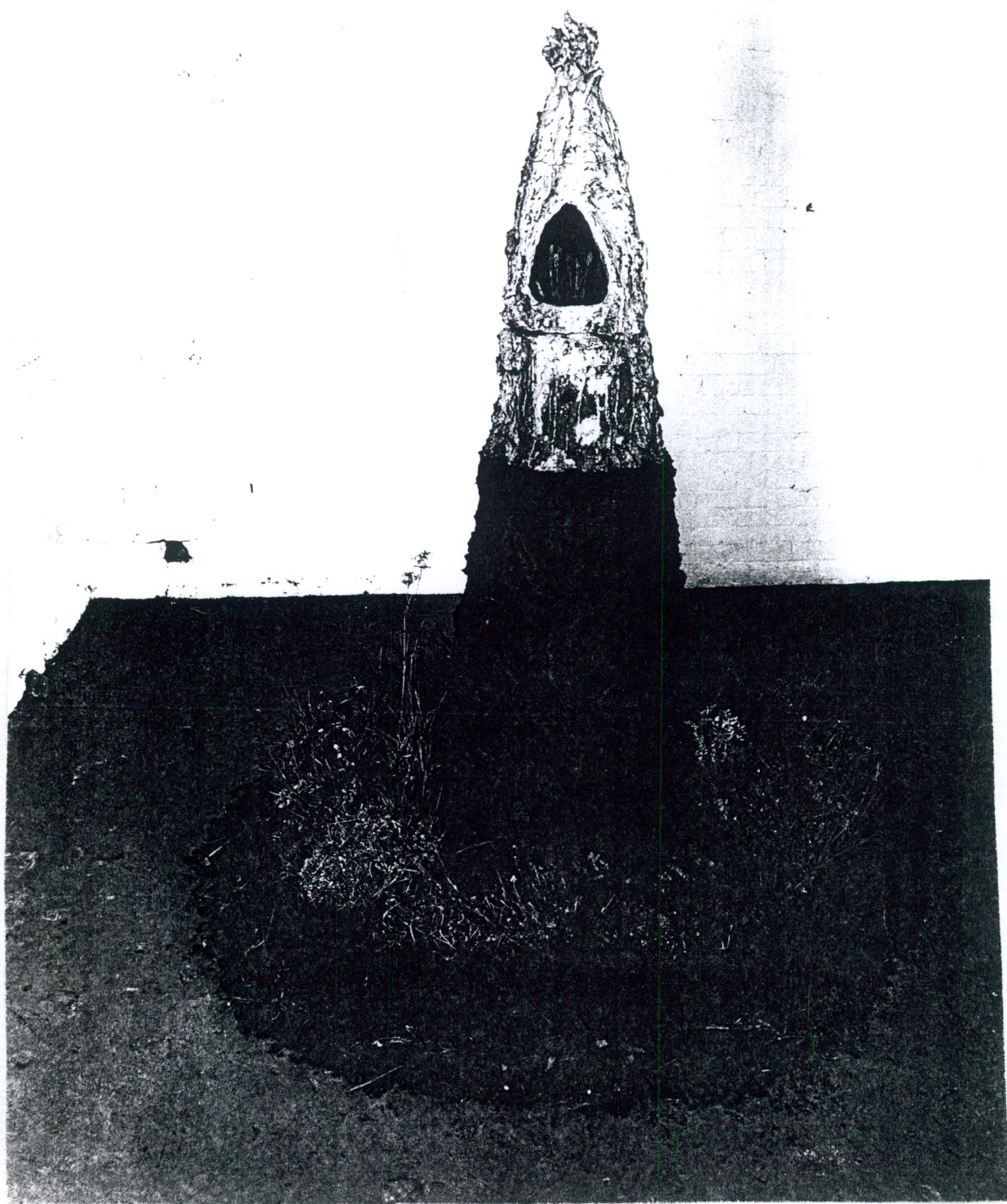


Fig 21. Cormac Boydell, *Bog Mound*, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin 1992

substances such as clay and glaze which crack, bloat, froth and fuse together when subjected to heat. His art comes from nature, is fired and given back to nature. As with the art of land artists, the ceramacist working with clay only allows natural elements to affect the final image. Fire changes the properties of clay, giving the pieces a more lasting characteristic than some land artists work. However it remains as earth, but in a durable state.

Influenced by the natural order of time, change and decay, Boydell's sculptures in Irish clay, combined with natural soil, rocks and growing plants, reveal a powerful relationship with the natural world. His love and understanding of rocks and clay are clearly manifested in his work. "It is like practical geology, I love the quality of rocks, and firing clay is the closest you can get to making rocks" (ref. 3) His roughly hewn *Skellig Beara* Pieces of 1992, with their abrasive textures and bright fluid glazes, are like paintings on stones, allowing Boydell to combine sculpture with painting. This painterly flowing quality of the ceramics contrasts vibrantly with their natural base settings - often on a mound of turf or an interesting shaped rock. The bright vibrant colour of the glazes is often created from naturally found local plants and minerals. The lime in the earth gives a burnt rock effect and the yellow ochre is found in the ground in Allihies which when burnt becomes red ochre. The glint of chrome, copper and manganese yellow and orange tones give his work a fire-like glow. There is a disused copper mine near his home where he finds much of the raw materials for his glazes. He sometimes gives his sculptural pieces up to fifteen firings to achieve the desired effect.

By combining ceramic sculptures with natural materials from around him, his work gives a palpable sense of place even to an urban audience. He likes the idea of putting natural objects into a synthetic situation like a city gallery space. The idea of isolating and highlighting the ordinary creates a powerful dynamic for him. Such an event took place in a series of installations in the Dublin Temple Bar Gallery in 1992. (Fig. 21) The lustrous ceramics set upon bases of meadow hay and peat, ringed by local clays and sand and decorated with bog cotton, myrtle and natural ochres, evoked images of precious metals almost growing out of the earth, like lava spewing from a volcano.(ref. 4). Boydell enjoys conveying a sense of place through his work, particularly to an urban audience. Like Catherine Harper's experience of walking in a bog "to open the senses to a subtle battering" (Introduction ref. 3), the sense of sight, touch and smell were greatly exhilarated by this exhibition. It created for me a longing to experience at first hand the intimate personality of such a place; to experience the "conditions created by man himself... traditions, customs and social life" - (ref. 5) there



Fig 22. Skellig Michael, a weather beaten rock known as 'the Wailing Woman'

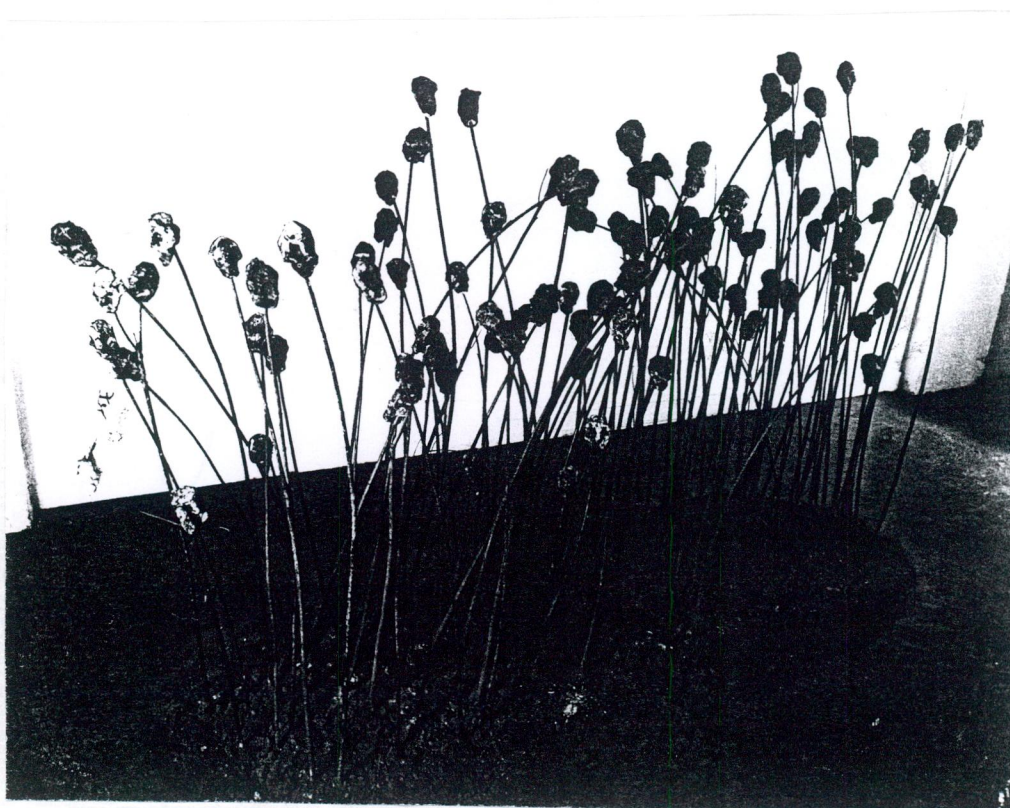


Fig 23. Cormac Boydell, *Cet Chuille*, Temple Bar, Dublin 1992.

should be nothing exclusive about art we should explore ways of making people more aware of their surroundings.

In Boydell's installation pieces in Temple Bar, three upright forms dominated, mounds topped with hollow ceramic cones, like a jagged outline on the mountains at dusk. One of the mounds, entitled *Bog*, was like a hymn to peat - a stack of black mud rising from a watery nest of spongy moss. The strong, richly glazed, conical form gave a precious feeling, something worth caring for - making a strong ecological plea that Ireland and the Beara peninsula are unique. The form of these pieces was inspired by a weathered twelve foot high rock on Skellig Michael, called "The Wailing Woman". Worn and weather beaten, this layer of upright rock almost looks transparent in places. (Fig. 22) Form and decoration are equally important for him. Whether he is treating a piece of work like the *Bog Mound* 1992, with luscious dripping glazes, he seems equally satisfied with the stark contrasting minimal decoration and small scale work in his piece *Cet Chuille* 1992, representing the Tain, it is obvious that he is always interested in the magic of the materials. In his *Cet Chuille* or 100 Heads, piece, one hundred roughly made heads balance on willow sticks, like tiny boulders. (Fig. 23) The willows were set into a bed of ochre, creating an interesting contrast of texture and colour. His interest in ancient mythology is evident in this piece. The hundred heads refer to a story when Cuchulainn slayed one hundred of Maeve's followers and stuck their heads onto sticks. However he has always been interested in the pre-Celtic stone carvings of heads and the roughly hewn small wooden heads thrown as votive offerings into a well near Paris, France. He also enjoys paintings images of heads onto highly glazed pinched plates, which he calls Irish Buddhas.

The size of his studio and kiln space dictated the size of his work until 1985, when he was invited by the Crawford Gallery, Cork, to exhibit an installation-size piece of work. This both forced and inspired him to work outside when he decided to build a kiln on the side of the mountain. He was so excited and inspired by working out of doors in the landscape, surrounded by the animals, sea, people working in the fields, a complete contrast from working in a white, box-shaped studio. The kilns built by making three five foot high tepee shapes out of woven willow branches, each with a small door, and then covered in slip and mud, became an installation piece in the exhibition. Turf was included in the making of one of the kilns, copper sulphide and iron oxide in the other two, giving subtle variations in the contrast, colour and texture.

Cormac Boydell's work is created in his soul and is expressed by his fingers in clay. His truly original work is never preconceived. He works spontaneously without



Fig 24. Cormac Boydell, *Flowing Lava*, The Craft Fair, Dublin 1993

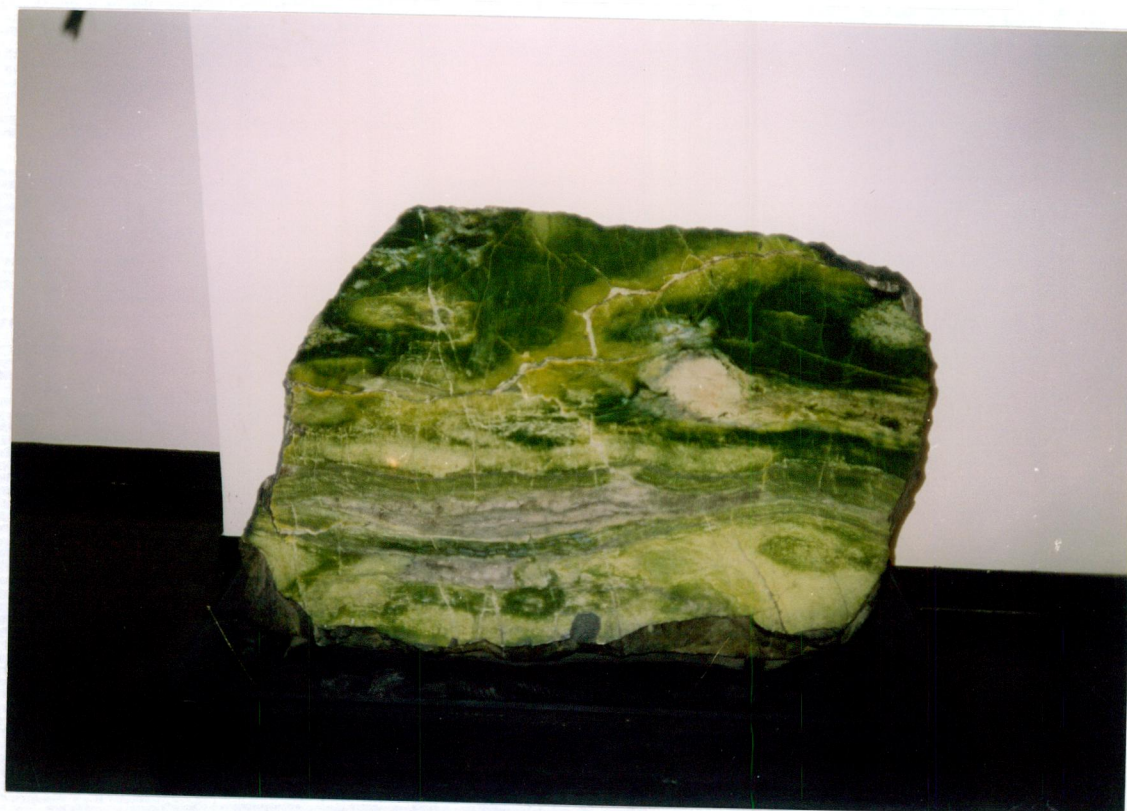


Fig 25. Cormac Boydell, *Strata*, The Craft Fair, Dublin 1993

allowing the mechanics of a throwing wheel or a press mould to interfere between the artist and the clay. Unselfconsciously, his ceramic pieces evoke images of his West Cork environment. Preferring not to follow in the footsteps of any great master or school or thought, he greatly admired the early Japanese potters- the textures and clay remain visible in their finished pieces, but more importantly the hand of the maker is never disguised. The attitude of the artist to his craft inspires Cormac Boydell far more than looking at a beautifully finished piece of work. Although he feels it is dangerous to compromise and to make work geared towards a sales market, he agrees that when starting out as a potter it is difficult not to be lured into making a marketable product. He admits to having fallen into such a trap, at the start of his career, but feels it is worth taking the risk, having economic courage and giving the work the power, spontaneity and love that comes with this freedom. This freedom shows that Cormac Boydell has an intimacy with clay, creating sensuous forms often with a profusion of colours, entwining his work with both a spiritual and earthy organic feeling.

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Fig 26 *A Wayside prism, OPW, Heritage Centre, Ceide Fields, Co. Mayo*
1993

CHAPTER 6

CEIDE FIELDS

In Ireland, a place always comes with a name, and with the name a story. One such place is Ceide Fields, "Ceide", meaning plateau (ref. 1), on the north Mayo coastland. On a slope overlooking the sea and covered by a turf bog, the remains of an ancient community or settlement have been found, at least 5000 years old.

When I visited the area in July 1993, it took some time on the ground for the story to be absorbed - a whole buried landscape, 2,500 acres of highly organised Neolithic walled fields, the biggest Stone Age monument in the world.

This bleak and rolling stretch of bogland with a dramatic view of the sea has been given human focus by the Office of Public works' heritage centre, which looks like a cross between a pyramid and a lighthouse. Looking like a wayside prism, it will eventually be shawled in heather and rightfully exudes a powerful presence. Developed in 1993, the Ceide Fields project explains the extent of the oldest and enclosed landscape in Europe, more than four square miles of ordinary farmland trapped in time by the growth of the bog. Separated from us today, not just by metres of bog but by five thousand years of time. The centre also covers aspects of geology, archaeology and wildlife of north Mayo. (Fig. 26)

To mark the celebration of 5000 years of human life in north Mayo, early in 1993 the Sculptors Society of Ireland formed forces with a consortium of county and regional organisations, a dozen sculptors mostly Irish but including a Dane, a Japanese and an American were chosen to install a series of sculptures/installations over an eighty mile area. Their mandate was to mark the landscape in a contemporary way, using local and natural materials as far as possible, at the same time taking account of the integrity of the sites and paying due deference to the sensitivities of the donor communities.

Nothing on this scale has been attempted in this country before. The term sculpture trail has connotations of a pleasant walk through a forest or park where one is surprised by artworks that are not only accessible but are put in one's way. The sculptures in Hazelwood, Co. Sligo 1985, exemplify a sculpture trail in this sense. Thirteen artists took place in this symposium. Today thousands of visitors come to view the sculpture and experience the pleasures or forest trekking.



Fig 27. Eilis 'Baoil, *Wind Trees*, (artist's impression), Tir Saile Symposium, Co. Mayo 1993

But the north Mayo installations are not meant to be viewed in one day. Spanning a distance of eighty miles, those rural coastal communities to whom the world of high art is normally inaccessible, are now themselves custodians of works that the cosmopolitan art viewers will not find ready-to-hand.

Our environment today is a crazy quilt of invading sounds that torture our ears. Exploring nature's process as an art medium, Eilis O'Baoil has created a sound oasis. Such tortuous sounds particularly apply to urban dwellers but even in rural places today noises of farm machinery, transport, Hi-fi systems are saturating the surroundings. Just as Hungarian shepherds play their pipes on the mountains, involving a great volume of space and engaging in a dialogue with their surroundings, O'Baoil has created a sound oasis on the side of a rugged hill, overlooking the wild seas of the Atlantic ocean.

O'Baoil's piece called *Wind Trees*, (Fig. 27) near the Ceide Fields themselves, just above the main road was suggested by the pattern of five outspread fingers in the form of a handprint - the mark of man on the landscape. To the north of this spot the rock along the coastline is clearly stratified horizontally, (Dun Briste, the sea stack landmark). To the south of this point the strata changes to a vertical pattern. Known as *Muingally*, it is a turning point and a meeting place. The vegetation also comes to a dramatic transformation here. Fields, hedges give way to a boggy terrain, as man's influence retreats before the relentless sea winds. The piece is made up of five horse shoe shapes dug out of the land and lined by local stone. A copper windpipe is set in to protective walls surrounding a young sapling in each. Birch, Elm, Hazel, Oak and Alder - all trees indigenous to Ireland, depict the five tree types referred to in the Ogham scripts of the Celts. The pan pipes also denote five different characters by playing different notes in tonic solfa. These pipes can be played naturally by the wind or by visitors making the piece an interestingly attractive one. Climbing up the texturally enriched path to this wild haven one could wash away all ugly noises from one's ears. Through the whining noise of the wind pipes playing with the rustle of the leaves, the spectator becomes aware of what we have lost and what we could regain.

Out on the tip of the Mullet peninsula, Mike Bulfin, artist/environmental scientist found the site that most interested him. The place was 'crying out' for some kind of monument. He spent the first few days of the symposium walking the bog and searching for and selecting suitable stones. some which measure two to three feet in thickness and eight to ten feet high. Anxious to avoid the 'pastiche' of a modern-day stone circle, he decided to use the motif of a double spiral as found in the decoration of stones at New Grange. Bulfin believes that his is the first stone spiral. Having first had the idea of



Fig 28. Mike Bulfin, *Dearbhaille's Twist*, Tir Saile symposium, 1993

doing a 'stone turf' piece, the size of the actual stone found at the spot allowed him to make a far more dramatic and majestic piece of work.

Rising from an expanse of russet brown bog, looking as though it existed for all time, the stone spiral is called *Dearbhaille's Twist*, after an adjacent early Christian church. The stones have always been there the artist has just in a sense rearranged them. Their majestic abruptness, the sun lights up their facets as they tower into the clear blue sky, or on wet days, glittering statues in the soft bog. (Fig. 28)

"Acknowledgement" on Claggan Island by sculptor Marian O'Donnell embraces an old children's burial mound. "Anything I made here had to be a response to the entire vista as well as a recognition or acknowledgement of the children's burial mound" (Ref. 2) (Fig. 29)

Her response to the landscape is visual. She is fascinated by pattern, shape and form. She responds to the land as a surface, curious about what it covers, what it protects and what is hidden underneath. Choosing this remote spot, an island except for a sandy spit connection to the mainland, Marion O'Donnell was drawn to mound, to reform the surface around the infant burial ground. Until then it was an insignificant heap of stones, partly grass covered but reeking of pain and loss, resembling hidden but known and unspoken secrets. They underlie stories, places, names with a sense of denial that the Irish know from having been conquered, evicted, worked and starved and disowned by what they hoped would be their "saving grace", the Roman Catholic church, when infants still born or unbaptized were cast away to lie forgotten.

With a deep urge to protect this mound the artist chose a hugging shape, maybe a gesture of a mother holding a child. Made of cutstone and clay, the piece is set on the curve of the field, so the size does not obliterate the view from the burial ground. It has a span of approximately twenty feet rising to a height of five feet. The opening of the passage is flanked by gently battered walls of cutstone, which form a very distinctive sculptural feature on their own, backed by the slope of a new space where people can experience the sensation of walking into the earth as they enter through a narrow passage. This passage has echoes of the cave nearby on the water's edge, which has been an enduring part of the history and mythology of the area. It also serves another purpose, as a journey to the openness of the panoramic view - an overwhelmingly beautiful place, difficult to comprehend all at once.

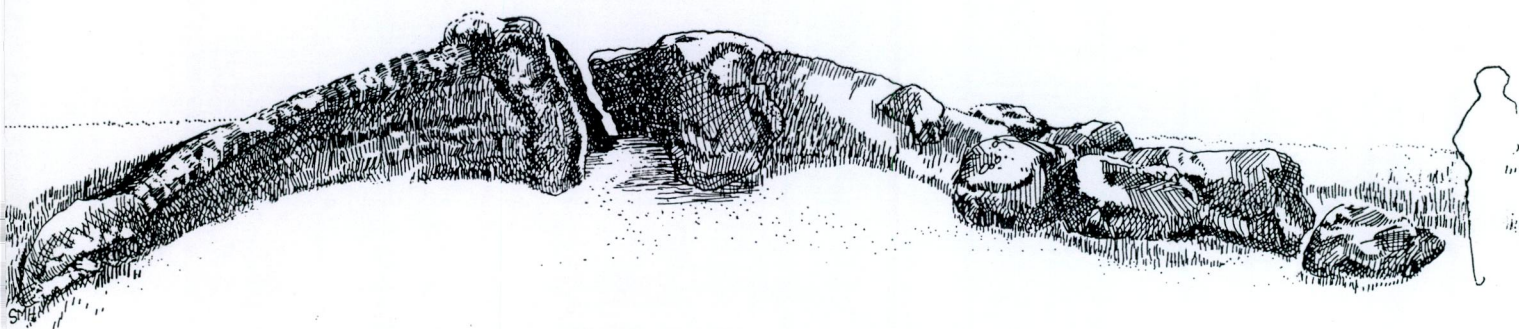


Fig 29. Marion O'Donnell, *Acknowledgement* (artist's impression), Tir Saile, 1993

The passage opening is a transition from the closed area of the old burial mound to the unlimited horizons of the Atlantic ocean. The visitor must negotiate the inner curves of the passage, to see again with new eyes the ever-changing vista, it is about moving from one space into another space, about recognising the inner and the outer self.

The cult of the unique individual so prevalent in the visual arts seem to militate against the spirit of the Symposium. Yet it has been proven that such projects in no way compromise the individual, as is evident in the very different pieces of work produced at the Tir Saile Sculpture Symposium

Community Involvement And Acceptance

Statistics show that the west of Ireland, particularly north Mayo, suffers from the highest rate of unemployment and mass emigration. This was not a project of solitary sculptors chipping away on their own, but one of co-operation with all sorts of helpers from local stone masons to impromptu 'meitheals' of neighbours. Since the idea became a reality there has been an extraordinary bonding of effort and goodwill as witnessed by officials, community groups, land owners and individuals at a huge party organised by sculptor Marion O'Donnell and landowner, Laurence Howard of Claggan Island. When I arrived to the windswept island, questioning if my map reading had gone astray, as I drove across a precarious looking sandspit, the sculptor's host insisted on inviting me in for a cup of tea. Inside their cosy kitchen, they began to recount the saga of the then famous party which had taken place the previous weekend. A marquee with free food, drink music and bonfire was enjoyed by everyone who had helped with Tir Saile. "The sight of cars nose to tail, creeping out along the tide in a lurid evening sun was an image for the archives" (ref. 3). A thousand people came and left at sunrise and nobody got wet.

Such was the co-operation with the landowners and community towards the artist, I feel the people of north Mayo realise they have something special to offer in their 5000 year old human landscape.

References - Chapter 6.

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2. Marion O'Donnell in conversation during Tir Saile symposium, July 1993.
3. Marion O'Donnell, *ibid.*



Fig 30. Bogland - Our Natural Wilderness.

CONCLUSION

At the turn of this century man realised through scientific investigation that this world was temporary and the components such as rocks, caves, trees and bogs were not permanent elements. Through the identification of the atom, man has become master of the cosmic forces and speed. (ref. 1) Transformed overnight from his petty terrestrial world into a cosmic world, man now has a simple alternative, to adapt or to perish. Man can now shape his own environment. He alone can learn from history, be it natural or manmade. An understanding of history and a sense of heritage are the cornerstones of civilisation, (ref. 2) and of man's understanding of himself.

Man built garrisons, walled in over-crowded cities out of fear of fellow man. Man also damaged his environment almost irreparably by filling it with dirt, fumes and waste, using its resources as if there was a never-ending supply. Although man has outgrown his globe, he still has a chance of creating an environment of health and beauty, peace and plenty.

As noted in the introduction, the traditional purposes of human work-man's survival-can now be transcended, permitting man to take responsibility for the future shaping of human consciousness. Man has time to think and pursue leisure. Man has always had an urge to express himself through art. Prehistoric cave paintings prove that time and colour are as old a form of expression as sound and music. In the recent past artists, developed complex rules which threatened to exclude them from the masses. Today the artist by expressing himself within a community, teaches us how we might express ourselves and enjoy the self expression of others.

"Our senses are captives of our culture..." "Man sees only what he has learned or has been taught to see" (ref. 3)

To teach people to see what there really is, we first have to peel back the visual stereotypes that we project to the outside world. To do this we have to learn to open our senses and to experience the world as it really is. If man sees more, he might care more and become more involved and less inclined to destroy the environment - something he mistakenly sees as separate from himself. The world of Cormac Boyde (Ch 5. ref. 4) re-activates all the senses - sight, through forms and colours; smell through the peat, herbs and grasses used instead of plinths; touch through the textures and feel of the clay and organic materials; sound through the trickling of water through the organic bases.

Catherine Harpen's work causes "a battering of the senses (Ch 2 ref. 2) using images of the bog and the bog bodies, she is loading her art with content and meaning about man's relationship with man and with his environment. Harpen's work specifies things that people have happening in their own lives but maybe have no way of articulating.

Chris Drury by isolating the ordinary is continually trying to explore through his work his place in nature, and the place of nature in him. The viewer is unconsciously drawn into the equation. The interaction created by the work, whether it be a gallery situation or stone cairn stumbled upon during a hill walking expedition, creates and awareness of this vital connection between man and the landscape.

Similarly, the work of sculptors mentioned in both the Tir Saile and the Bogland Symposia is creating art in the landscape and with the landscape, heightening people's awareness of and accessibility to our natural wilderness.

According to Estyn Evans, Irish people have always felt a closeness to nature. This is particularly demonstrated in older Irish literature where a sense of harmony and mystery of man's place in nature is obvious. "The gods dwelt among the hills and he firing spirits of the land were ever present". (ref. 5)

While a pagan sense of communion with all living things runs through ancient tales and poetry a timeless bond between man and nature is apparent in modern Irish poetry - Seamus Heaney - "The ground itself is kind, black butter" (Bogland Poems 1965 - 1975). However the Christian interlude turned man's thought away from nature (Evans Ibid p. 69) The classic Christian tradition tended to isolate man from nature and the humanities from the sciences. But many pagan beliefs and customs survived and became entangled with our Christian traditions. It is claimed that Irish people cling to the past. For Prof. Carl Sauer, of the University of California, Berkeley this term "embraces the whole dynamic relation of life and land" (E Evans Ibid p 68). "It is from retrospective science, that the ability to look ahead can be acquired" (Prof. Sauer Ibid) This dynamism can be seen in the work of Irish artists discussed in this thesis as well as in the work of conservationists whose crusade is to protect our past as preserved in the history written in the bog and to enlighten our future by teaching us how to look at the familiar with a fresh eye. Changes in human insight however cannot be made in one sweep. Consciousness grows from seeds, like all men and all organisms. The artist and the scientist have started to show us the way towards our emerging ecological consciousness and a new ecological ethic.

References - Conclusion

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2. David Bellamy, op.cit. p.149
3. Edward T. Hall, "Art Space and the Human Experience" in Kepes (ed.), op.cit., p. 56.
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