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Public Sculpture

and

The Dublin Millennium Sculpture Symposium 1988

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Introduction

The main aim of my thesis is to analyse the ten sculptures which were constructed around the City as a result of the Dublin Millennium Sculpture Symposium 1988. I will examine critically the work with reference to such factors as their location, materials and integration with each environment.

In order to analyse these sculptures I will investigate some of the problems public art can pose by discussing Eilis O'Connell's **Great Wall of Kinsale**, in Kinsale, erected in 1989 and comparing it to Leo Higgins' **Hands** in Finglas, 1990.

I will also discuss the development of sculpture in Dublin since 1800 as historical background to the Millennium Sculptures. I will take into account here the formation of the Sculptors Society of Ireland and the subsequent enthusiasm for sculpture since the '80s.

In order to carry out this research, I will be consulting in the main, periodicals. As there is very little documentation on the actual Symposium, I have interviewed some of the people involved to obtain my information.

CHAPTER 1

The Problems of Public Sculpture

In this chapter I hope to set out the various problems that public sculpture can pose, by discussing a number of sculptures that have proven controversial in the past and by examining two recent Irish sculptures: Eilis O'Connell's, **Great Wall of Kinsale** and Leo Higgins's, **Hands**. While just choosing two Irish examples, I feel that these works, due to their contrast, are sufficient to highlight the difficult nature of public sculpture.

As was the case with Rodin, much modern public sculpture has derived from the artists' deeply held private values that have often conflicted with those of the public. In the 1880s Rodin transformed a public commission for the **Burghers of Calais** into a personal statement (*Fig. 1*). Despite bitter criticism from his commissioners, Rodin used his cubical style and made the figures life size on ground level. Heroism in public art was thus reduced to life size. Although Rodin was later forced to accept a pedestal, he succeeded in imposing his artistic vision and values on commissioners and public. (Albert Elsen, 1985)

Almost a century later, Richard Serra explained his motives for the controversial **Titled Arc** (*Fig. 2*) in Lower Manhattan,

"Placing pieces in an urban context is not synonymous with an interest in a large audience even though the work will be seen by many people who would otherwise not look at art. The work I make does not draw from experience outside of the conventions of sculpture as sculpture. My audience is necessarily a limited one ... It is the needs of art, not the public, that comes first".

(Richard Serra, 1991, p.22)

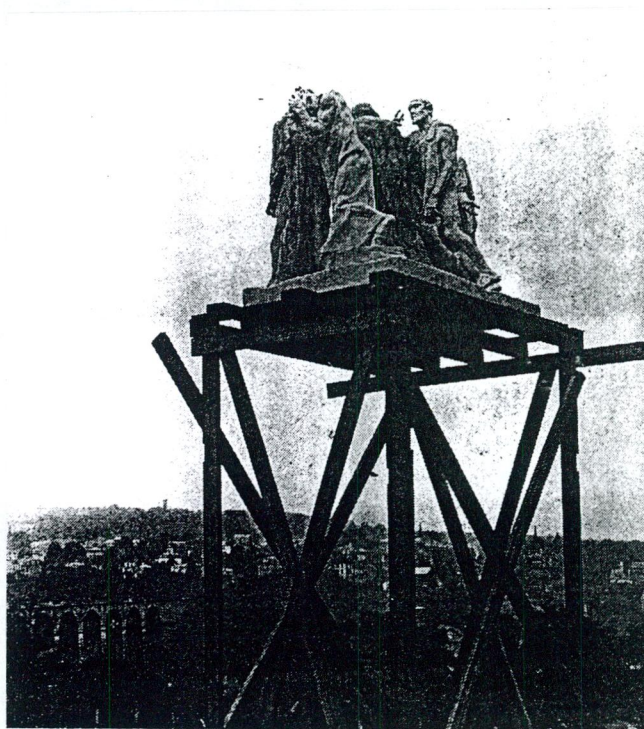


Fig. 1: *The Burghers of Calais*, plaster, on a plinth erected by Rodin at Meudon



Fig 1 (a): *The Burghers of Calais*, bronze, in Calais 1904

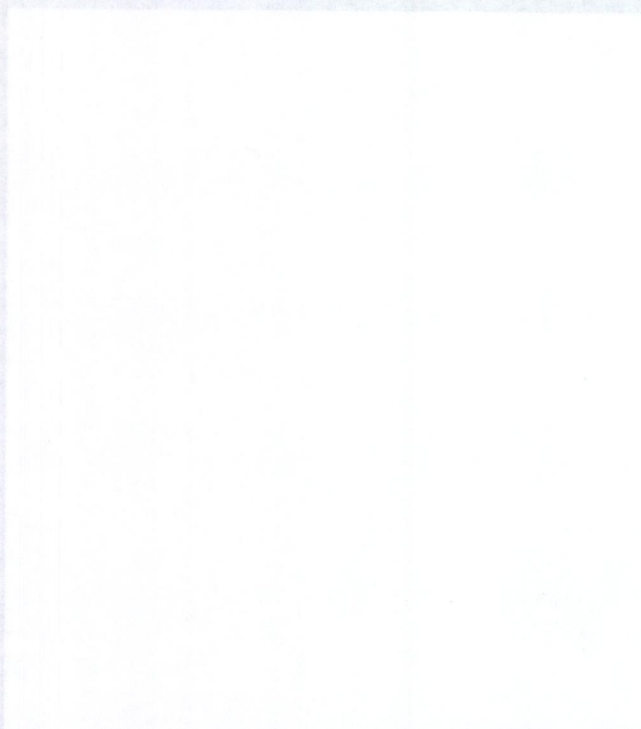
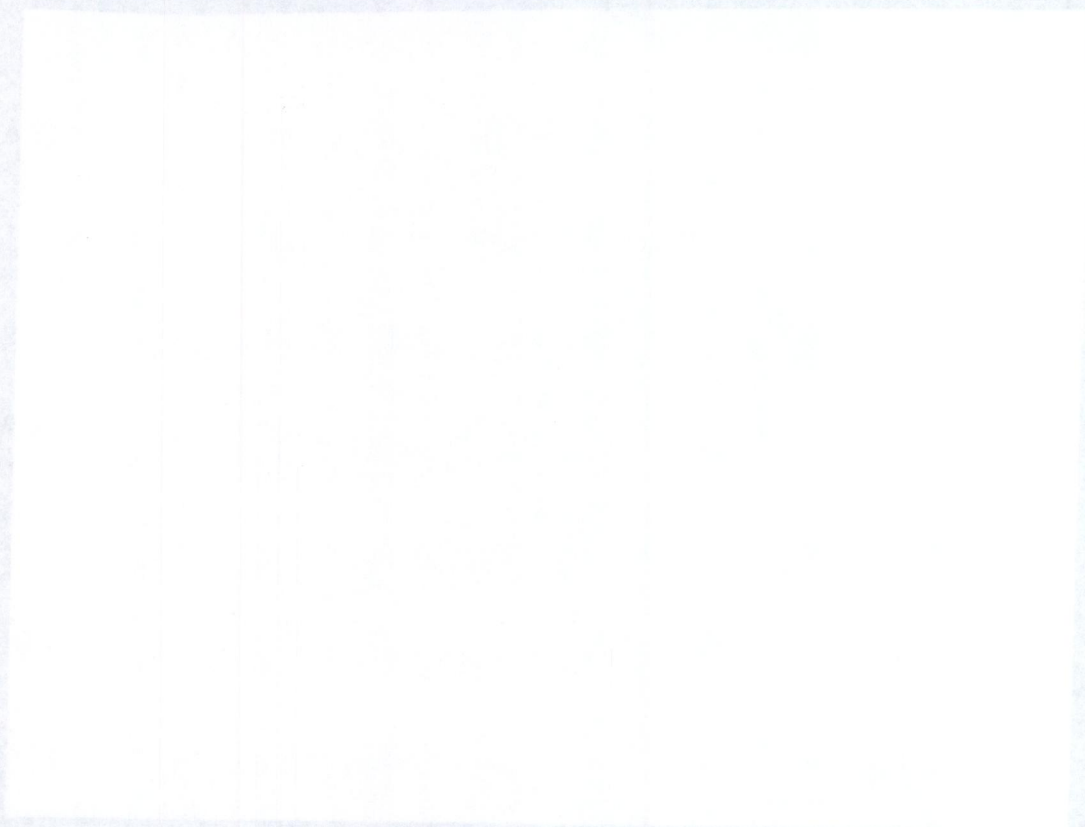




Fig 2: *Tilted Arc*, Richard Serra, Manhattan 1981



William Turnbull is quoted as saying,

"the problem with public sculpture lies largely
with the public not with sculpture".

(Cannon, 1972 p.23)

and William Tucker,

"the idea of designing a sculpture for a particular
site, even if chosen by oneself, seems to me a gross
limitation on the sculptor's freedom of action".

(Cannon, 1972, p.25)

If I agreed with these statements, I would not be writing this
thesis, searching to discover and define a role for art in a truly
public sense, a public art for our time that communicates to a
broad audience and remains true to the artist.

I think there is a certain arrogance about public sculpture.
Although commissioned, what gives an artist the right to impose
what are often described as "monstrosities" onto a community? In
the case of **Tilted Arc** the people who had to use the plaza were
strongly opposed to its existence and successfully petitioned for
its removal. Although, one can argue that the artist isn't at fault if
he carries out the brief.

The question of the permanency of public sculpture arises here.
Should provisions be made for the removal of public art in
Ireland? Who is to say that the public are wrong when a strong
reaction against a public sculpture is evident? Eilis O'Connell's
Great Wall of Kinsale (*Fig. 3*) received such opposition.

The sculpture was awarded by the Arts Council to the town of
Kinsale in recognition of its success in the 1986 Tidy Towns
Competition. The award is part of the Arts Council's scheme of
commissioning public sculptures for winners of that competition.
The scheme arose out of the Council's concern at the lack of public
commissions for sculpture and the subsequent decision in 1981 to
begin commissioning at least one piece of sculpture per year. A
report submitted to the Government also led to the creation of the

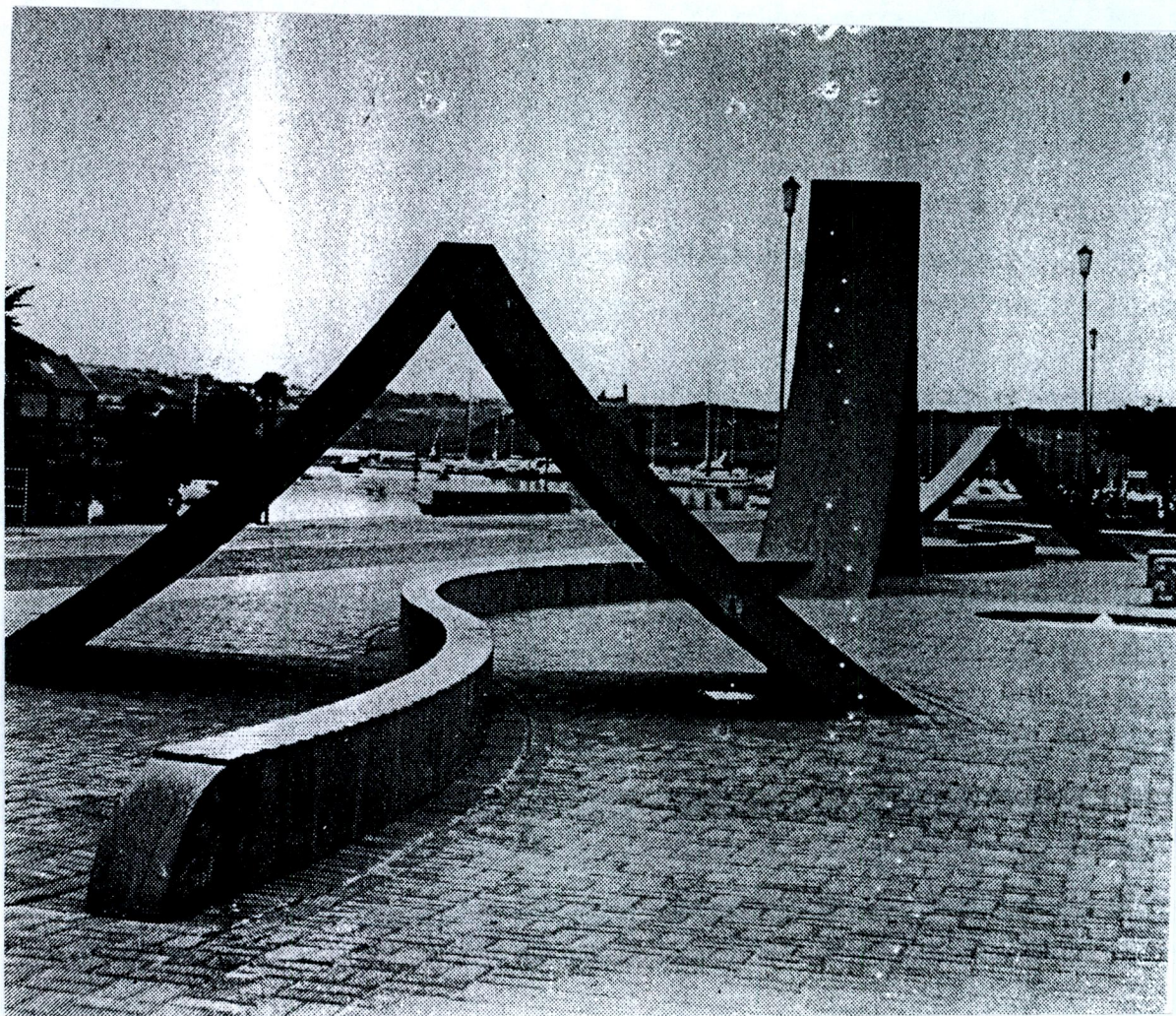


Fig 3: *Great Wall of Kinsale*, Eilis O'Connell, 1988



percentage scheme, in which up to 1% or £ 20,000 of new capital projects is made available for artistic features.

Kinsale Urban District Council (UDC) agreed to accept a commissioned sculpture and identified a site on the sea front. The UDC had hoped to re-develop the site as a childrens playground but when this was rejected the plan changed to the creation of a town park with suggestions that a traditional style statue such as a fisherman would be erected. This was soon quashed by the Arts Council and the UDC, so while making provisions for the town park they narrowed the site for the sculpture to a strip some two hundred feet along the waterfront. The idea of a perimeter piece was accepted by the Town Clerk and County Architect. The idea was also supported by Medbh Ruane, Visual Arts officer of the Arts Council, who saw the opportunity to expand the Arts Council's scheme significantly by creating a large site-specific environmental sculpture.

Eilis O'Connell put forward two proposals for the site. The first consisted of a low wall incorporating an entrance in the centre; the second was the present design. The design incorporates a number of functional aspects which relate directly to the site. The sculpture replaced the existing perimeter wall, which had been used as seating for people waiting for the bus. The central spine of the sculpture was kept low to continue this practice; the arcs at each end were envisaged as bus shelters while the central arch formed an entrance to the town park behind. According to the artist, **The Great Wall of Kinsale** was first and foremost a sculpture,

"I just make sculpture for its own sake".

She regards the forms as "soft" not "modern".....

"They have an oriental feel to them, they have much more to do with ancient things like Chinese architecture than hard edged modern sculpture".

(*Cork Examiner*, 8th April '89)

The structure became a 179 feet long curving wall, straddled at either end by curved seven foot arches. The wall is split in the middle by a third seventeen foot high arch. The entire structure cost £22,000 plus £13,000, the cost of landscaping around it.

The most significant and, as it turned out, most controversial aspect of the proposal was the decision to use corten steel to fabricate the sculpture. It was chosen mainly because the UDC demanded that it be maintenance free. Corten steel is maintenance free because the surface of the metal develops a layer of rust which seals the surface and protects it from further corrosion, a process known as maturation.

The sculpture was voted in by the UDC and was accepted by eight votes to one; it was also accepted by Kinsale Chamber of Tourism by forty votes to one. The people of Kinsale were not consulted.

By the time the sculpture was officially unveiled on the 22nd July 1988, a small but vociferous campaign of opposition to the sculpture had begun in the town. Their argument was that the material used in the sculpture was not performing as it should and that the arches were unsafe as they were too easily climbed by children. The protests were dismissed by local artists who pointed to the adverse reporting of the affair by sections of the Cork media as the real reason for the public concern expressed (Walsh, 1989, p. 45).

Leo Higgins was brought in by the Arts Council to advise on the threat to public safety raised by protesters. They proposed that the sculpture be shot blasted to remove existing rust, primed to prevent further rust and painted. These modifications were carried out and the Arts Council and Kinsale UDC proved victorious. This 'win' was seen as important in the context of increasing support for public art programmes. But was it really a 'win' for Kinsale UDC and the Arts Council or was it a desperate attempt to save red faces? Could they have handled the loss of £ 35,000 expenditure and admitted to a mistake?

Frank Buckley, a Kinsale-based musician, said:

"I find it offensive, pretentious and a waste of money especially in a town that hasn't got a hall".

(*Kinsale Newsletter*, April '89)

Declan McGonagle, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, said

"Don't assume I would automatically defend that Kinsale piece. I am not at all sure it was the result of a process I could approve. There is an assumption that any kind of art is better than no art, and that all art is good for people".

(P. Woodworth, 21st July '90)

McGonagle's long experience as an organiser of public art events in Derry has taught him the value of consulting the local community. He fully recognises that such an approach requires money for public programmes before, during and after the work is created. He sees it as the only way to give people real access to projects in their community. Otherwise, they inevitably feel that something unfamiliar has been imposed upon them and react by finding it irrelevant at best and ugly at worst.

Ciaran MacGonigal, Director of the RHA, says:

"The principle of public sculpture is excellent, the results have often not been good in practice. Criticism of the practice should not be taken as an attack on the principle. But we are not getting the sculpture we deserve. We are getting the kind of sculpture various public agencies think is good for us".

(P. Woodworth, 21st July, '90)

Michael Bulfin, Chairman of the Sculptors Society, also agrees that consultation with the community is necessary and points out that his organisation has gone to some pains to ensure this happens:

"Once an artist has been selected he or she should talk at length to the community about their project. If the reaction is very negative, I think the sculptor should think again. There is, however, sometimes a very real contradiction between what an artist genuinely believes would work well in a given place and what the local people want. Ninety people out a hundred would vote for 'chocolate box' art over Rembrandt".

(Sculptors Society Newsletter, Aug. 1983)

The Kinsale dispute can be put down to several local factors. The first is the fact that the town thrives on the tourism trade. The social and cultural life of the town is geared towards this. The 'olde worlde' charm of the town is designed to attract this trade. The second is the sheer scale of the project. The monumental scale, raw steel and minimal forms of the sculpture make a striking visual statement. It is not easy to ignore and one wonders whether the commissioning and installation of such physical presence and environmental impact should have been handled in the way it was; whether in fact there was adequate consultation with the ultimate recipient of the sculpture - the townspeople of Kinsale?

Another recent public sculpture project in Ireland has shown that public involvement can generate public acceptance. An artwork can become significant to its public through the incorporation of content relevant to the local audience. This piece is Leo Higgins's **Hands** in Finglas (*Fig. 4*), a suburb in Dublin's northside. Finglas is a working class community struggling to overcome high unemployment and a reputation for being a troubled area.

The sculpture stands seven feet high at a busy crossroads in Finglas village. It is visible from five approaching roads and is situated on a paved area in front of **Superquinn**, who sponsored the project. Superquinn were renovating their shopfront and pavement area in front of it and approached the Sculptors Society of Ireland to advertise for a sculpture for the site.



Fig 4: *Hands*, Leo Higgins, Finglas, 1990



Leo Higgins won the competition. Although it was not part of the brief to involve the local people, Higgins, over a number of months painstakingly took casts of hands from the people of Finglas. This one-to-one contact made it possible for Higgins to get to know the people and their concerns. It also gave the people an opportunity to meet him and find out how the sculpture would be made.

The artist then put the hands together to form a tapering column of bronze hands. The word 'building' comes to mind when I see this sculpture. It represents the community building a better life through Leo Higgins building this sculpture. **Hands** has become a civic symbol and an object of pride.

This returns to my theory that public involvement can generate public acceptance. An art work can become significant to its public through the incorporation of content relevant to the local audience.

Higgins, I feel, deals with his job much more sensitively than O'Connell. O'Connell's piece has little relevance to the local people and they were excluded from any involvement.

Of course this is not the case for every public sculpture made. I think that public involvement is one solution to the abyss of public sculpture problems. In the Millennium sculptures you will see that none of them have involved the public in the way that Higgins did. However, most of the work involves some people participation which adds to the acceptance of the work.

CHAPTER 2

Tracing the History of Sculpture in Dublin since 1800

In this chapter I propose to trace the history of sculpture in Dublin since 1800 as a background to the current sculpture 'boom'. I shall deal with this by looking at major artists at the time and important monuments that still stand today. I will discuss this on a superficial level, purely because it serves the purpose of setting the scene for the Millennium Sculptures.

Sculpture in Dublin about two hundred years ago was both memorial and monumental. This trend continued into the 1960s. Probably the greatest structure still standing is the **Wellington Testimonial**, an obelisk in the Phoenix Park (*Fig. 5*). It was begun in 1817 by the English architect, Sir Robert Smirke. Originally it was intended for St. Stephen's Green but the proposal fell through as its great height of over sixty two metres would have been out of scale in such surroundings. Obelisks like this are a curious aspect of monumental design and appear in Donnybrook and Leinster Lawn. The **Parnell Monument** in Upper O'Connell St. (*Fig. 6*) has a triangular shaped obelisk as a background to the figure. This type of tall rectangular shaft tapering to a point goes back to ancient Egypt, when obelisks were used to dignify the entrances to the temples and to mark important sites or boundaries.

The **O'Connell Monument** (*Fig. 7*) that dominates O'Connell Street was designed by John Foley. It is a heroic statue of the Liberator (3.7 meters high) while beneath are allegorical figures, the chief being Eire holding the Act of Emancipation, with winged figures representing, Patriotism, Eloquence, Fidelity and Courage. This imaginative monument commissioned in 1864 was completed after Foleys death by his assistant Brock and was unveiled in 1882. John Henry Foley was the most talented of the Irish sculptors of that period. The statues of Goldsmith (1864) and



Fig. 5: *Wellington Testimonial*, Phoenix Park, 1817





Fig 6: *Parnell Monument*, Upper O'Connell St, 1899



Burke (1868) in College Green are his work, as also is the statue of Prince Albert in the London memorial of that name.

The **Campanile** in Trinity College (*Fig. 8*), was designed by Sir Charles Lanyon, about 1853 and replaced the old College belfry. In its complexity it is typical of 19th century design, and although it lacks the repose of the older buildings of the college it is an interesting and well placed feature of the campus.

Other monumental works were carried out by artists like Oliver Sheppard (**The Fall of Cuchulain**, G.P.O., 1911), Jerome O'Connor (**Robert Emmet**, St. Stephen's Green, 1917), and Andrew O'Connor (**Lafayette** in Dunlaoighre 1921 and **Daniel O'Connell**, National Bank Dame Street, 1923).

Edward Delaney has carried out most political work since then such as **Wolfe Tone** 1967 (*Fig. 9*) in St. Stephen's Green and **Thomas Davis** 1966 (*Fig. 10*) in College Green. I think that these works do not show him at his best as this type of commemorative work runs counter to modern artistic ideals.

Post-war sculpture in Ireland has been dominated by ecclesiastical commissions. It was a great period for church building and in certain dioceses the architects met with most enlightened patronage to ensure that works of art were incorporated into their modern setting. The leading artist in the religious field and one whose secular works are also notable is Oisín Kelly. He worked in a great variety of media and allowed the materials to speak for themselves.

It is here that I have to make an exception to art works in Dublin as Oisín Kelly didn't make any religious pieces in the city. His noble relief of the last supper in Knockanure (*Fig. 11*) Co. Kerry, 1963 is in carved wood while his **St. Peter** over the porch at Milford Co. Donegal 1966 is in bronze. The linear quality of Kelly's work gives it great precision. It achieves monumentality and movement as in the **Children of Lir** 1971 (*Fig. 12*) in the Garden of Remembrance, Parnell Square, Dublin, which triumphs notably



Fig 7: *O'Connell Monument*, O'Connell Street, 1882





Fig 8: *The Campanile*, Trinity College, 1853



over its surroundings. His work has great expressive qualities and shows a love of people. This is evident in the commemorative piece of **Jim Larkin** 1979 in O'Connell St. (*Fig. 13*) depicted as a powerful political man, and in a contrasting piece in Cork of two full length bronze workmen who stand gazing in awe at the Cork Municipal Offices.

The predominance of memorial and church work has probably been one of the main reasons why Irish sculpture was so slow to develop an abstract idiom. There has been and still is little work of secular character available for sculptors. Buildings are no longer sculpturally decorated so that the stone carver of old has virtually no place except as a restorer - this is a sad end to a profession which has given us our best sculptors. In view of the lack of work, it is surprising that only a few major Irish sculptors have worked abroad - F.E. McWilliam and Andrew O'Connor. This, however was particularly disappointing for Ireland as their work achieved prominence just after the war when little else was happening in Ireland. They might have been a serious influence of that generation of Irish men as they were one of the first Irish sculptors to show the influence of modern movements, like conceptualism in their art. F.E. McWilliam's only monumental piece in Ireland is his sculpture **Princess Macha** (*Fig. 14*). Commissioned for the new Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry in 1957, this piece is generally recognised as one of the most important commissions of McWilliam's career - yet one that has also aroused controversy about its appropriateness (Roy Wilkinson, 1989, p. 29). Princess Macha, stands - or rather sits - outside the hospital, a dove perched on the end of one elongated stretched out arm. The surface of the body is pockmarked stretched and heavily textured, a finish achieved by pressing small objects into the original clay. McWilliam described the sculpture as one,

"that rhymed with but was not the Celtic thing".

(T.P. Flanagan, 1981)



Fig. 9: *Wolf Tone*, Edward Delaney, 1967





Fig 10: *Thomas Davis*, Edward Delaney, 1966

It was Ian Stuart who moved into the field of non-figurative work in the early 1960s. His first pieces using junk materials were deliberate, strong statements where the texture of the rusting metal was less important than the angular forms. This phase was short lived and was followed by the stark simplicity of his polished metal sculpture which stands severely architectural like a primitive yet very much a machine age dolmen in the Goulding's garden at the Dargle Glen. Stuart was the first Dublin sculptor to emerge as a 'modern' figure and he was followed by several young men: Brian King, Michael Bulfin and John Burke, who worked with painted sculpture. King is an artist who used with great success repetition and contrast. His forms are simplicity itself but they have grandeur which is often helped by the decisive colouring. He is at his best on a large scale and when seen in an architectural setting as in Galway University where his monumental steel form complements the architectural space and becomes the focal point of the main concourse. This type of work is almost always in an architectural setting and has become known as corporate abstract sculpture.

The Bank of Ireland Headquarters in Baggot St. commissioned two abstract painted steel pieces, one by Michael Bulfin and the other by John Burke, both in 1975. Bulfin's **Reflections** (*Fig. 15*) is a vivid yellow structure. It represents a shaft of light entering the bank's forecourt and reflecting around the many polished surfaces that form the building.

A huge gap in sculpture had become evident. It was either memorial, commemorative or corporate abstract. Sites for sculpture were prominent, urban and often privately owned i.e. banks and colleges and favouring established artists. There seemed little room for diversification given the control patrons had, although this type of patronage was not necessarily conservative, there was room for improvement.



Fig. 11: *The Last Supper*, Oisín Kelly, 1963





Fig. 12: *Children of Lir*, Oisín Kelly



In the late '70s a series of sculpture workshops were held by the Independent Artists Sculpture Group. Following these workshops funding was given by An Chomhairle Ealaíon to a symposium in 1978. The Japanese sculptor Minoru Nizuma was the invited guest and made the recommendation that Irish sculptors should unite in a group. This idea was acted on and in 1980 the Sculptors Society was founded by a group of sculptors many of whom had attended the Symposium.

The preoccupation of the Sculptors Society was a desire among artists to get a chance to practise their craft and to get going in the realm of public sculpture. The strategy behind the founding of the Society and the series of symposia was to persuade local authorities that there was a group of sculptors ready, willing and able to produce good public work. Since the founding of the Society most if not all public commissions have been done through them. They advertise competitions from commissioning bodies to their members.

While no one could argue about Ireland's enthusiastic boom in sculpture, criticisms have been made about the content and relevance of the sculpture being produced. Since the decline of monumental, memorial and church art in its traditional forms, Irish art has shown little interest in depicting these themes in a more modern sense. As recently as 1984, the critic Aidan Dunne remarked that these areas

"were not considered the legitimate province of the Fine Arts".

(Dunne, 15 July, 1984)

Little of Ireland's turbulent history is registered, let alone explored in the visual arts. Even in 1987 on the occasion of the massive Irish Women Artists series of exhibitions covering the period from the late eighteenth century to the present, the English critic Waldemar Januszczak could remark that:



Fig. 13: *Jim Larkin*, Oisín Kelly, 1979





Fig. 14: *Princess Macha*, F.E. McWilliam, 1957



"remarkably the show is distinguished by the total absence of insights in to our records of, Ireland's political history".

(Januszczak, 1987, p.12)

Januszczak noted that there was precious little in the way of social observation either. I think that the art Januszczak referred to was a reaction against the long tradition of political and religious art that had dominated for almost a century. Personal expression is still a relatively new concept in Irish public sculpture and it is creating a vivid visual display. It is not possible to speak of a special style in Ireland at the moment, but it is possible to speak of a re-awakening and re-vitalisation of the ancient art of sculpture.



Fig. 15: *Reflections*, Michael Bulfin, 1975



CHAPTER 3

Dublin Sculpture Symposium 1988

In this chapter I will discuss how the project was initiated, how each sculpture was selected and by whom. I will then talk about each sculpture in depth in relation to their site, scale, materials, and their overall effect.

(a) How It Began

Initially Dublin Corporation approached the Sculptors Society of Ireland with a proposal. They wanted to commemorate the Millennium with a sculpture. Allied Irish Banks agreed to sponsor the project for £ 40,000. It was then agreed that ten sculptures would be erected around the city instead of one. Each artist would then be given a budget of £ 4,000. The S.S.I. appointed Jenny Haughton as 'Co-ordinator'. Her job was to oversee the budget, to run the selection process and communicate between artist and panel. Dublin Corporation, when asked to propose ten sites, did so; and they are as follows:

1. Pimlico, a run down square used as a car park,
2. Ballymun, a grassy slope by the flats,
3. St. Catherine's Park, off Thomas Street,
4. Traffic Island, O'Connell Bridge, south end,
5. Liffey Street, opposite the Ha'Penny Bridge,
6. Essex Quay, waste ground by roadside,
7. George's Street, an existing cobbled seating area,
8. Clontarf Link Road, a flat open green by the sea,
9. Gardiner Street park at St. Patrick's Cathedral,
10. Traffic Island, corner of St. Stephen's Green and Baginbun St.

The competition then advertised for site specific works. The only commitment Dublin Corporation had was to maintain all sculptures in the years to come and to carry out alterations to the sites as each sculpture needed.

(b) The Selection Board

Jenny Haughton sent letter to relevant organisations inviting a representative to be on the panel. According to the S.S.I.s "Code of Practice for the Commissioning/Purchase of Art for Public Places" handbook, the Artists Association of Ireland and the Sculptors Society of Ireland should be represented and artists or artists' representatives should be in the majority. It also states that there should be a community representative. Two of the eight selectors were artists but there was no community representative. Although Jenny Haughton did not choose the make up of the panel, she feels now that she should have been more specific in inviting representatives as some had no experience of this kind of procedure. I think that the few fresh faces could have added to the variety of work that resulted.

The Committee were:-

Leo Higgins	Sculptor and members of S.S.I.
Brian Maguire	Artist and member of A.A.I.
Pat Seagar	Member of the Millennium Committee (set up to oversee all Millennium projects during the year).
Medbh Ruane	Art Critic and member of the Arts Council.
Terry Murray	Dublin Corporation, Parks Development.
Frank McDonald	Architecture critic with the Irish Times.
Dermot Egan	A.I.B., Deputy Chief Executive.
Michael Crimmin	Public Art Development Trust of Great Britain.

(c) The Selection Process

The brief supplied to the artists stated the ten sites and asked for 'site specific' works that would incorporate the history, the community and the utilisation of each site. FAS (Employment Services Office) would be incorporated to provide facilities and man power for each sculptor, when chosen.

On three consecutive Saturdays after the brief was issued, any artist who was interested was taken in a group to the different sites. This was organised by the Sculptors Society so that each artist would get a proper feel of each site. It was also to make them aware of every site in order that there would not be an imbalance of entries, i.e., artists favouring more prominent city centre sites.

One hundred and fifty-two entries were received in maquette form. Each maquette remained anonymous to the panel until the final ten were chosen. The selection jury worked in an anonymous fashion by voting on each entry. They first narrowed it down to forty-five quality 'sculptures', sculptures that would be made well, stand the test of time and those that showed consideration for the sites they were proposed for. In the next stage they again voted anonymously and each maquette that received five votes or more went to the next stage. Nineteen were selected here. Again, in the same manner, the final ten were chosen.

However, there is a sense of unease and frustration among many sculptors about the methods of commissioning public sculpture. There is unease from those producing large permanent indestructible public works (i.e. stone, bronze, iron) and frustration from those who haven't had the opportunity to experiment on something big and so are out of the running. The reliance on open competition for public commissions means in effect that the established sculptor with a proven track record and many years experience is forced to start from the bottom rung of the ladder each time they seek new work - competing with an ever increasing pool of artists (Jakki McKenna, 1992, p.3)

I think it is an understandable frustration on both sides. Maybe it's time to review the policy of open competition and look for new ways to include more artists in the world of public sculpture as well as establishing those that are already there.

I believe the way the selection panel voted on the Millennium Sculptures was very fair. However, it is obvious that the quality of a maquette and its proposal would suggest that it was by an established artist. Of the final ten sculptors chosen all except two, Jakki McKenna and Rachel Joynt had carried out large public works before. There was no discussion between the panel on the selection of the final ten sculptures, although the voting was unanimous at the end.

The ten artists that were selected were asked to consult with Dublin Corporation's Technical Committee. They advised on what needed to be altered in order to co-operate with the existing network of wiring, pipes, drains, etc.

At this stage meetings were called in the residential communities and each artist talked about what was about to happen in the area. The two localities involved were Ballymun and Pimlico. Here sculptures were to be placed in their midst with little prior warning. I think the selection process should have been changed for those areas. All maquettes proposed for these sites should have been shown to the community. With the help of the selection panel the local people could have voted on what they wanted. In the case of Pimlico, a difficult site, only two entries were received, the existing sculpture there now and a religious statue of our Lady, a serious entry I was assured by Leo Higgins!. This raises a problem of uneven distribution of proposals between each site. City centre sites seemed more popular possibly because they would attract more attention. Entries for Ballymun and Pimlico were less in number because they were challenging residential sites. I think more entries should have been sought for these sites before a final decision was made. In the case of Pimlico it became their only choice since the religious statue was never seriously considered.

(d) The Ten Sculptures and Sculptors

In this section I will set out each sculpture individually and discuss it in relation to its site. I will talk about materials, scale aims, purpose and how, six years on, they may or may not still have any relevance to their sites. Do they involve public participation or are they even approachable?

In most cases I have quoted the artist about their piece but in some cases this was not possible. As I said earlier, there is little documentation on these sculptures and in some cases non, so this will be mostly on site analysis.

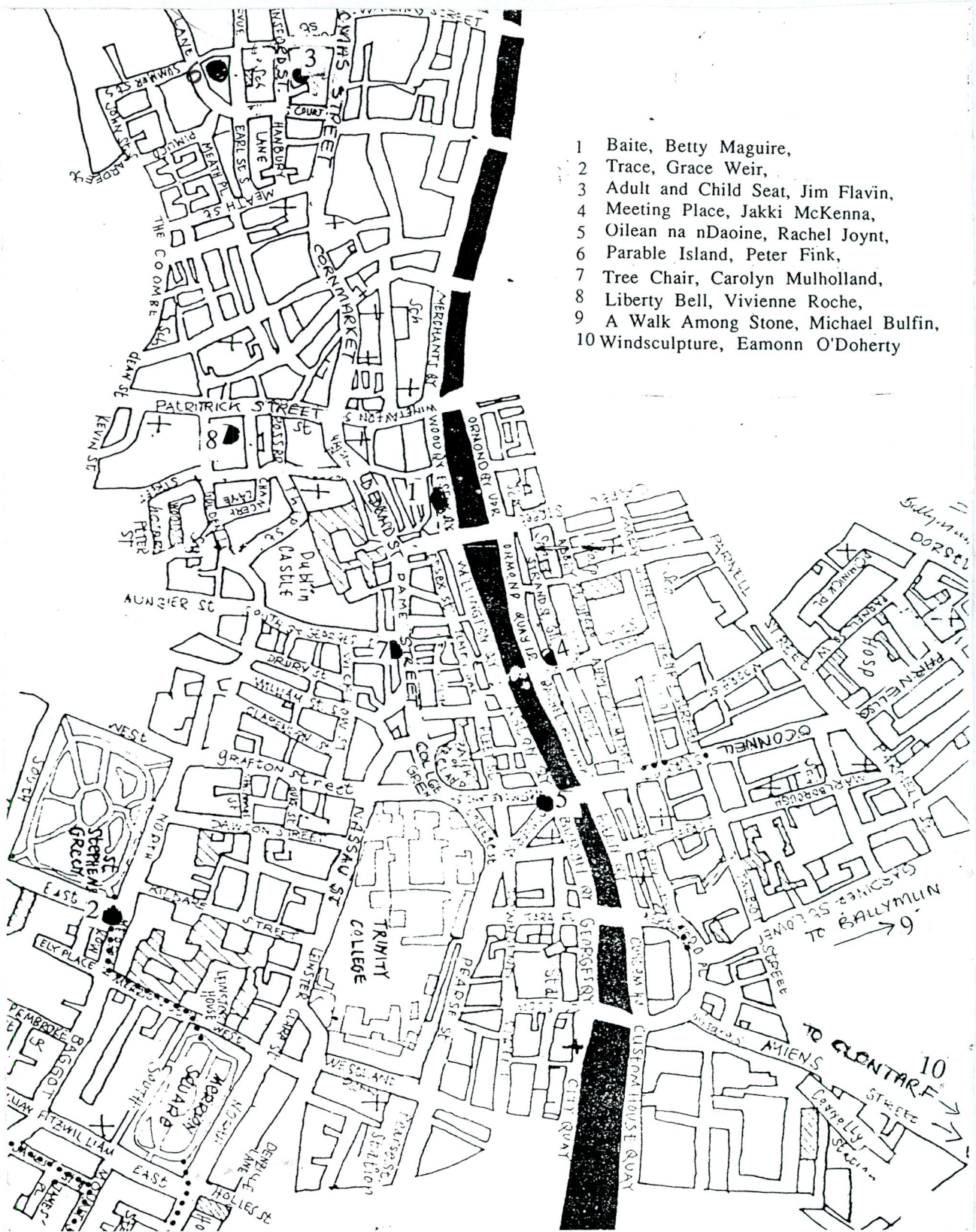


Fig. A: Map of the Sculptures



Eamonn O'Doherty, **Windsculpture**, Clontarf

This piece is a tall and ambitious steel structure standing 25 feet tall (*Fig. 16*) on a flat grassy green by the sea. It has shaped aluminium sails that are colourfully painted making it eye-catching from the three approaching roads. Its 'sails' are all shaped differently. Some are curved, some wide and flat or narrow. All of them have pointed ends. The arc-like tube structure that encircles the whole piece acts as a balance for the peculiarly angled sails. It also adds a softening effect to the whole angular structure. The sails on **Windsculpture** were originally supposed to move, i.e. spin on an axis with the different wind changes, but this has never worked. Because it stands on such an exposed area the driving sea air would have made it a spectacular piece but the sea air has only speeded up the process of rusting.

The site for **Windsculpture** is an exposed blustery one. As one approaches the site from Dublin City, a row of houses are on the left of the road and on the right is the green upon which **Windsculpture** exists. Another road goes to the right before the green towards Dublin Docks. In the distance cranes, masts and chimneys echo the shape of **Windsculpture**. Behind the sculpture to the right is the Liffey estuary flowing into the sea. The blue of the sea and sky are reflected in the blue sails. The sails themselves are reminiscent of ships and masts of boats that constantly travel up the river. I think that O'Doherty's modern abstract piece has so many connotations of the area, i.e. sea, weather and the docks, and he has used these elements successfully in making this work.

This is perhaps the only sculpture that does not involve human participation. Although the proposed maquette had two sculpted figures below it, O'Doherty felt that they were not necessary and so left them out. I think if he included those figures he would have made the piece more approachable. As it is, it stands alone, arrogantly dominating the surrounding green.

At the time O'Doherty said,

"the different parts of the sculpture will change position constantly with wind speed and direction, presenting a different aspect each day to the passers by serving as a reminder of the constantly changing forces of nature",

(Brian Fallon, 1989, p.13)

Perhaps O'Doherty should have considered how the sculpture would change if the sails didn't move. His statement relies totally on the sculpture working.

When I questioned Dublin Corporation on the maintenance of the sculpture, Sean Kelly from the Public Monuments Department said:

"It is a responsibility of the artist to look out for their own work".

When I further questioned him about Dublin Corporation's promise to maintain these sculptures, he replied that he didn't recall that being said. Dublin Corporation's lack of commitment is something that arises with many of the sculptures.



Fig. 16: *Windsculpture*, Eamonn O'Doherty, 1988



Betty Maguire, Baite, Essex Quay

This is a sculpture in almost three sections (*Fig. 17*). Each end is a rising iron structure suggesting the skeletal form of a ship. In the centre are three wooden benches that are reminiscent of the alignment which oarsmen would have made as they rowed. Together these three sections suggest a sunken ship in mud with just the benches and the protruding bow and stern remaining. At each end two steel spirals curve menacingly, as did the fierce heads on old Viking ships. The whole structure is ninety feet long and very life-size, i.e. one could almost think these were remains of a ship.

Baite, is sited in Essex Quay by the roadside. On the opposite side of the road running parallel to both the road and the sculpture is the River Liffey. Only a stone's throw away is Wood Quay, where archaeologists found remains of an old Viking settlement. Behind the sculpture facing the river is the Gothic facade of the Church of SS. Michael and John built in 1918. In an area of such rich historical connotations the sculpture immediately evokes scenes of Vikings and settlements to me. It is easy to see why the public identify with it easily and naturally.

The benches on **Baite** are constantly used as seating for people waiting at the bus stop beside it. In my mind sitting on these benches is like sitting in a ship. Betty Maguire said:

"It is reminiscent of the arrival of the Vikings in Ireland and their journey up the Liffey. Dublin is built on a Viking settlement - a buried past, so I see the sculpture as being partially buried".

(Brian Fallon, 1989, p.13)

I think the simplicity of **Baite** is what makes it such a striking and popular piece.



Fig 17: *Baite*, Betty Maguire, 1988



Grace Weir, Trace, Traffic Island, Baggot Street

This sculpture is sited on a busy traffic island used by pedestrians everyday (*Fig. 18*). By placing it on the traffic island it can be approached from four different angles. Each approaching road make **Trace** look very different. **Trace** is made up of two portland stone arches that looks as if they are built out of sections, i.e. one block on top of another. At the time the Customs House was been renovated and the stone from the building was used in the sculpture. In different places the 'blocks' are intersected by bronze panels that also look like solid blocks. These panels are decorated by different Celtic designs and figures. They add warmth, texture and add a more tactile quality to the sculpture. The arches are ten feet high and two feet thick. They are positioned parallel to each other about six feet apart though do not stand side by side. Instead they stand so that two opposite ends face each other. Connecting these ends is almost a third arch, i.e. the arch does not meet at the top, therefore creating an illusion of there being another arch. The arches echo the strong Georgian features of the area, like the doorways with fanlights about them. It also reminds me of a smaller version of the arched entrance into St. Stephen's Green from Grafton Street.

Grace Weir has built four lines of brickwork into the pavement from the four approaching points, that converge at the columns of the arches. I think this makes **Trace** a very approachable piece as one follows the lines to the sculpture. These brick lines also have the effect of positioning the sculpture on the pavement, almost like stabilisers.

"I wish this arch to be a visual stimulus, to be part of the Dublin streetscape. By placing it on the traffic island people can walk through it, making it part of their lives. I am interested in the contrast of materials, the texture and elegance of stone with

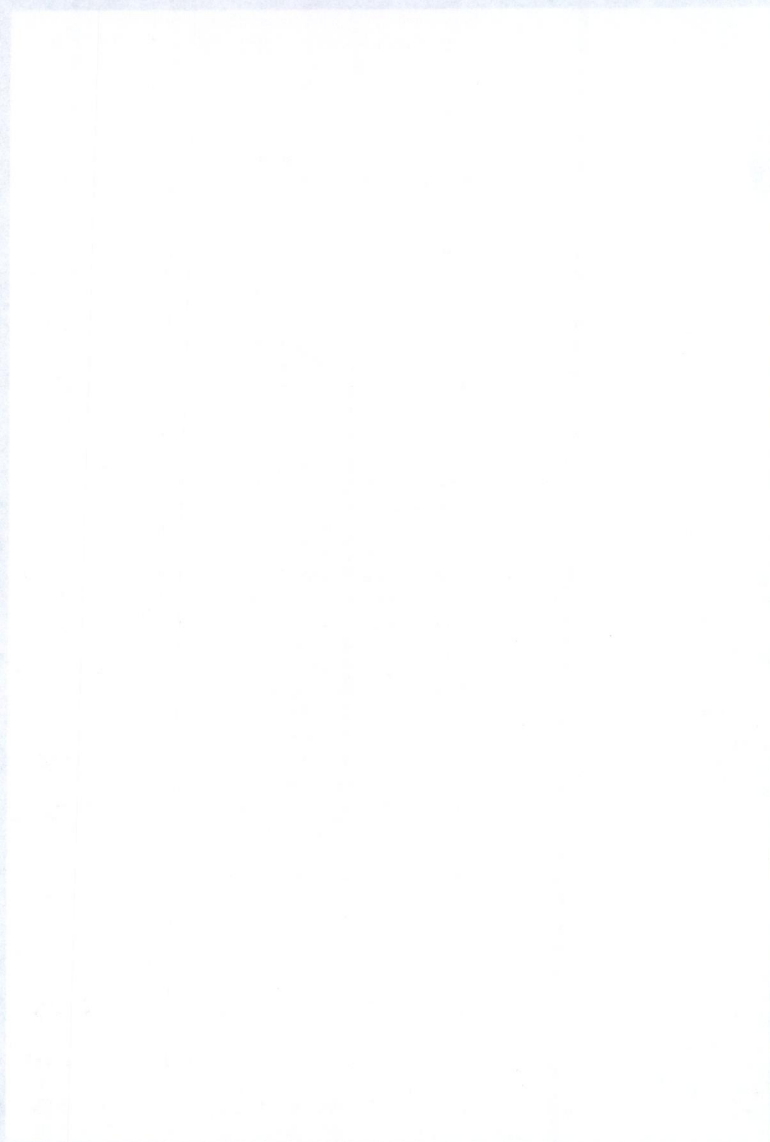
the warmth and colour of bronze. The overall double arch gives an illusion of a third arch and one arch becomes a shadow of the other"

(Brian Fallon, 1989, p.13)

Brian Fallon said that he found it obtrusive and hard to see and that the scale did not register (Fallon, 1989, p. 13). Perhaps the arches could have been higher and in a grander scale in line with the tall Georgian buildings around it. Having seen it here for six years I think it is hard to imagine any other sculpture in its place.



Fig 18: *Trace*, Grace Weir, 1988



Jim Flavin, Adult and Child Seat, St. Catherine's Park

This sculpture is situated in a little woody park in the Liberties that was once a graveyard (*Fig. 19*). It sits almost huddled in a corner, camouflaged by the shrubbery around it. The old headstones in the centre of the park lie at angles echoing the forms and colour of this curvilinear seat. The cemetery that represents the end of life is contrasted in Flavin's **Adult and Child Seat**, which celebrates the continuation of life. The park is quiet and peaceful but outside its gates, derelict houses and flats lie in contrast. **Adult and Child Seat** reminds me of a sleeping animal the way it nestles snugly into its corner.

The sculpture is bronze and over the years has blackened with pollution and has become green with oxidisation. This in fact has helped it settle into the park. The sculpture balances on two 'legs' and possibly looks as if it could topple over, or 'woken' in my analogy of the sleeping animal. To the right and centre are the two seats. The one on the right is the 'adult' seat as it is wide and flat. The central one is small and tight and slightly higher. The left the sculpture stretches out and around to the front like a protecting arm around the 'child seat'.

"This piece celebrates the relationship between young and old. It is a piece of public furniture inviting the viewer to participate".

(Brian Fallon, 1989, p.13)

People do sit in it and children climb through the holes at the back of the 'seats'. Public participation has also included severe defacing. The work is extensively graffitied in its six years. Flavin's sculpture has also become a product of its area, like an abandoned car, played in, climbed on, and destroyed. Apart from this, questions have been raised about its originality. Its remarkable resemblance to works of Moore have been noted, and Brian Fallon said:

"London parks are full of works in this style and they hardly add to the gaiety of nations or neighbourhoods".

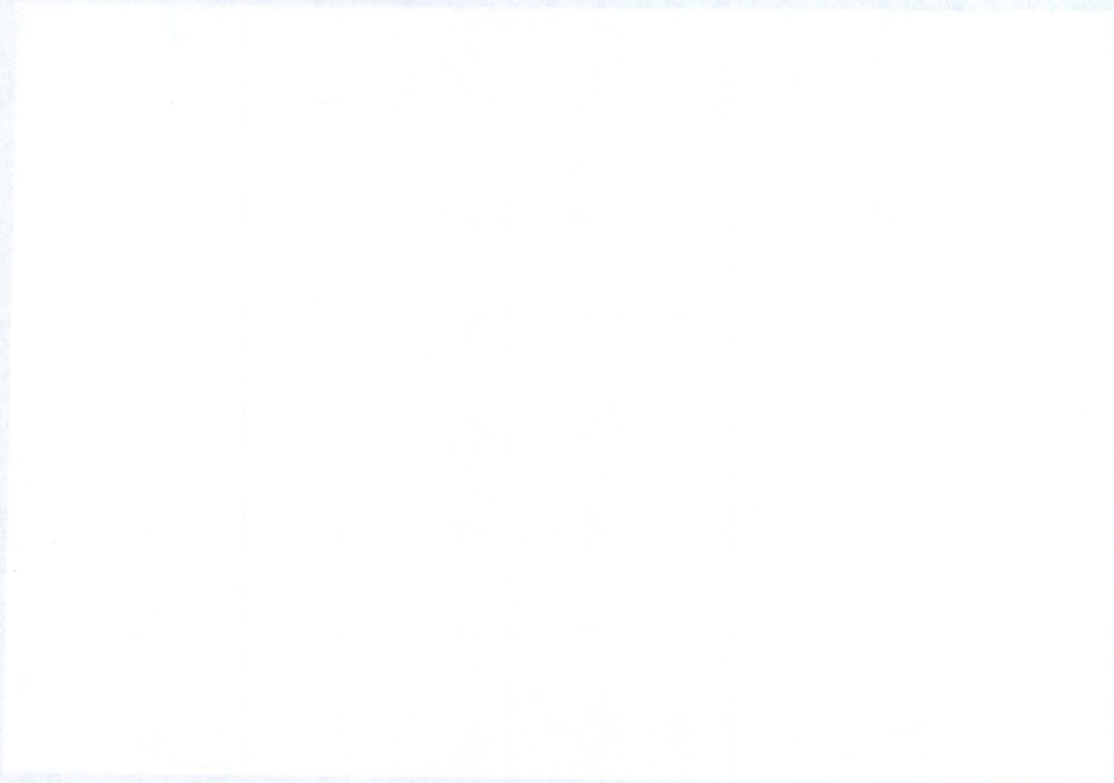
(Irish Times, 8th February, 1989)

I think he had a valid point about London parks being full of works like this, but in their not adding to the gaiety of neighbourhoods, I disagree. Public art has a lot to offer communities and in the case of Flavin's piece it certainly enriches that corner of the park, as it is played in and sat on.

The fact that it has been defaced poses the question of whether or not public sculpture should exist in a place where respect for property of any kind is lacking? But then again, should art be exclusive to more 'up-market' areas. I think everybody and every place is worthy of art, not just any art but good art. If an artist is to place art in a place like St. Catherine's Park or Pimlico then he should be aware of the consequence, i.e. people react with and against their environment and that includes defacing property. These questions I shall raise again in relation to Peter Fink's sculpture, a stone's throw away from Jim Flavin's piece.



Fig. 19: *Adult and Child Seat*, Jim Flavin, 1988



Jakki McKenna, Meeting Place, Ha'Penny Bridge

McKenna's ladies sitting on a bench chatting during a days shopping have fitted perfectly into the busy pedestrian area (*Fig. 20*). The sculpture sits in the middle of a rectangular brick paved with new trees planted around it. Behind the sculpture are the Woollen Mills and a newsagent. A canopy stretches from the Woollen Mills almost to the sculpture. The right of the sculpture is Ha'Penny Bridge spanning the Liffey. This is the only sculpture of the ten that uses the human form. The 'ladies' are cast in bronze and are large and bulky. They sit close to each other on a granite bench, their feet firmly flat on the ground in deep conversation. The right side of the bench stretches out further than the left and people use this as a seat. It is not unusual to see two women on the other side of the bench, with shopping bags, in conversation.

"My sculptures are about people and in particular women. In Dublin City, the absence of 'female statues' and the prominence of 'male statues' is evident. My work '**Meeting Place**', a recognition and celebration of working women, may begin to redress the balance".

(Brian Fallon, 1989, p.13)

The artist had originally thought of placing the sculpture under Jim Larkin in O'Connell St. She thought it would show the strength of ordinary women on the ground as opposed to the strong male figure set on a high plinth.

"I wanted to make a powerful piece but in a quiet way like the women in deep conversation. It would have shown I think where women are placed in society, behind the scenes, while men take positions of power".

(Conversation with the author, January '94)

McKenna wasn't allowed to put her piece in O'Connell St. as it wasn't one of the chosen sites, so she opted for Liffey Street. She feels it doesn't have the same impact as she had originally

intended. In fact, it is a very different piece now - non intrusive and quite friendly. **Meeting Place** was a big venture for Jakki McKenna. It was the first time she had worked in clay and modelled a figure. She had also never cast in bronze before. She feels now that if she were doing this work today, her modelling would be more refined. I think that her freshness and almost 'amateur' approach gives this work its character.



Fig. 20: *Meeting Place*, Jakki McKenna, 1988



Rachel Joynt, Oilean Na nDaoine, Traffic Island, O'Connell Bridge

This is sculpture in the most novel sense because it is sunken in the ground and possesses a touch of humour, which few public sculptures do (*Fig. 21*). This sculpture takes the form of foot prints, shoe prints, bird and animal prints all in different sizes. They are made from aluminium and bronze and are cast into the actual pavement slabs. These 'prints' cover the triangular traffic island. It is possible to follow them across the island, but in their quirky nature, no set of prints follow a normal course. i.e. some shoe prints take small steps then impossible large ones. They are a constant source of wonder to the people who walk about them and a pleasant surprise to those who first discover them. They reflect the constant flow of pedestrian traffic on this small island.

"Wearing, rusting, sinking, fading, moving and evaporating constantly occurs. The flux and fusion. Traces of our continually changing paths have been recorded to be enjoyed".

(Rachel Joynt, 1989)

This was the only site that had a particular briefing. It was stated that the sculpture should not be too large or obtrusive, distract or disrupt the flow of traffic and people. It was a challenging job to which Rachel Joynt rose.

Making art for the people is a common theme in Joynt's work, and an important one. Does public art mean art in public or for the public? Joynt's priority seems to be the latter. For example, in another piece she did for Moore Street, a lamp, she cast in bronze fruit and vegetable around the lamp stand (*Fig. 21a*). At the base of the lamp she places weights. This is for the traders of Moore Street, who participated in Joynt's project by telling her what they would like which would be relevant to them



Fig. 21: *Oilean Na nDaoine*, Rachel Joynt, 1988





Fig. 21(a): *Solas na Glasari*, Rachel Joynt, 1991



Vivienne Roche, Liberty Bell, St. Patrick's Cathedral

This sculpture stands in the middle of a green park by St. Patrick's Cathedral (*Fig. 22*). The park is well kept and cultivated with walkways and flower beds, which to me works against this ancient looking piece. It seems to need an old worn area to give it more authenticity.

The bell is made from two different materials, steel and bronze. The outer piece which is shaped like a bell encases the bronze bell on two sides, also providing a base and rising to a smaller flat piece on top. The walls of the steel 'shell' are curved slightly to echo the roundness of the bell. The bell itself is attached to this by a chain, anchoring it to the roof and base. While the steel is smooth and architectural the bronze of the bell is textured and not altogether circular in shape. The whole structure rises to a height of nine feet and sits on a circular brick base. This round brick base reflects the rotund quality of the bell.

"I wanted the sculpture to seem ancient and contemporary. I made forms in the early eighties which related to the forms of musical instruments and it was from here that I first became interested in bells. All the bells can be rung but their sound is secondary to the form".

(Vivienne Roche, 1990)

Roche spent four years in Scandinavia and studied the material culture of the Vikings, i.e. the formal motifs evident in ancient armour, tools, and utensils. With these rich references the recurring themes in her work, such as bells and musical instruments, have found a unified form and have been enriched by

"the immensely resonant world of feeling contained within Nordic Mythology".

(Vivienne Roche, 1990)



Fig. 22: *Liberty Bell*, Vivienne Roche, 1988



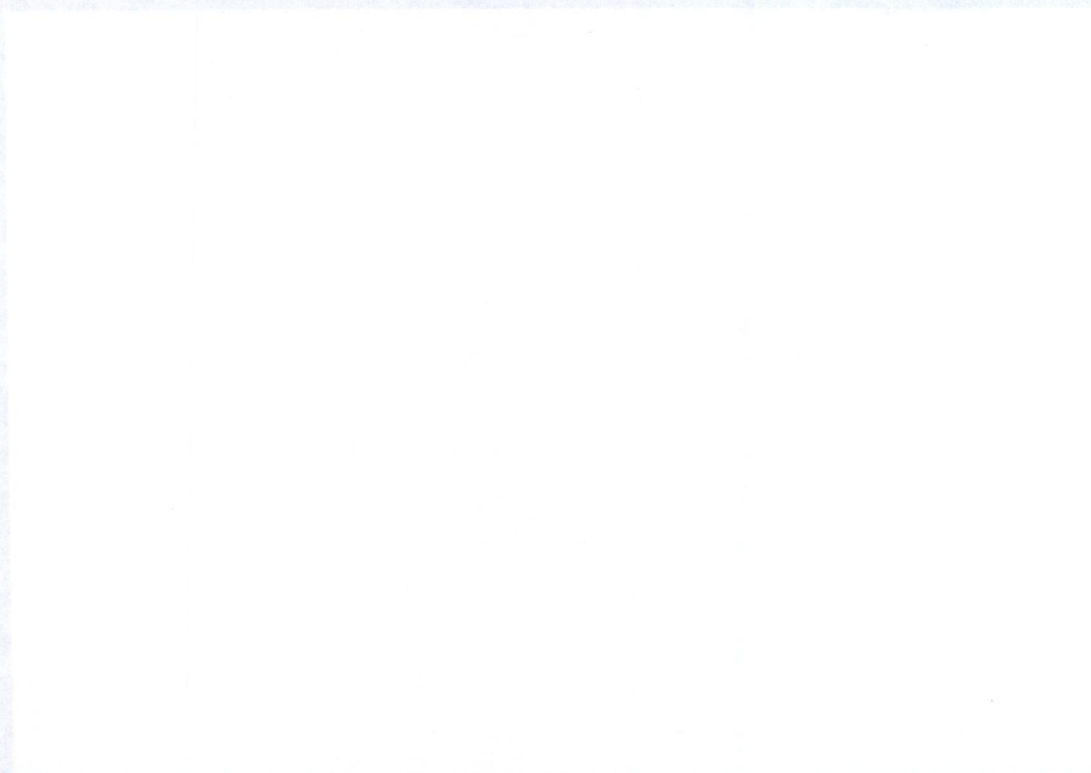
Michael Bulfin, A Walk Among Stones, Ballymun

This work is a string of alternate combinations of granite boulders and concrete blocks set on the crest of a small rise (*Fig. 23*). From the road below the high-rise flats tower up behind it or flanking it. The best view is easily from the road below, because as one walks beneath the 'stones' seem to rise up out of the ground. The flats seem to move behind the stones thus creating shifting combinations. From close up it seems much less effective. The two different types of stone work well together. The ancient glacial type granite boulders reminiscent of Stone Age Ireland stand next to squared concrete blocks almost like a miniature version of the tower blocks behind. **A Walk Among Stones** is at its most striking at the setting sun. The low sun sets behind the hill thus casting long shadows down the slope and the place becomes reminiscent of **Stonehenge** and ancient burial grounds. I think this piece speaks very strongly about the daunting elements of the well known high-rise flats. Like Peter Fink's and Jim Flavin's work, this piece has also been graffitied but it somehow seems more territorial than sheet vandalism. If you note from the photographs the different way that each sculpture has been defaced. Fink's work has obviously been violently harmed while Bulfin's piece has names, dates etc.

I think this is because the people of Ballymun, especially those living in close proximity to it, were involved in the erecting of the work. Because of its large scale the placing of the work needed a lot of man power. This kind of involvement generated respect and acceptance of the work. This is owned by the people of Ballymun; they walk among it, sit upon it, and claim it as their own. There is a fine line between "claiming" and "rejecting" and Bulfin managed to cross this line by involving the people. Perhaps there are other ways to cross it, but to me this seems the obvious answer.



Fig. 23: *A Walk Among Stones*, Michael Bulfin, 1988



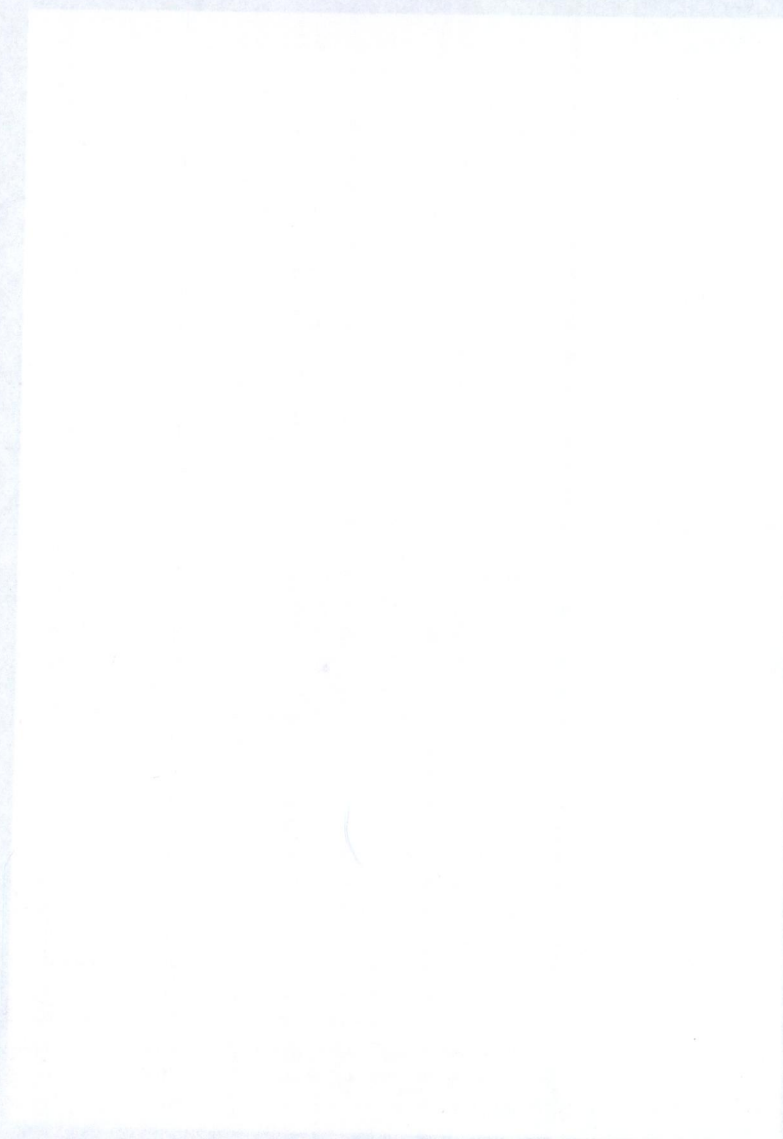
Carolyn Mulholland, Treechair, Georges Street

This work seems almost fragile. The 'chair' teeters on crooked legs and its foliage on top looks as if it might topple over with the weight (*Fig. 24*). It is cast in bronze and stands seven feet high. The 'tree' part 'grows' out of the back of the chair into two 'trunks'. They stretch over three feet before the foliage clusters into extra large leaves, forming a canopy on top. The whole structure is very illustrative, it reminds me of a fairy throne. It also reminds me of Jim Flavin's piece the way it nestles into a corner of shrubbery and invites people to sit on it.

Treechair is sited in a tiny 'park'. It is a rectangular paved area about twenty feet by ten with trees and shrubbery on three sides. It also has an existing bench which people use regularly. Because **Treechair** is almost camouflaged it is only when one is actually beside it does it become apparent.



Fig. 24: *Treechair*, Carolyn Mulholland, 1988



Peter Fink, Parable Island, Pimlico

This is a large abstract work, big and unavoidable in the heart of a working class area (*Fig. 25*). Surrounded by old red bricked houses and large block of flats, this sculpture has become somewhat of an eyesore to the people of Pimlico.

This sculpture seems an obvious exception to the other ten pieces. Almost everyone I spoke to in connection with the Millennium Project believes that it doesn't work in its place and possible provisions for its removal should be made.

This is in no way the fault of the sculptor, Peter Fink, who went far and beyond the call of many artists to get to know the area and people. Fink lived in Pimlico, before and after the work was commissioned. He knew the local people, knew their concerns and the history of the area.

The site was chosen because it was a muddy car park for lorries and cars and in need of repair (*Fig. 25a*). The briefing for the site was that the sculpture would be surrounded by a small green with seating and shrubbery. This was to be carried out by Dublin Corporation. Fink's sculpture represents a loom because of an old weaving industry in the area.

The sculpture stands over thirty feet high on two six foot concrete plinth. It spans almost thirty feet across in places. The main structure in red painted steel seems to be balancing precariously on its stand, which is covered in coloured ceramic tiles in vertical stripes. This is echoed in the low walls which surround the work. As you can see from the photos Dublin Corporation haven't installed the proposed seating and shrubbery.



Fig 25: *Parable Island*, Peter Fink, 1988





Fig 25a: Site before the Sculpture



When I challenged Sean Kelly from the Corporation he said he didn't recall that stipulation and he believed the area was completed. As with Jim Flavin's and Michael Bulfin's work, **Parable Island** has been badly defaced. The red steel has faded and blackened from burning cars beneath it, as has the ceramic tiles, which are graffitied and smashed in places. It is an obvious attraction for children to climb, but this can be a dangerous one. Young people have climbed easily to the top and one local woman remembered a boy breaking his leg in a fall from it. (I could get not further clarification of this from SSI or Dublin Corporation).

At the beginning the coloured tiles must have been attractive and probably reflected the coloured balconies of the flats. The red steel matched the red bricked houses and flats; but now it has become an eyesore. Why does it not work? According to Leo Higgins who spoke with the locals at the time, a number of factors contributed. When the people of Pimlico knew that money was being spent on sculpture they were angry because it wasn't instead being spent on upgrading their standard of living, i.e. drainage system, school, etc. Their concerns were all too obvious and their priorities were clearly marked out. But when they realised that this money was for an art work only and would not be otherwise spend, their conclusion was they anything was better than nothing. Money spent on their area had to improve some part of their lives.

Does an introduction of art work into an area like Pimlico improve their quality of life, their visual experience or does it pose yet another problem for them? Is the defacing of the sculpture a reaction against it or a reaction against the area? I think it's not the sculpture that does not work, it is the area. A violent or damaging reaction against any property here is an act of desperation.

Dublin Corporation's lack of commitment here is evident. Their promise of maintaining all the Millennium Sculptures seems to have been an empty one. But one only has to look at the state of Pimlico and areas like it to see that there is the same poor standard of maintenance in all facilities such as roads, amenities, etc. Maybe provisions should be made for the removal of the sculpture. A certain amount of time should be allocated for a sculpture to settle into its surroundings, but if after that time there is still strong opposition, some sort of guidelines for the removal of the piece should be made. After all, who is to say that the public are wrong?

In Pimlico, the piece wasn't popular. It is accepted that it will stay. How much longer will Parable island withstand the lack of maintenance and the evident vandalism.

(e) FAS and Funding

The inclusion of FAS in Finglas provided the sculptors with space, machinery, tools and a team of young people to help them make the sculptures. These facilities are important, as what deters a lot of new sculptors from working in large scale is the lack of these facilities. This was also a good experience for the trainees of FAS. They also got the opportunity to work in large scale and to understand the concept of each piece.

Allied Irish Banks generously donated £ 40,000 to the symposium. £ 4,000 was allocated to each artist. However, some of the sculptors had to look for extra sponsorship to complete their piece. Michael Bulfin got sponsorship from Irish Concrete Limited and Jakki McKenna received £ 7,000 from Arnotts in return for their logo on one of the bronze bags. Rachel Joynt obtained sponsorship from Clarkes a footwear company. Many companies were eager to enter this type of sponsorship as the whole Millennium atmosphere generated a sense of pride in the city and its people. Funding for public sculptures in Ireland has almost always relied on the generosity of patrons. It could eventually come to a stage when companies will have exhausted their funds for projects like these

CONCLUSION

I have used these Millennium Sculptures as a case study for public sculpture. By looking at the way the work was chosen and each sculpture in its environment, I have tried to outline why problems still exist in public sculpture and will probably continue to do so. It is very difficult to draw definite conclusions on public sculpture and this Symposium. The diverse range of subject, style and media employed by sculptors rule out any claims of coherence.

Some of the work in this Symposium has a historical quality to it, e.g. Betty Maguire's **Baite**, Grace Weir's **Trace** and Peter Fink's **Parable Island**. Others draw inspiration from their sites, Michael Bulfin's **A Walk among Stones**, Rachel Joynt's **Oilean na nDaoine** and Eamonn O'Doherty, **Windsculpture**.

I think most of the sculptors have tried to reach out to the public in some way. Maguire, McKenna, Flavin and Mulholland are all inviting people to sit on their work and become part of it. People can walk through Weir's arches and they follow Joynt's inlaid feet. Roche's Liberty bell, can be rung to make a sound that echoes around the walls of the Cathedral.

I think most of the sculptors thought long and hard about their piece, and the incorporation of a 'people participation' aspect to their work has generated an acceptance and respect for these sculptures. Peter Fink's sculpture is perhaps the most disappointing and I think this reflects on the Sculptors Society. They should have had the insight to see ahead and not take a gamble on what was the only sculpture offered.

On the whole, the Dublin Millennium Sculpture Symposium was a success. I think it has opened new doors for young artists to work in the public sculpture field, and to work alongside more establish artists.

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