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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

4TH YEAR CRAFT DESIGN: GLASS

"THE USE OF HAIR IN CONTEMPORARY ART " BY DONNA COOGAN

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN AND

COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF DESIGN; 1994

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the help that I have received from Alice Maher, Catherine Owens, Terry Niedzialek and Joanna Svensson.

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INTRODUCTION

Hair has always had a magic in it for me and, when I discovered that artists use it in their work, I felt like something in me had found its place.

The aim of this thesis is to research the work of four artists who use hair as a central element in their work. These artists are: Terry Niedzialek, Tunga, Alice Maher, and Catherine Owens. I will also use my own work. Each of the artists uses or represents hair in very different ways. Terry Niedzialek uses mixed media to create sculptures using the hair of live models, still attached to their head. Tunga works on a huge scale, representing hair in stories, performance pieces, and hanks of copper wire. Alice Maher gathers the hair of anonymous people and plaits and weaves it together into her pieces of work. Catherine Owens writes powerful poetry and paints, draws, and works with actual hair in her installations. I use my camera to take close-up photos of stray hair and make hair block portraits in glass.

This research will be backed up with the material on the historical background of hair through the ages which will show what a rich, powerful, substance hair has always been considered to be.

The research for this thesis has not been easily available. There are no books written on the artists I have chosen to discuss, and no general books on artists who use hair in their work. A lot of my research has involved making contact with artists and collecting material through galleries, magazine articles and catalogues. My research has taken me to Sweden (by phone!), London and America. Two of the people that I have been in touch with are themselves writing books about hair, but they are taking a few years to write them.





Fig 1. Running figures of Mimi spirit people with weapons: note the elaborate head-dresses.



Fig. 2 Women musicians: tomb of NAKHT

CHAPTER I

Ancient World

In this chapter, I will look at the use of hair down through the ages starting with the Ancient World in Egypt through to the eighteenth century French courts. Next, I will look at its use in tribes from Africa and Australia. Finally, I will look at how hair was used in the past and today in needlework and in jewellery.

Historical Background/Perspective

Since early man, hair adornment, and uses of hair fibre, have been in evidence. Cave paintings show mud, feathers, and animal skins used as hair adornment. (fig. 1)

Boxwood combs from the Stone Age, about 10,000 B.C. - indicate early examples of hairdressing. The Ancient civilisations have been very creative in the use of hair.

(Compton's Encyclopedia, 1991, p.8)

Ancient Egypt

The Egyptian court gods had a barber god. Shaven heads and smooth, hair-free bodies were signs of nobility in Egypt from about 3000 B.C. Wigs were widely worn. (fig. 2) In New Kingdom banqueting scenes, the royalty wore incense cones on top of their wigs. These cakes of perfumed grease melted down and made the Egyptian's linen tunic cling to every curve of their pumiced bodies, reinforcing the cosmetic and symbolic supremacy of their heads. (Cooper-Hewitt, Hair, 1980, p8) What a piece of performance art! Hair has a long history of being noted for its potency. Heavy wigs, especially when associated with nudity, could be erotic signals. In the New Kingdom story, the evil wife accuses her husband's brother of attempting to seduce her by reporting him as saying: "Come, let us spend an hour lying. Put on your wig." (Baines, 1984, p206)





Fig. 3 Wig worn by Marie Antoinette in 1778

Ancient Rome

The Romans believed that the spirit guarding the head would be seriously inconvenienced by washing. Plutarch records that hair washing was best performed on August 13th, the birthday of the goddess Diana. Wealthy Romans sprinkled gold dust on their hair to obtain the popular fair-haired look. (Charles, p63) The Romans usually depicted barbarians with beards and long tousled hair. (Cooper-Hewitt, 1980, p8)

Ancient Greece

Barber shops were the meeting place for political discussion, sport, social news and gossip. In the 5th century B.C., Athenian men began to wear shorter hair, cutting it in ritual offering to Hercules. Blond hair was rare and much admired. (Charles, p53)

Nomadic Tribes

Hair adornment was very popular with Nomadic tribes - after all, it was a very portable art. The ancient Scythians were famous for their long streaming manes and fabulous gold combs. (Cooper-Hewitt, 1980, p8)

Long hair was considered so vital to the Royal Frankish right of succession that, in the 6th century A.D. Queen Clotilde allowed her grandchildren to be murdered rather than shorn. (Cooper-Hewitt, 1980, p8)

French Courts of the 18th Century

Few cultures can boast a more extravagant manifestation of personal decoration as status than the huge battle scenes and gardens created for the heads of women of the French eighteenth century court. This sense of the excitement of making oneself an exhibit must have been felt by Marie Antoinette, who, on the occasion of greeting the

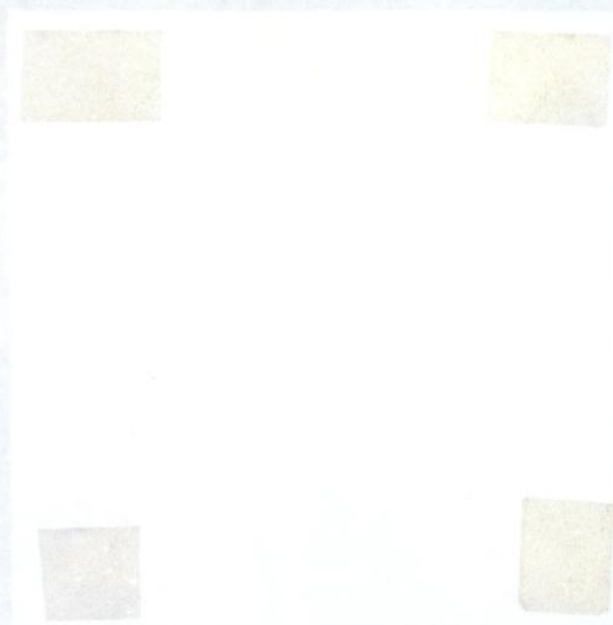




Fig. 4 Samburu Warrior



Fig. 5 Woman from Upper Volta: West Africa

U.S. Ambassador at the Paris shipyard in 1778, commissioned a wig replica of the ship which had transported Benjamin Franklin across the Atlantic. (fig. 3) (Reed, 1991, p5)

Tribes

Today, hair is considered to be superficial here in the West. But in primitive cultures people used to adorn their hair with twigs and other materials from nature as part of ritual. Creative expression through the hair has engaged the imaginations of many people.

African Hair Sculpture

African hair sculpture is an art. Africans rarely leave the hair on the body in its natural state, but spend a considerable amount of time and energy on grooming and self-adornment. There are so many examples of this all over Africa.

Examples include the Samburu people of East Africa whose culture revolves around designing, showing off and discussing personal appearance, particularly the elaborate hair styles in which the hair of warriors is lengthened with sisal string and covered with animal fat and ochre, so that it stands out in a visored helmet of hair. (fig. 4) (Reed, 1991, p4)

The women from Upper Volta, West Africa, stretch their hair over wing-like frames. (fig. 5) (Reed, 1991, p4) More extraordinary still are the Mangbettu women of Central Africa. A unique feature of the members of this ethnic group was the shape of their heads. Mangbettu mothers pressed the heads of their babies between pieces of giraffe hide or bark, which were tied tightly around the skull. As the head grew, the head bands were replaced. The result, after years of constant wrapping and re-wrapping (not unlike Chinese foot-binding!), was an elongated cone-shaped cranium, which was believed to increase the brain cavity and consequently to encourage greater intelligence. Hairstyles





Fig. 6 Mang Bettu woman





Fig. 7 Aboriginal man in full ceremonial design: patterns extend through the beard and hair.





Fig. 8 Aboriginal woman uses a traditional spindle to spin hair string.

were devised that accentuated the shape of the head. After much of the hair had been braided and wrapped around the forehead and lower part of the head a number of times, strands of hair growing from the crown were skilfully interwoven with straw to form a cylinder, which was secured to the scalp by hairpins made out of copper, wood, ivory, or bone. (fig. 6) (Sagay, 1985, p24) In Nigeria, the head is considered to be the seat of destiny and fortune and is therefore perceived to be the locus of power for both men and women.

Aborigines

In Australia, the traditional aboriginal arts include a wealth of spectacular personal adornments made from shells, feathers, and fibre. (fig. 7) Forms of personal clothing ranged from possum fur rugs, bearing the personal insignias of the wearers in the form of designs scratched into the hole, to other small items of clothing such as the simple hair string belts of Central Australian nomads, pulled tight to prevent hunger. Women and children enjoyed the simple social ritual of adorning each other's hair with grass seeds; pellets of clay were added for the same decorative purpose. In the desert regions, women spun human hair and the fur of small rabbit-like marsupials known as bilbies, as well as wallaby fur. A simple spindle is used to spin the hair and fur into hair belts and other items for ritual use. (fig. 8) (Isaacs, 1990, p113)

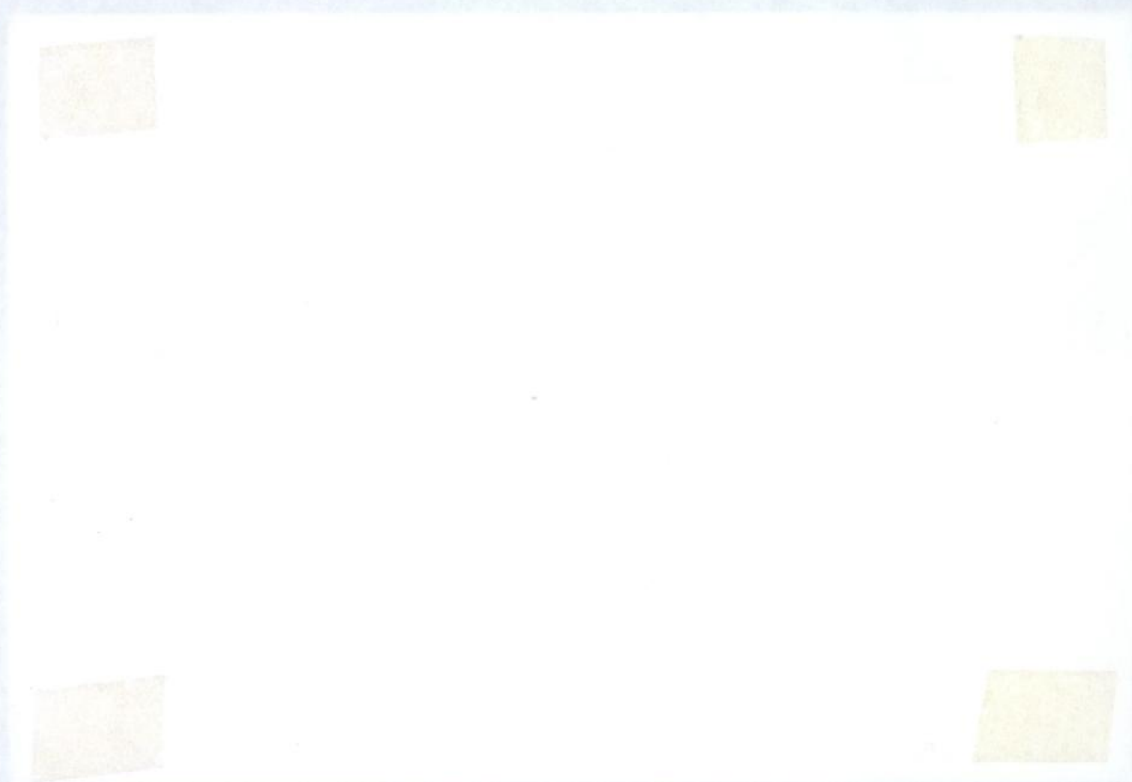




Fig. 9 Seven Scholars (detail) 1988: embroidered with silk and human hair at the JINAN GENERAL embroidery factory in China. 2.46 x 1.35 metres

Textile - Hairwork

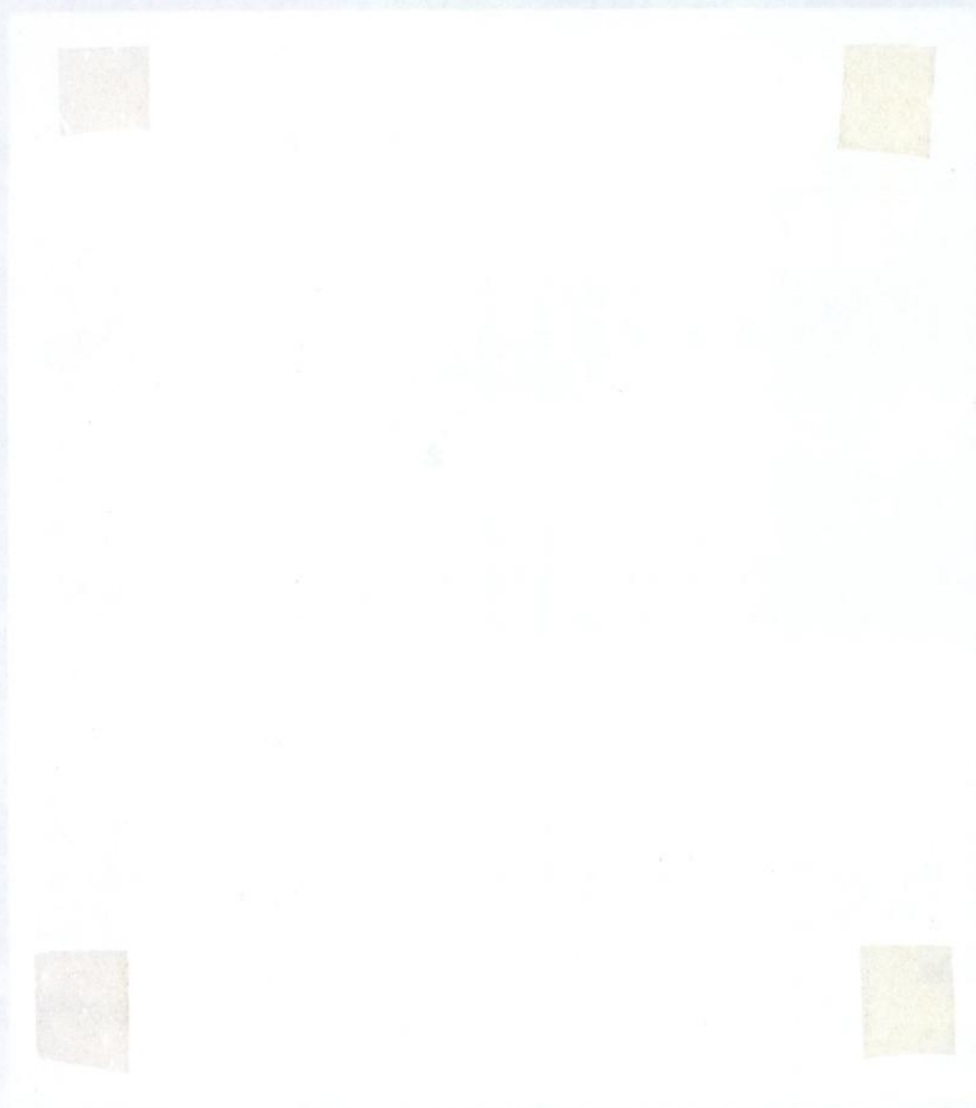
China - Painting with needle and human hair

Hair embroidery has been going on in China since the Tang Dynasty 618 - 906 A.D. Female believers in Buddhism would cut their hair and then use the hair to embroider Buddhist idols on satin, to show their devotion. A mixture of silk and human hair was used. Silk was used because of its fineness, and was ideal to show small detail. Silk can be divided into 120 pieces. Human hair strands cannot be divided and so, because of its rough texture, can produce very bold patterns. When the two materials were used together they looked harmonious in colour and texture. The human hair was first stripped of colour and then dyed different colours to suit the artists' needs. (fig. 9) The embroidery in figure 9 is based on a traditional Chinese painting by Fan Zeng, an art professor of Nankai University in Tianjin who is best known for his paintings of ancient Chinese historical figures. The embroidery shows seven literary individuals in different postures and expressions. (Wezhi, 1990, p10/11)

Mourning and Memorial Jewellery

Hair has for centuries and in many cultures been regarded as magical and, in some cases, amuletic. Hair of an enemy, burned, gave power. Enemies were scalped to form a collection of hair banners to indicate fierceness and prowess. Hair shirts indicated penance and virtue or conspicuous virtue. Many cultures used hair in various ways to express grief - by cutting it, throwing it on the body of the dead, wearing it unbraided or refusing to dress or comb it. Pialla tribe of New Guinea integrated ancestral hair into the head-dress.

In the age of the photograph, we find carrying around a loved one's vanished image more tasteful than wearing a discarded portion of their substance. Where today we would carry a photo of someone we love in a locket, in Victorian times one would carry



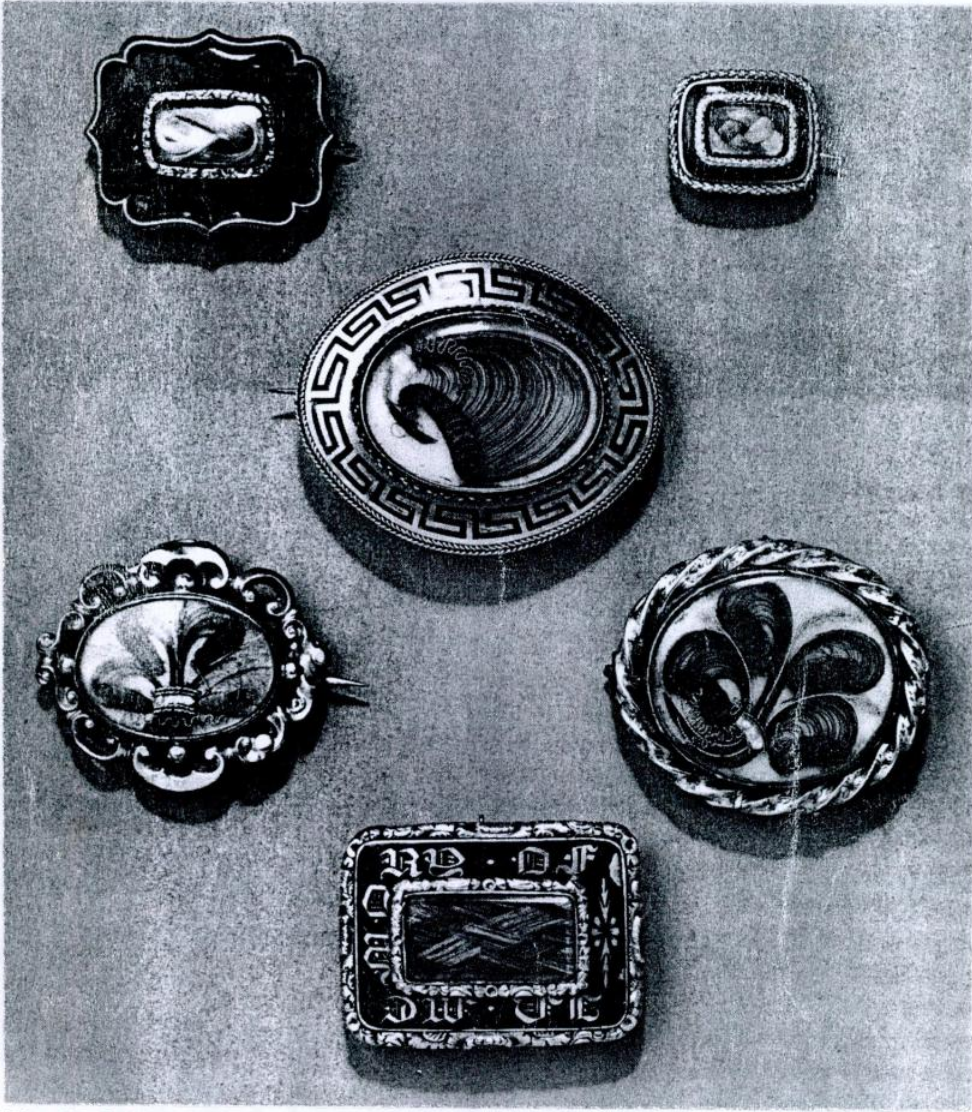


Fig. 10 Selection of mid-nineteenth century jewellery



United States
Hair Wreath, 19th century
Human hair

Fig. 12



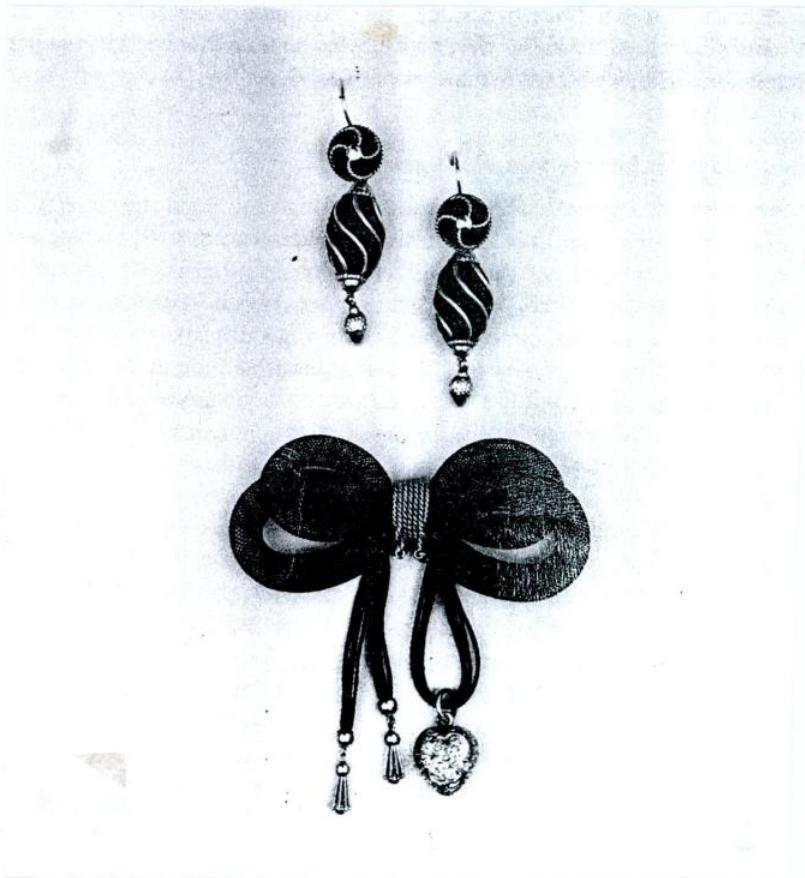
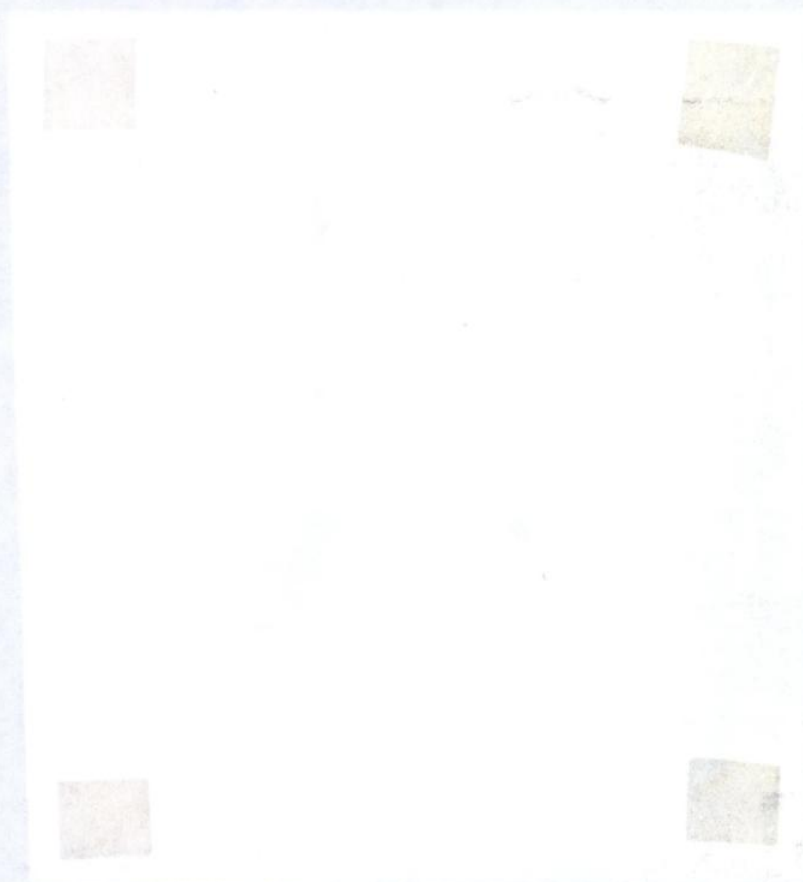


Fig. 11 Hollow-form work



lock of hair in one's locket. Hair has been used for jewellery as early as the 17th century. It experienced a revival at the end of the 18th century.

By the first third of the 19th century, its time had come. Early pieces were flat woven or braided plaits under crystal (fig. 10) . In the late 1830s and '40s more intricate and beautiful work came into favour. Hollow-form beads and three dimensional shapes were fashioned, using intricate interweaving techniques much like caning on chair seats (fig. 11), only on an exquisite and miniature scale. The resulting pieces, terminating in gold or metal hardware, were relatively imposing in size e.g. earrings with large tear-shaped drops. But these were so lightweight as to be barely noticeable to the wearer. Necklaces were, not surprisingly, prickly and scratchy and so were worn against high-necked gowns. Because of the strength of the hair, the pieces were surprisingly resilient. Although initially hair workers used hair from the dead beloved, by the 1850s it was considered very dangerous to trust some soulless commercial workshop to make up pieces since there was no guarantee that the hair of the person commemorated was actually being used. To insure against this, pattern books published detailed instructions enabling women to make their own jewellery. The hair wreath was another item that was made then. (fig. 12) (Warner, 1986, p58)

Hairwork Today

There is an area in Sweden called Värmland where the tradition of hairwork has never died out. Through my research, I made contact with an American woman called Joanna Svensson who is a hairworker. She is married to a Swedish man and has been living in Sweden for many years. Joanna told me that not alone was mourning jewellery currently being made but also hair objects that were tokens of affection made for weddings and other joyous occasions. In fact, I sent her some of my own long hair which she made into a pair of earrings for me. (figs. 13/14) In the last century in Sweden, there were as many as 1,800 hair workers. Many of them travelled to foreign countries to work. They would travel in groups of three or four people, all on the same passports. Joanna



Fig. 13 Heart-shaped earrings made from hair taken from Donna Coogan's head, 1993



Fig. 14 Detail of above hair earrings

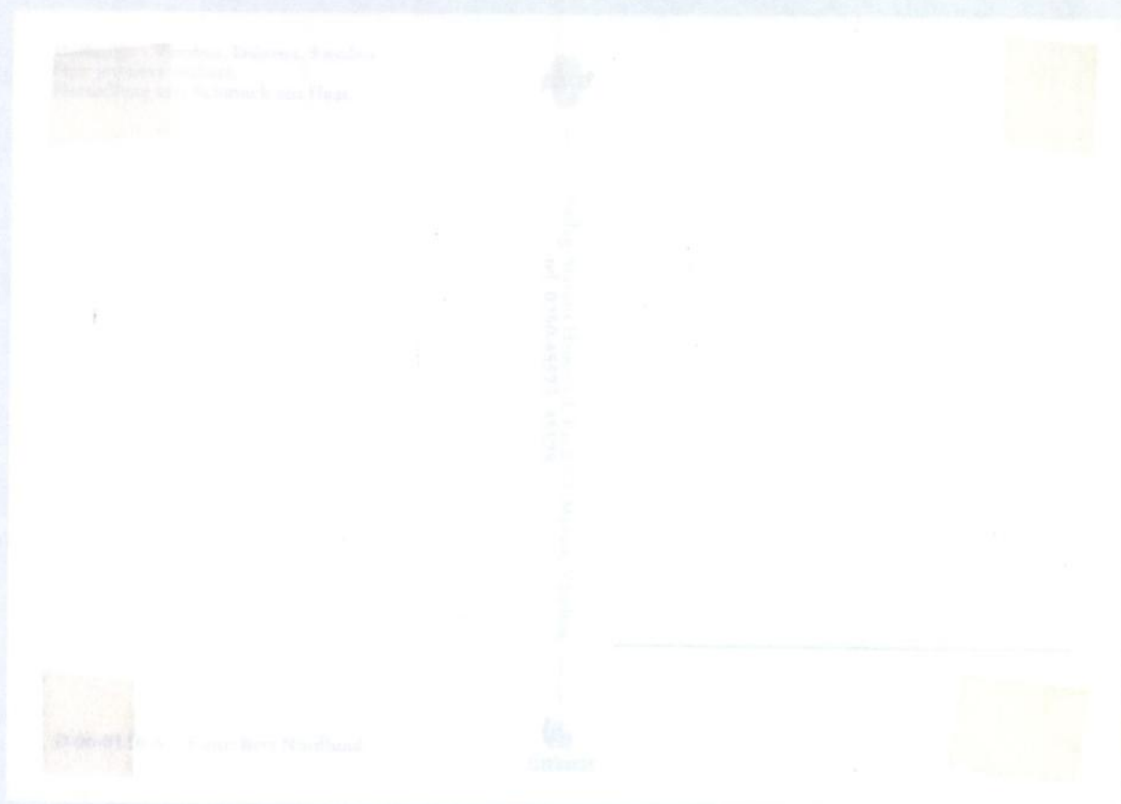




Fig. 15 Hairworkers today and their tools - Vämhus



Fig. 16 Hairwork from Vämhus



confirmed that there was indeed a reluctance in people to trust hairworkers. So, often, the woman of the family that wanted the hairwork done would insist that the hairworker made the piece of work at the woman's own home. Joanna said that the hairworker would be tempted to substitute the hair if it was damaged and hard to work with or, if they could, they might take a little of the hair for their own use. Some of the hair workers would be as young as fourteen years old. Today in Våmhus, which is the only place left in Sweden where the work is done, there are about sixty workers, twenty of which would be working commercially. (fig. 15) Their customers might normally be an older woman who would want a piece of work made to give to her grandchildren or other customers who might want jewellery or modern pieces. (fig. 16) The pieces are worn by old and young alike. The doughnut-shaped braiding table, using weights and pins to make the jewellery, has not changed in design at all. The hair, for use in making a piece of work, is required to be at least one foot long. Sometimes Joanna will advise the customer to come back next Summer when the hair is long enough. (Hair these days is only half as long as it was on the average person in 1920.) There is now a revival of interest in the craft in America and Germany. Mark Campbell's book The Art of Hairwork, first printed in 1902 - 1908, has now been reprinted in Germany.

Superstition

It could be said that from my point of view superstition plays little part in my life. I know some superstitions like "You should never wash your hair during your periods.", but would take little notice of them, would consider them groundless tales. When one reads of some of the superstitions held in some cultures, it is hard to credit that they were believed, which they definitely were. There are a lot of superstitions built up around hair, not surprisingly, given its perceived potency and power.

Superstitions include various ideas. It used to be believed that if girls wanted to make their hair grow luxuriantly, the right time to have it cut was when there was a new moon; and their hair would go grey prematurely and lose its shine if they cut it at the

dark of the moon. It was also believed that girls would suffer from headaches and dull hair if they cut their hair in March; and cutting hair at night would reduce a girl's sexuality. There is a more useful one - a cure for Asthma! It was believed that asthma was a disease that was transferred through hair. To be cured, the patient had to bore a hole in a black oak tree. This had to be at the same height as the patient's own head. The patient then put a lock of their own hair into the hole and blocked up the hole with a wooden peg. This idea was also used by the people in Kentucky. They thought that they could cure a cold by putting hair or nail clippings into a hollow tree.

One of the places that was rampant with superstitions was the sea. Sailors would not cut their finger-nails or hair when the sea was calm because they believed that it would bring gales. (Hill, 1968, p34, 73, 96)*

* This book gives no dates or countries of origin.

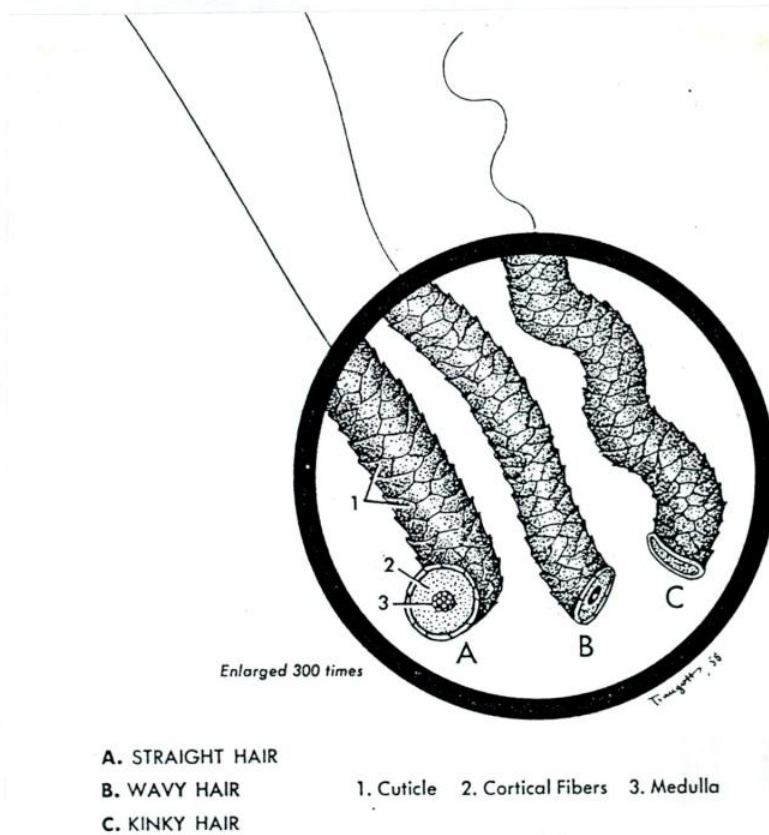


Fig. 17

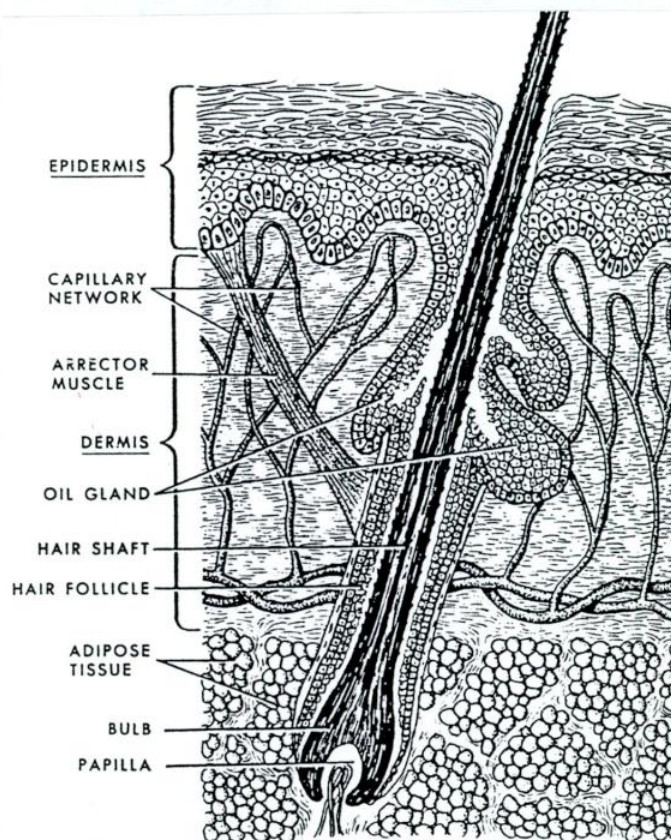


Fig. 18



CHAPTER II

In this chapter, I will look at how contemporary artists are using hair in their work. I will focus in on the work of Terry Niedzialek, Tunga, Alice Maher, Catherine Owens, and my own work.

Hair as a Contemporary Art Medium

"Hair is a slender, flexible structure found on the surface of mammals." (Compton's Encyclopedia, Vol. 10 H, 1991, p7) This is one of the differences between mammals and the rest of the animal kingdom. There are different amounts and place of hair growth on the different kinds of mammals. We know that the entire body of a cat, goat, horse is covered with hair. The whale and hippopotamus have only a few hairs. In apes and humans, there is no hair on the soles of the feet or the palms of the hand. "Human hair consists of a root, embedded in the skin, and a shaft, projecting from the skin surface. The root ends in a soft, whitish enlargement, the hair bulb." (Compton's Encyclopedia, Vol. 10 H, 1991, p7) It is amazing to note that the different types of hair are shaped differently. Straight hairs are cylindrical, wavy hairs are oval and curly hairs are flattened in cross section. (figs. 17 & 18)

Hair is organic fibre: Cloth is made from the hair of sheep, goats, camels. Felt for hats is made from hare and rabbit hair. Carpet padding and gymnasium mats use cow hair. Upholsterers use horsehair from tails and manes. Artists' brushes use the hair from squirrels, camels, badger, sables. Wigs and hairnets use human hair. (Compton's Encyclopedia, Vol. 10.11, 1991) Even though hair grows out of the body, there is no pain felt when we cut it. Hair is immortal since it continues to grow after we are dead. (We know the colour of the hair of some Pharaohs, of their Queens and slaves.) So, given all we know about this amazing substance, hair - its strength, nervelessness, imperishability, flexibility, magic - it is hardly any wonder that we find artists using it in their work. (Warner, 1991)

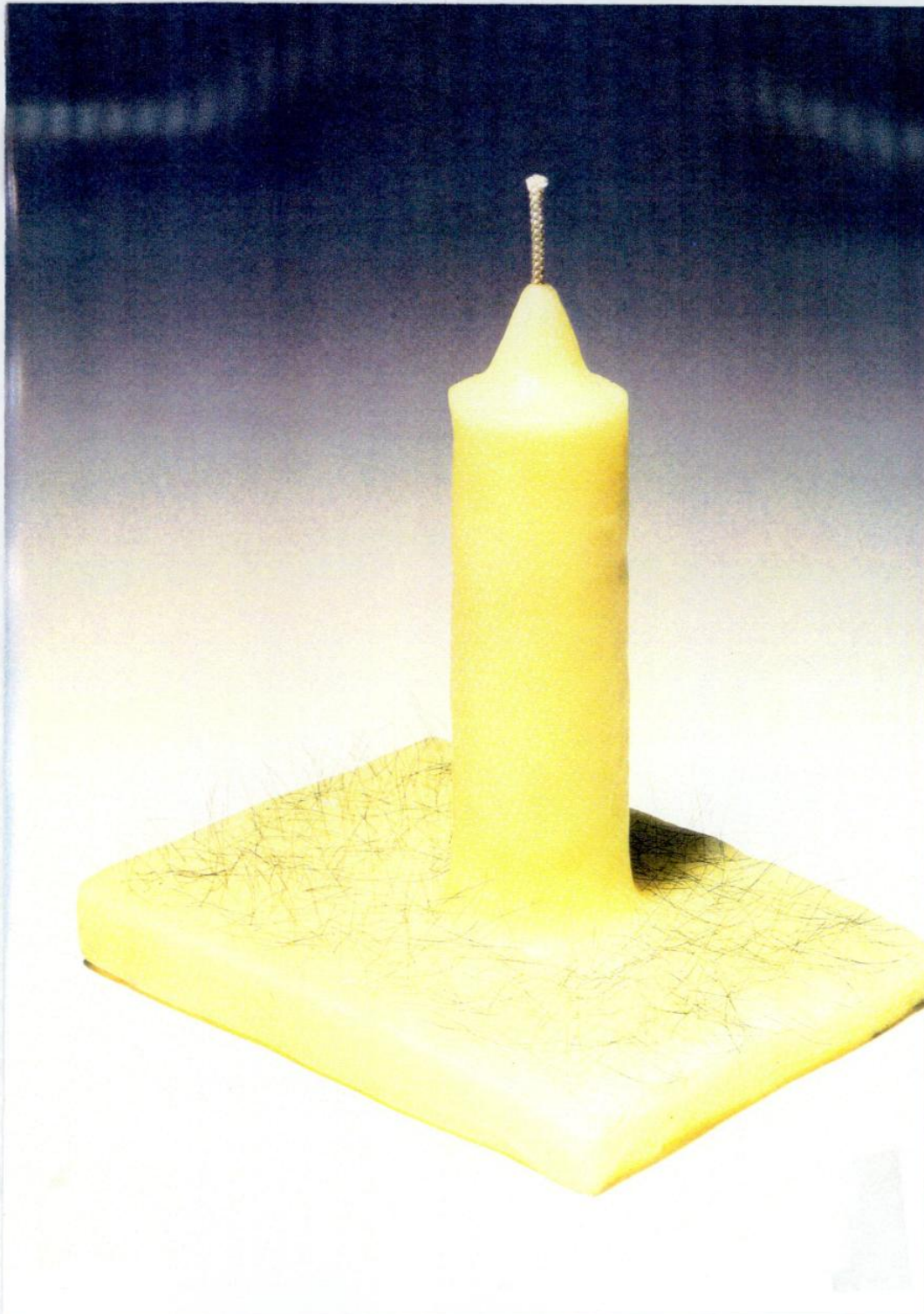


Fig. 19 Untitled (candle) wax and human hair, 1991



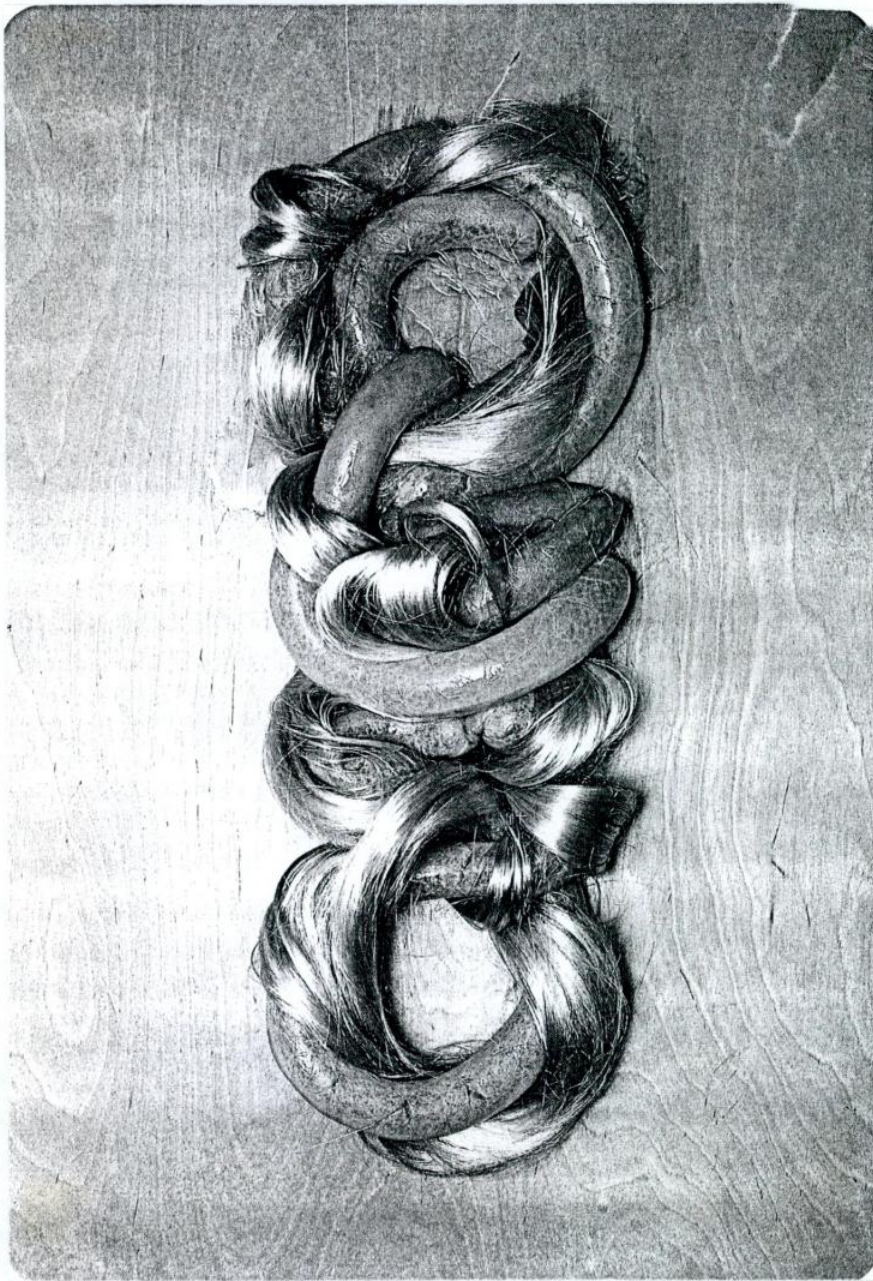


Fig. 20 Quite Contrary: Blond hair and pig's gut, 1991

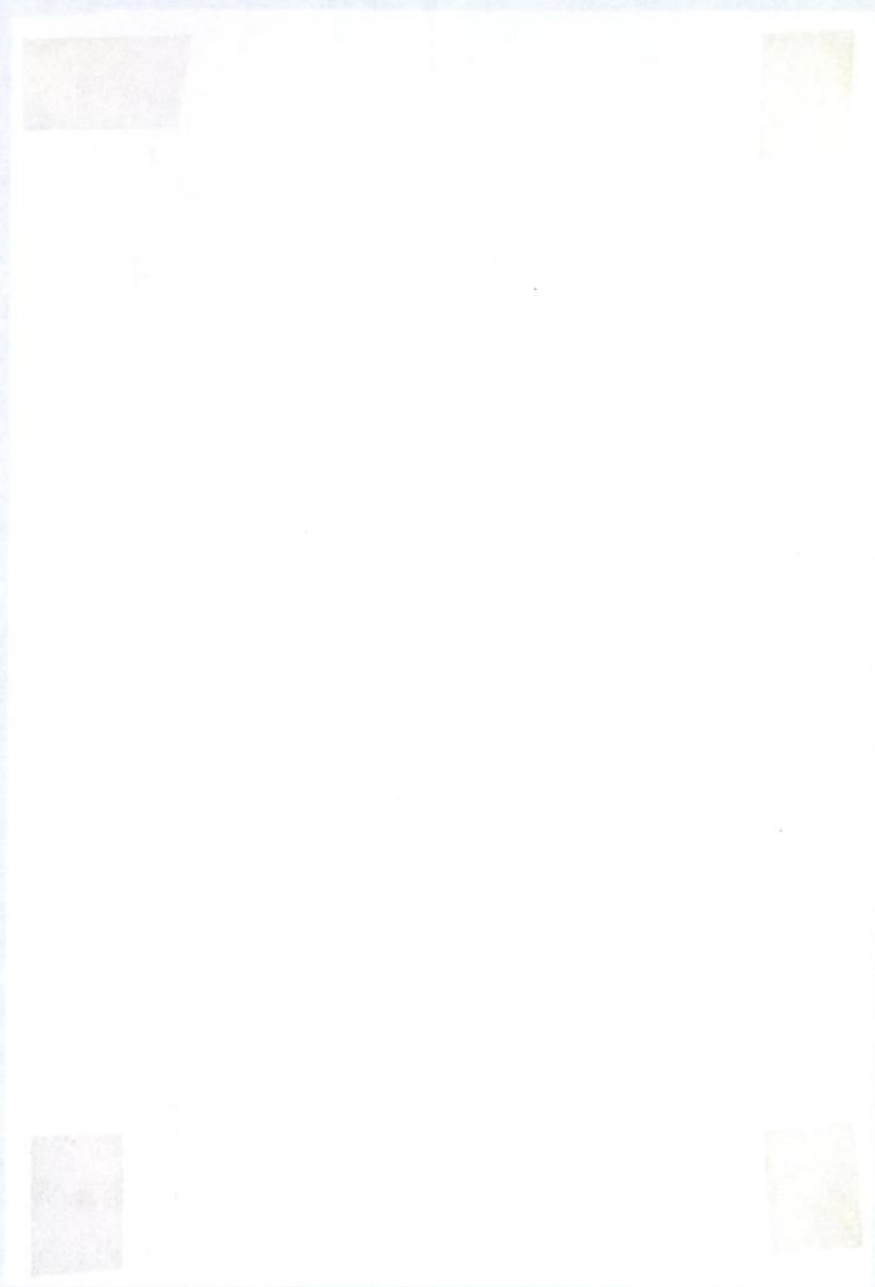




Fig. 21 Hair Pie: short crust pastry and human hair, 1991



WILLIAM T. HAN
HARVARD
ALBANY, N.Y.

ALBANY, N.Y. 12202

Contemporary Artists who use Hair in their Work

Given hair's perceived strength and potency, it is hardly surprising that artists have drawn on this for their work. The use of bodies or body parts is very prevalent in sculpture today. A lot of these artists incorporate hair into their work - artists such as Paul Thek who made a piece entitled Birthday Cake (1967) The piece is made of beeswax, hair, candles, stainless steel and plexi. The effect intended is that of raw meat. Four flat, thick, square slabs are stacked up pyramidally, in diminishing tiers or steps. Each tier is covered with a thin layer of ivory-coloured fat which serves as 'icing'. The 'icing' is sprinkled with a light coat of fine curling hair. Twenty-one birthday candles pierce the Birthday Cake all over by sharp points of the plastic candle holders. It is really to be eaten and, since the living source of the flesh is uncertain, we may entertain the possibility that it is human - the hair suggests as much. (Cotter, 1991, p125)

Robert Gober also uses wax and hair in a lot of his work. (fig. 19) A wax candle rising up from a hairy base is an obvious but impotent phallic symbol. Helen Chadwick draws on the 'blond is beautiful' myth to create maximum effect in her piece Quite Contrary (1991) (fig. 20) where she entwines long blond hair and pig's gut. Irish artist, Brigid Teehan bakes a hair pie. (fig. 21) Kiki Smith's print is informally known as The Hair Print. (1990) Anselm Kiefer uses straw to represent blond hair in his paintings, responding to the poem '*Todesfuge*' by Paul Celan which was written in a concentration camp in 1945. Although many artists, such as these, have used hair in some aspect of their work, the artists that I have chosen to discuss in depth are focused on hair that comes from the head, where hair is the central part of their work. The artists are Terry Niedzialek, Tunga, Alice Maher, and Catherine Owens.

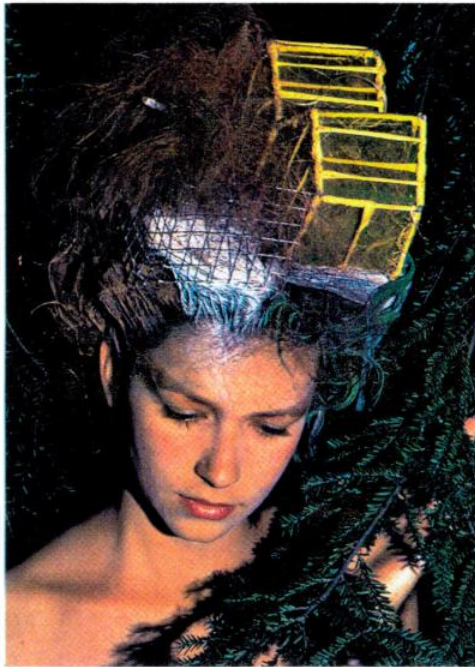


Fig.22 Terry Niedzialek: The Greenhouse Effect

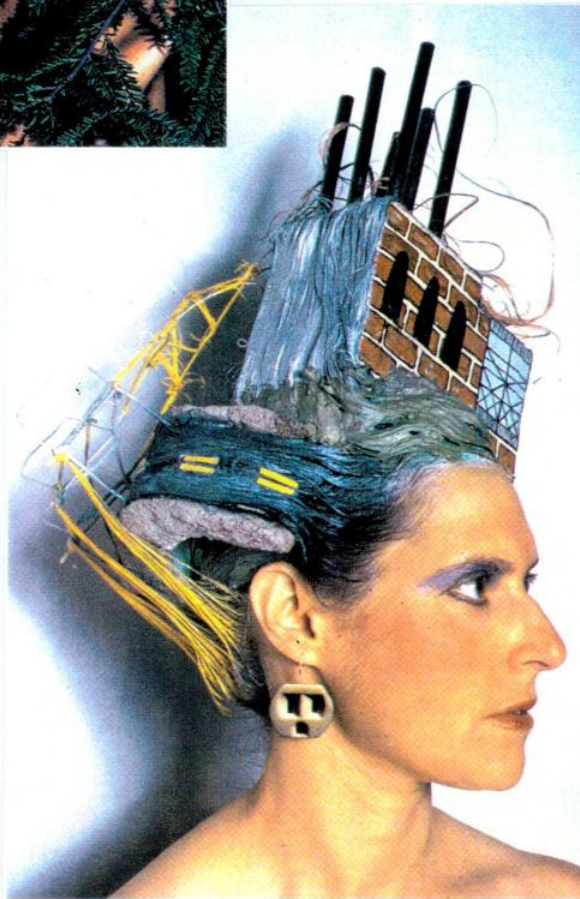
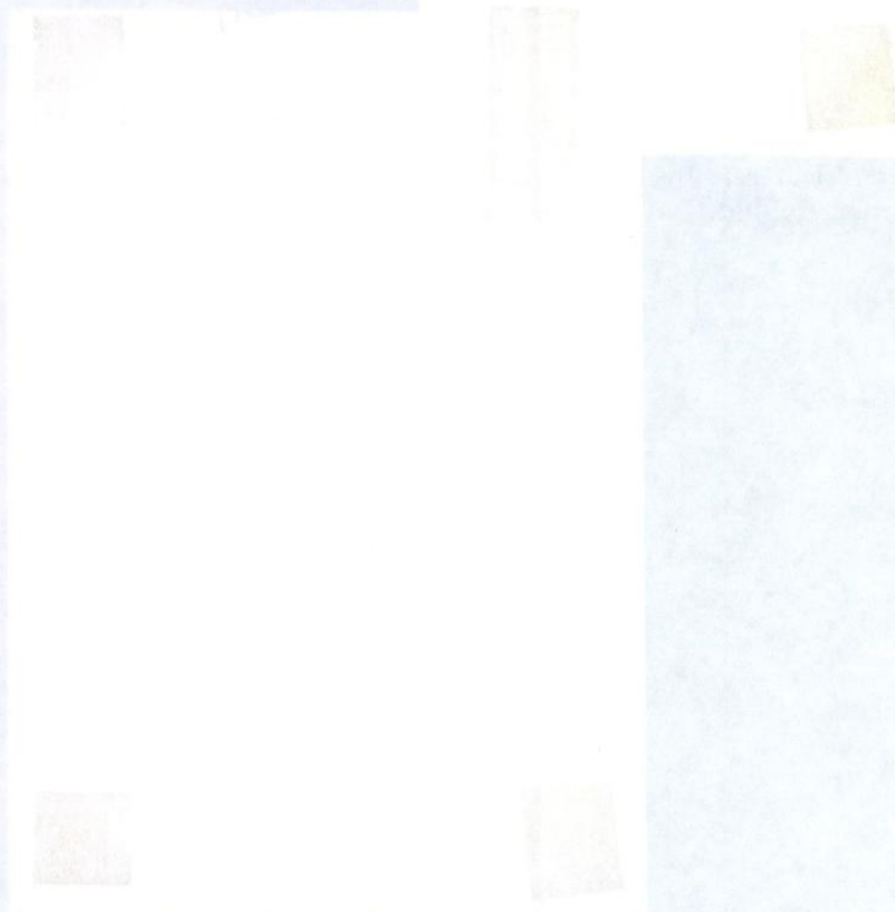


Fig. 23 Terry Niedzialek: Industrial Hair Sculpture



TERRY NIEDZIALEK

Of all the artists whose work I have looked at and will discuss, Terry Niedzialek's work, it could be said, is the most straightforward in that each head is a complete work of art with nothing concealed - an immediate visual. When I came across accounts of her work, I was very excited. There are certain parallels between Terry Niedzialek's and my own background which I will later discuss.

Terry Niedzialek's work is very different to other artists that work with hair in that she is working with hair while it is still attached to a living person's head.

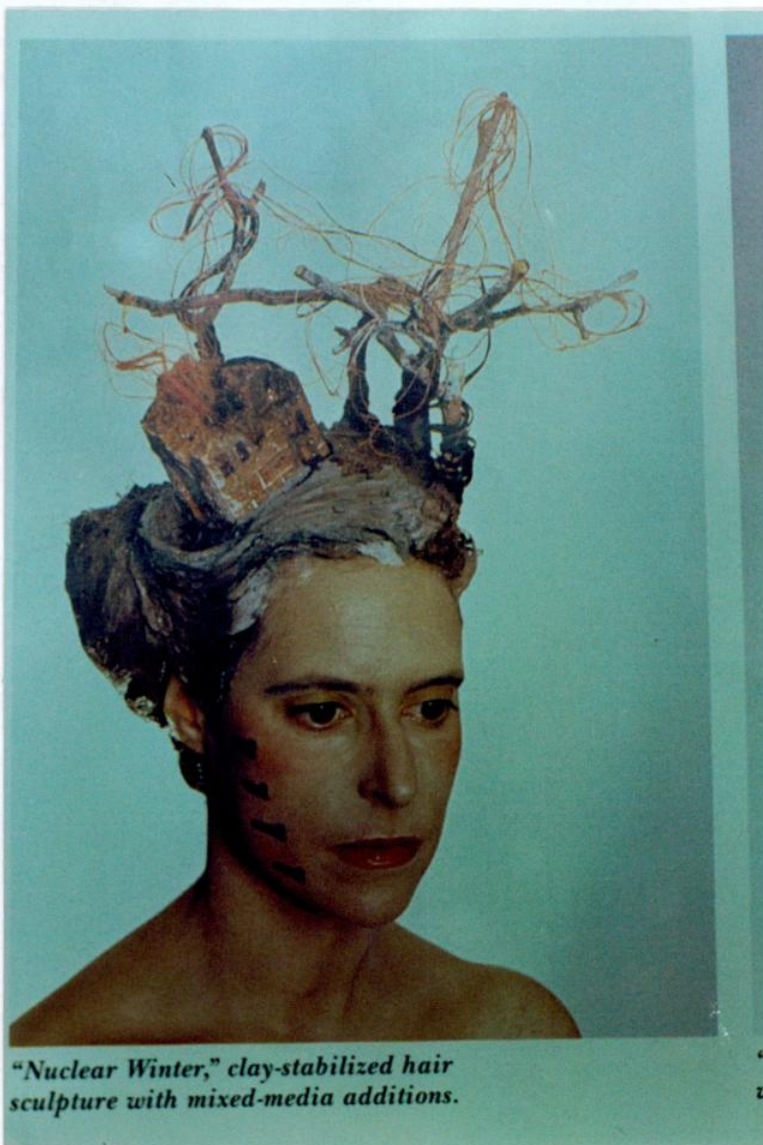
"Terry Niedzialek is a fiber artist whose medium is the fibre closest to all of us - human hair." (Friedman, 1991, p34) She started working with hair at fourteen years of age as a hairdresser and worked at it for ten years. Then, as she says herself, "There's just so much you can do cutting hair. I got bored with it so I went to Art school." (Friedman, 1991, p35) All through art college she continued to supplement her income by styling hair. This, I feel, is a very important point because all through Art School in Colorado, doing large sculptural works, utilising cement, wood, and steel rods in a structural way, she always still had her hands in hair. She was married to an avant garde visual and performance artist called Julius Vitali. It was her husband who was the first to see how compatible the two ways of working (hairdressing and construction work) were and suggested that she begin making art with hair. "It was the material I had the most experience with," recalls Niedzialek, "so It made a lot of sense to incorporate it into my sculpture." (Friedman, 1991, p35)

So Terry Niedzialek changed things around. Instead of styling the head by cutting away at the hair, she works with what is already there and adds to it. She creates new textures and shapes by adding wire, clay, foam, sticks, ornaments and gels. She "explores its narrative and thematic potential." (Reed, 1991, p3) She combines ancient and contemporary methods with new techniques she has developed.





Fig. 24 Terry Niedzialek: The Bride's Lighthouse



"Nuclear Winter," clay-stabilized hair sculpture with mixed-media additions.

Fig. 25



In Greenhouse Effect (fig. 21), she used clay, hair gel, tempera paint, hardware, cloth, wire, tree branches, photo gels. "Rich tangles of green and brown hair tumble below the diorama of the greenhouse, suggesting roots." (Reed, 1991, p3) Terry Niedzialek's hair montages are environmental sculptures and she wants them to transform people's consciousness about their environment and their place in it. Adrienne Reed, in her essay on Terry Niedzialek's work in Lehigh University catalogue, breaks the work up into three main categories: Images taken from industrial society; images of nature; and images of tension between society and nature.

Industrial Hair Montage (fig. 22) depicts chimney stacks, black and ominous on top of a brick building surrounded by murky waste and tension between the taut hair and fencing. The Bride's Lighthouse (fig. 23) is a beautiful, expansive piece with its isolated lighthouse scene interacting with the motion of the beautiful rounded blue sea curl. In Nuclear Winter (fig. 24) the crippled distorted trees in tangled earth are showing us the destruction that man can cause to the earth. (Reed, 1991, p7) Hair is part of the human body, and the human body is part of the environment, part of the earth.

"Sculpting with hair on the head, the artist manipulates fiber on an ellipsoid, and also works with a medium which is literally alive and growing." (Reed, 1991, p4). In Brooks Adams article in Hair and History, he says: "Hairstyles have never been and can never be a pure art form. They have always involved compromise between the hairdresser and the client, the idea and the reality, the natural attributes and the cosmetic or technological possibilities." (Adams, 1980, p7) This was written in 1980 and Niedzialek's first hair sculpture was created in 1983. I believe if Brooks Adams were to see Terry Niedzialek's work he would have to add "except in the case of Terry Niedzialek's work".

Workshops

Niedzialek does about thirty workshops a year in high schools, colleges, galleries, museums, and culture centres around the country. Dan Friedman says that "Niedzialek's workshops are characterized by a great deal of interaction between her and the viewers." "She explains what she is doing as she goes along, answers questions and generally engages in dialogue with those who have come to watch." (Friedman, 1991, p36) This is not unlike a larger scale version of what used to go on in the hairdressers where Niedzialek began. It is amazing that when you take a person who has learned the skills of listening and communicating with people (as while Niedzialek was a hairdresser) and put those same skills into a different setting (as in a workshop or art college), the cross-over of skills can work very well. Niedzialek also does workshops in which the students create hair montages on each other. They walk around the school showing off their montages and it becomes an event, a happening, for the whole school. Niedzialek recounts that often her students say things like "it's great to use you own body as a part of a sculpture, it seems so natural, it should be a part of every art class." (Friedman, 1991, p36)

Transient Nature

Unlike most fibre art, which can last for years or even centuries, hair montages are by nature transient, never lasting more than a day or two. "The temporary nature of the work makes it wonderful", says Niedzialek. "You can do it over and over again. When you're tattooed, that's it, you can only have one tattoo on a particular part of your body per lifetime. A hair montage is not an artifact, it's more like a special event." (Friedman, 1991, p36) I totally agree with this point and I believe that the temporary nature of the work insures that this artist is able to let go and move on with constant fresh starts.

In an interview included in the text of the catalogue of Niedzialek's exhibition in Lehigh University, PA, 1991, when asked what attracts her to hair as a medium, Niedzialek replies:

I really don't know. When I have my hands in someone's hair, it has a totally different sensibility than a blob of clay because it's alive. But even more than the life coming from within, I'm really focused on the outer influences coming to bear on the person. The living model is a vehicle to embody those outer influences. I feel that I too am a vehicle connected to the earth and the universe. I am absorbing that primal connection in contrast to our current culture. I feel all the cultures that do and have existed and their relationship with the earth. In my living are all those contrasts and conflicts actualized

Influences

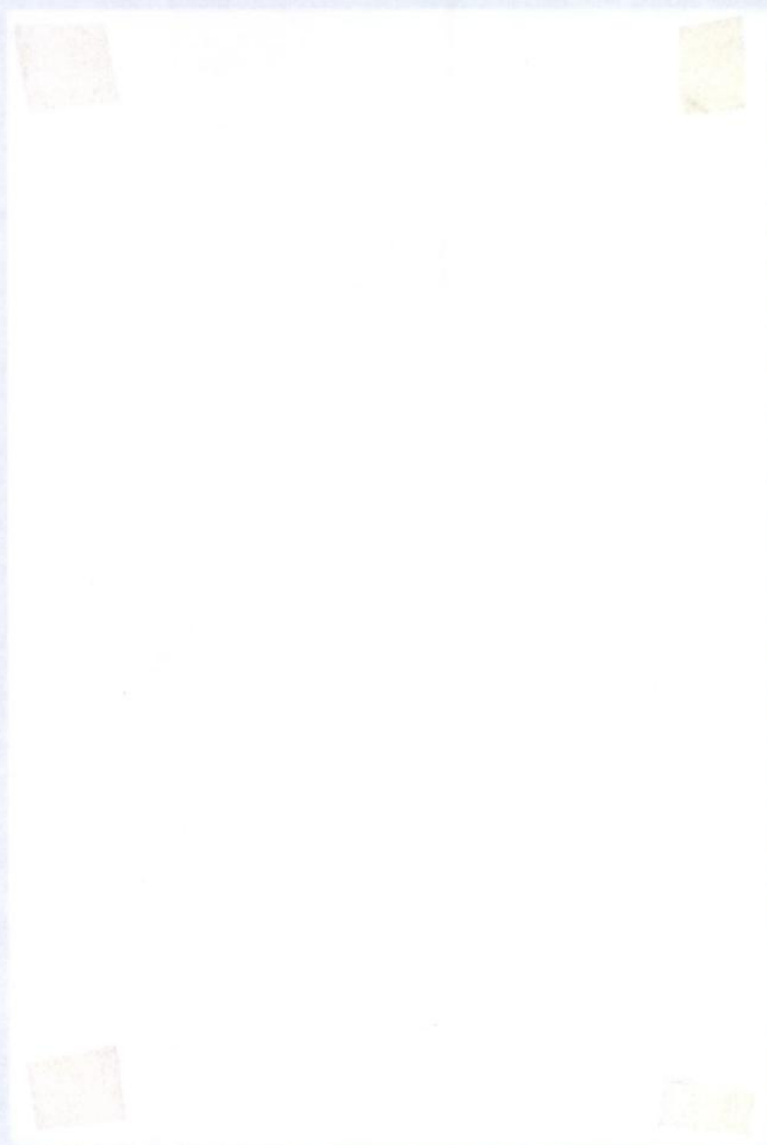
Niedzialek says that she feels that her work has grown from the elaborate creations of eighteenth century Europe as well as from the ritual adornment of aboriginal tribes. But she states that she did not know about either of them before she started working. She makes the interesting point about some kinds of knowledge being in our genes, what is called "Genetic Memory" (Reed, 1991, p10)

Conclusion

It could be said that Terry Niedzialek's work is part of a continual thread that has run through history. Just like the Aborigines and the Africans, she had her hands in hair from an early age and she uses that contact to create.



Fig. 26 Tunga, Scalpe, 1984



TUNGA

Tunga was born in Brazil in 1952. I find Tunga's work incredibly exciting. It surprises, shocks and fascinates all at the same time. It is an adventure, full of outsized visuals, live performance pieces and intriguing stories. It was very difficult to get information on Tunga. I managed to get four catalogues from Scotland, England and Chicago and two magazine articles from my own library. The same essay, written by Guy Brett was in three of the catalogues. Of all the exhibitions that I regret not seeing, 'Tunga' (Whitechapel, May/June 1989) is the one I am most sorry about. It is one exhibition that I feel would have made a huge impact on me.

The hair theme in Tunga's work originated from a story that Tunga wrote about female Siamese twins, joined by their hair. The scalp of the girls is given to a woman; after their death, this woman takes two blond hairs from the scalp to use in one of her embroideries which is based on an image that she had dreamt of. As she is working with the hair, it turns to metal that resembles gold. After some time the scalp and the embroidering woman find themselves in the Temple of Yun Ka. The men who live in this temple spent their time painting on silk. They are captivated by the woman's embroidery and, so, they drug her so that she would be in a continual state of sleepiness and could then produce more images that they could use for their paintings. (Warner, 1991, p11)

Guy Brett wonders why Tunga produced such a crazy story. Brett comments that maybe this story, which mixes the ordinary with the extraordinary, is Tunga's way of mocking the museum and art world's acceptance of what makes a piece of art work valid as a work of art. (Brett, 1990, p54) Marina Warner feels that the story acts as a source of inspiration for Tunga in his three dimensional work (Warner, 1991, p11) as in Scalpe (fig. 26) In this piece of work, he takes the idea of the scalp from the Siamese twins which was already perceived to be a huge mass of hair, and creates an even larger volume of hair/wire. I feel that there is an enormous feeling of energy in Tunga's work, I am totally sympathetic to his use of materials, especially metal and wire. For me there



Fig. 27 Tunga: Metal plates with huge hanks of copper wire and chips of metal attached to them. 1989



is a strong association of energy, electricity, current in the use of metals as a material in Tunga's art pieces. I feel this especially so when all his pieces are made on a huge scale, filling a whole room with their enormous presence.

Installation

"A quick glimpse of Tunga's installation as you enter the room reveals a large cone-like structure, two metres high, with plaits of giant's hair sweeping around the floor. Step carefully and slowly around this fantasy and follow the winding path of the wisps of wire as they become first copper curls and then playful plaits. The plaits emerge from between two stalwart metal comb-like sheets which are held together with corn-on-the-cob (!) and covered with brains which appear to cling on helplessly." (Oona Strathern, 1989, p380) (fig. 27)

This work is not unlike Terry Niedzialek's work in that she is working with live hair on the head, drawing on its life force energy. Then we look at Tunga's work, which I feel resembles and re-enacts the live energy and action of work in progress that one might see on a hairdresser's floor. The hair/wire in Tunga's sculpture looks like it has just been handled by human hands and is charged with life force energy. The scale of the work, its giant size, forces and impact. Just like the giant-sized fantasy of the story of the Siamese twins.

"Narrative is a thread (yarn), like thread out of the labyrinth or like the gold thread in embroidery which enriches the surrounding dross. It also connects with the hair/wire in Tunga's sculpture." (Brett, 1990, p55)

Siamese Twins

Oona Strathern (Jan/June, 1989, p380) goes on to say that, while talking with Tunga at the Whitechapel exhibition (1989), she did a double-take as she watched a girl walk past and smile at him. A split second later, the girl walks past again and then Strathern notices that the girl's hair sweeps down to the ground, and sweeps up again, joining on



Fig. 28 Tunga: Siamese Twins



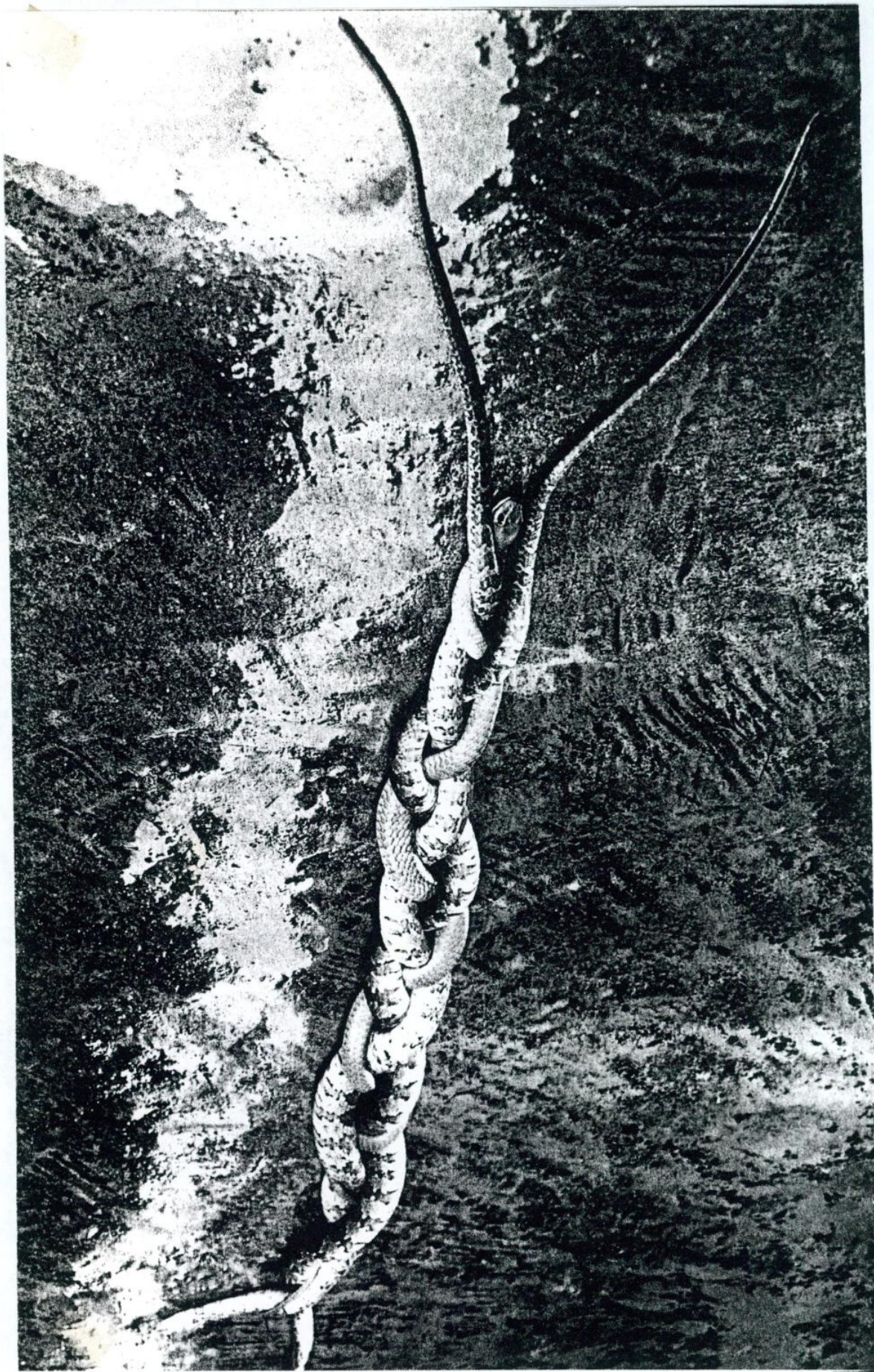


Fig. 29 Tunga: Avant-garde Vipérinne - 3 plaited and anaesthetised snakes, 1986



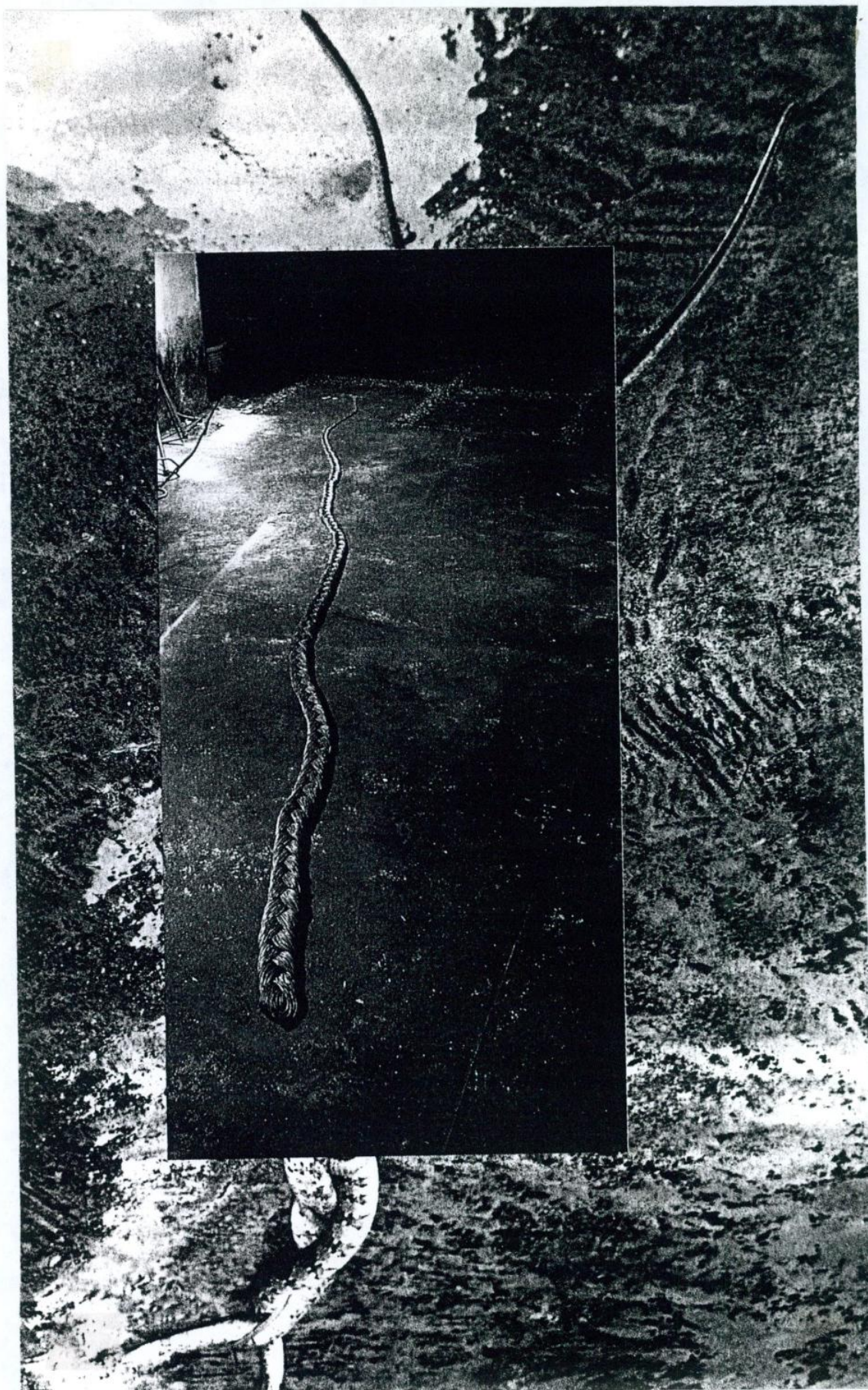


Fig. 30 Tunga, Tresse (plait) No. 3, 1983 - Lead - 300cm x 15cm



to the head of the first girl. These 'Siamese Twins' of Tunga's, joined by the hair, are typical of the way his work surprises, shocks and fascinates at the same time. (fig. 28)

The idea of Siamese twins conjures up the idea of immense difficulties of separation. Tunga's twins are joined by their hair. Realistically, they could be separated instantly with a snip of a scissors. Tunga is drawing on our perception of what Siamese twinhood means, joined by flesh. He is also using the power of storytelling, in which we open up and allow ourselves to be told a story which can be as far-fetched as he likes. We are using passive listening and we do not feel threatened by the unbelievable aspects of the story because we know them not to be real. So the use of narrative makes us become more receptive to the subtleties of what the artist wants us to know. Because of the power of the hair in connecting the two lives as one, one knows it would not be a simple operation; the severing of the deep contact and energy, running unbroken, uninterrupted between the two girls. Only at the time of death is the hair cut, and it still has and shows its power by changing into gold and being such an influence over other people's lives. This would seem to me to echo a lot of the respect that hair has been given right through the ages.

Snakes

In the Dictionary of Symbols, it states that the plait is symbolic of intimate relationships, intermingling streams, and interdependence. One of Tunga's performance pieces was where he plaited three anaesthetised snakes (figs. 29 & 30) to make a living work of art where the performance reaches its high point when the snakes shed their skins and slowly unplaited themselves as they came back to life as the effect of the anaesthetic wore off them. (Strathern, 1989, p38) This ties in with the wire plaits/hair, live energy, Siamese twins. It is my opinion that Tunga is showing that even though we fully sympathise with the hair join of the Siamese twins, ultimately the twins had the choice whether they, themselves really wanted to separate. Linked together willingly by the energy of their hair - a dependency with choice.

Conclusion

I think the impact of Tunga's work is enormous. He whisks together his own live energies with those of the materials he uses and draws in the viewer. His own work reaffirms all the attention and power that has been associated with hair right through the ages. He keeps his subject broad by not using the real hair of any particular person (except the twins, which was personal and still attached) and represents hair with giant hanks of wire and strands of plaited snakes. I think his work succeeds in a very live way, full of energy, content and variety.

IRISH ARTISTS

There are two main Irish artists, that I am aware of, whose hair as an important part of their work. Alice Maher, working and living in Ireland, and Catherine Owens, working and living in New York. I was able to make contact with both of these women and ask them directly about hair and their work.

ALICE MAHER

I said at the very beginning how excited I was when I discovered that some artists used hair as a main feature in their work. It was while watching a program about Alice Maher's work, The Keep, that I made that discovery. Alice Maher was born in Tipperary in 1956. She went to art college in Cork and Belfast between 1981 and 1986. The following year, she was awarded a Fullbright Scholarship for further study at the San Francisco Art Institute. She has shown work in solo and group exhibitions every year since 1986. Since she tutors part-time at N.C.A.D., I was able to make direct contact with her and she very kindly accepted questions and wrote answers to them for me. (See Appendix I)

I wanted to know if hair had always been an important part of Alice Maher's visual research and drawing. Maher's early interests centred around mythology and folktales and an interest in female identity and the image of femaleness as it comes down to us through the centuries. She was always thinking about power and strength. She told me that she often employed images of objects which held a powerful symbolism in her work e.g. the use of horns on a 'female' figure to denote a relocating of power, or the use of body hair for the same purpose.



Fig. 31 Alice Maher: The Thicket, 1990

STEVEN MEYER
Drawing for "The Thicker" 1990
Mixed media on paper
1490 mm x 1120 mm
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
Copyright 1990, Art 100/100

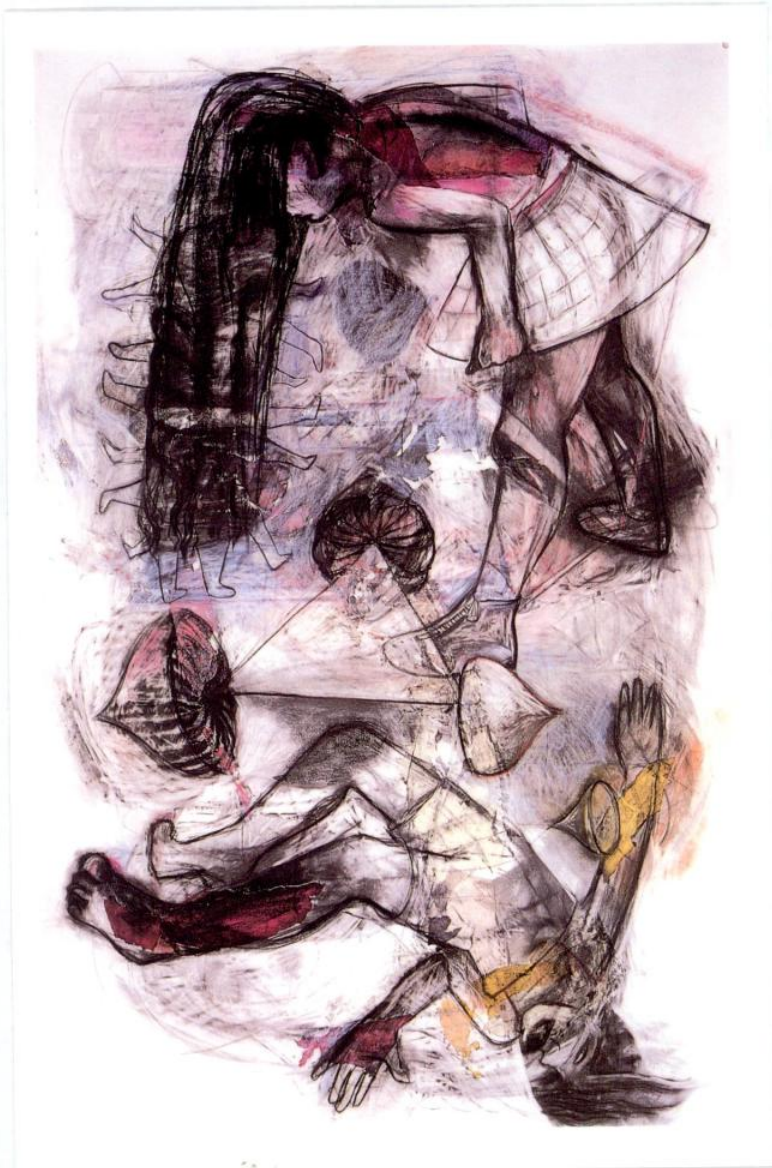


Fig. 32 Alice Maher: Untitled Drawing, 1990

ALAN MAHER
Unfinished Work 1990
Mixed media on paper
1260 mm x 2500 mm
Edition 40/40
Printed by [illegible]
[illegible]



Fig. 33 Alice Maher: Drawing from The Thicket, 1990

ALICE MAHER

Drawing from 'The Thicket' 1990

Mixed media on paper

1400 mm x 1120 mm

White Gallery Printers Ltd.,

London EC2N 6LJ, UK

The Thicket

In 1990, Alice Maher did a series of drawings known as The Thicket. These drawings are very relevant in that it was The Thicket images that led Maher into using actual hair as a material.

The girl's discovery of the world has become a key focus of the work by Alice Maher; poised between childhood and adolescence she exists at that certain moment before biology takes over and femininity ceases to be a game - even if unknown to her the rules were always predetermined. Once she is made into a lady her positioning within patriarchy's symbolic order ensures that her speech is modulated, her actions circumscribed and her desires repressed. Yet through the very physical process of scraping layers of collage and the erasure of earlier drawings these works on paper seek to reconstitute a moment seemingly buried beneath the weight of adult womanhood." (Barber, Aug. 1991, p1)

Fig. 31 is a drawing full of energy and action. The girl has wrenched a bunch of flowers out of the ground with one hand, has knocked over a stool, and is doing a brilliant balancing act on tippy toes, while trying to look at herself, through a tangle of long hair, in a puddle of water. Alice Maher states that the little girls are "stocky and bold, curious and independent, all the things in fact that fairytales try to warn girls against becoming." (Maher, Appendix I) In fig. 32, the drawing contains two girls. The top girl seems to be using her hair to blot out what looks like the extending limbs of lots of people, while the bottom image of a girl looks like she has cut her hair and temporarily fallen off her charger. Fig. 33 is a more restful drawing. Again, there are two girls together, both lying down. The top girl is in the self-comforting foetal position, looking on as the other girl flicks her copy books about. I love the energy and life in these drawings. The girls appear unaffected, wild and free. There is a definite strength and boldness of line used. These drawings really show the life, energy and freshness of hair. Alice Maher works in many different media. Sometimes she makes and sometimes she draws. She says that usually images in drawings might lead to her making something. Once the thing is made, it may give her ideas for more images and so on. She believes that the The Thicket images led her into using actual hair as a material, When she saw how strong and important hair was in her drawings, she then started to collect actual hair. Once she had a sizeable pile in her flat she then knew that hair had a power all of its own and that she could work it into a piece. (Maher, Appendix I)

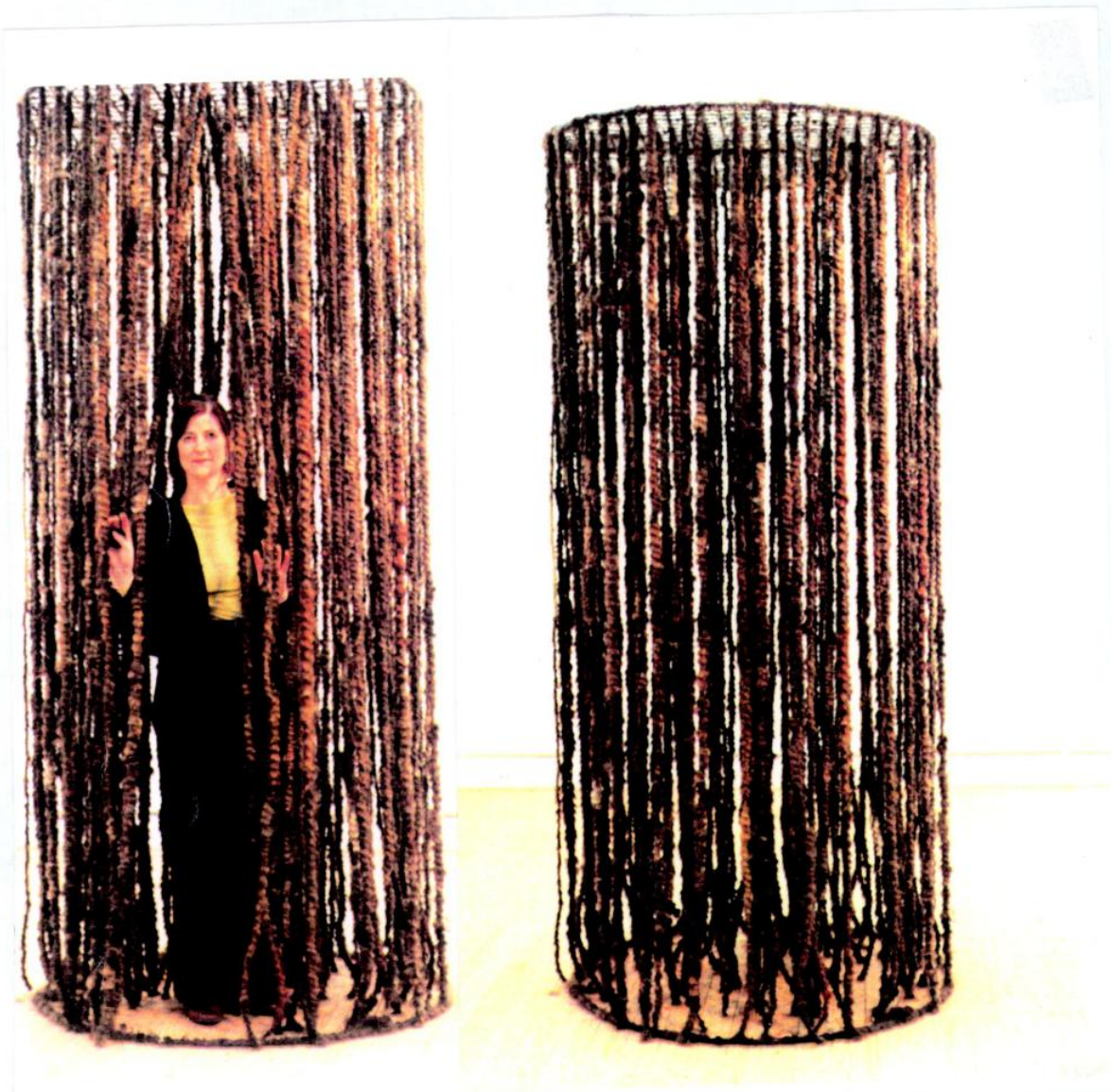


Fig. 34 Alice Maher: The Keep - 100 plaits of human hair (9ft x 3ft)

1941. 11/10/41

Keep

7' high. - 2 1/2' wide

100 Bolander's house
back

The Keep

The Keep consists of a tall, column-like cylinder made up from one hundred long plaits of human hair. (fig. 34) It stands about nine feet high and three feet wide, self-supporting on an invisible frame. It shakes slightly as one approaches, and one can actually get within it and look out through the plaits. (Brett, March 1992, p?)

Alice Maher feels that through her use of actual hair in The Keep, she began to explore its meaning as a power symbol. She is very interested in the myths, culture and historical background that revolve around hair. She sees hair as having a strength of its own that she can use. Unlike Terry Niedzialek, Alice Maher was never a hairdresser and her work does not resemble a hairdresser's floor, but she certainly had a link with the hairdresser in that she used real hair collected from hairdressers in Cork and Belfast. Niedzialek works with individuals and their own hair. Tunga represents hair with wire in his work.

Alice Maher crosses over and knits together the hair of lots of individuals, both male and female. She says that no one knows where the female hair and the male hair begins. She has looked at fairytales such as Rapunzel, where Rapunzel is locked up in a tower with no way out. Her only contact with men is by letting the prince climb up her hair into the tower, she is used and abused. Alice Maher is interested in myths like Samson and Delilah where Samson loses his strength when Delilah cuts off his hair which was his source of power. Maher feels that The Keep helped her explore ideas about hair and female hair where, for example, it is acceptable for men to have underarm hair whereas it is considered unacceptable for women to have underarm hair. In Anthony Synotts article "The Body Social", he talks about the double standard invoked where grey hair on men is regarded as a mark of distinction whereas on women it is perceived as a sign of age. He gives lots of examples where hair is used to create opposites in men and women e.g. where a wig/hair piece is considered as adding to a woman's 'crowning glory' whereas in a man it is regarded as a sign of weakness, so shameful. Men minimise their head and facial hair while maximising their body hair.

Women maximise their head hair and minimise their body hair. (Synott, p113) I feel the simplicity of Alice Maher's act of plaiting together both female and male hair, without knowledge of which is which goes a long way to blurring the male hair/female hair divide. The plaits are made up of different lengths of hair, ranging in colour - blonde, auburn, ginger, brown and black. (Brett, Autumn, 1992, p73)

Alice Maher tells me that she made The Keep into a tower shape again in association with the fairytale of Rapunzel and also because of the space and architecture of the gallery that the piece was to be installed in. So, The Keep's appearance is that of a tall, solid pillar. Maher says that if you came close to The Keep you would see that "it's made up of multiples of soft malleable stuff and, if you care to, you can actually step into it. So it's saying, no pillar is unshakeable, no tower unapproachable, no power inaccessible." (Maher, Appendix I)

"Because hair is an organic material, it is often assumed to be part of nature - yet we always experience it as worked and styled so as to have significance within a particular culture." (Barber, Feb. 1992) Maybe that is why the hair in The Keep is controlled and plaited to signify the control over the female, male use of hair. There is a contrast between the controlled plaits in The Keep and the hair/wire in Tunga's work where there are some sections of wild, loose hair/wire running into and out of some controlled plaited sections of hair/wire. (see fig. 26) Where has the wild hair of The Thicket girls gone? I could not bear to imagine that it was now being controlled in The Keep as adult hair.

Reactions to Hair

I love the giant scale of The Keep, and the fact that it is tactile and that one can go inside the piece. People react to hair off the head with a mixture of delight and revulsion. I asked Alice Maher what kind of reactions had she got from people to The Keep. She said that children enjoy it because they can touch it and play with it and



Fig. 34 Alice Maher: Folt - 9 paintings on paper, 1993

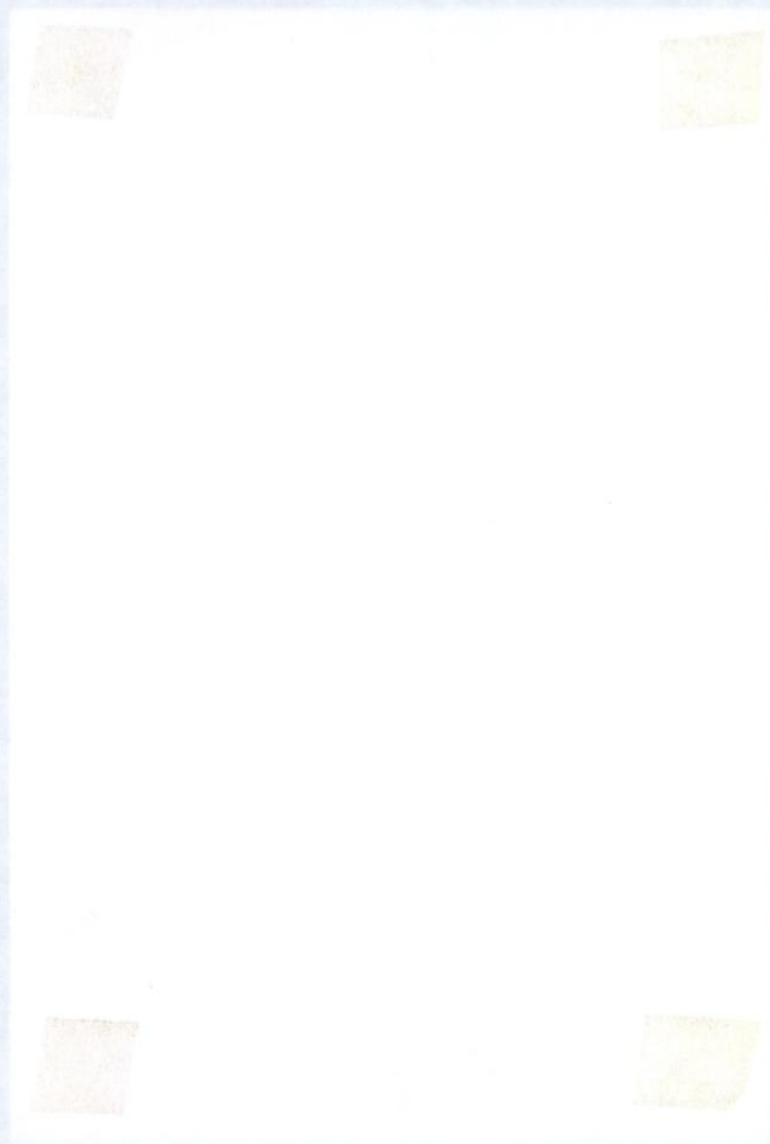




Fig. 36 Alice Maher: Folt - 9 paintings on paper, 1993

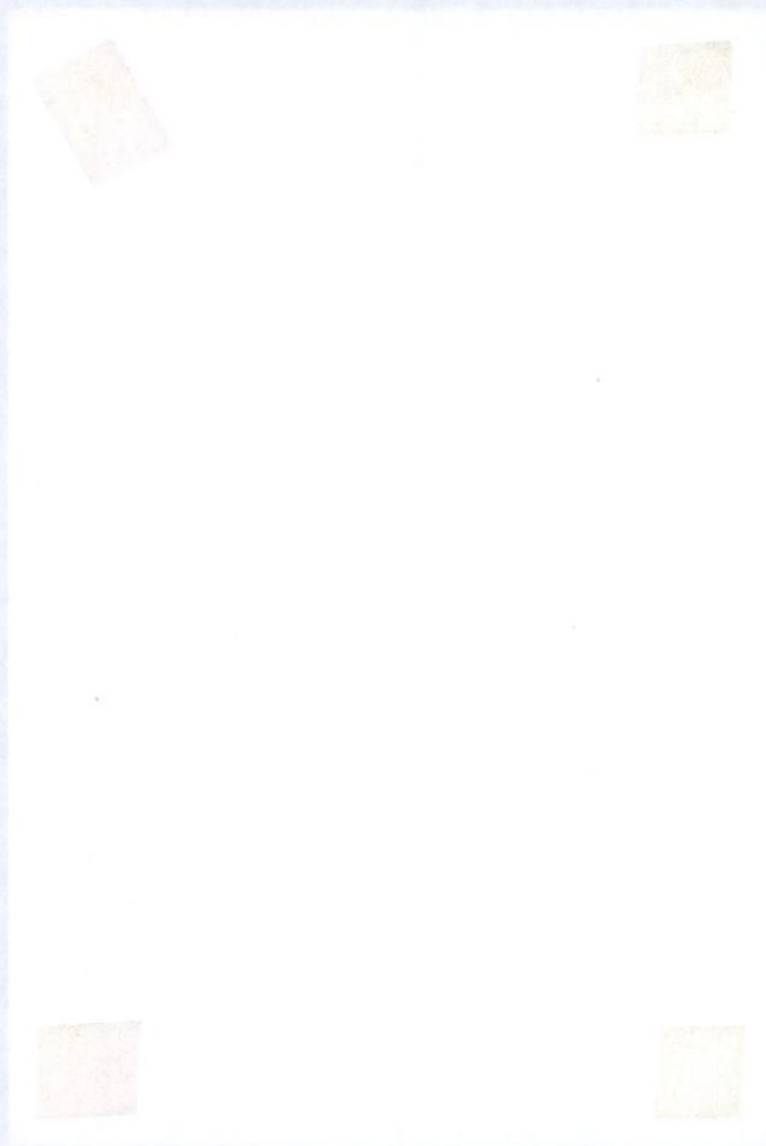




Fig. 37 Alice Maher: Folt - 9 paintings on paper, 1993

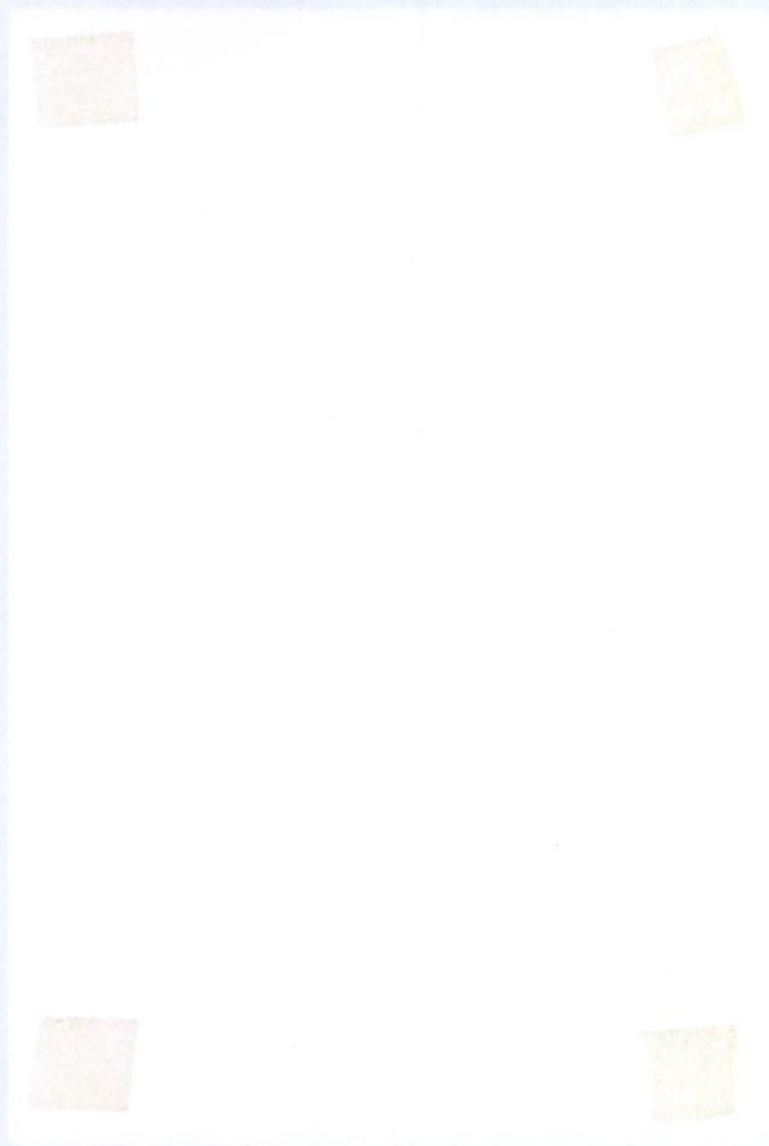
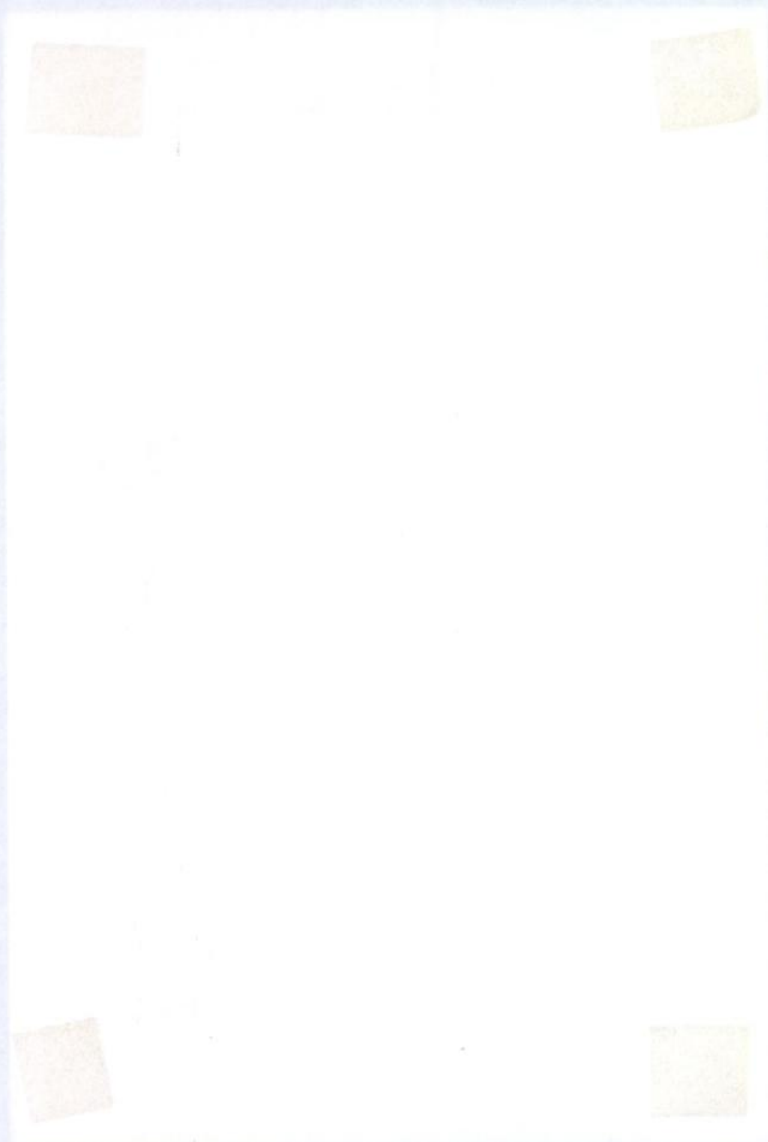




Fig. 38 Alice Maher: Folt - plaits of human hair in framed perspex, 1993



enjoy the added excitement of being allowed to play with a piece of work in a gallery. Adults' reactions are more restrained. They are more aware that it is hair cut from the heads of different people and its touch affects them. They are very careful and slow about going inside, pushing aside each braid with their hands stretched out in front of them. Maher believes that

"it certainly spells 'strangeness' for many people, 'holocaust' for some, 'fear' for some, kind of 'shock' for some. But, it is not a meditative piece, nor a quiet piece; it is kind of proactive and a bit aggressive by its just standing there - a shape conjured up out of the dregs of our past and the depths of our subconsciousness" (Maher, Appendix I)

Folt

Folt is an Irish word which can mean abundance, tresses, forest of hair. (figs. 35-37)

Folt comprises of six pieces, all 900mm by 1100mm and attached to one continuous wall. Each piece is framed in perspex to look somewhat like a display case. Five of these cases contain paintings on paper - nine to each case - with each one of the nine pinned lightly to its white ground like a 'sample'. The sixth case contains tightly-packed plaits of human hair. (fig. 38)

The exhibition that Folt was in was called "Relocating History" (1993). The exhibition brought together the work of seven Irish women artists responding to the generative theme of the "History of Woman". In Maher's piece Folt, she is now working with hair gathered from lots of different people and putting it plaited and boxed at the end of a line of ordered and classified and boxed hair styles. "The many different meanings ascribed to hair, particularly woman's hair, as a culturally significant material are a central part of numerous themes in Western folklore, mythology and consciousness. It is this multiplicity of theme and meaning which is addressed in Folt." (Maher, 1993, p)

Alice Maher says that the painted images are meant to act as a kind of catalogue of styles for the viewer to look at. Maher says that it is a game where the viewer can

playfully pick out and identify certain styles of friends, personalities, relations, historical figures, themselves, from the dozens of styles on view. "The heads represented are so simplified at times as to become something else - a toaster, a brush, a pudding." (Maher). When one reaches the sixth case, the game is over. One is now faced with the actual real hair of hundreds of people as opposed to the hairstyle images on paper. The sixth case contains tightly-packed plaits of hair. Again, as in The Keep it contains the hair of male and female and, probably, a mixture of races and religions and ages, people who never knew each other, all bound together. (Maher, 1993) Unlike the work in The Keep, you are not invited to touch this work. Being boxed, it is that bit removed from the inquiries of the viewer. You can not touch it, feel it, play with it. It demands a more gut reaction from the viewer. The perspex acts as a 'do not touch' barrier. The stillness of the tightly-cased hair reminds me of the poem written by Tadeusz Rózewicz (The Museum of Auschwitz, 1984):

Pigtail

When all the women in the transport
had their heads shaved,
Four workmen with brooms made
of birch twigs
Swept up
and gathered up the hair
Behind clean glass
the stiff hair lies
of those suffocated in gas chambers
there are pins and side combs
in this hair

The hair is not shot through with light
is not parted by the breeze
is not touched by any hand
or rain or lips

in huge chests
Clouds of dry hair
of those suffocated
and a faded plait
a pigtail with a ribbon
pulled at school
by naughty boys

I do not believe that Alice Maher had Auschwitz in mind - or any subject as heavy. If the box of hair ropes were set in isolation, I think then it would be quite a morbid piece. Placing it alongside five boxed cases, of equal size to the boxed hair, containing nine oil paintings in each, lightens the subject matter totally.

Conclusion

Alice Maher's work, unlike Niedzialek's and Tunga's involves, physically, many more people, given that it is made up of hundreds of different people's hair. It is backed up with a lot of information and knowledge of myths, folklore and historical background. It recognises and explores the power and life-force in hair. "It involves the viewer and contains many shifting associations, emotions, memories and expectations." (Maher, Relocating History, 1993)

Catherine Owens

Catherine Owens was born in Dublin in 1959. She went to art college in Belfast and is now living and working in New York. She says "we're brought up with the idea that art doesn't pay and the naive notion that art and money don't mix. I'm trying to prove wrong the theory that you can't make a living out of being a painter." (Irish Times, June 17, 1989)

I corresponded during the Summer with Catherine and she too, like Alice Maher, was very happy to answer questions that I put to her about her work with hair. (see Appendix II) I was really interested to learn that Catherine Owens is going to have an exhibition of her work entitled 'BALLS' in the Project Arts Centre in February 1994.

Balls

The work entitled Balls was developed from Catherine Owens interest in all things personal and small. For the Balls pieces, she has used hair as her small fine object, exploring its place and power throughout history. Catherine's recent work is about women. She has written a text that used the image of hair to communicate one woman's thoughts about her fragile place in a man's world. (Catherine Owens)

Balls

Nervously
Plaiting
Wrapping
Twisting
Turning
Folding
Pushing
Twirling
Coiling
Tying
And untying
Determined to better herself
To get the better of her situation
And to get better,
Doing and undoing
Everything

Crowning herself with hollow haloes of support,
Draped over her shoulders in total disbelief
Her skin a shroud of comfort and regret.

Pushing the inevitable behind her ears.
Pinned back beneath her scalp
And pricked repeatedly by the bristle
Of loud and angry conversation,
As every pore becomes a gaping hole
And each new blemish a receptacle for disease.
Counting slowly from one to one hundred
Dragging her pathetic philosophy
To the end of each strand,
Running her crimped right hand
In a sign across her dying skin
Checking under her fingernails
For the dirt to cover her tracks with,
Hoping in a vain attempt to rearrange
The hairlines on her scalp,
Strip searching herself with
Extra strength removal cream
Topped off by a pair of large tweezers
Plucking at the waste.

She placed the brush back down on the dressing table
And began to think of how many hairs
She would have to save for God's arrival.
He'll be coming soon
To take back what's his,
Reclaim the loan
And repossess the vacant spaces
While scrutinizing the results.
Every hair must be in place,
The measure of a lifetimes care and attention,
His yardstick for the truth.
Her whole identity curled up around each finger,
As he places his hands lovingly on her head.
"There, there, my child...
Why don't you come with me?"
God only knows why
But each hair was a wish,
Not scattered or falling down around her ankles
Where much of her world likes to spend its time.

As she sat stroking herself
She thought of all the ill fitting glass slippers,
And wandered into someone else.
Anyone else would do!
Lady Godiva, bobbing up and down
Riding high on a pair of warm shoulder blades.
Joan of Arc burned for her stake in honor
And buried in belief.
Mary Magdalen, on bended knee between his knees
Asked to repent in public
To use her head to dry him off,
Hair main, her crown, her glory...
Nothing short of a sin

Tied up with gratitude and humiliation.
Or to push her long golden locks over the edge
Praying to the devil himself
That all hell might jump out of her skin
And emerge as one with the ugly gargoyles
That surround her balcony.

95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100,
Will I go with him?
Is everything in place?
Will he notice or forget?
Can I forget myself?
She pressed her nose against the glass,
Her breath a cloud of knots
Coming up to meet her mouth.
Saving every hair that had ever fallen out
Keeping them safe for a rainy day,
All bundled up neatly, rolled into a ball,
Gathered together loosely in the palm of her hand,
She teased the soft and tender shapes,
Letting go of everything
She flung the Balls on to the fire,
Stood up and shed her skin.

Catherine Owens begins this text with the image of a woman re-enacting her ritual of brushing her hair one hundred times. Although we know that hair feels no pain, the actions that she uses to describe what the woman does to her hair "pinned back beneath her scalp, and pricked repeatedly by the bristle..." seems to me to be saying that hair is alive and feeling. The woman uses the method of rough handling of her hair as self-purging: pushing - pinning - pricking. She is punishing and flogging herself. Preparing for the day of judgement when God comes to inspect and take back what is his. This idea is like the one that the Catholic Church teaches us that we do not own ourselves, God made us and we will return to our maker when we die. While repeatedly brushing her hair, the woman's thoughts drift off. She takes an introspective look at the history of women through which she explores their identity in relation to their hair. The brave Joan of Arc, hair shorn and burnt at the stake; the proud Lady Godiva, able to hold her head up high as she rode through the streets on horse back, totally naked except for her hair; the humiliation of Mary Magdalen, having to use her hair to dry Jesus feet. Fuelled by these brave independent women, she finds a spark of defiance within herself. She takes control and makes a choice for herself. She denies God his due and burns her hair. This done, she stands up proud and tall, just like Joan of Arc

and Lady Godiva. The title Balls, it could be said, is like a shout demanding the reader's attention. I think the stark contrast between the maleness of the title and the immediate entry into the intimacy of the female world works very well.

Earliest images of using hair

Catherine has told me that hair has been a recurring image in her work over the years. It first emerged as a focal point in her work when she was a teenager at the Belfast College of Art. Her earliest image of using hair or being aware of its importance comes from her childhood. In this day and age of huge interest in alternative spiritual paths, a lot of these spiritual teachings (e.g. Buddhism) tell us to try and live in the moment. Having some experience as a parent of three children, I am very aware of how deep childhood happenings go. One reason is that a child's world is very small and they exist in the actual moment of what is going on. Childhood memories and moments can be so strong, full of visual, tactile recollections and feelings, and some special moments have a lasting effect. Catherine remembers how her mother used to take her five children out for a Sunday drive, two in the front and three younger ones in the back. To keep the younger ones in the back quiet, she would give each of them a turn to brush her hair while she drove. Catherine has such strong memories of doing this and of a feeling of closeness and comfort and a sense of satisfaction from this repetitious act.

Early work

As a teenager, she was involved in the whole punk thing, so her hair was always going through various changes, colour, style, length, etc. It was the time when the likes of Peter Marks had lifted hairdressing out of the back streets and into the high streets. Both men and women were 'doing things' with their hair "Hairstyles were all about forces of attraction and forces of rejection, quite ritualistic and tribal." (Catherine Owens)



Fig. 39 Catherine Owens: Detail of 3 knitted panels

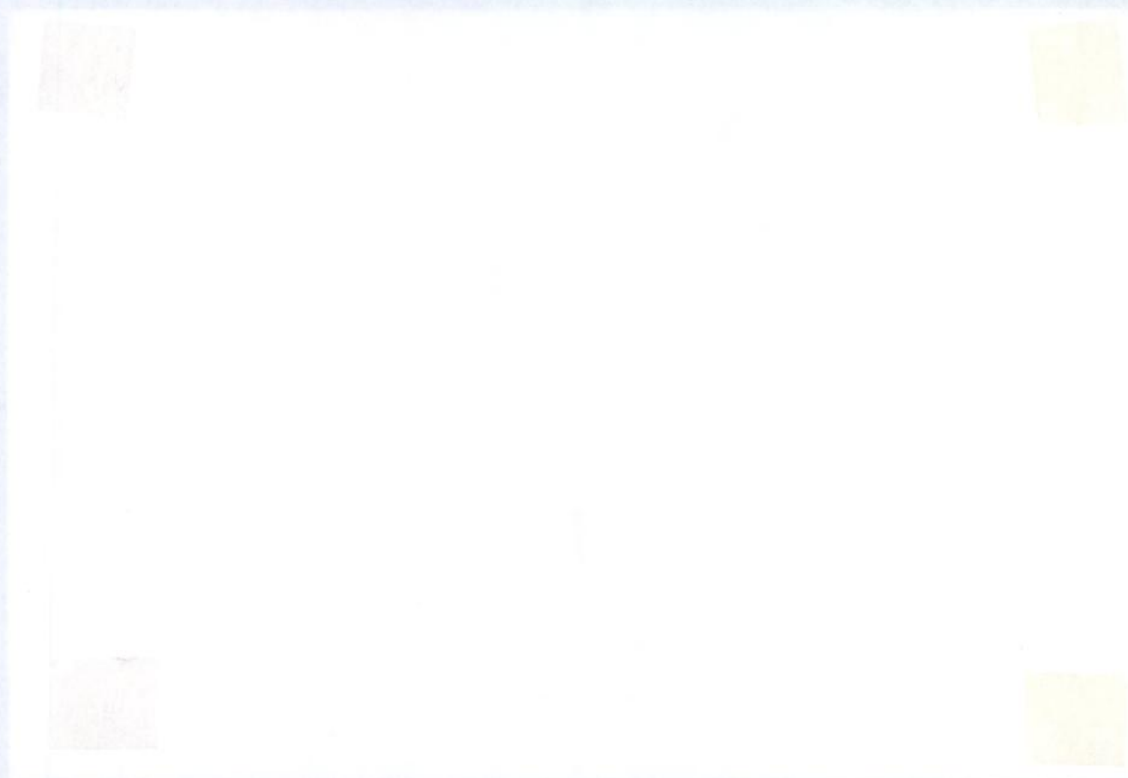




Fig. 40 Catherine Owens: Ball painting - acrylic, hair on masonite board



Project

39 East Essex Street, Temple Bar, Dublin 2.

Opened 1994



Sealed by the
Dublin Council



Fig. 41 Catherine Owens: Untitled, Pencil on paper (35 x 27inches)

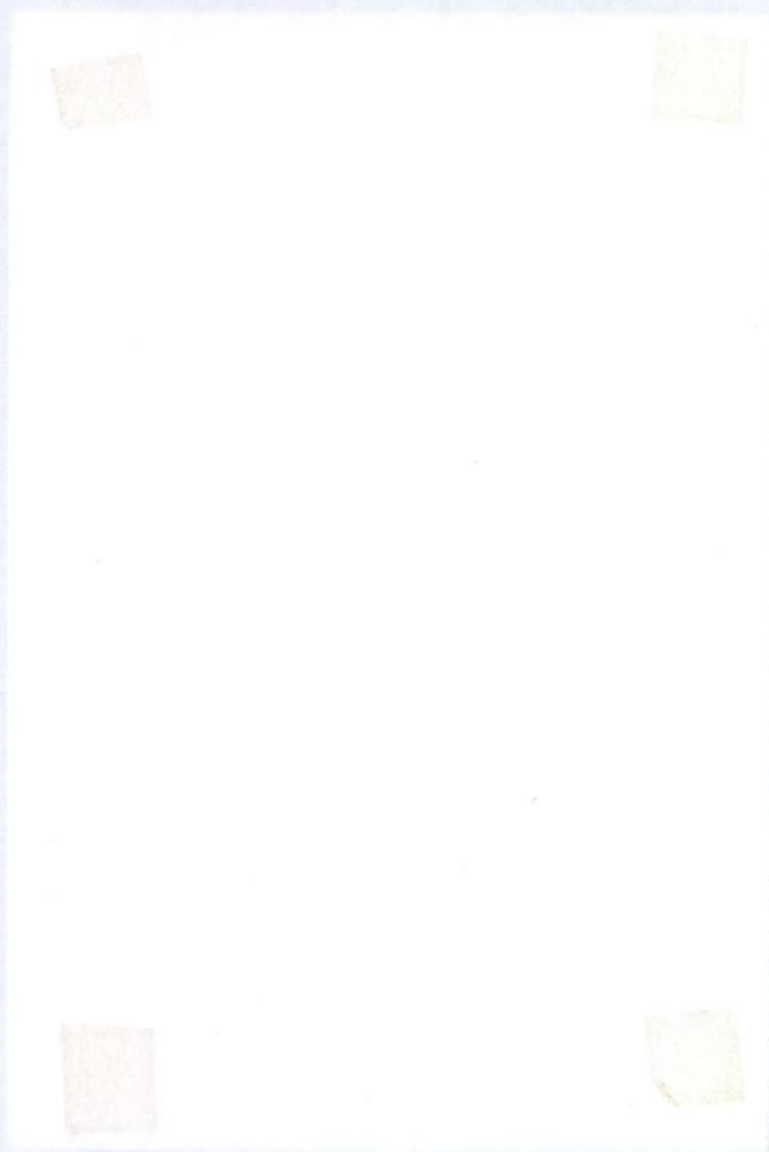
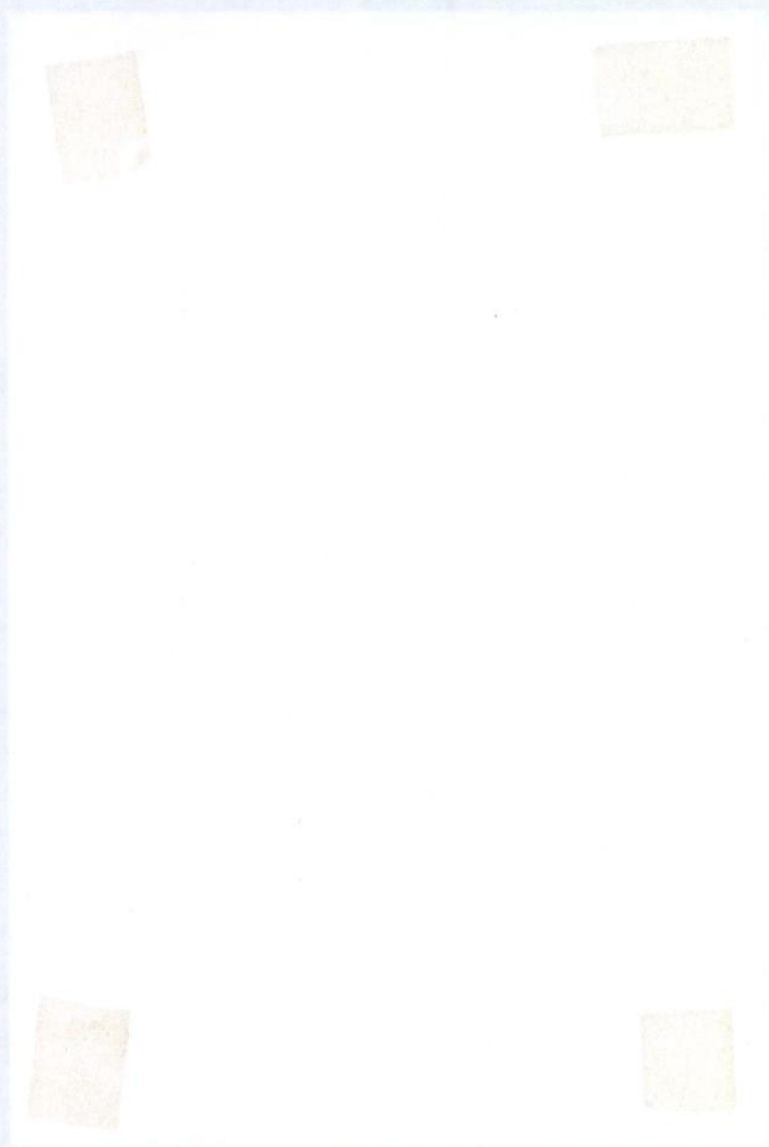




Fig. 42 Catherine Owens: detail - laminated hair tag (5 3/4 x3 inches)



During her college years, her boyfriend was a haircutter who would come up from Dublin at weekends and cut the hair of her friends. Catherine started to take slides and photographs of the process and from the results of that work came a series of drawings and paintings - of the hair and of the hands cutting the hair or running through the hair.

Exhibition 1994

At the moment (Feb. '94), there is a solo exhibition of Catherine Owens' work on show in the Project Arts Centre, Dublin. The work consists of three very large hand-knitted panels of the text Balls. Fig. 39 shows a detail of this work. Catherine choose to present the text Balls in knitted form. She feels that this medium specifically relates to 'women's work', and so ties in very well with the subject matter. The panels were knit by Lainy Keogh, the well-known Irish knitter. I feel the choice of knitting the panels is an exciting way of presenting the written text. However, I feel that the choice of lettering takes away from the appearance of the work and makes it look more machine-knit than hand-knit and so depersonalises it. The panels are accompanied by drawings for the knitted panels on knitting-pattern paper. There are also six Ball paintings (fig. 40) made with mixed media - acrylic paint and hair on masonite board. The choice of colours is very rich - gold, pinks, deep reds and burnt sienna. The colours are very alluring but I also feel that they carry a resemblance to menstrual blood. The use of the matted hair in the balls of red acrylic would to me seem to support this idea. I would see Catherine as having very good drawing skills. Figure 41 is a pencil drawing of a ball of hair like one would collect from a hair brush. The use of tone and pencil line makes a very detailed study of the hair ball. It is drawings such as these that build up the artist's collection of information and sensitivities about a subject matter.

Also in the exhibition there is a large wall sculpture consisting of three hundred laminated identity hair tags. We see a detail of this work in fig. 42 which is a picture of one of the laminated identity hair tags. I do not believe that the substance in these plastic laminated tags is real hair; it feels like some type of synthetic fibre. Also the hair fibre colour was the same reddish brown in all the tags. At the exhibition there were

individual hair tags on sale because Catherine Owens wanted to have pieces of art accessible for purchase at a price small enough for anyone to afford. I was delighted to be able to buy my tag and so be able to scrutinise it!

The fact that Catherine Owen's exhibition is on now, in February, was really a great bonus for me and very well timed to coincide with the conclusion of my thesis. Having been researching and writing about the four artists that I looked at, it was really great to actually see Catherine Owens' work first hand.

Reactions to work

Catherine Owens says that she feels that most people associate real hair, off the head, with death. The reactions that Catherine Owens got from people to her work were similar to those that Alice Maher got. While Alice Maher found that people had a fear of the severed material and were affected by the touch of it, Catherine Owens found that some people were repulsed at the thought of having to touch, look at or even contemplate anything that may be so close to death, while others are intrigued by exactly the same prospect and enjoy the interaction of something that dark. She says that the other problem that people have with hair off the head is that, as children, we are told repeatedly that we must never use a friend's brush to brush our hair with, for fear of picking up some undesirable nits etc. The reaction that she has from people with regard to the use of hair has been very mixed. Most people secretly enjoy looking at it and thinking about it. As she says, and I have also found the same to be true, Owens has yet to meet a person that does not have their own hair story.

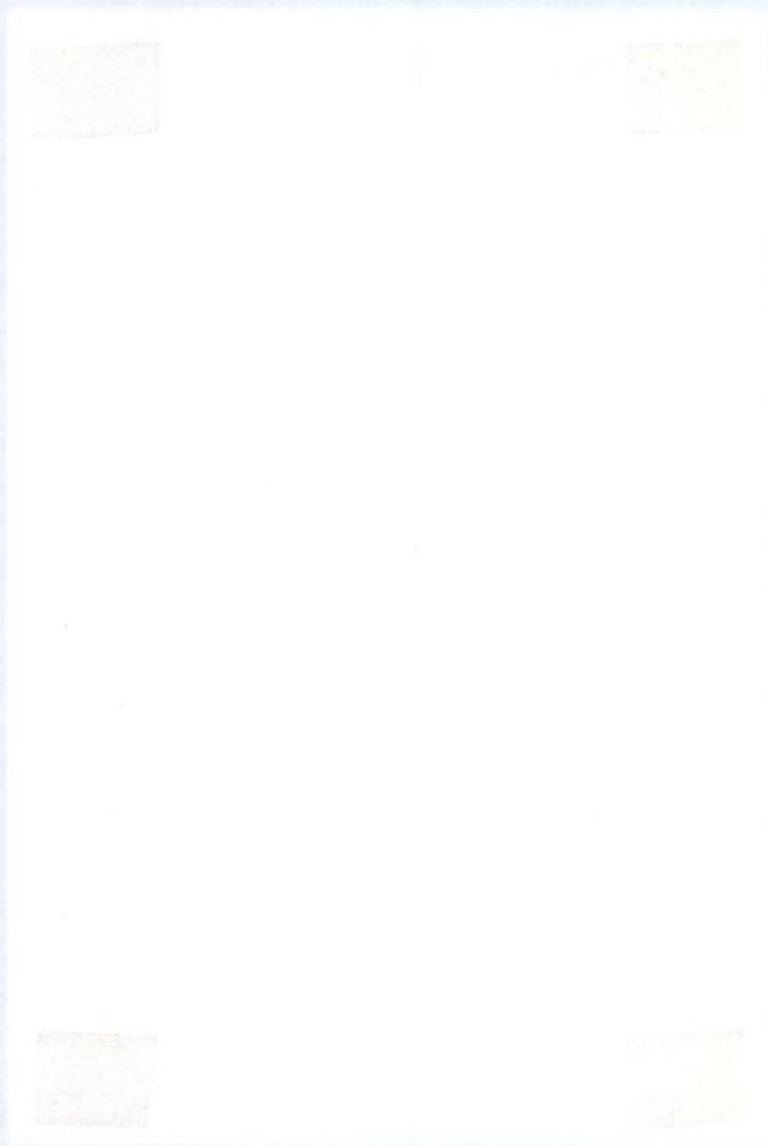
Conclusion

Catherine Owens' work, like Alice Maher's, uses hair that is detached from the head, whereas Niedzialek and Tunga's work is about hair that still has life in it. There is another similarity between Owens and Maher in that their subject matter is about women's issues. Catherine Owens' interest in hair is deep-rooted and dates back to her

early childhood memories and her formative teenage years and then as one of her early source materials while at Art College. This connection has run right through to her most recent works. She is not looking to please the viewer with her work but to provoke the thoughts and confront the viewer with her dealing with the issue of the status of women and the importance of women making their own choices. This, I feel, she has done by choice of subject matter (female hair), her own original beautifully written text and the multi-media that she chooses to use to express her work.



Fig. 43 Donna Coogan: Betty, 1993



My Own Work

Hair was my first love and art medium. I have always loved hair. It has always been part of my looking, my visual awareness. I worked instinctually with it, and knew how to cut and interact with it without ever being shown how. This was 1972 - hairdressing was associated with older women, perms and colour rinses. My mother found the idea of my wanting to be a hairdresser nauseous! The likes of Peter Marks and its kind was just beginning, and so too, the move from back street to high street. While still at school, I went job hunting for Saturday work. I got a job in a poky men's hairdressers in Westmoreland Street. I started cutting hair straight away. After some time, I went for an interview to one of the most prestigious hairdressing salons - David Marshals - but he just took me on face value and indicated that they did not want any hippies! I wanted proper training but could not afford it. I lost a lot of confidence because I was not trained properly. I loved interacting with hair - the energy, flow, and contact. I loved my tools and invented my own tools to meet my needs.

And, so, I had three children. I was a stay-at-home mother, picking at night classes. Like Terry Niedzialek (from an early age and throughout the period rearing my family), I always had to keep my hands in hair. When my youngest son was five, I started at Art College. Like Terry Niedzialek, my foundation work was all about nests, great tangles of line, just like hair. The two artists whose work I found incredibly exciting were the action paintings of Jackson Pollock and the instinctual energised glass engraving of John Hutton. In life-drawing classes, the tutors would always say "Don't spend time with hair.", but that was where my eyes were always drawn to.

It was during my third year at college when, for the first time we were allowed to choose and work on our own personal projects, the hair emerged as a dominant interest again. My personal project was based on a friend of mine called Betty. Betty is over seventy years old and, I believe, very beautiful. She is a very intelligent, amusing woman, who used to be a doctor but now puts all her energies into her beautiful garden. I see her in total harmony with herself and this garden that was made with love. I

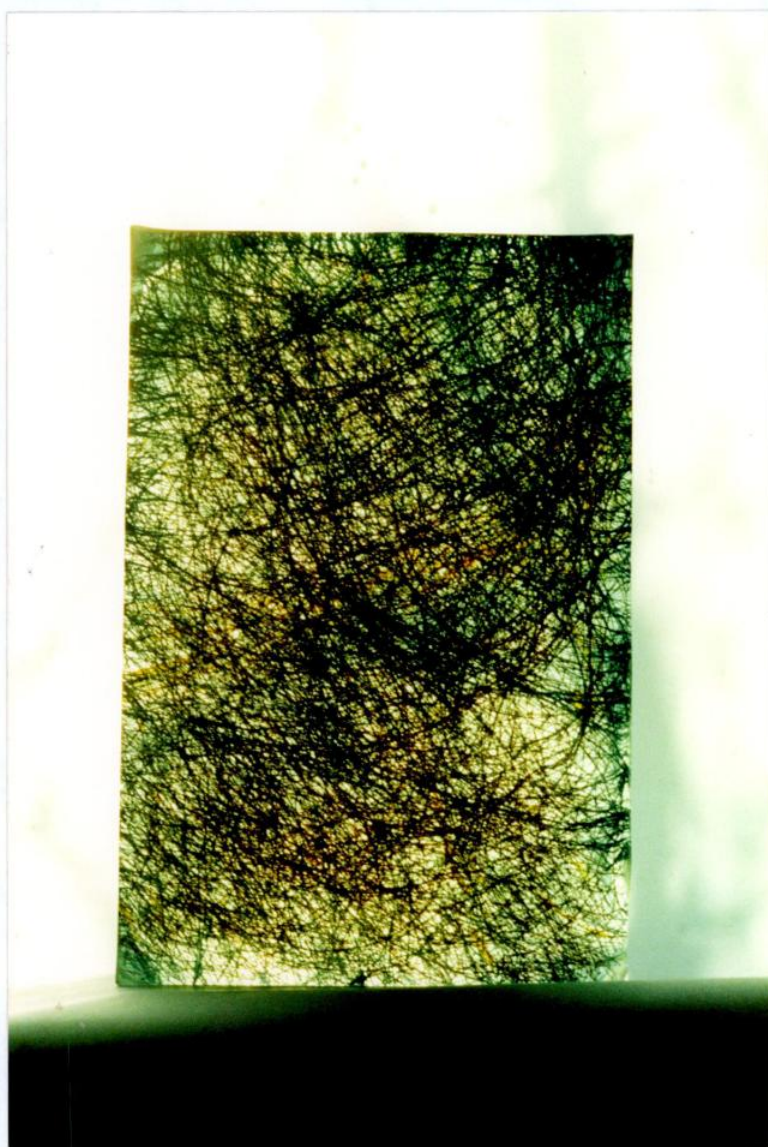
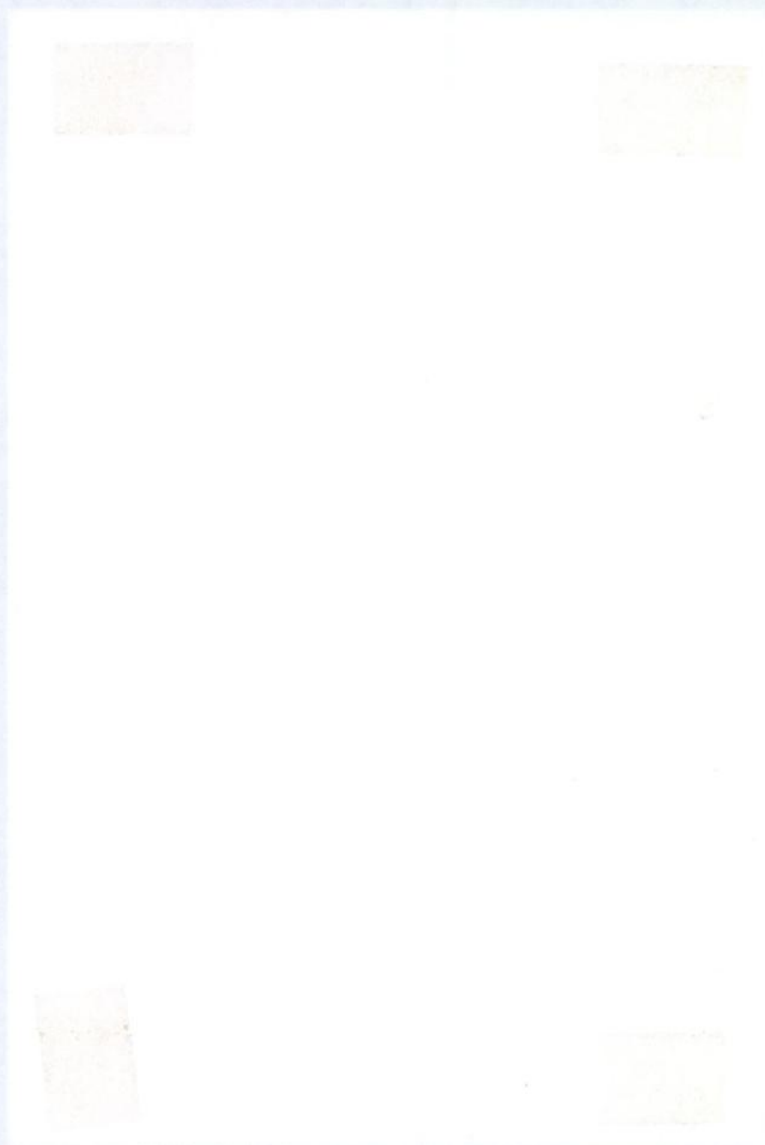


Fig. 44 Donna Coogan: Hair Block - copper wire fused in between layers of glass, 1993



wanted to capture this harmony, this everyday spirituality and, so, proceeded (as I usually do when collecting source material) to look through my camera. There were three areas that I focused on - Betty's roses, her skin and her hair.

I am in the glass department in the College and, so, I proceeded to represent hair, skin and roses on glass, using many techniques, such as painting, silk-screen printing, acid etching, slumping, and blasting. I also, like Tunga represented hair using copper wire placed in between layers of glass and fused together in a kiln. I found this incredibly enjoyable and it was then that I realised that I was now in a position to choose to do what I had not been able to do as a teenager. I had wanted to work at hairdressing when it was not considered a decent job, but here I was, a mature student in Art College, and now, finally, I was in a place where I could work with hair and be taken seriously.

I am very comfortable looking through the lens of my camera. As my work progressed, I was looking more and more at Betty's hair and less at her skin or roses. I was very happy with the images that I got (fig. 43) In these photos, I could capture the beauty of hair, skin and Betty's blue jumper. This image carries such weight of importance for me. I feel they are filled with the beauty of every life, life force and energy. For me, these hair lines have such an energy. They are moving, strong and positive, with no beginning and no end. So, unlike Alice Maher and Catherine Owens, I do not feel I am working with detached hair off the head. I am showing live sections of hair on the head, focusing on the stray, independent hair that is beautiful, free and moving.

At the moment, I am working with copper wire as fine as hair and cutting each hair/wire and placing hundreds (in some cases) in between layers of glass and fusing them together in a kiln. (fig. 44) This work is in progress but I hope to capture in my glass what I feel I have caught with my photos. I want my glass to capture the beautiful independent hair lines interacting with the life force of Betty, represented by the colour of Betty's skin and jumper and the energy of the glass.

Conclusion

Of all the artists whose work I have looked at, Terry Niedzialek, Tunga, Alice Maher, Catherine Owens, I have the least to say. I am not like Terry Niedzialek making my own statements about politics or the environment. Nor do I have the hypnotic wonder found in Tunga's work, nor do I draw on any myths, folklore and historical background like Alice Maher. Unlike Catherine Owens, I am not trying to confront the viewer.

Unlike these established artists, whose work I find incredibly stimulating, I am just beginning. My work is starting by looking at and working with materials that I am comfortable with, representing what I find harmony and beauty in - at the very moment of looking, in the now. So I come from being an unfulfilled hairdresser to finding my right place for now, working on what I want to.

I would like to finish with a poem written by Wyndham Lewis, an artist, who had a strong interest in hair form and hairdressing. I feel that there has been an awareness of the presence of the hairdresser right through the thesis and I would like to bring it to life in a small way.

Bless the Hairdresser (1914)

He attacks Mother Nature for a small fee.
Hourly he ploughs heads for sixpence,
Scours chins and lips for threepence.
He makes systematic mercenary war on
this wilderness,
He trims aimless and retrograde.
growth
Into clean-arched shapes and angular
parts

CONCLUSION

The ancient civilisations have given hair an exalted place in their lives. The Egyptians had barber gods. The Romans sprinkled gold dust on their hair. The Greek barber shops were the meeting place of great minds. Hair was a portable art to the Nomadic tribes. The Chinese embroidered with it. The barbers of the Middle Ages were also allowed to act as surgeons because of their barber skills. The eighteenth century French courts used hair for extravagant manifestations of personal decoration. The primitive cultures never left the hair on the body in its natural state. The Africans and the Aborigines used string, animal fat and ochre to adorn their hair. The Victorians spent time and patience making mementoes from hair of loved ones.

Hair is a strong, malleable substance and, throughout the ages, has been deemed full of potency, power and life force. It is the fibre closest to us all. The four artists that I wrote about, Terry Niedzialek, Tunga, Alice Maher and Catherine Owens all drew on this historical source for their work. Terry Niedzialek ploughed her hands into the hair of live models adding all sorts of mixed media. Tunga writes stories about hair's magical power of turning to gold. He represents it on a giant scale with huge hanks of wire and giant metal combs creating an enormous visual impact. Alice gathers the hair that has been cut from the heads of lots of different people, male and female, and works it all together into plaits for packing tightly together in perspex frames or giant columns nine feet high. Catherine Owens writes powerful poetry about women's personal identity in relation to their hair and also paints it, draws it, and uses actual hair in some of her installations. I continue to cut, gather, make and represent hair in my own work

APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE TO ALICE MAHER, MAY 1993

Q. Has hair always been an important part of your drawing/work/looking? Is there a thread that runs through your early work to now that has associations with hair?

A. I've always found that one piece of work leads to another and some of them drop out of space totally uninfluenced by what went before. So if you trace my general interests back to '87 when I left college you'll probably find a common thread there - early interest in mythology and folktale, interest in female identity and the image of femaleness as it comes down to us through the centuries (particularly through the painted image, and through Art history). I was always thinking about power and strength (early drawings are monumental in scale, the surface combative, the image often involving a struggle of some sort). I have also often employed images of objects which held a powerful symbol e.g. the use of horns on a 'female' figure to denote a relocating of power, or the use of body hair for the same purpose. Then if you come on to my 1990 drawings The Thicket series on girlhood as an exploration of female identity you'll see many symbols and objects used throughout that refer to folktale and myth, to rural life. The little girls are stocky and bold, curious and independent, all the things in fact that fairytales try to warn girls against becoming. They let their hair grow long and wild (as all little girls long for) - they do it up in huge ribbons and 'coquettish' styles that deny their 'innocence' - they wear beautiful pleated skirts and their favourite strapped sandals, they carry little weapons like a branch or a scissors, ready to defend themselves at all times, but also needing to poke the world to see how it works. In short they are 'subversive little bitches' - see article in 'STET' literary magazine Vol 5 for article of this title by John MacMonagle. Any, a great interest in the "attributes" to the girl/woman, costume, hair etc.

I work in many different media - sometimes I make, sometimes I draw. Usually images in drawing might lead to my making something. Once that thing is made, it may give

me ideas for more images and so on. So I think The Thicket images lead me into using actual hair as a material - I saw how important it was in the drawings and then I just started to collect it. Once I had a sizeable pile in my flat I knew it had a power all of its own and that I could work it into a piece.

Q. When did hair first emerge as a focal point in your work?

A. In any images of women or girls the hair always figured big by using actual hair in Keep I began to explore its meaning as a 'power' symbol i.e. hair = strength. Think of Samson and Delilah and so on and why its considered unacceptable to have body hair in females and vice versa for males. while hair is considered beautiful on our heads but when discarded becomes an untouchable often fearful thing - think of voodoo objects etc.

Q. What does hair represent to you? Is there a strong female or male association in you work?

A. I think I've discussed its many meanings in relation to power and strength, it comes through folk culture in the form of fairy tales (Rapunzel etc.) through myth (Cassandra). Its sexual and cultural meanings are many and varied - and its to try and tap into these many many meanings that I'd wished to do - not just one. The shaving of heads as punishment, the giving of locks of hair to loved ones, - Hair still carries a most powerful and symbolic meaning in today's culture. I'm interested in all of these and how hair means different things for men and for women at different times in history. Remember that guy who got his long hair caught in a thorny bush as he was running away from the enemy - they caught up with him due to his vanity and chopped the whole head off! By weaving both male and female hair together I try to break into these myths (no one knows where the female hair ends and male begins or indeed where one 'person's' lot ends and another begins). So again its a bit subversive. I made a tower because of the architecture of the gallery but also because of Rapunzel and because it a symmetrical

autocratic (phallic?) shape - a pillar. but if you come close you see its made up of multiples of soft malleable stuff and if you care t, you can actually step into it - so its saying no pillar is unshakeable, no tower unapproachable, no power inaccessible. It also celebrates physicality of course in its most physical form

Q. Could you tell me something about your work?

A. (No answer)

Q. Where have you collected the hair from? Is it both male and female hair. Do you use actual hair in you work or represent hair in your work?

A. Hairdressers and barbers in Cork and Belfast. Male and female mixed. Actual hair in Keep

Q. Is there a difference for you in hair on or off the head?

A. Yes. and if its supposed to be 'dead' then why are people so afraid of it?

Q. People react to hair off the head with a mixture of delight and revulsion. What reactions have you had from people?

A. Both. Children delight in it because they are not afraid of physicality or afraid to 'play with' or touch anything. Its part of their as yet uncontrolled curiosity.

Adults sometimes fear it, its touch affects them. Those who go into the Keep do so slow and carefully pushing aside each braid and standing with both hands in front of them clasped in a 'tentative' position - it certainly spells 'strangeness' for many people, 'holocaust' for some, 'fear' for some, kind of 'shock' for some. But its not a meditative piece, nor a quiet piece - its kind of proactive and a bit aggressive by its just standing

there - a shape conjured up out of the dregs of our past and the depths of our
subconsciousness.

APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE TO CATHERINE OWENS, AUGUST 4TH, 1993

1. Has hair always been an important part of your work/drawing/looking? Is there a thread that runs through your early work to now that has associations with hair?
2. When did hair first emerge as a focal point in your work?
3. What does hair represent to you? Is there a strong female/male association in your work?
4. Where have you collected the hair from? Is it both male and female hair? Do you use actual hair in your work or represent hair in your work?
5. Is there a difference for you in hair on or off the head?
6. People react to hair off the head with a mixture of delight and revulsion. What reactions have you had from people?
7. Do you get your own hair cut in a hairdressers?
8. I'd love a photo of your self! And your work if possible?

Dear Donna,

In answer to your questions,

1. Hair has always been a part of my work or at least a recurring image over the years, its funny as I've never had to think about it until now, and your questions have prompted me to examine where these images have actually come from.

My earliest image of using hair or being aware of its importance was as a child. My mother used to take us for Sunday drives. Usually she would take her five children with her, three in the back of the car and two in the front. Out of desperation to keep her three youngest in the back quiet she would give each of us a turn to brush her hair while she drove. I have very strong memories of brushing my mother's hair on these occasions, I remember feelings of closeness and comfort and a sense of satisfaction from this repetitious act.

2. Hair first emerged as a focal point in my work at Art Collage, I was at Collage in Belfast, and at the time I had a boyfriend who was a hair cutter, I was also involved in the whole punk thing...so my own hair was always going through various changes, colour, style length, etc. While in my second year there I made a series of photographs of hair cuts that my boyfriend made. He would come up from Dublin for the weekend, and my class mates would come round to my house to have their hair cut in the latest fabulous styles. Then I would take slides and photographs of the process and the results, from that point I then made a series of drawings and paintings of the hair, and the hands cutting the hair or running through the hair.

3. I think hair for me in one way is a metaphor for sexuality, at the time I was a teenager going to collage (1978-1982) hair was seeing a whole new light of day and both men and women were "Doing Things" with their hair. So by including some of these images in my work I was able to make some documentation of that time. It was more like a ritualistic expression, very tribal, a sort of a "are you part of my club...and will I fit into yours..." and the hair said it all, a force for attraction or a force for rejection.

4. In my recent work I have only been using female hair. It has been a conscious decision as the work I am making at present all revolves around the subtle power of women. I use both real and man made hair. The real hair comes from friends and hairdressers and hopefully one of the pieces that will be in the Feb./94 show at the Project will be a large real hair piece. I have used manmade hair for a large wall sculpture that contains 250 laminated tags of hair.

5. Peoples reactions to work made of hair or hair off the head is I feel very understandable, firstly, most people associate real hair off the head with death, so some people are repulsed at the thought of having to touch, look at or even contemplate anything that may be so close to death as that, while others are intrigued by exactly the same prospect, and enjoy the interaction of something that dark. The other problem that people have with hair off the head is that as children we are told repeatedly that we must never use a friends brush to brush our hair with, for fear of picking up some undesirable bugs..etc.. The reactions that I have had from people with regard to the use of hair have been very mixed, most people secretly enjoy looking at it and thinking about it, and I have yet to meet a person that doesn't have their own "Hair Story"

6. As for my own hair... I very rarely get it cut.. as I never trust anyone to do what I want with it...! and if I absolutely have to have it cut, that happens about once a year or so.

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