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PUBLIC SCULPTURE

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BY

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

"In its traditional forms monument or memorial, public sculpture represented the ruling classes and their values and as such was rightly seen as an extension of their authority. When power changed from one regime to another, so did public art" 1

Throughout history, it could be argued, public art has mirrored the society that produced it. For example, in a socialist society, public spaces and buildings have been adorned with worker images; in post war times the images commissioned were monuments to victories. It is easy to understand that the public body commissioning a public monument would want its own ideology to be part of the image, as well as the particular event or individual which the commission is celebrating.

In the past, patrons simply selected an artist whose style was appropriate to the desired result. In contemporary society, the numbers of parties involved in processing public art has grown much larger than that of patron and artist. We now live in a period in which the concepts of participation, consensus and ownership are vital to the way things are achieved.

It is no longer acceptable to impose public art in the traditional manner. Nelsons Pillar provides us with an example of such imposition. The pillar was commissioned by the English Government in 1808 to commemorate Admiral Horatio Nelson's achievements in battle.

The pillar consisted of a doric column 121 feet high surmounted by the 13 foot high statue of Nelson, sculpted by Thomas Kirk. On the 8th of March 1966 the pillar was destroyed by an unknown group of Irish nationalists because of its political implications.

It is unfortunate, however, that this imposition still occurs and in turn leads to a negative public reaction, which in some instances has ended up in the courtroom and, ultimately, to the removal of such works.

The issue - 'what is public art?' - has been debated by artists, critics and members of the public for decades and will probably be debated well into the future. This discourse was highlighted in the 1960's and 1970's due to the 'public art' which was installed during this period. Works which were included in this discourse were "Mota Viget" by Mark Di Suvero, Calders "La Grande Vitesse" and George Sugerman's "Baltimore Federal".

This thesis is study of the problems which relate to contemporary public sculpture. The problems are varied, ranging from the very definition of public sculpture itself to the public perception of such works. Subsequently, several strategies are discussed in the hope of creating public art for the public.

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER ONE

ART IN PUBLIC PLACES AND PUBLIC ART

ART IN PUBLIC PLACES.

Critics, such as Harriet Senie have come to the conclusion that art in public places must be differentiated from public art in order to distinguish the goals or aims of the relative practice. It must be noted, however, that these areas, in some instances, do overlap.

Art in public places, by definition, is, as it suggests, an artist conceiving and creating a work which is then placed in a public area. The artwork is either purchased or commissioned for publicly owned or publicly accessible areas. These works may be commissioned or purchased by government or private bodies and are then placed on public display.

Alexander Calder's public sculptures, both his 'mobiles' and 'stabiles', are almost direct descendants from his gallery or museum works. His public and private (gallery) mobiles tend to be similar in appearance. The mobiles are constructed from sheet metal which was then painted in various colours. Calder used a variety of methods of attaching the metal forms to each other.

Occasionally wire was threaded through the forms, allowing them to pivot. Other elements included in these works are curving bars with metal rings at their tips, creating an aural effect.

Such means of fabrication were used in both "Red Gongs" (fig 1), 1950, which is housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Calders "125" (Fig 2) which was created in 1957 for the International Arrivals Terminal at New Yorks Kennedy Airport. Although the composition of the two works is different they both deal with the sculptural elements of weight, mass, volume, colour and movement. Calders "125" is an extension of his gallery works which has been enlarged for the public arena.

When Calder had to enlarge the scale of his mobiles for commissions such as "125", he went to metal fabricators and supervised the production of the art. The placing of private art (gallery art) - which sometimes has been enlarged - in the public domain has been practised for decades. Other practitioners who come to mind include Henry Moore, Mark Di Savero and Richard Serra.

These works may appear in urban or rural sites such as parks, woods, streets, squares or walkways or they can be situated indoors, insides churches, hospitals, the foyers of public buildings, the concourses of railway stations, underground tube stations or shopping centres.

There are many reasons for artists placing work in the public domain, the first being a matter of physical access; i.e. the work can be seen by a larger audience than those residing in private spaces. The second reason is that artists can thus be funded to realise their works which are often on a large scale.



Fig 1 A.Calder "Red Gongs" 1950 New York
The Metropolitan Museum of Art



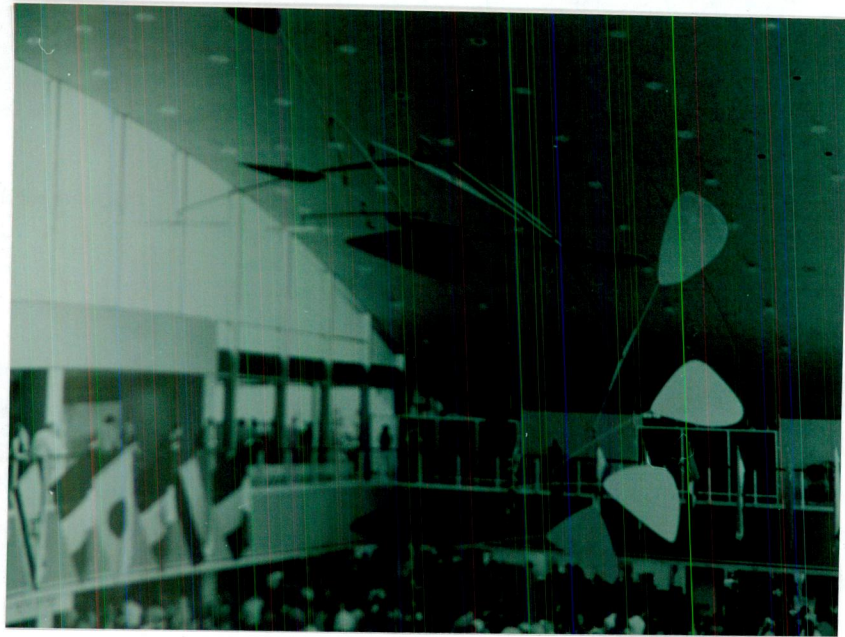


Fig 2 A. Calder "125" 1957 New York
International Arrivals Terminal, Kennedy Airport



PUBLIC ART

To define public art is somewhat more complicated. For most people, the words public art conjure up images of monuments and memorials. These works are generally commemorative in their content. Works depicting events or heroes of the past are usually figurative, although some are symbolic, in which case the figures represent virtues, such as, patriotism or justice.

The monument of Daniel O'Connell (fig,3) which resides at the top of O'Connell Street, here in Dublin, is a public artwork. Although mainly a portrait of the man himself it also contains some symbolic figurative characters around the middle and lower part of the monument.

After the funeral of Daniel O'Connell in 1847, a fund to erect a national monument was promoted by several newspapers and the hierarchy of the church authorised church door collections. An open competition for a suitable design, that attracted several entries, was won by a Dubliner, John Henry Foley. Foley died in 1874 before the work was finished and the monument was completed by Brock, his assistant. On the 15th of August 1882 the ceremony to unveil the almost-completed O'Connell monument was performed by the Lord Mayor in front of hundreds of people.

The overall height of the monument is 40 feet with the bronze statue of O'Connell wrapped in his famous cloak standing twelve feet high. Directly underneath O'Connell is Erin trampling her cast off shackles while holding the 1829 Act of Emancipation and pointing upward to the Liberator.



Fig 3 John Foley "O'Connell" 1882 Dublin
O'Connell Street, Dublin



Nearly thirty more figures symbolise the church, professions, arts, trades and peasantry. These figures are either carried in the round or in relief.

Problems with Defining Public Art

Although the O'Connell monument was intended to be a commemorative public artwork it could be argued that the lower part of the monument could represent art in public places. The four winged figures are supposed to represent O'Connell's chief virtues. 'Patriotism', (fig, 4), has a sword in her right hand and a shield in her left. 'Fidelity', (fig, 5), bears a mariners compass and strokes a dog. 'Eloquence', (fig, 6), clasps a sheaf of papers and addresses her listeners. Finally, 'Courage', (fig, 7), is shown strangling a serpent and supporting an axe.

John Beardsley questions to what extent are traditional public artworks 'public'. He states that within public art is the notion that it shares the same values and beliefs as its audience. It is presumed to be art conceived for the public, with the public's ideals as an essence of the work. He imagines that "this presumption was ever correct",

Public art by its very nature should presume an understanding of its imagery and symbols by those for whom it is intended. In the case of the O'Connell monument most of the work is legible and understood by the majority of the audience. There is no problem understanding or reading the portrait statue which stands at the apex of the plinth or most of the images which are directly under the Liberator.



Fig 4 "Patriotism" detail of O'Connell Monument,
O'Connell St, Dublin



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Fig 5 "Fidelity" detail of O'Connell Monument,
O'Connell St, Dublin





Fig 6 "Eloquence" detail of O'Connell Monument,
O'Connell St, Dublin



Fig 7 "Courage" detail of O'Connell Monument,
O'Connell St, Dublin



One such image is Erin who is always depicted as a female.

When, however, the figurative forms in public art, such as the four virtues of O'Connell, become more symbolic, it is questionable whether the majority of the audience will understand it.

It is questionable that people understand the symbolic content of the four elements which represent O'Connell's virtues. Audiences are more likely to perceive the aesthetic qualities rather than the symbolic ones. A winged figure carrying a sword does not automatically conjure up images of patriotism, it may represent a symbol of power. A figure strangling a snake does not necessarily symbolise courage, but could hold religious implications of good versus evil. The four winged figures have been formulated by the artist's conception of what they should look like as signifiers of 'Patriotism', 'Courage' and 'Fidelity'; this conception will not necessarily coincide with that of the public.

John H. Foley's conception of the 'Virtues' is not automatically accessible to the public. Beardsley asks if we have become too accustomed to such imagery in which "more often than not the symbolism is opaque. A nubile maiden is a nubile maiden until we are told she personifies liberty, peace, wisdom or a river."³

By the 1960's public art commonly understood by the majority of its audience and relating to their shared goals had clearly become an impossibility. The population had become far too diverse and values not only differed but were often polarised.

"An art that expresses the values of all people is impossible to achieve. In addition, the forms of the 20th Century art have tended towards an aesthetic - and an ethic - of personal expression and toward individualist rather than collectivist content".⁴

CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER TWO

AMERICAN ART IN THE SIXTIES

In the sixties, the artworks which graced the plazas and public spaces were mainly minimal art, produced by artists such as Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Barnett Newmann, Tony Smith and Richard Serra. The issue they were attempting to address was the idealism of modern sculpture. The Minimalists, as they were known, tried to deal with the formal aspects of sculpture and to purify their work through simplification. They strived to rid their minds of the materialism which was being embraced by their society. The Minimalists tried to engage the consciousness of the spectator with the placement of a sculpture within a particular environment. The concepts of perception were established as existing not only between the spectator and the work, but also with the space which was inhabited by both. It must be noted that this type of art should be labelled 'art in the public space' rather than 'public art'.

In order to ascertain the origins and the problems of public sculpture it is necessary to identify the patrons of this specific type of work. The main patrons, in the United States of America, are the General Services Administration, the National Endowment for the Arts and the private sector.

THE GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

The General Services Administration (G.S.A.) was established under the Kennedy administration in 1963.

It was set up to introduce an Art-in-Architecture programme which commissioned work by sculptors for federal buildings across the U.S.. The G.S.A. funding programme allocated a small percentage of its building costs to be used for art purposes and the programme was implemented mainly in federal office spaces. There was a clause stating that an American living artist would be preferred to carry out these commissions.

When this programme first started it was the architect who recommended the artist to the G.S.A.. This procedure changed in 1973 to selection from a panel of 'qualified art professionals' which were appointed by the National Endowment for the Arts (another federal commissioning body).

The original purpose or function of the art commissioned by the G.S.A. was to enhance the architecture or the open space which the 'work of art' inhabited. There are, however, some secondary reasons why government bodies commission artworks in public places. The government sees the commissioning of art as a means of supporting or funding the marginal art community. By funding the arts the government can also create employment opportunities for artists, craftspeople and associated trades.

The problems of art in the public place begins with the patron and the patrons selection process. The G.S.A. in its art - in - architecture programme uses the following method of selecting artists. When architects negotiate their contracts they are informed that one percent of the estimated construction costs will be allocated for sculpture. They therefore submit an art - in - architecture proposal as part of the overall design concept.

This proposal must include a description of the location and nature of the artwork to be commissioned.

The G.S.A. then requests the N.E.A. to appoint a panel of art professionals to meet the architect for the purpose of nominating three to five artists for the planned artwork. One or more of the artists is to be from the area of the project. These panels are set up on an ad hoc basis for specific projects. They usually contain directors of galleries , history of art professors and leading private art collectors.

The panel and the architect meet at the project site with representatives of the G.S.A. and the N.E.A. to review visual materials of artists whose work would be appropriate for the proposed commission.

Problems arise from the composition of the commissioning panel itself. Even though some of the members of the panel come from the locale of the proposed site they tend to be well educated in the field of art. For this reason the panel could be termed elitist, and tend to favour work of an overtly intellectual nature. Due to this factor the work is often seen in the light of "Big Brother Knows Best", which was the initial problem they were trying to avoid.

It was through this commissioning process that Richard Serra's "Tilted Arc" (Fig, 8) was commissioned for the Federal Plaza in New York.



Fig 8 R Serra "Tilted Arc" 1981 (destroyed 1986)
New York Federal Plaza



The voting panel members who sanctioned this work were Mike Merchall, the Commissioner of the Public Buildings Services, Karel Yasko, the Assistant Commissioner in the Office of Design and Construction and David R. Dibner of the Art-in-Architecture programme.

"Tilted Arc" is twelve feet high and one hundred and twenty feet in length. There are two distinct sides to the form of the sculpture, one is convex and the other is concave. As the observer crosses the plaza on the concave side, the arcs sweep creates an 'amphitheatre like' space. This concave echoes the curved steps in front of the buildings. The concave amplifies both the sound and the self awareness of the viewer within the entire space. It also magnifies the sculptural field of the space. The concavity makes the viewer realise his own movement through space and time in relation to the plaza. While the convexity makes the curve appear endless when the viewer walks around it.

This is a very formal description of a 'public' artwork. The public, however, compared "Tilted Arc" to the Berlin wall and a security specialist for the Federal Protection and Safety Division of the G.S.A. stated that the sculpture presented "a blast wall effect..... comparable to devices which are used to vent explosive forces. This one could vent an explosion both upward and in an angle toward both buildings",

In short, the general public perceived this work as threatening. It was public thinking which had "Tilted Arc" removed.

Some called it an eyesore and said it prevented public use of the area and attracted vagrants, others thought it a good hiding place for muggers. As a result of perceptions like these "Tilted Arc" was destroyed on March 15, 1989.

"What we need in public art today is not consensus but communication.....Good public art (good for the public and good for art) functions as an invitation to dialogue, not inaccessible monologue",

THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

The governing body, the National Endowment for the Arts (N.E.A.) began in 1967 an Art in Public Places programme. This offered funds to local authorities for art on specific sites. The idea behind the funding was to purchase art in response to local demand. The art then becomes the property of the community rather than that of the federal funding organisation.

The commissioning of sculpture by the N.E.A. was often part of an urban renewal project. It was hoped that these sculptures would provide the community with a positive self image, and in some cases, it was believed to create a sense of civic identity and to impress outsiders and, in the process, generate funds through tourist revenues.

The Art in Public Places Committee names an ad hoc jury, usually three to five people. Although their committees are made up of artists and architects they also employ community representatives and city employees.

Each jury receives background information on the project, including site plans or a site visit. The N.E.A. established three methods of selecting artwork; an open competition, a limited competition, and direct selection.

In the open competition, a prospectus describing the site, budget and nature of the work to be commissioned is published. This includes an invitation to all artists to submit proposals. Artists are not paid for proposals that have not been selected by the jury. The jury then meets, selects and recommends an artwork for commission.

In a limited competition, a letter is sent to a number of preselected artists. Usually between three and five artists are invited to prepare proposals. The artists are paid for their submissions which are retained by the commissioning body. The jury then recommends an artist for the commission.

The direct selection process is handled in the same way as the limited entry process except that the jury only accept the proposal of one artist. The contract between the commissioning body and the artist can serve as a guide for similar agreements in other cities, with modifications for different situations.

Unlike the G.S.A., the N.E.A. includes both community representatives and city employees on their juries. The key to successful selection and placement of the work is the introduction of the 'public' factor into the selection process.

The commissioning of sculpture by the N.E.A. was often part of a larger urban renewal project.

Problems arose when the commissioning of art in public places by the N.E.A. took precedence over an urban renewal project. Refael Ferre's "Puerto Rico Sun" (Fig, 9), was one such case. It was installed in 1979, in a South Bronx community garden park. It was intended as a symbol of local pride, however, in an economically deprived residential area their need was not for art but for decent housing facilities. Needless to say, the work was rejected by the community.

THE PRIVATE CORPORATE SECTOR

The third patron of public site art is the private corporate business sector, such as banks. Large companies have been known to commission art which, in the case of large scale sculpture, is placed outside their front doors. These works are commissioned for a number of reasons - the most common being for decorative purposes - and is usually an afterthought in the buildings construction. Although the sculpture functions primarily as a decoration, it could also be suggested that the work serves as a status symbol for its patrons, and if created by a well known artist could increase the value of the property in which it is situated.

In 1968 Isamu Noguchi was commissioned by the Marine Midland Bank in New York to create a public artwork for their plaza. His original proposal for the plaza involved the use of natural rocks but the price of materials exceeded the budget and he had to submit alternative proposals. Every time Noguchi produced a model that the architect liked it had to be shown to Helmsley, the project developer.



Fig 9 R Ferre "Puerto Rico Sun" 1979 New York
South Bronx



Helmsley turned down five proposals in all before settling on Noguchi's "Red Cube" (Fig, 10). Although this commission was intended to be a collaboration between patron, architect and artist - the final decision was dictated by the budget and the personal taste of the patron, Mr. Helmsley.

Commissions planned by corporations or developers can be implemented more directly than that of governmental bodies. There is less consultation because there are no jury panels, only the patron, architect and artist are involved.

There are several ways the private corporate secures the services of an artist. If the architect is considered to be sufficiently knowledgeable in the field of art, he/she may commission the artist who he/she feels competent to carry out the work. Presumably this artist has performed well in the past and is dependable. Architect and artist should meet at the very inception of the project to discuss location, size, material, scale and the cost of the work. It is necessary that the artist submit a scale model or drawing for approval by the architect and the owner. Should the preliminary model still be unacceptable, the artist may have to submit revised concepts until agreement is reached.

The problems with the private sector's strategy for commission is parallel to that of the G.S.A. Since the process is less complex with only artist, architect and owner involved in the work, it again tends to become overtly intellectual. This in turn leads to problems with the public's interpretation of the work.

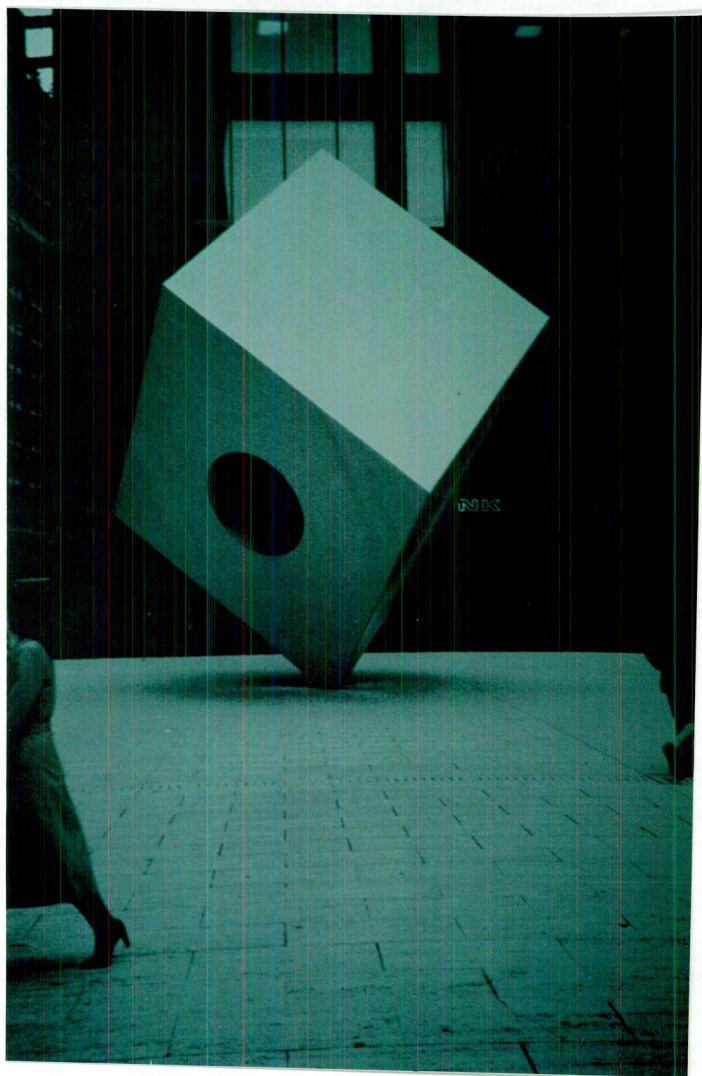


Fig 10 I Noguchi "Red Cube" 1968
Marine Midland Bank, New York



CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC ART

Contemporary "public art" in our society is essentially private art in public places. This placement of art has more to do with property, ownership and fashion than it does with providing public with an aesthetic experience related to their own real life experience (this excludes community art).

Art in public places is considered private because it is commonly familiar only to the museum going majority. It is essentially art proposed by a single class and imposed on others.

When a person enters a gallery or museum, that person announces himself/herself as a viewer. The viewer submits to the terms of the art arena, the viewer agrees to be a 'subject'. Outside the gallery or museum, in a public place, there is no art viewer; there are only passers-by, coming from a variety of backgrounds with different histories and experiences. It is questionable if these people have asked for art. When they come across a public work of art, they tend to see it not as art but simply as something else in their world, something that has not been there before. Art, in order to exist in the outside world, has to agree to social conventions, certain rules of peaceful co-existence, it must lie low; instead of attacking, it must insinuate. If art does not adhere to social conventions, it's situation may become problematic.

The majority of the public are suspicious of art in public places; their instinct leads them to suspect modern sculpture as being 'monuments' to the educated classes which commissioned them.

This art is often met with the utmost resistance because it is considered a token of an urban elite. This resistance often articulates an archaic territorial instinct, which could also be seen as a demand for cultural respect. Public sculpture can be interpreted as an object which unnecessarily takes possession of a place, which originally belonged solely to the public. To someone who regularly comes in contact with the work, it may be seen as an impediment or an infringement on his/her own personal space. Due to the large proportions that contemporary public sculpture tends to assume, the passer-by often feels intimidated by the work.

Contemporary public sculpture is mostly descendent from the art we see in the gallery or museum. Unlike traditional figurative public sculpture, which was identifiable by historical or political content, contemporary 'public' sculpture has a dialogue of its own.

Contemporary public sculpture has taken the place of the traditional monument or memorial without referring clearly to a specific body of meaning. For this reason the work appears to be illegible and sometimes regarded as an insult to the public.

Contemporary public sculpture which is situated in the public domain has "often appeared mute to the public it hoped to address".⁸

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER 3

EDUCATION FOR CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC SCULPTURE

Public sculpture has all too often met with a negative response from its patron and its audience. Brian McAvera has talked about the need for artists to create a coherent and accessible dialogue of meaning within a public work.

I believe that many of our modern artworks need to be decoded - their messages are hidden under a sophisticated art language. Placing this language in the public sphere can lead to a work being misread or even totally incomprehensible.

Although no clear cut solution to the problems of public art have been found, various strategies have been applied with success.

In this chapter I will endeavour to show that art, through the use of various educational strategies, can harmoniously exist within the public domain.

EDUCATION OF THE ARTIST

Most of the art we see in the public domain is conceived by artists who have been trained in conventional art schools. For most potential artists, their sights are set on showing their work in galleries or sculpture parks.

Sally Morgan, a senior lecturer at Darlington College of Arts, questions the ability of the artist to " recognise an audience beyond the critic or the informed gallery going public.

In short, they tend to work within a particular tradition and have difficulty in adapting to the challenge of a change of context",

She believes that artists that train under such circumstances inherit the ideas of the 'romantic artist'. This idea of the 'romantic artist' has been handed down for generations, and is a familiar concept to artist and public alike. The artist perceives himself/herself as 'different'. He/she has a romantic notion of being locked away in an isolated consciousness, alienated from society in order to make his/her inner self known. It could be said that initially, this notion was progressive and liberating, a struggle to break with tradition and to attain a subjective emotional truth.

In relation to contemporary society, this idea tends to manifest itself as a hopeless split between the artist and society at large. It is due to this isolation that artists have entered into their own elitist world, complete with their own discourse. This split is one of the factors contributing to the problems of public art. Although this split is apparent in most forms of art, it is increasingly so in the context of public art or art in public places. Inevitably this leads to problems when dealing with the public or patrons who commission public art.

Sally Morgan states :

" The fact that we need to give this work (public art as opposed to art) a separate name at all indicates that we consider that education for 'public art' needs to be different from traditional fine art training in a number of ways"¹⁰

Public art requires all the aesthetic skills of the traditional fine art training but in addition to this, it must also deal with non-art skills, which up until recently have been absent from fine art courses. These non-art skills are essentially communication skills. The artist must have the ability to articulate his/her proposal to the commissioning body. Although fine art courses have introduced some strategies in dealing with the business and professional aspects of art training, they do not necessarily deal with problems of public art.

In the recent past, colleges such as, The Art Institute of Chicago and the Glasgow School of Art, have introduced an environmental art course which trains students in the field of public art. The aims of such courses are to develop a personal vocabulary in relation to materials and ideas and also to develop the ability to produce his/her own response to a context. The student learns to produce art with or through other people - the art of collaboration.

The objectives of such courses are to educate the student to :

1. Research and understand personal responses to the making of art.
2. Research and understand contexts.
3. Be sensitive to the wishes and values of those who may use them.
4. Recognise the needs and possibilities in terms of image making.

5. Identify and carry out a strategy for art practise in response to the above.

The students are taught communication skills in the form of presentation, negotiation and consultation.

Presentation

Presentation is acknowledged as the setting out of ideas, both in visual terms (models and drawings) and textual format. These have to be set out in a readily comprehensible fashion in order to be accessible to both patron and audience. These drawings or models should be to scale, so that the work may be seen in relation to the overall site and relative to a human being. The artist also needs to indicate the materials, the colours and the finish he/she intends to use in fabricating work.

Proposals should also include a production schedule, instructions for the provision of maintenance and a short statement describing the relationship of the artist's proposal to the site. The ideas that the artist considers important in the piece and any other relevant information about the piece should naturally be included.

The most important element which should be included in a proposal is the budget, which should account for the following :

1. Materials
2. Transport of the artwork to the site or the storage of the work until the date of installation.

3. Fabrication fees e.g rental of equipment such as welders etc.
4. Studio rent - a studio may be needed for the artist, while working on the commission.
5. Labour costs - assistants or other jobs, such as carpentry work
6. Insurance - it is important that the artist insure commissions against theft, damage, vandalism, accidents and public liability while work is in progress. Once the work is installed it is the responsibility of the client.
7. Unforeseen expenses during production - this is important in relation to large commissions. If procedures are delayed, which is often the case, it is important to allow for such emergencies.
8. The artist must include V.A.T. as an expense.
9. Photography of work in progress - work must be documented for both client and artist.
10. Artist fee - the artist should not undersell him/herself. If unsure of the appropriate fee to charge, artist should contact the relevant professional association for advice.

NEGOTIATION

Negotiation is vital skill for the student to acquire.

When attempting to realise a public artwork, negotiation plays an integral part in the commissioning process, especially when confronting the client with a budget.

Both presentation and negotiation can be taught through realistic projects and role playing. The projects demand taking real sites and applying artistic creation to the site. The lecturers then stimulate different reactions to the work and request that the student respond to it in any way they see fit. This is a fundamental part of the learning process, by simulating the real world, it is hoped that the student will benefit from this discourse.

CONSULTATION

Consultation overlaps with negotiation. Consultation in this case refers to the audience of the commission. It is important that the student can identify the audience who will experience his art. In order to form a reaction to the space, the student will have to consult with those who use it. In a community context, such as a school or housing estate, the common denominator which denotes the art may be easily ascertained. On the other hand, a place where it is impossible to predict the type of audience, such as a train station, the student will need to interview a cross section of the public in order to articulate his/her response.

Studio work is vital in these public art education course, it is not sufficient to concentrate on the theoretical aspects of public art. It is obvious that the student needs lectures, workshops and seminars within this area.

Sally Morgan confesses that....."deeper understanding can be achieved through the students active participation in community (or off campus) projects and placements"¹¹

Work experience can be arranged between the college and an artist who works in this field. The student may gain experience from working in a real context and the artist may also be glad of an assistant. Work experience gives the feeling of professional practice and fills the gap between theory and, eventually, the students own practice. It is most beneficial to the student because he/she will gain a first hand knowledge of both the problems and the techniques that can be employed in projects.

By bringing together the essential qualities of fine art courses and introducing the new disciplines which I have discussed, theory and placement will, in the end, contribute to the practice of public art as a whole.

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC

Apart from educating the artist, there is also a need to educate the public. By doing so it may help to eradicate some of the problems of public art.

Every stage of the art commissioning process provides opportunities for public education. This, ideally, leads to a greater understanding and appreciation of the project and its purposes. The greater the public input, the greater the project stands to gain the acceptance of the public majority.

There are many ways of involving and educating the public. The first is to involve the public in the jury process. After they have selected the finalists, they should organise an exhibition of these final works in a public place, such as a local community hall or centre. This gives the public an idea as to what work might occupy the site.

Once the final selection has been made, the winning artwork must be made known to the public and the artists prior commissions and achievements must also be made known.

At this stage, the artist should be expected to assume a public role as interpreter of the artwork. The artist is obliged to meet with the press and speak at public conferences to discuss the relevant steps in the development of the final work. This allows the public and the press to query any details before the fabrication is initiated.

The artists winning design drawings, plan and model should be kept on exhibition and be made available for review for all the relative commissioning bodies.

The artists timetable for the execution of the work should also be announced to the community. If the artist requires an assistant, such as a technician or a fabricator, he/she should be attained locally. This provides another opportunity for the public to be involved.

The completion and unveiling of the work also creates an opportunity to educate and communicate the public.

At the ceremony, and in the weeks following, a lecture or a panel discussion can provide a helpful basis for interpretation. This could relate to the original concept of the commissioning body and an evaluation of the successes of the winning artists solution. Praising the work in relation to its environment and its potential meaning to the community should be invited. All such comments should be shared with the media and recorded by the community.

Generally, these procedures of educating and communicating with the public protect both the artist and the public from misunderstandings. When problems arise, the procedures are normally equal to the challenge and willing compromise will produce a satisfactory solution.

The key to the acceptance of a contemporary public artwork is the public's involvement. Whether they are engaged in the selection process or in the fabrication of the work itself, it is essential that the public be involved or at least be made aware of the transitions that their public spaces are undergoing.

"An artwork can become significant to its public through the incorporation of content relevant to the local audience, or by the assumption of an identifiable function. Assimilation can also be encouraged through a work's role in a larger civic improvement program.

In the first case, recognisable content of function provides a means by which the public can become engaged with the work, though its style or for may be unfamiliar to them. In the latter, the works identity as art is submerged by a more general public purpose, helping to ensure its validity."¹²

COLLABORATIONS IN PUBLIC ART

Although Richard Serra's name is associated with public art controversy he has made significant contributions to communities such as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. "Carnegie" (Fig, 11) was Serra's first major vertical piece to be installed in the U.S.A.. "Carnegie" is a prop construction of four identical plates which are fabricated from Cor-Ten steel. This piece was purchased as part of the 1985 Carnegie International Exhibition. There was a trial erection of the piece at the Pittsburgh - Des Moines Corporation before it was finally installed in front of the Museum of Art at the Carnegie Institute.

Serra started using steel at U.S. Steel, California where he worked. This work experience gave him a technical foundation and made him conscious of the working conditions of the steel worker. The works forty foot plates were rolled at Lakers Steel in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, which is the only steel mill in the country which is capable of producing such large plates. The fabrication and the installation of "Carnegie" is, no doubt, a community effort. Due to the social specificity of the site, Serra's work gained instant acceptance by the community.



Fig 11 R Serra "Carnegie" 1985
Museum of Art Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh



John Lane, director of the museum stated:

"One could hardly imagine a more appropriate conjunction of artist, material and location than Serra, steel and Pittsburgh"¹³

Serra provide this working class community with symbols to which they could point to with pride and with which they could positively identify as a symbol of their own hard labour. For the citizens of Pittsburgh the material and the site have become the content of the piece.

In much the same fashion, George Segal gained acceptance for his piece "The Steelmakers", (Fig, 12). Segal was commissioned in 1977 by the Youngstown Arts Council to produce a sculpture for the new Federal Plaza in Youngstown. The arts Council had received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to support part of the commission.

The sculpture celebrated the towns chief industry and was seen as a means for revitalising a declining neighbourhood. In 1978, however, the councils efforts , to raise the matching funds to complete the work were threatened by a drastic turn of economic events. Over 10,000 steelworkers lost their jobs due to the closure of two of the largest steel mills in the Youngstown area. It was due to this economic decline that Segal thought that his work would never be realised.

When Segal highlighted the funding difficulties and detailed the subject matter of "The Steelmakers", contributions began flooding in from local community sources.



Fig 12 G Segal "The Steel Makers" 1980
Youngstown, Ohio



The work had been adopted as a symbol of civic pride and donations were received from banks, local businesses and other foundations. This work became an icon of its community and they were prepared to see it realised. The Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation donated an idle furnace from the Briar Hill mill and the models for the work were selected by the Buildings Trades Union, who assisted in the fabrication and installation of the sculpture.

The support of the union may have been responsible for legitimising the artwork. The sculpture benefits enormously from the recognisable image of the furnace which in turn stirs the emotions of the public in a way no abstract image can. The theme of the sculpture is well chosen and the persistence of local pride to complete the work under economic stress adds to its appeal.

Howard Smagula states that:

"Segal believes strongly that we are moving towards a period in time when the needs of society and the services of the artist will harmonise"¹⁴

Segal was correct in his belief, five years after he completed "The Steelmakers", great changes of attitude to the development of public art took place. In the early 1980's, public art began to take into consideration the element of collaboration between the architect, the artist and the public.

These collaborations produced such environments as the Shoreline Walk at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration complex, in Seattle, Washington, (N.O.A.A.).

The N.O.A.A. invited five artists, who had been selected by them and the N.E.A., to develop the project for the Sand Point peninsula. The five artists chosen for the project were Siah Armajani, Scott Burton, Douglas Hollis, Martin Puryear and George Trakas.

Initially three of the artists discussed the possibility of collaborating on a single artwork. However, this was not possible due to geographic distances. Instead, the artists developed a sculpture trail which would connect separate works with each other. Each of these different works responded to the landscape in a different way.

Before submitting their final proposals, the five artists held many meetings with N.O.A.A. staff and community representatives as well as each other. The concerns of the community included safety and respect for the natural environment. The aims of the artists were to emphasise the recreational nature of the shoreline as well as the protection of its natural state. Together they conceived a sculpture trail along the waterfront that served to unify the five sculptures. The works are located on different types of terrain to emphasise the topography of the site.

The works which were installed at the site in 1983, have utilitarian aspects to them, the most obvious being George Trakas' "Berth Haven", (Fig, 13) which can be used as a dock for boats or as a swimming point. Armajani's "Bridges ", (Fig, 14), is a bridge which allows the viewer to cross a small river and continue along the sculpture trail.



Fig 13 G Trakas "Berth Haven" 1983
Seattle, Washington (NOAA)



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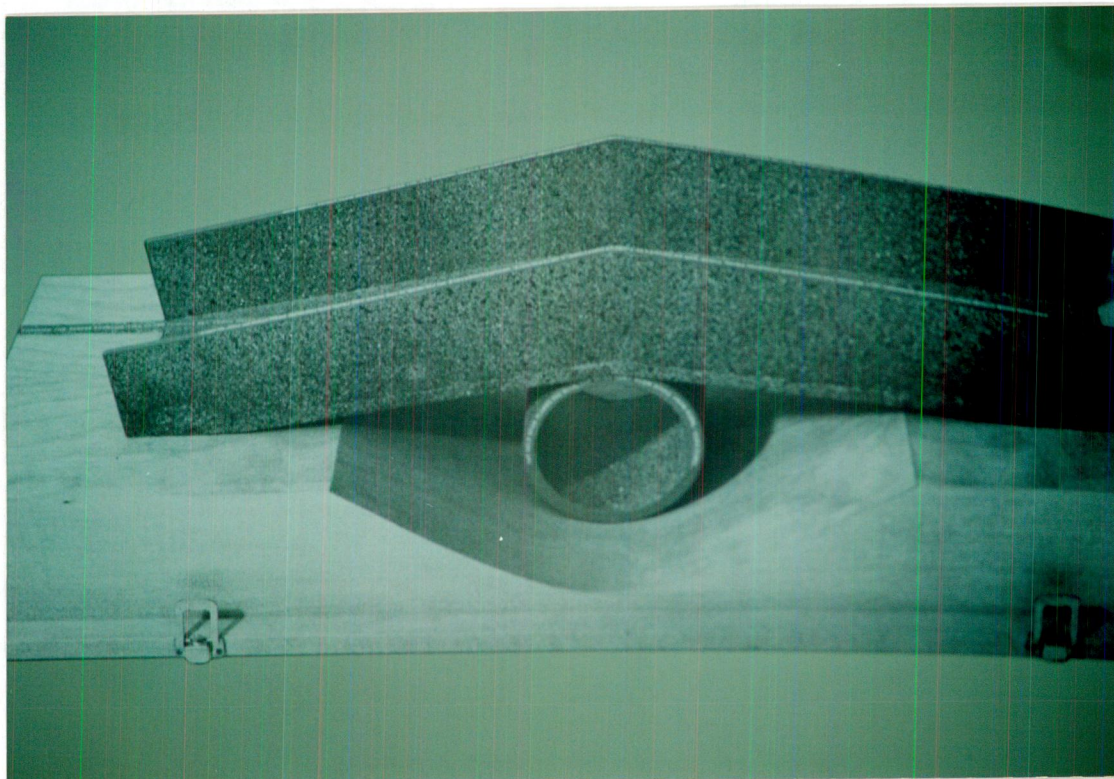
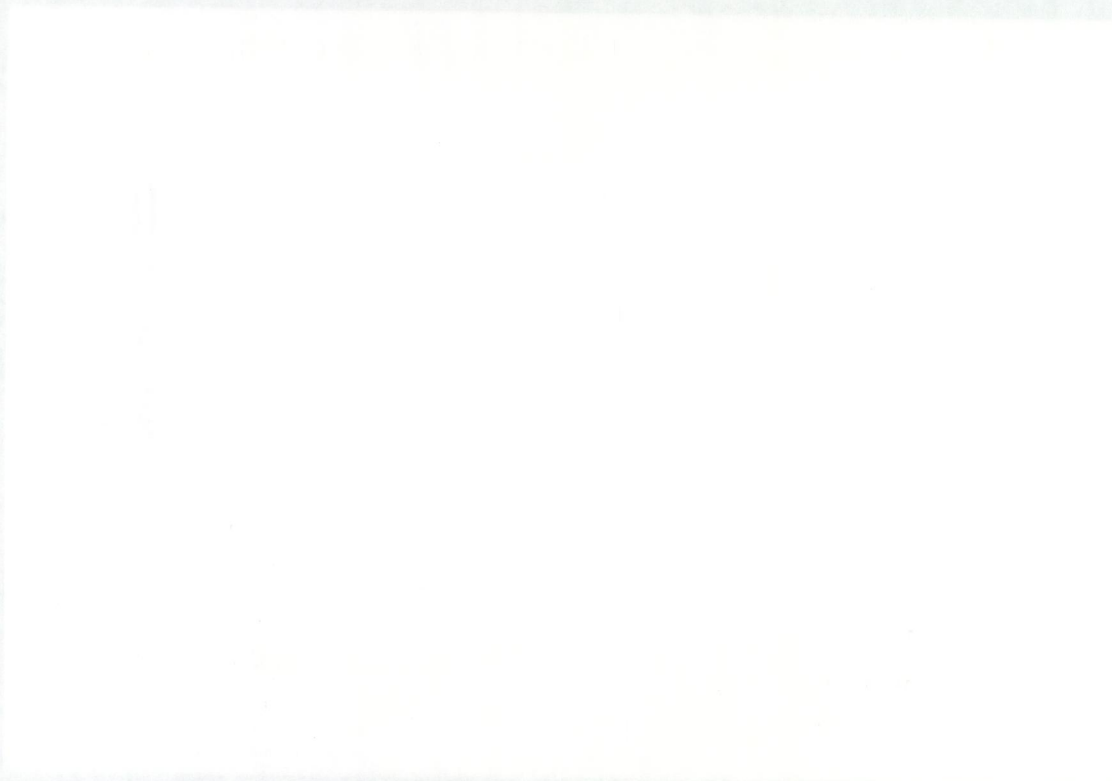


Fig 14 S Armajani "Bridges" 1983
Seattle, Washington (NOAA)



The other works, "Knoll", by Martin Puryear, "Viewpoint", by Scott Burton and "Sound Garden, (Fig, 15), by Douglas Hollis, are all equipped with seating within the parameters of the work.

From the artist's first visits to Seattle, N.O.A.A. employees and nearby residents were kept informed about the project. These meetings served the development of the artists concepts which they hoped would enhance the publics use and enjoyment of the site.

George Trakas, in a discussion relating to the issues of public art and the concept of using the public as a source of feedback for public work, states:

"It is usually the case that lots of pressures help get the thing done - that is true throughout the history of large public and architectural commissions. The limits imposed are very often a learning process and, without all the limits, without all the conflicts, the piece wouldn't be as rich. It keeps my adrenalin flowing and it also keeps everybody connected with what's going to happen."¹⁵

In order for public art to progress, Trakas' attitude must be adopted by more artists. Trakas and his colleagues have proven that through communication and co-operation public art can exist harmoniously in the public domain.

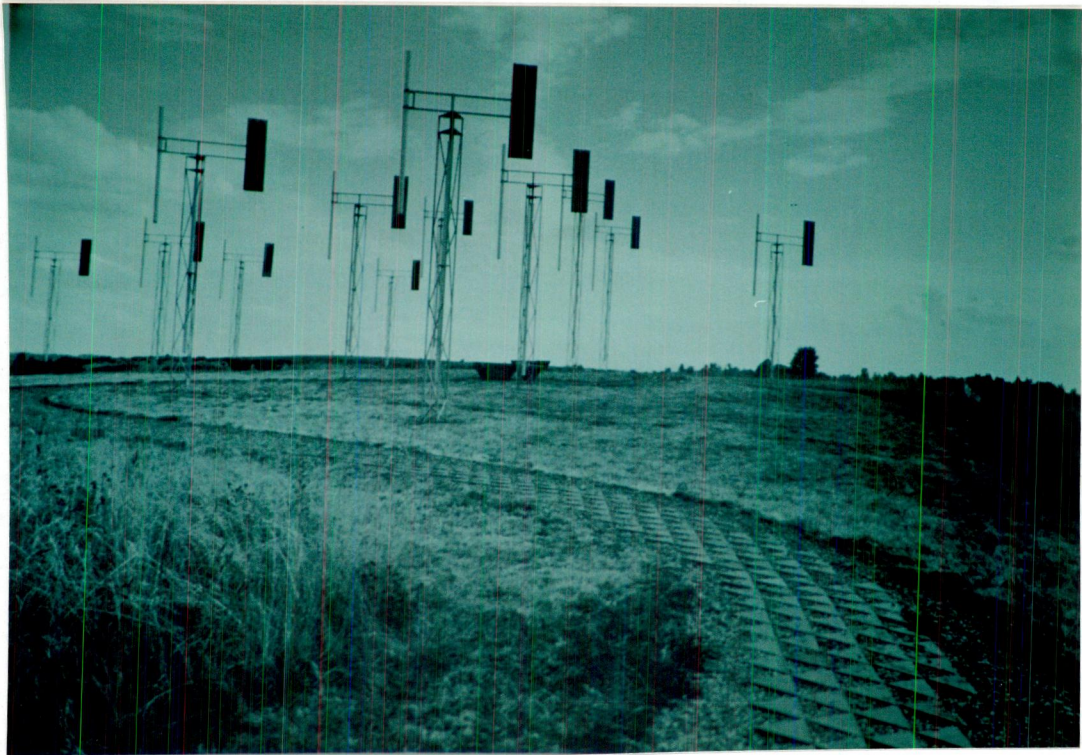


Fig 15 D Hollis "Sound Garden"
Seattle, Washington (NOAA)

The Seattle Arts Commission which oversees such projects as the Shoreline Walk play a large part in the success of Seattle's Percentage for Arts programme. It annually reviews the city's capital investment and refurbishment schemes and identifies eligible projects. The commission keeps comprehensive lists of potential public sites for consideration and is continually updated.

The flexibility and variety of Seattle's Percentage for Arts programme facilitates the development of the artists role as maker, thinker and catalyst. Increasingly this has meant the involvement of artists on architectural or urban design teams. In all projects the quality of the idea is considered important. An artist is hired for an imaginative contribution, not necessarily for the reproduction of stylistically predictable studio work. The artist, therefore, is regarded as supplying the team with a different point of view from that of the architect, the designer and the engineer.

Some progress has also been made in Ireland. In the last few years the Sculpture Society of Ireland (S.S.I.) has initiated several collaborative projects. The Ahenny Slate Quarries Sculpture Symposia took place in Kilkenny in 1992. The symposia presented the artist with the unique opportunity to work with other artists and with members of the community. The objectives of such symposia are not only to allow the artist to work on a project away from the studio but also to create a feeling of artistic development and ownership within the community and its environs.

The selection panel consisted of three members. Two of the members were artists, Sonja Landweer and Marian O'Donnell and the other member was James Power, the quarry owner. The panel selected seven artists to produce works within the vicinity of the quarry and to utilise the natural material found there.

Unlike the works at Shoreline Walk in Seattle, which have utilitarian aspects to them, the sculptures at the Ahenny Slate Quarries tend to be purely conceptual. The absence of utilitarian elements in these works, such as "Birth, Death, Rebirth" (Fig 16) by Helen Comeford, did not inhibit the community from getting involved, both financially and physically.

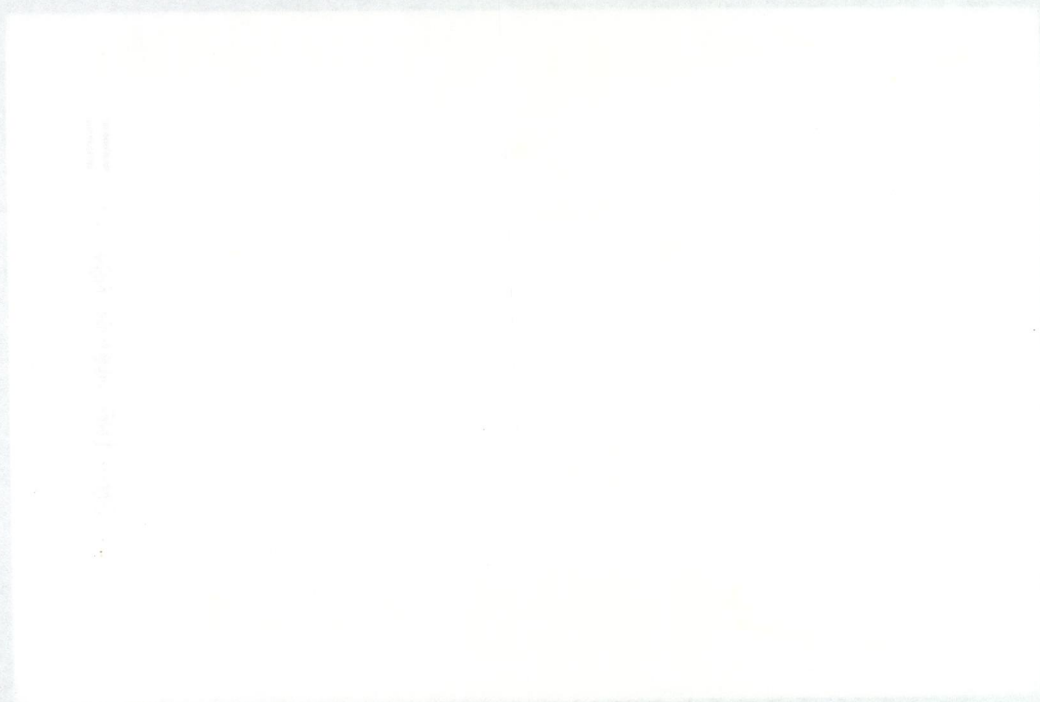
"Birth, Death, Rebirth" is fabricated from slate, packed together tightly vertically in a spiral manner. Comeford dedicates the work to her father who died just before the project took place. When she talks about the project in general she states :

"Impossible to forget the warmth which embraced us all. The work grew and we grew, we grew into the place and the place grew into us. Time and again we heard 'the slate quarries will never be the same again'. Neither will any of the participants."¹⁶

The collaboration process can provide a solid foundation for making a significant impact on the surrounding environment. This process takes the consideration of all parties into account for the project. A specific goal can be achieved through the discourse which takes place in relation to the project.



Fig 16 H Comeford "Birth,Death,Rebirth" (detail)
Ahenny Slate Quarry, Kilkenny



It must be pointed out, however, that the collaboration process cannot exist without the co-operation of all parties.

CONCLUSION

Art has been placed in public as well as private domains for centuries. It has never failed to be provocative when exposed to an extended audience. Throughout history, monuments have been built and sculpted in communal circumstances usually for the purpose of prestige or commemoration. Power and authority have inevitably been the impetus behind these achievements which are not only approved but respected.

Contemporary public art has served aesthetical rather than communicational purposes. Its instigation can be the undertaking of a few leaders and its language of communication tends to exclude the public. Whether or not artworks located in public spaces, can be effective in conveying the intentional thought and feeling is an ongoing issue for debate. It is questionable whether the diverse society of today can read the content of a given artwork. More often than not the underlying meaning of an artwork remains exclusively with the small minority educated in the arts. Even when art is commissioned for didactic purposes by the church or the state, certain symbolism and imagery is recognisable only to a few intellectuals. The underlying problem has been one of fitting art into popular cultural. These problems stem from art's elitist background which traditionally believes that art cannot appeal to, or be understood by everyone.

By placing art in public places, choices are made on behalf of others and artworks bring about change in the environment.

It is therefore important that public art is not forced upon the public without consideration for their needs, interest or feelings.

Harriet Senie states:

"There has been a serious failure of communication. Contemporary art is not immediately comprehensible to the general public, and artists and critics have largely failed to explain their work in understandable language"¹⁷

Although the direction of public art has an uncertain future, I believe that collaborative projects such as the Shoreline Walk in Seattle and the Ahenny Slate Quarries Sculpture Symposia in Killkenny should be followed closely. The process and outcome of such projects can be used as a measure for which future projects may be based on.

FOOTNOTES

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4. Beardsley, J Personal Sensibilities in Public Art
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5. Smagula, H Currents P5
6. Serra, Buskirk The Destruction of Tilted Arc:
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7. Senie, H Contemporary Public Sculpture P231
8. Senie, H Contemporary Public Sculpture P4
9. Morgan, S Beyond the Aesthetic Adventure:
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11. Morgan, S Beyond the Aesthetic Adventure:
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12. Krauss, R Richard Serra / Sculpture P51
13. Senie, H Contemporary Public Sculpture P138
14. Smagula, H Currents P28
15. Yards, S Sittings P111
16. Comeford, H Symosra 1992 P19
17. Senie, H Contemporary Public Sculpture P17

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