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FINE ART SCULPTURE

OUT OF THE STUDIO: ART IN THE COMMUNITY

by

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Illustration No. 1
Macnas in Parade in the Streets of Galway City opening the Galway Arts Festival, July 1993 - theme 'Noah's Ark'

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with the growth of the community arts movement in Ireland in recent decades. The first chapter of this paper is historical. In this chapter I have deliberately opted for a selective focus which highlights some salient aspects of this history. It is not intended to be a comprehensive history. Instead it concentrates on a number of key moments which I believe served to determine subsequent events in ways which are central to my overall argument. It is for this reason that I have simplified the very complex chain of events which actually took place.

During the last twenty years, the relationship of the arts to local communities has been pursued in a variety of ways: extending the reach of traditional arts to a wider social spectrum; helping people, in particular communities, to develop their own arts skills and forms of expression; giving greater recognition to the arts in particular, cultural, social or occupational groups; and developing critiques of traditional, or popular arts.

Many features of the way society has developed into the 1990's suggest that these concepts and experiences need review. In the 1960's and '70's in Britain and the USA 'Community Arts' was a recognisable movement, today it is less distinct. In Ireland it has never been to the forefront although it has made an important contribution.

These issues now face an additional challenge from European integration. The development of the European Community thus far has been primarily economic and secondarily social. Cultural policies are urgently needed to complement these, both to help people affirm their cultural identity, to stimulate greater mutual understanding in a

much extended society and to foster new forms of expression reflecting contemporary experience.

It is against this background that it is important to reassess the nature and role of the 'Community Arts' experience in Ireland.

Chapter 1 is an overview of Community Arts in Ireland. It examines the emergence of Community Arts and the historical and contemporary Irish experience. I look at why and how it emerged and the elements that formed and encouraged it. Also in Chapter 1 is a short discussion on Community Arts in Britain which is an important prologue to the situation in Ireland.

In discussing the 'Irish Experience' of Community Arts I have purposely left out what was and is happening in Community Arts in the North of Ireland. Not because it is of any less importance but because of its different social and political background. What inspired Community Arts in the North would merit a thesis of its own.

Chapter 2 of my paper concentrates on funding and policy making for Community Arts in Ireland, especially looking at the involvement of the Dublin Corporation, Dublin County Council and the Arts Council. There is need for a greater expanded and developed role in line with more contemporary understanding and practices in Community Arts development. There should be a greater commitment of resources, more support for professional Community Arts animateurs and a strong emphasis on co-ordination with other agencies.

The proposed developments in community arts should be supported by the Arts Council through grant-aid for programmes involving animateurs and artists, training initiatives and equipment. The support of the Arts Council, whether through grant-aid or promotion should always be given in a context of co-ordination and liaison with the local authorities and their arts officers. In this Chapter on funding and policy making for Community Arts in Ireland I have focused on Dublin, although much of the commentary would apply equally throughout the country.

The third and final Chapter of this paper deals with the role of the artist, the professional working with a community. The Chapter opens up with a section relating to the desire for art on a community level. The ways in which an artist communicates with his or her audience, the red tape, fund raising and personal hassles that go hand in hand with Community Arts work are often so unfamiliar to the professional artist that many feel safe to remain in the formal art world.

To illustrate these problems, I have chosen to discuss an exhibition held in New York in 1987. This was the 'Out of the Studio: Art with the Community' exhibition which was something of a groundbreaking event. It questioned the appropriate role of the community cultural worker and artist working in relation to various communities.

The final section of this Chapter concentrates upon the gallery and museum response to the Community Arts movement. I have written about the changing role that galleries and museums are developing which involved more collaboration with Community Arts groups and their work.

There are of course many assumptions made in these arguments which remain incompletely demonstrated. This is so because this thesis is being written at a time of considerable debate and change in the complementary worlds of education and the arts. The Community Arts argument is very much an open argument rather than a closed one.

CHAPTER 1

> The complexity of 'community' relates to the difficult interaction between the tendencies originally distinguished in the historical development; one the one hand the sense of direct common concern; on the other hand the materialization of various forms of common organisation, which may or may not adequately express this.
>
> 'Community' can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.
> (Williams, Raymond, (new ed.), 1983, p. 76)

It has been widely stated in academic circles and justly so, that community studies have too often been approached and analyzed from an emotional viewpoint. Assumptions are made on the basis that a 'community' exists in the particular group or locality being studied, that 'community' is a good thing, that 'community' is where people get along together in a harmonious manner, working co-operatively towards similar objectives and rewards.

> Community signified a more humane and intimate existence, more stable, more traditional and less tainted by the rational pursuit of self interest.
> (Worsley (ed.), 1987, p. 241)

In short, in all studies where empirical methods are employed, there is the danger that the researchers bring with them, usually unconsciously, preconceived ideas about how certain situations and relations should be, that is, they are observing the situation through their own cultural eyeglass.[1] In other words, the normative (the 'is') has unwittingly or otherwise been confused with the prescriptive (the 'ought') resulting in communities being defined and analyzed from the outside rather than from the inside. It is from the inside

that we can discover how people develop their own communities and how they make sense of their own communities.

Community Arts emerged in the western world as part of the democratic movements of the 1960's. Community Arts challenged the traditional, exclusive relationship between the arts and the social elite, and the conventional definition of what constitutes the arts.

While the arts in general were becoming more popular, some artists, arts workers and political activists were forging the link between the arts and social, political and cultural movements. Community Arts emerged in different ways, in different countries but a number of common factors can be identified.[2]

First there was the movement by groups of artists out of the major art institutions. They brought their art into the streets of towns and suburbs, organising open-air music festivals, mural painting and art labs.[3] They sought

> ... to create new and liberating forms of expression of direct social relevance to people and which, in some cases, encouraged the participation of "ordinary" people in the creative process.
>
> (Bowles, Chapter 3, 1991)

Secondly, the sixties saw an increase in the political and cultural activities of social movements such as students and women, the working classes and ethnic groups. These movements, particularly the women's movement, believed that creative expression was an essential tool in the wider struggle towards a radical transformation of society. Their activities pushed the conventional boundaries of cultural definitions and creative

expression.

Furthermore, in the sixties improved resources, as a result of economic growth, and a change in political will led to a more liberal attitude by the State towards marginalised groups (ethnic groups, working class, women's groups etc.) and innovative projects.

Finally, technological advances in communications which on the one hand created an instant centralised world, had also a diametrically opposite effect. The new communications technology, video and, for example, radio, became increasingly compact, portable and cheap. Thus individuals and small groups could make use of technology as a means of creating their own images and communicating their own ideas.

> The Community Arts movement faces several major problems which it has consistently failed to confront. If it does not face these soon, it will become just one more worthy branch of whatever this government chooses to leave of the welfare state. Meals on wheels, home-made scones, inflatables and face painting, the kindly folk who do good without ever causing trouble.
>
> (Kelly, O., 1984, page 12)

Owen Kelly defines Community Arts as being a general term for a group of cultural activities which the practitioners recognise as having common features but whose precise boundaries remain undrawn. The activities referred to usually include mural painting, community photography, printing, community festivals, newsletters, drama, video projects and the like.

The Community Arts advisory panel of the Greater London Arts Association has produced a policy paper which contains a provisional definition of community arts, which

it calls its 'terms of reference'. Accordingly,

> The term "Community Arts" does not refer to any specific activity or group of activities, rather it defines an approach to creative activity, embracing many kinds of events and a wide range of media .... The approach used in Community Arts enjoins both artists and local people with their various communities to use appropriate art forms as a means of communication and expression ... community arts proposes the use of art to effect social change and policies and encompasses the expression of political action .... Community Arts activists operate in areas of deprivation using the term "deprivation" to include financial, cultural, environmental or educational deprivation.

The above serves as a starting point to indicate the field where this paper is concerned and these points will be examined in detail later in the Chapter.

The first big problem which the Community Arts movement faces is that it has no real or clear understanding of its own history. The movement has neither documented its own history or drawn any real conclusions from it. Community artists have therefore failed to develop a consistent set of definitions for their activities, with the result that the movement has staggered from one direction to another. In effect the policies of the funding agencies have determined who were, and who were not perceived as community artists!

> The mistakes and conflicts in Community Arts are necessary because its only beginning and its addressing decades of neglect. Experience precedes knowledge and there's been no knowledge and there's been no experience.
>
> (Niall O Baoill - Director of Wet Paint Arts Dublin - The Irish Times, Wednesday May 20th, 1992)

As a result of the Community Arts movement having made no logical sense of its own

history and having no political framework within which such a history could be located, it has been unable to construct any programme which might give effect to its aims. This has been problematic for the Community Arts movement. It is not to say that the activities of various Community Arts groups have been aimless, their work has never been co-ordinated programmatically, as part of a unified strategy. Local gains have remained local, and have thus been subjected to subsequent erosion through the constant pressures executed by the centralised state. Although individual groups may very well have programmes,

> The movement as a whole has never admitted to one, and has been very reluctant to admit the need or the possibility of one. Instead it has concentrated on administrative and bureaucratic issues, or on issues of simple finance. It has preferred to beg for more money rather than to evolve a programme which might strengthen it beyond the need for begging.
>
> (Kelly, O., 1984, Introduction, p.4)

In the Republic of Ireland, Community Arts became an identifiable phenomenon towards the end of the 1970's, it was influenced by four main factors.

First, reflecting a different history, the Republic lacked the politically active groups that existed in both specifically Britain and the North of Ireland. However, increases in urban unemployment together with the development of new, sprawling working class suburbs and the decay of inner city areas had created large areas of disaffected and alienated populations experiencing high levels of social, economic and cultural deprivation. The self-help initiatives in these areas were supported by socially aware artists, cultural workers and political activists. They used collective, creative methods reflecting those used in Britain and the North of Ireland.

Two of the best known examples took place in the early 1980's in Dublin's North Inner City, the inner city looking on festival and city workshop. Other early projects included 'Moving Theatre' which, under the direction of Annie Kilmartin, worked with communities in the local authority housing estates of Dublin. The working class area of Dublin gave birth to a number of creative and media projects such as Ballymun Arts Workshop. Base 10 and the Community Newsletter, Ballymun News.

Second, worldwide themes such as adult and development education and the women's movement were, by the late 1970's and the early 1980's influencing the voluntary sector's approach to tackling poverty, social inequality and alienation. Exploring one's own creativity through experiential workshops in an attempt to improve both mental and physical health and well-being an to improve peoples control over their lives was part of that trend.

In the voluntary sector, art groups such as the Grapevine Arts Centre which first opened in Dublin in 1974, Sligo Community Arts Group, Waterford Arts for All, Theatre Omnibus in Limerick and Wexford's Barefoot Dance Company were motivated by their belief in the value of arts activities as tools of personal development and the importance of providing opportunities for creative activity to as wide a social group as possible.

Third, because of its relatively late arrival, the statutory sector's early Community Arts policy was heavily influenced by European models.[4] By the mid-1970's, the Arts Council was already putting into place policies of increased access to the arts which had been initiated in the major European countries two decades previously. These policies

encouraged greater access to the arts through increased funding for regional arts centres,theatres and theatre groups and an increase in funding for touring theatre.[5]

Community Arts was first included as a specific expenditure in the Arts Council's budget in 1980.[6]

Current Community Arts practice in the Republic reflect the divergence of the aims and objectives evident in its emergence. Some are linked to the policies of the Arts Council, others integrating themselves more firmly with the aims of development and social change. In the last few years there have been a number of attempts to identify the strands within Community Arts practice.

Jude Bowles identifies four broad strands of Community Arts practice. These are:

1. The practice of artists presenting various art forms in a more local, decentralised and easily accessible fashion, such as street and touring theatre. Bowles uses the Galway based group Macnas as an example of this type of Community Arts work. According to Bowles 'often these groups work and develop ideas and subjects with the community groups in workshops - subjects that have particular relevance to the communities being addressed.' Macnas commenced life in October 1985 and has enjoyed a major national reputation since they performed their work 'Gulliver in Lilliput' at the Dublin Millennium in 1988.

Illustration No. 2
Macnas in Parade in the Streets of Castlebar on 7th July, 1987, en route to 'The Big Game' performance in MacHale Park.

We interpret the word community in the broad popular sense. We are interested in the past times, games and rituals of our community in the West. We wish to create dramatic, visual spectacles using and exploring these popular forms of communal entertainments. Our spectacles will be created in the community, in large outdoor familiar spaces. We hope to make fun and have fun on a grant scale and amongst ourselves.

(from letter sent by Macnas to ACE in 1986, envisaging the concept of their project 'The Big Game'.)

Macnas have opened the Galway Arts Festival Parade with a large colourful spectacle since 1986. In October 1986 they created a community spectacle for the Ballinasloe Horse Fair which comprised members of the groups as exotic, surrealistic, circus-like animals being directed by three cattle drovers in a parade. They have also completed several education projects for example, one was carried out in Parochial School, Galway City. The project involved the decision 'to research materials and objects to stimulate the children's imaginations and guide them towards the idea of a lantern procession'. The theme of the project became 'Light and Darkness'.

2. The second strand of Community Arts identified by Bowles is that of artists working with local groups and institutions such as schools and colleges. 'This kind of practice works very well and is extremely beneficial to both artists and groups.' (Bowles, Developing Community Arts.) Examples of this kind of practice are - Theatre in Education groups like TEAM and GRAFFITI - the Arts Council artists-in-schools, writers-in-school and artists in community schemes, the Arts Squads and the FAS Social Employment Schemes.

Illustration No. 3
Macnas in Parade in the Streets of Galway City opening the Galway Arts Festival, July 1993 - theme 'Noah's Ark'

3. Bowles third strand identifies developmental community arts, which uses arts activities primarily as tools of personal and community development within group work. For example the Dublin Traveller's Education and Development Group.

4. Finally, she writes about community arts projects which are devised and developed by groups with the help of skilled artists or arts workers. Bowles uses the example of the Kilbarrack Dart Action Group who researched and presented, with the help of an architect and artists, its own design of the local dart station to the local authorities.

I do not agree with Bowles categories of community arts practice. I do not see these four strands as separate, as all are merely different approaches which may be used at different times in the same project. For example, Macnas sometimes simultaneously, sometimes not involve schools, they use arts activities as tools for personal and community development and their projects are devised and developed with the help of skilled artists or arts workers. She has separated various practices into each of her four strands when any one of these groups would fit into all these strands. The Dublin Arts Report broadly defines community arts as the first entailing professional artists, of all disciplines, working for or with particular communities. The second, involving communities using the arts as a means of community development. In this practice the emphasis falls more upon the arts helping to make the community rather than the community making art objects of events.

There is no possible justification for the definitions, or separations employed by Bowles for identifying community arts practice. The only way of defining community arts practice is by situating it within a historical and socio-cultural context.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 1

1. Effrat (1974) outlined three main problems in field research where the findings are strongly influenced by the value judgements of the person carrying out the research. These are:

   (i) Field Research and Investigator Bias - referring to the researchers methodology and criteria for 'filtering' of material.

   (ii) Representativeness of the Community - where researchers generalise from the part to the whole and/or about similar 'types' of communities.

   (iii) Predefinition of the Community - where researchers assume a community exists before empirical research has been even carried out.

2. For more discussion of this theme see Bates (1989, Chapter 2) and Bowles (1991, Introduction and Chapter 4).

3. Art Labs started opening up in the U.K. in the late '60's. They were concerned with trying to break down the restrictions deemed to be inherent in 'straight' social codes and structures. (See Kelly. O. - Community, Art and the State, Chapter 1.)

4. Andre Malraux's term as de Gaulle's Minister of Culture between 1959-1969 set in train a policy to bring 'the best of French Culture' to the regions by establishing throughout the country a network of Maisons de la Culture. The Council of Europe set up its own research project on cultural democracy and socio-cultural animation. The objectives of the project were described as seeking to 'provide that stimulus to the mental and physical and emotional life of the people in a particular area which will move them to undertake a wider range of experience through which they will find a greater degree of self-realisation, self-expression and awareness of belonging to a community - a community over which they have a contribution to make'. Simpson (1978, p. 16.)

5. See Kennedy, (1990, p.p. 182-190) for discussion of Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaions regionalisation policy.

6. For more discussion on the Arts Council's policy toward community arts see Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

In November 1934, Thomas MacGreevy delivered a paper to the Irish Society in London, on the theme of 'A Cultural Irish Republic'.[1] He stated: 'Our first need if we had realised it was not a political republic but a cultural republic. We made a mistake. We have to rectify it.' MacGreevy claimed: 'There is no Irish cultural Republic, no Republic of the Irish mind.' This bald statement is perhaps more true today than it was in 1934. Ireland has concentrated on the issue of political freedom and has neglected the equally important issue of cultural freedom. Brian P. Kennedy in his essay on the Cultural Republic: Ireland 1922-39, put forward the question - will any politician take up the challenge in a co-ordinate manner? Few could argue the significance, symbolically at least, of the advent of a Ministry for Arts and Culture in Ireland or indeed the unique catalytic effect of Michael D. Higgins in his initial months of office.

The Department and Minister are of course faced with considerable philosophical, policy and structural challenges. Even the most superficial scan of the cultural landscape and examination of the efficacy of the arts (in their institutionalised arrangements and dominant traditions) could not fail to reveal extraordinary levels of illusion and neglect. The as yet untypical Minister and his advisers however are notably sensitive and informed of all this. Their energy, intellects and powers of analysis are almost without parallel in Irish political life. Their sense of mission is unquestionably real but, lest we rest too much by way of this exciting breakthrough, it is surely prudent to adopt as realistic and

engaged a relationship to it as soon as possible. This is particularly important to those who profess a commitment to 'cultural democracy' - a term that is growing in public consciousness and significance and best represented in many respects by the voice and practice of the community arts movement.

There is a rich historical tradition contributing to the idea that cultural democracy is a desirable project for rationally based State policy in the arts. It largely originates with the enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and from there moves intricately through the political and cultural history of the modern world.[2] The administrative categories under which cultural democracy has made itself felt on the agenda of the Arts Council have largely been those of education (both in and out of schools), which has come to be 'community arts' and the issue of regional policy. Notions of 'access', 'equitability', and 'empowerment' are central concepts here. From the time of the sixth Arts Council directed by Colm O Brian, cultural democratic ideas have formed an important part of the general body of ideas shaping and informing arts policy. The stimulating and enabling role of the Calouste Gulbenkion Foundation in developing these ideas as they might apply to Ireland was essential here. Since 1978 the Arts Council has had an educational policy of its own as well as views of its aims on educational policy which it expresses independently.[3] (See for example, Ciaran Benson, The Place of the Arts in Irish Education, Dublin: The Arts Council, 1979: etc. regarding the controversial area of community arts, the strongest statement yet on this came from the joint Arts Council - Gulbenkion Foundation ACE project which ran from 1985-89.)[4] But the internal controversy which this generated amongst the members of the ninth Arts Council was symptomatic of the tensions which continue in the Arts Council's conceptions of its

functions.

> In the present climate, reflecting the ethos of 1980's Thatcherism the twin notions of the arts as businesses or 'cultural industries' and of 'return investment' have come to dominate as ideas informing arts policy, or so it seems.
> (Benson, C., Towards a Cultural Democracy, 1992)

The crisis in the State's finances has meant a re-valuation of the State's commitment to certain services. Significantly, it has meant a re-consideration of the nature of services which a modern democratic State thinks that it ought to provide. These re-evaluations and re-considerations tend not to be part of any published policy. They emerge in decisions and if the same is true of the previous unformulated policies which they are changing, then the significance of those decisions bears a final comment. The supplanting of exchequer support for the arts, for example, by lottery supplements, and the mechanisms of its disbursement, may turn out to be of far-reaching significance for future State arts policy, as would a prolonged vacancy of the Education Officers job and of the Regions Officers in the Arts Council itself. The process whereby ideologies struggle with each other continues as does the need for explicit policy.

There is general recognition now that cultural change cannot come about through the action of central political forces alone. Cultural democracy implies active community participation in decision making and this is expressed most fully in the concept of community arts. 1985 saw the birth of CAFE - Creative Activity for Everyone, a body established to co-ordinate and strengthen the efforts of all groups and individuals interested in creative activity. Its focus is on community and individual development with creative activity as a means to that end. 'Community art takes it as given that building

culture is a dynamic, ongoing enterprise, and that non-artists can't just be consigned to the role of consumers, consuming the mass media or the professional arts.' (Jenny Harris, 1984, quoted in CAFE Seminar Report, Dublin.) This is essentially stressing art as a process rather than as product, and as such is a vital part of cultural democracy. Community arts:

> ... signifies a special process of art activity rather than any special product - a process which seeks to involve action by the local population as a whole rather than passive interest of that minority (often established at some 5% of total population) which regularly attends performances of serious music, opera, ballet and drama or visits art exhibitions.
>
> (Lord Radcliffe Maud, quoted in John Lane 1978, Art Centres - Every Town Should Have One, Elek Ltd., London.)

This concept draws attention to the essential distinction between the democratisation of culture and cultural democracy. Cultural democracy implies recognising the cultural values of sub-cultural groups and the importance of the right or ordinary people to express themselves in their own terms rather than in terms of dominant cultural values.

The Arts Council is a statutory body, established under the Arts Act, 1951, amended and extended by the Arts Act, 1973. Unlike the local authorities, the Arts Council's remit is not limited to Dublin. As the national statutory arts agency its primary purpose is 'to stimulate public interest in, and to promote the knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts'. (The Arts Act, 1951, amended in 1973.)

The Arts Council has submitted that its community arts policy can be determined from a range of documents, and in particular from the annual reports of recent years. The present approach of the Council is fourfold and is included in the footnotes.[5]

TABLE 5.4C • ARTS COUNCIL EXPENDITURE ON THE ARTS (1990)

	Grants	Directly Promoted Activities	Total	% of Total Arts Expenditure
Literature	£581,166	£6,521	£587,687	6.5%
Visual Arts	£890,605	£126,330	£1,016,935	11.3%
Film	£254,050	£354	£254,404	2.8%
Drama	£3,579,069	(£355)	£3,578,714	39.7%
Dance	£320,901	—	£320,901	3.6%
Traditional Arts	£212,283	£200	£212,483	2.4%
Opera	£512,274	£584	£512,858	5.7%
Music	£383,922	—	£383,922	4.3%
Arts Centres	£540,900	—	£540,900	6.0%
Education*	£59,150	£12,081	£71,231	0.8%
Community Arts and Festivals	£168,125	—	£168,125	1.9%
Arts/Community/Education†	£28,000	£8,800	£36,800	0.4%
Regional Development	£202,555	£5,126	£207,681	2.3%
Capital	£985,846	—	£985,846	10.9%
Sundry	£20,698	£106,449	£127,147	1.4%
TOTALS	**£8,739,544**	**£266,090**	**£9,005,634**	**100%**

** The largest expenditures in education are grants to TEAM and Graffiti theatre-in-education companies and these are accounted for under the Drama budget.*

† Residual funding from the ACE project which concluded in 1989.

The Arts Council maintains that the nature of community arts practice is such that it cannot be the responsibility of the Council alone. Its own concern with standards and its primary commitment to the individual artists are reflected in the emphasis upon the professional aspects of community arts practice and upon training. While this makes sense that community arts is an area for which several agencies share responsibility, the Arts Council should be more active in its engagement with those agencies. It has been submitted by several key representatives (CAFE), that the existing structure of the Development Committee for Community Arts is lacking in direction and that it seems of little interest to the Arts Council as a whole.

The Dublin Arts Report, compiled in 1991, states that:

> It seems clear that the Council has allowed its traditional aesthetic priorities to obscure its a sense of the enormous social and cultural significance of community arts. There is little evidence of the institutional commitment implied by the Council's identification of community arts as of 'prime importance' to the development of the arts.

As with the amateur arts, the Council may believe that placing community arts at the heart of its agenda will be to present itself as the primary funder of such activity. Policy remit and funding function must again be separated and the Council should confirm publicly that its 1986 identification of community arts as one of four areas of prime importance (the other 3 were arts education; regional arts and arts centres) represents the current Arts Council's view. If it does so confirm, we submit that the Council as the statutory body in the arts should convene the other relevant agencies and formulate, in a matter of months, a national community arts policy and plan. The partnership created

to devise such a plan should include CAFE, as the umbrella body for community art in Ireland.

The Dublin local authorities have recognised the relationship between community development and arts policy, investing increasing funds in various different programmes. Wet Paint Arts, the Dublin based group, best known for their production of new plays specially commissioned for young Dublin audiences, have been contracted for the last three years by Dublin Corporation to organise the arts programme of its summer projects in the city's play centres. Wet Paint has four principle sources of funding: Dublin Corporation (£3,500 grant; £11,400 fee for summer programme); Dublin County Council (£7,500 for tour of county); Comhairle le leas Oige (£25,000 grant) and the Arts Council (£27,000 grant). The fact that the company has four sources of grant-aid is a tribute to its administrative patience and adroitness in placing itself and its work on the agenda of arts funders, youth work funders and of local government. However, the company has also suffered by each agency looking to the others to take primary responsibility for funding Wet Paint. In 1991 the County Council made a challenge grant to the Arts Council in relation to Wet Paint, but the Arts Council declined. In 1989 the Council refused to meet a similar challenge offered by Comhairle le leas Oige.

Illustration No. 4
Wet Paint's Summer Project 'Tribal Fields'
in progress at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Summer 1993.

In both cases the company was the loser and this in part explains the deficit of approximately £15,000 being carried into 1992.

It was recommended in the Dublin Arts Report that the Arts Council acknowledge that Wet Paints exemplifies the notion of 'company's of significance', as represented by the Council in its 5-year development plan presented to the government, and that its funding be increased significantly. Also, in the context of revised arts policies and provision, it was recommended that Dublin Corporation and Dublin County Council should reflect in their funding of Wet Paint an acknowledgement by local government of the distinctive cultural service provided by Wet Paint to the youth population of Dublin on a community wide basis.

I will return now to the new opportunity represented by way of the advent of a Minister for Arts and Culture in Ireland, or indeed the appointment to government of Michael D. Higgins. In an article written for CAFE magazine, Niall O Baoill (Wet Paint) feels that by the end of this year:

> Michael D. Higgins should be made more than spiritually aware and tender to the gross inequalities that exist within the arts. He should I believe at a minimum have a cast-iron commitment to the following basic actions.
>
> (CAFE, Arts Community, Spring 1993.)

Those 'following basic actions' are (1) to effect an active policy on culture and the arts, obviously with reference to the existing White Paper and/or legislative changes as required; (2) to ensure the inclusion of the arts as a core area of learning in the Irish education system, again a rare opportunity exists to achieve this fundamental development

at present with the Green Paper 'education for a changing World' currently up for redefinition; (3) to democratise and develop the Arts Council, and (4) to discriminate in favour of developing long-term strategies aimed at meeting the cultural and creative needs of the disenfranchised sections of the community - arguments concerning the general underdevelopment of the arts in Ireland cannot disguise the failure of existing structures and provision to address broader cultural and socio-economic relations. A radical reappraisal and shift to identifying with this challenge at all levels in policy and provision is absolutely necessary.

There is a heightening critical awareness about such matters all over the country and there is the intellectual edge and grass roots movement with which to galvanise such an initiative. Do we now have the political will and tenacity to engage? There will hardly be a more willing Minister. But given the inevitable vicissitudes and expediency of political life he may become distracted unless it is represented and repeatedly insisted on the legitimacy of our values, and ways of developing ourselves and the arts and the hunger for equality.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 2

1. Correspondence of Thomas MacGreevy, Trinity College, Dublin, MS 8003/9.

2. For a fascinating treatment of this period, particularly in relation to the moral sources of self, see Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvara University Press, 1989.

3. See, for example, Ciaran Benson, The Place of the Arts in Irish Education, Dublin: The Arts Council, 1979: Don Herron, Deaf Ears, Dublin: The Arts Council, 1985: and The Arts Council and Education 1979-89, Dublin: The Arts Council, 1989.

4. See Ciaran Benson, ed., Art and the Ordinary: The ACE Report, Dublin: The ACE Committee, The Arts Council, 1989.

5. (i) The funding of full-time professional resource organisations, e.g. Creative Activity for Everyone (CAFE), the national umbrella body; Alternative Entertainments (Tallaght).

   (ii) The artist-in-community scheme which facilitates a number of project-centres residencies by professional artists working with a community. Introduced in 1990, the scheme is funded by the Council but individual projects must also raise local finance.

   (iii) Festivals, ranging from the local arts festival to the nationally known, may receive Council support e.g.,Dublin 15 Festival; Ballyfermot Arts Week.

   (iv) Policy development with a particular concentration on training. This approach is implemented through the Development Committee for Community Arts with representatives of the Council, Combat Poverty, AONTAS, CAFE, FAS,Ireland Funds and the Gulbenkion Foundation. The Committee also has a brief to improve co-ordination in the very complex field of community arts.

CHAPTER 3

> If the Community Arts movement has been unclear about the nature of "community" and the way in which community relates to the agencies and processes of the State, then it has been equally unclear about the nature of "art", and the way in which it is defined in our society and the methods by which it is produced and distributed.
>
> (Owen Kelly, "Community Art and the State", Chapter 8, p. 53.)

Kelly continues to discuss the inevitable consequences which this confusion has led to. Mainly being, the tendency to concentrate on the mechanical techniques of the various art forms, to the exclusion of any consideration of the necessary mental techniques of thought, planning, style and aesthetic decision which govern them; or the wider social forces which shape and direct those mental techniques. According to kelly this has occurred because of the community arts movement's inability to deal with questions of style, due to the movements lack of any common theoretical understanding; and through the resulting assumption that the material means of artistic production are somehow neutral, and therefore capable of being used without any questions being asked.

Art is an ideological construction; a generalisation which has a complex history through which its meaning has both shifted and narrowed. In its current usage its chief purpose is to bestow an apparently inherent value onto certain activities and the products resulting from these activities, while withholding this value from certain other similar activities. There are activities which may be interesting and rewarding in their own right, and which may be pursued as hobbies, leisure activities or even careers, but they will never, no matter what standard they reach, be accorded the status of art. The process by which

this happens if profoundly political: it is not in any sense a consequence of impersonal market forces, nor is it the unfortunate outcome of a series of historical accidents: it is the result of some groups being more powerful than others; of some groups being in the position to gain access to the levels of power which is denied others.

As with the term 'community', the term 'art' must be used in a dynamic way, recognising that if it describes anything useful at all it is a set of social relationships and the social practices that result from them. Such a way of looking at art is suggested by Raymond Williams:

> The distinction between art and non-art, or between aesthetic and other intentions and responses, as well as those more flexible distinctions by which elements of a process, or intentions and responses, are seen, in real cases, as predominant or subordinate can ... be seen as they historically are; as variable social forms within which the relevant practices are perceived and organised. Thus the distinctions are not eternal varieties, or supra-historical categories, but actual elements of social organisations ....

The term 'art', then, does not describe a set of activities, but a framework within which certain activities are placed, and the distinctions which are maintained between 'art' and 'non-art' are part of the dominant structures of our 'social organisation'. (Culture, Chapter 5, Fontana, 1981.)

For our purposes, art can best be seen as a term used to describe a network of inter-related activities, of cultural practices, and not as a label to be wielded in a limited or excluding way. I think it is important to point out now that community arts practice is not concerned with the art forms, but it is very interested in exploring and exploiting the

arts as a set of cultural languages. Thus it is the symbols and the materials of the different arts that are at the heart of the community arts practice and the intent behind the work is very direct communication within the group itself, or from the group to its immediate community, or with a wider community. On the contrary, very often professional artists are quite unconcerned with their audience in a specific sense, whereas community arts work is essentially communicative, though it must be understood that the communication may well be internal within the individual or the group and therefore the notion of making a finished work for showing to an audience or at least for that to be the primary intent behind any work made as part of the process can be inappropriate.

Herein lies the thorny issue of quality and standards, perhaps the greatest stumbling block when it comes to consideration of community arts practice by conventional arts practitioners and funding agencies. The conventional argument goes that the art created by community arts practice is qualitatively much poorer than that created by professional artists and is therefore not deserving of support from scarce public resources. There may be an acknowledgement of the social or educational value of community arts practice but this is felt to be a concern of and responsibility of those charged with adult education and community development. The one concession is the limited support for those artists or groups who work in and with communities because the scarce public monies for the arts are thus being kept within the arts community and there is an acknowledgement that this kind of practice is an important part of the wider policy of greater public access to the arts.

The counter argument to this is that an education of community arts that rests primarily

upon the conventional aesthetic judgement of the work produced is entirely inappropriate as it fails to take on board that the work is not, or at least not just, the objects, or performance made but that the work resides as much in the complex network of growth in understanding and communication that occurs in and through the group encountering itself through the languages of the arts.

Stuart Davis has declares that 'in times such as these, few artists can remain wrapped up in studio problems.'[1]

A little more than fifty years ago, he argued, before the American Artists Congress, that painters and sculptors should abandon the institutions of high culture and more directly engage their immediate surroundings. There is little new in the impulse, for artists to work in the 'community'. The idea received a renewed impetus in the activist years of the late 1960's and has been rekindled again since the 1980's. But regardless of who they've worked for, artists have rarely gotten much support for their efforts; money has been minimal and recognition from the museum and gallery world next to nil.

That has been part of the point. such enterprises are defined by their eschewal of institutional certification along with their desire to reach beyond elitist art audiences. This is perhaps the most exciting issue to which an artist trying to transcend the art world can address her/himself today, but unfortunately it takes a heroic degree of dedication, persistence and hard labour to cut through the bureaucratic resistance to anything imaginative or anything which does not seem to maintain the status quo.

This made the 1987 'Out of the Studio: Art with Community' exhibition, held in the P.S.1 (Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, New York) something of a groundbreaking event. Although institutions like P.S.1 have led the way in extending public art into other discourses (advertising, journalism, entertainment etc.) community projects have gone underexamined.

Roughly half of the pieces resulted from actual collaborations between an artist and a community group; the others were done by artists who 'interpreted' aspects of the community concept. What enabled may of the collaborative projects to reach beyond their 'original contexts' was their special creation or adaptation for the P.S.1 exhibition. P.S.1 executive director Allan Heiss explained in an introductory essay that the exhibition was not to be confused with

> work created in art classes at local community art centres. Rather the exhibition examines the nature of art created through intense interaction with a specific non-art constituency .... While many social workers, counsellors and art therapists have benefited the community, few have produced what is considered art in the process.[2]

To this, exhibition co-curator Tom Finkelpearl added that 'the important difference between the art in this show and simple community work is its ability to transcend its original context.'[3]

In other words, according to David Trend (reviewer of exhibition in After Image '87) 'this wasn't the simple output of senior citizens and children, but material that could overcome its humble origins by virtue of a curated transcendentalism'.

Presumably, such aestheticization was necessary in order to locate a common ground between community and gallery audiences. At least such was the shows underlying conceit. Yet because viewers were rarely, if ever, told of the 'processes' through which the pieces were made a complete understanding of the final products was foreclosed.

Such was the case with 'Red Alice', a piece born in classroom discussions between Bronx public school special education teacher and K.O.S. (Kids of Survival). The work consisted of a grid of 388 pages from 'Alice in Wonderland' over which a solid rectangle painted in red obliterated all but the outer rows of pages. It appears to possess the sale and finished appearance of an object meriting serious aesthetic consideration. But I can't help wondering how well its theoretical premises (or gallery patina) would be appreciated by the general population at Bronx Intermediate School 52, where Rollins teaches.

Similar problems were evident in Deborah Ossof's 'Telephone Reassurance' ('87), a sculptural installation that included recordings of simulated conversations between a volunteer and clients of a senior citizen's facility. Ossoff's introductory statement for the piece described her subject as an elderly woman named Catherine who every day brought 'sunshine' into the homes of 'shuttins'. Unfortunately, because of this upbeat tone, the piece generated a patronizing voyeurism that did little more than sentimentalize the very real horrors of age, loneliness, and illness.

By placing such public transactions on display, exhibitions like the one at P.S.1 magnify their problems along with their benefits. They point to the difficulty identified by Lucy Lippard in her essay for the show - that by self-definition these hybrids of artistry and

social work seem doomed to marginality.

'I suspect that most of us who work between culture and society are longing for real community' Lippard wrote. 'We would like to forego the one night stands, the fast lane of the gallery/art market. Artists like these would like their work to belong some place.'[4]

But these places will never be found within arts institutions that reinforce class divisions. For shows like 'Out of the Studio' are actually raising larger issues than an artists involvement with a high school. They question the appropriate role of the community cultural worker. How can the mechanisms of organised culture be reconstructed to facilitate these efforts. Despite its flaws, an exhibition like P.S.1 'Out of the Studio: Artists with Community' brings us a step closer to some answers.

Museums and galleries play a vital part in arts in the community. Many galleries in the U.K. have revolutionised their community service within the last two decades in response to community pressure. In Dublin, out of our four public galleries (The Irish Museum of Modern Art, The Douglas Hyde Gallery, The National Gallery, The Hugh Lane Gallery) two of them have community services. The Hugh Lane and the Irish Museum of Modern Art are developing community interest in their collections through workshops, Leaving Certificate, art college and adult education classes.

There has been a broadening or orientation to the communities they serve and an overall change in policy and finance to accommodate the new approach. Today galleries are generally more active in seeking collaboration, consultation and involvement from within

their communities, not just in empowering people to use what is on offer, but to include more discussion about what it is and how it is displayed.

The Irish Museum of Modern Art have been involving themselves with their neighbouring communities and also in working with young artists from these communities. Workshops encourage looking, discussing, questioning, making, criticising, skill-sharing and development. This interdependent relationship between so called active and passive involvement in art blurs the distinction between traditional and new activities. The gallery and its resources, access to practising artists and staff skills, secondary sources such as films, books, catalogues and equipment are all part of the participative environment. Working with the community does not mean targeting only disadvantaged groups or other groups according to social status, income bracket and ability, it means integrating groups and interests. It means planning collaboration in ways that address the working environment, finding common links between creative training in the arts and in business.

Barriers need to be broken down not just between communities and the arts but between the arts and the non-arts world. Galleries, theatres and orchestras have it within their power to provide access, not only to the products of creative endeavour but to the people who create. Who are these people? Are they all professional graduates? How do they make a living? How do they become an artist? Am I an artist? Galleries and theatres, I believe, can help to answer these questions. They provide contact with artists, art students, art teachers and with a wide variety of groups not participating in formal arts education.

Galleries such as The Douglas Hyde, The Hugh Lane and IMMA should make it a central concern to give their audiences a variety of opportunities for coming close to the processes of making art, both in physical and conceptual senses. Highlighting how and why an artist works makes possible the feeling of being closer to what is made, and the ability to participate.

The development from community arts into arts with and for the community has influenced many aspects of the work of artists. Public perception of the arts and the attitudes of artists to their work in Ireland are all changing. This development is likely to continue. It will be a condition of social and cultural growth into the next century. It needs recognition not only in national arts strategy but also in policies embracing education and professional arts training, leisure, health, libraries, transport, buildings and the social services. The arts are integral to a quality of life, undergoing rapid change in rural as well as in urban areas.

Since the arts have had much to do with this quality and local authorities are their primary keeper, it follows that ensuring the place and financial support of the arts should become their statutory responsibility. This implies a combination of resources and policy action; first the help and co-operation of professional artists to supplement local endeavour; secondly, funding levels that recognise the contribution of the arts to the communities; thirdly, an end to the expenditure capping of local authorities which restricts democratic decision making and the application of local knowledge in responding to community needs.

It is an impediment to the expansion of arts in the community to adult education and other forms of participatory activity which enhance the quality of life.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 3

1. Stuart David 'Why an American Artists Congress?' Artists Against War and Fascism: Papers of the first American Artists Congress (New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1986), p. 65.

2. Published in Public Art fund Newsletter 1, No. 1, USA (Winter 1987), p.1.

3. 'Communion and Community', in ibid. p. 4.

4. Lucy Lippard, 'Out of the Studio ... For Good', in ibid., p.2.

CONCLUSION

Emerging trends nationally and within the capital indicate sophisticated new understandings of what the arts are, what the arts can do and who can be an artist. If more and more people are receiving an introduction to art and developing the confidence to express themselves then the so-called 'arts establishment' will automatically find itself under redefinition. Developments in community arts which enhance access to the arts are wholly to be welcomed.

At community level there is a phenomenal growth in informal creative developments and educational activity, a factor recognised in the publication of two major reports in recent years, the Dublin Arts Report and the National Youth Arts policy. Women's groups, active elderly groups and critically, youth groups (among many) have embraced the arts, redefined arts practice to suit their specific needs, and returned the product of their endeavours with results calculated to 'chasten the stoic established arts world'. In Dublin, a cross section of examples would be: Route 36 (Ballymun Youth Theatre), Walk the Talk (Coolock Youth Theatre), Rialto Youth Project, Balcony Belles (Sherriff Street Women's Theatre), Klear (Kilbarrack Adult Education) all of whose work has been showcased at the City Arts Centre.

The Dublin local authorities have recognised the relationship between community development and arts policy, investing increasing funds in programmes such as touring international theatre in the country to providing for professional arts and drama workers on childrens summer projects. Dublin Corporation recently appointed its first City Arts

Officer to co-ordinate and implement its diverse range of arts strategies.

However, despite improving access to arts events, the argument has been gathering support that the State and its institutions were failing to provide opportunities for everyone to discover and enhance their creative potential through participation in the arts. In its influential 1982 report, the Arts in Schools, the Calouste Gulbenkion Foundation reflected a growing body of opinion when it argued that art is a language and creativity, an intelligence common to all human beings without which people are excluded from taking a full part in society. It concluded that arts activities should play a much more important role in education. 'Creativity is not a special faculty with which some children are endowed and others are not but it is a form of intelligence and as such can be developed and trained like any other mode of thinking.' (Calouste Gulbenkion Foundation 1982, p. 29.)

It was in this context that the Arts Council initiated its artists-in-schools programme. In addition the emergence of agencies such as the Combat Poverty Agency and AnCo (now FAS, with a statutory responsibility for training and employment), meant that a new context and funding opportunities emerged for community arts activities.

Despite the spread of community arts activity and the number of grant giving bodies, grant-aid to individual projects and organisations remains small. For example, although the Arts Council has demonstrated a commitment to community arts through its involvement in Arts Community Education[1] and its Committee for Community Arts, the Council's financial review of 1992 show that only £219,000 - 2% of its total expenditure

went to community arts and festivals. Only six community arts organisations[2] received grants, these ranges from £200 to £25,000. Of the seventeen festivals grant-aided (51% of the total community arts and festival expenditure), thirteen received £2,000 or less. The remaining 4% of the community arts and festival expenditure went to the Arts Council's artist-in-the-community scheme.

The availability of only small and short-term grants has three main consequences. First, community arts organisations can rarely provide the service demanded by the communities with which they work. Second, projects are, in the main, once-off or short-term. This limits the opportunities for community arts to integrate and co-ordinate its practice within community development and to provide a comprehensive arts experience for those involved.

However, it is gratifying to report that there is a developing awareness that a cultural dysfunction exists in the domain of community arts work where traditionally there has been almost no policy-based and planned provision for the arts. This welcome development must be balanced against evidence of an understandable wariness on the part of the Arts council etc. about too great a commitment. In part this is attributable to a caution about entering a field which could entail significant additional expenditure. But it seems also to be the case that part of the reluctance is based upon an uncertainty as to whether community arts is a legitimate area of arts practice, or at least legitimate enough to command increased public funding.

When a senator in 1973, Mary Robinson spoke of the need to make the arts 'an integral

part of our lives'. Sean O'Casey spoke on occasion of the need to 'pull the plough a little closer to the stars'. In pulling arts work and community arts work a little closer, some of that cultural integration so necessary to our over-specialised and dangerously fragmented society, will be achieved.

FOOTNOTES

CONCLUSION

1. ACE, a joint committee, appointed in 1985, of the Arts Council and the Calouste Gulbenkion Foundation.

2. Community arts groups funded by the Arts Council in 1991 were: Macnas, Dublin Youth Theatre, Theatre Omnibus, Alternative Entertainments, National Youth Council of Ireland and CAFE.

APPENDIX

TABLE 7.3 • RANGE OF COMMUNITY ARTS PRACTICE IN DUBLIN

Type of Activity	Description	Example
Community Arts Groups	Geographically-based groups with a commitment to the practice of, and training in, the arts within their locality.	Alternative Entertainments (Tallaght)
Community Arts Festivals	Locally-based festivals with an arts programme that has a strong emphasis on participation.	Dublin 15 Festival (Blanchardstown)
Community Arts Projects	Short to medium term projects,built around specific occasions or the needs of particular interest groups.	A Woman's Place (series of visual arts projects with women in various Dublin communities during 1991)
Community Arts Residencies	Short-term residencies by professional artists in particular communities (geographic or interest).	John Byrne in Lourdes Youth and Community Services (under Arts Council Artists-in-Community Scheme)
Community Arts Teams	Teams of professional artists, of various disciplines, usually employed under an SES scheme, and working on a range of projects with particular groups within a more widespread community.	City Artsquad (1990–91); 5 County Artsquads (1991–92); Dun Laoghaire (1988–89 and 1991–92)
Community Programmes of Arts Organisations	Programmes specially designed to link the work of a professional arts organisation with local communities.	Irish Museum of Modern Art — an ongoing programme with Active Aged.
Arts Programmes of Community Organisations	Courses, classes or workshops forming part of a wider educational or developmental programme.	Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group

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