# Contemporary Irish Art

# and its

# Teaching in Post-Primary Schools

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B.A. in Art and Design Education

1995

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# *Contemporary Irish Art and its Teaching in Post-Primary Schools.*

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Education

in

Candidacy for the

B.A. DEGREE IN ART AND DESIGN EDUCATION

by

Deirdre Bonner

April,1995

## ABSTRACT..

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This dissertation investigates the place of Contemporary Irish Art and it's teaching in Post Primary Schools through out the country .

Inspiration for this area of study in my dissertation came from the perceived idea acquired as a student Art teacher that Contemporary Irish Art was not being addressed adequately in the form of teaching at Leaving Certificate Level .

Exploration into this suggested idea confirmed through the use of a questionaire that Contemporary Irish Art was indeed not being taught by the majority of teachers surveyed .

Furthermore the survey revealed that many of the teachers blamed the text books Lourda Sheppard 's Sight,Insight,Exite. and Henry J. Sharpe's Art History and Appreciation . for the absence of Contemporary Irish Art from our classrooms .

Therefore, Part i of my methodology aimed at structuring an Art History class around the "INTRODUCTION" provided in these text books by the authors .
(This the teachers believed an impossible task due to the lack of resources available on Contemporary Irish Art.)

Part ii of my methodology aimed at requiring information on Contemporary Irish Artists that I had no previous knowledge of.Thus,through research work making myself aware of areas to avail of resource materials.

_ accepting "INTRODUCTION" provided in text books as a guidance unto which the teachers must base their research.

_ How to go about researching material.

Thus,within my methodology I realised that the main problems restricting teachers from teaching Contemporary Irish Art was their own lack of knowledge and exposure to this area when training as art teachers thus,creating a lack of confidence in this area among most teachers.
(Numberous other problems arose which you will later observe.
My recommendations to address these problems are as follows:

* Teacher training should be addressed where Post Primary School teachers are equipped as student teachers to deal with the topic of Contemporary Irish Art in a classroom situation.

* Inservice days should be organised to inform teachers on this area of Irish Art since there is such a lack of knowledge in this area .

* Resources need to be made more accessable to teachers with the help of MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES. There needs to be more of a relationship between these institutions, and Post Primary Schools .

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation investigates the place of Contemporary Irish Art in the post-primary Art, Craft and Design Leaving Certificate syllabus.

**Is it being taught adequately in post-primary schools or indeed is it being taught at all?**

Firstly, in order to acquire information on this subject, a questionnaire was circulated to fifty post-primary schools throughout the country (investigating the place of Contemporary Irish Art in both rural and urban post-primary schools).

The findings of the survey revealed that this perceived idea was actually true but also suggested that there were numerous problems, which discouraged teachers from addressing the subject of Contemporary Irish Art in the classroom.

Through my methodology, I hope to investigate these problems and to arrive at my conclusion with recommendations of how these problems could be addressed in order for Contemporary Irish Art to occupy a place in post-primary schools.

# CHAPTER 1

## TEACHING ART HISTORY

The Calouste Gulbenkian Art and Schools report states an aim which is very relevant for the teaching of history of art, this is that:

> Teachers must avoid giving the impression that only their views count. If we want to promote independent, critical and creative thinking, we shall be working against ourselves if we try to achieve these things by methods of teaching which style the initiative and promote the acceptance of an authoritarian body or establishment. (1)

The Gulbenkian Foundation follow on to say that the arts teaching is not just a simple matter of passing on the cultural heritage "In contrast to the diverse, relative and evolutionary nature of culture as it actually exists, a picture is conjured up of a universally valued archive of stable treasures. The arts teacher is seen as a kind of guide around this archive." (2)

Looking at Peter Abbs' view, he states that the arts teacher should use teaching methods that "keep the response of the pupils in the aesthetic mode, deepening it, refining it". (3) Abbs states that the task for the art teacher is to

> Promote that reciprocal play between the repertoire of artistic conventions inherited through the culture and that innate pro-clarity in the individual and group for symbolic expression. The formal aesthetics we have proposed would have the arts taught as aesthetics activity where the conventions and meanings of art are grasped through the medium of art and through sustained practical experience of art making. (4)

Although the practical side of art education is important, I disagree with Abbs in his belief that all concepts and meanings should be grasped by practical

means. In my experience of the art class, it is necessary for concepts and meanings to be backed up by practical work, but it is equally important that pupils develop an ability to voice their own opinion confidently, while acquiring a structure for evaluating, criticising and appreciating through discussions in the art history class. This way each pupil should also develop a vocabulary of art history which will be the most useful and beneficial way for a pupil to gain a full knowledge and appreciation of works of art.

Of course, the question then arises of what should be taught? Here, I agree with Anthony Dyson's view that "there is always some connection between what artists do and what is considered by teachers proper for children in their art lessons to do". (5) This view relates to that of the Gulbenkian Foundation, that art teachers act as guides, therefore passing over some works and concentrating on others. However, not only does this view make art teachers out to be guides, it also gives the impression that art history teachers are partaking in censorship. (Is this impression then related to the perceived absence of the teaching of Contemporary Irish Art within the classroom situation?) The Gulbenkian Foundation ask the question, "Whether or not the children should be encouraged to understand the work of the great artists - we have no doubt that they should - but which artists do you choose and by what criteria do we call them great?" (6)

This is an interesting question which, in relation to the Leaving Certificate syllabus, can be easily answered - the criteria one usually uses to decide who and what one chooses to teach, is who and what is most likely to appear on the Leaving Certificate History and Appreciation of Art examination paper. Although this is a disappointing fact, there is such a

wide programme to be covered in the Art History course that teachers often have to pick and choose what they teach. Therefore, through concentrating on a selection of artists teachers try to enable the pupil to appreciate and evaluate these paintings and then use this structure of examining with other areas of the Art History course.

Another view relating to this, is that of Frederick Palmer who says:

> A truly visual education is not only about making artifacts, studying the environment, expressing feelings. There are important aspects germane to the development of us all, but for our full intellectual and aesthetic growth we rely also on a knowledge of cultural relevance, an appreciation of past achievements and an understanding of current ideas and initiatives. If we are to grow and extend ourselves educationally we must be capable of placing what we see and what we make within a wider context, be able to make relationships across subjects, across art forms, across cultures and so establish links between the different visual and aesthetic element of our experience. (7)

This quotation states quite simply what should happen as a result of good visual education in the art class. However, for this to happen the teacher must create opportunities for the pupils to do this. Thus, within the Art History class the teacher has the ability and opportunity to provide his/her pupils with the necessary vocabulary of Art so that they can *develop a criteria for evaluating and appreciating their own work and that of others, while also examining the works of past artists or more contemporary works of art.* Furthermore, within this quotation by Frederick Palmer he states that "For our full intellectual and aesthetic growth we rely also on knowledge of cultural relevance, an appreciation of past achievements and an <u>understanding of current ideas and initiatives</u>". (8)

The later part of this quotation is noteworthy, because there is a perception that current ideas and initiatives within the Irish context in the form of Contemporary Irish Art is being totally ignored within our classrooms at post-primary level, even though it appears every year on the History and Appreciation of Art Leaving Certificate examination paper under the "Art in Ireland" section. Therefore, do we regard these teachers as equipping their students with an overall broad knowledge of History of Art, or are these students getting the best possible exposure available to the History of Art when their teachers decide for them that Contemporary Irish Art holds no relevance within the Art History world. Furthermore, should we recognise that because teachers are ignoring Contemporary Irish Art that there is a problem within this area. Are there underlying factors which are prohibiting teachers from addressing Contemporary Irish Art? The questions needing answers are, what elements direct the teacher in his/her selection of topics to address within the "Art in Ireland" sections and what elements discourage him/her from addressing Contemporary Irish Art?

## ART HISTORY - THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING IT

The study of the works of art is of great value and importance for the pupil. It educates and develops their appreciation of works by both contemporary artists and cultures and also of past cultures and traditions. The Gulbenkian Foundation states "It is important to help the pupil to understand and appreciate both Contemporary and Traditional works of art. It would be a very narrow vision of art education which only saw importance in pupils own work". (9) Art education is not simply about the using of manual or perceptual skills, it is much broader "enriching not only the potential

practitioner, but those who wish to have an informed appreciation of the environment, the different media of visual communication, their own past culture and that of others". (10) The importance of art historical education is again highlighted by Laura H. Chapman who, in her book Instant Art, Instant Culture states:

> The accomplishments of artists and others who devote their lives to art certainly are worth knowing about, not only because their efforts are superb models of individual achievement, but also because their work can teach us about our own potential. From the artistic heritage we can learn much about feelings and concerns that have been grasped by the human mind and given visual form. Studies of the artistic heritage can teach us that there are more telling, poignant and powerful examples of human imagination that we may encounter in ordinary life. (11)

Chapman's views are of interest because of the emphasis she places on the understanding of the feelings and concerns of the artist. In doing this the "barriers" that lie between pupils and paintings are broken down. By discussing the feelings and concerns of the artist, who beforehand seemed distant, the pupil may understand, even empathise with the artist.

## Art History - Contribution to the Curriculum

To begin with, lets look at art itself - what are the justifications for teaching art? Eliott Eisner puts forward two justifications a contextualist and essentialist justification. According to Eisner these are defined as follows,

> A Contextualist justification emphasises the instrumental consequences of art in work and utilises the particular needs of the student or the society as a major basis for forming its objectives.

> The Essentialist justification emphasises the kinds of contributions to human experience and understanding that only art can provide, it emphasises what is indigenous and unique to art. (12)

Also Louis Arnaud Reid states the "function of art education in liberal education is to develop an understanding of the arts, aesthetic education should develop increased awareness of the aesthetic everywhere". (13) (Therefore, this statement would mean that the "aesthetic everywhere" would definitely also include the aesthetic of Contemporary Art (works of art). If we look at the aims of arts education at post-primary level identified in the Report of the Curriculum and Examinations Board of Studies: Arts we will see that:

1 Arts education should extend the range and quality of pupils experience on Art/Craft/Design by continuing, deepening and broadening the visual arts education begun in primary school.

2 To provide adolescent pupils with an important personal resource during the transition from childhood to adulthood.

3 To develop pupils skills and abilities in making art in a variety of media.

4 Through active involvement, to further the understanding and appreciation of design in all its forms.

5 To extend pupils knowledge and understanding of the history of art so as to foster their capacity to make developed critical judgement and

authentic personal choices.

6 To develop pupils critical awareness and understanding of the visual elements of popular culture, including film, video, fashion and the mass media.

7 To develop a practised understanding of the continuum between art and the environment and consequently a sense of responsibility for the natural and built environment. (14)

Among other aims, within this report, I would consider that the overall development of the pupils understanding of art requires a good knowledge of the critical, evaluative and appreciative skills in order for the pupils to give a true interpretation of a Traditional work of Art or a Contemporary piece of Art, (the later being more important in the case of this dissertation).

In an article by Irving Sandler he maintains Contemporary Art is very important and valuable in the overall appreciation of Art, Craft and Design. He believes that the teaching of Art History traditionally had been based on a conception of the past as a more or less orderly evolution of artistic traditions from generation to generation, each generation adding its gloss while considering those traditions valuable and pertinent to its time. He maintains also that it is the job of the Art History teachers and art critics to promote interest in Art History through methods of teaching it whether it is Traditional or Contemporary Art they are teaching. He encourages teachers to promote Contemporary Art to their pupils "It is he who is most concerned with Contemporary Art and its conflicting and competing values" (15)

Sandler therefore, believes that the art critics have to develop a language to evaluate and appreciate Contemporary Art before they themselves can encourage others to take interest or appreciate Contemporary Art. They may use the critical process given to traditional early paintings in a similar way in order to come up with a criteria to evaluate Contemporary Art. "The present regenerate those aspects of the past that illuminate and enrich the past". (16)

If we look back at point five of the aims of arts education on the Irish Report of Curriculum and Examination Board of Studies: Arts we will see that this need is also summarised in the final report from the National Curriculum Art Working Group in England

> We believe that it is important for the pupils to gain a developing awareness of the work of others. The history of art and diverse way in which it occurs in other cultures and contexts should be taught in their own right. Until pupils have gained sufficient experience to make informed judgements they must proceed intuitively, by simple likes and dislikes rather than by reason. As pupils get older, this process should be complemented by the study of art, history and social, economic, religious and cultural contexts. Pupils need the ability to "engage" with an artifact ie be willing to devote time and energy to responding and relating to it. (17)

Therefore, again we see that it is the job of the teacher to become an informer of the language of Art which the pupils will need in order to appreciate art whether Contemporary or otherwise. The English summary seems to make me believe that the pupils are subjected to works of art at various ages while here in Ireland, the introduction of the Junior Certificate Art syllabus allows the pupil to appreciate works of art while prior to this pupils entered the Leaving Certificate Art course with very little interaction

with art works. The exposure made available to the pupils to even Contemporary Irish Art in this country is very limited, if not at times, totally absent from our art classes within the school situation, and this type of art should be addressed as it is often possible for teachers to get the actual artist to the school ("hands on experience"), or even to take their class to exhibitions.

The English Board also go on to list aims similar to those of the Irish Board. However, I am concentrating specifically on the aims for the history and appreciation of art and design:

1 Identify different kinds of art and their purposes.

2 Begin to identify the characteristics of art in a variety of genres from different periods, cultures and traditions.

3 Make imaginative use in their own work of developing knowledge of the work of other artists.

4 Identify the conventions used by artists and assess critically their effect.

5 Demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the principle features of our artistic heritage and appreciate a variety of other artists traditions.

6 Apply imaginatively the methods and approaches of other artists in the presentation of their ideas and feelings. (18)

These aims try to incorporate a wide level of visual art and combine the historical and contemporary with the pupils' own work. When they talk of arts works for younger children in the National Curriculum Art Working Group in England, it is rather like the Support Studies in the Art, Craft and Design Junior Certificate syllabus. These support studies that are required for the Junior Certificate would be a perfect opportunity for the teacher to introduce the appreciation of Art whether it be in an historical or contemporary contrast, but I strongly believe that due to the time factor that is so often complained about for finishing practical projects and theoretical work for the Leaving Certificate, this would be a perfect opportunity for teachers to introduce the work of artists in their own country - Contemporary Irish artists. The pupils could be exposed to the artists and their works through exhibitions and even "artist in residence" schemes. This may enhance and increase the pupils interest in Art History when their object of study can be made more accessible. I accept Louis Arnaud Reid's view on the importance and value of aesthetic education, he states,

> Everyone comes to the arts as individuals with certain temperaments, dispositions and gifts, with special personal association which effect which is seen, with a particular cultural background in which the arts and the aesthetic may or may not have played a part, and perhaps with some, or little experience of trying to work in some medium. (19)

Reid puts emphasis on the individual and on social differences and ultimately in the art class the individual and his/her experience is and must be emphasised. However, this experience may be non-existent depending on each individual's social background. Reid goes on to say that

> ..... for organised aesthetic education to proceed there will have to be, on the one hand open exposure to works of art of various kinds, and on the other, some initiation into their place in the historical cultural context, some learning about technique, manners and styles. (20)

Here again we see the mentioning of "works of art of various kinds". Therefore, again we will have to remember that within this bracket the term Contemporary Art must be considered and addressed.

**Extract taken from Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools (Part of Leaving Certificate syllabus for Art including Crafts at Higher and Ordinary level course issued by the Department of Education every year. Every teacher should have these guidelines.)**

According to the Leaving Certificate programme this is the approach taken for History and Appreciation of Art in the Leaving Certificate examination paper.

**History and Appreciation of Art - Leaving Certificate Programme**

Questions will be framed so as to test the general knowledge of historical development and visual appreciation rather than detailed or specialised knowledge of the History of Art. Opportunities will be offered for the expression of the candidates own opinions of works and visual problems. Answers to questions may be illustrated by sketches where these would be appropriate. The fields of special study covered by the examination are as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Section I | Art in Ireland (from prehistoric to the present). |
| Section II | European Art (from 1000 AD to the present). |
| Section III | General Appreciation, it is intended to afford candidates an opportunity to discuss topics based on every day visual experience in their own environment. |

The examination will offer a wide range of topics on each section or special field of study. Candidates should answer one question from each of the sections of the paper in two and a half hours.

**Leaving Certificate - Ordinary and Higher Level Art (including Crafts)**

Candidates will be required to answer four papers as follows:

| Paper | Title | Time | Marks |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | Imaginative Composition or Still-life | 2.5 hours | 100 |
| B | Design<br>or Craft work | 2.5 hours<br>5 hours | 100 |
| C | Life Sketching | 1 hour | 50 |
| D | History and Appreciation of Art | 2.5 hours | 150 |

Considering that this dissertation is mainly concerned with Contemporary Irish Art, here are examples of the type of related questions, which have previously appeared on the Leaving Certificate Examination papers.

**1991**

**Higher Level - Question 4**

Modern Architecture has been greatly influenced by the use of such materials as steel, glass reinforced concrete, plastics etc. Discuss this statement with reference to a recent Irish building you know.

or

Write an account of the work of any Contemporary Irish painter whose style appeals to you. Refer in your answer to specific paintings by your chosen artist.

The following are examples of questions appearing under the General Appreciation section which could be answered by pupils who may have been in attendance at a Contemporary Irish Art exhibition. Thus in preparing information on one topic such as Contemporary Irish Art, through Museum visits accompanying this subject, pupils are equipped to answer the General Appreciation question also.

**1994**

**Higher Level**

Give an account of a visit to an exhibition of craft or photography which you enjoyed and refer in your answer to at least two exhibits you found interesting.

**Ordinary Level**

Describe a visit to a Museum or Art Gallery. Mention at least two exhibits which you liked.

**1990**

**Ordinary Level**

Describe any sculptor or sculptor group which incorporate water as part of the total design and discuss its visual effects. (Illustrate)

The following survey suggests that Contemporary Irish Art is actually being inadequately addressed in terms of teaching and documentation and that many teachers base what they choose to teach in class on these past History and Appreciation of Art examination papers.

As can be clearly seen, Contemporary Irish Art appears each year on the Leaving Certificate Examination paper, but there is a perceived idea that the topic is not being addressed in class. Thus, is Contemporary Irish Art not being taught in class, and if not, why not?

## FOOTNOTES-CHAPTER 1

(1) . Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Arts in Schools, (London : Oyez Press,1983), p.33.

(2) . Ibid ; pp.37-38.

(3) . Peter Abbs, "A is for Aesthetic" : Essay on Creative and Aesthetic Education ,(London : Falmer Press ,1989), p.38.

(4) . Ibid ; p.39.

(5) . Anthony Dyson,"History of Art in Schools" : Grasping the Nettle, Art Education : Heritage and Prospect, ed idem , p.38.

(6) . Gulbenkian Foundation, Arts in Schools, p.38.

(7) . Fredrick Palmer, Art History and Criticism in Schools, pp.1-2.

(8) . Ibid ; pp.1-2.

(9) . Gulbenkian Foundation, Arts in Schools, p.36.

(10) . Association of Art Historians, Art History and Criticism in Schools (London : Inner London Authority and University of London, Institute of Education, 1986), p.1.

(11) . Laura H. Chapman, "Unspoken Policy for American Schools", Instant Art , Instant Culture (New York and London : Teachers College, Columbia University, 1982), p.31.

(12) . Louis Arnaud Reid , " Meaning in the Arts", Study of Education and Art , Eds . Dick field and John Newick (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul , 1973) , pp . 301-304.

(13) . Ibid.

(14) . Curriculum and Examination Board, Report of the Board of Studies : The Arts (Dublin : Curriculum and Examinations Board, 1987 ), p . 25.

(15) . Gregory Battcock, New Ideas in Art Education ( New York : E.P Dutton and Co., 1973), p . 119 .

(16) . Ibid, p . 117 .

(17) . National Curriculum in Art Working Group in Robert Clement, Art Teachers Handbook, Cheltenham : Stanley Thornes, 1993 ), p.162.

(18) . Ibid.

(19) . Arnaud Reid ,"Aesthetics in the Curriculum", in Study of Education and Arts, Eds, Field and Newick, p . 165.

(20) . Ibid ; p.166.

## CHAPTER 2

## SURVEY

This dissertation investigates the place of Contemporary Irish Art in the post-primary Art, Craft and Design Leaving Certificate syllabus.

**Is it being taught adequately in post-primary schools or indeed is it being taught at all?**

Firstly, in order to acquire information on this subject, a questionnaire was circulated to fifty post-primary schools throughout the country (investigating the place of Contemporary Irish Art in both rural and urban post-primary schools). The survey included twenty schools in County Donegal, three schools in County Galway, ten schools in County Dublin, two schools in the North of Ireland and one in County Sligo. Therefore, the remaining fourteen questionnaires were not returned. (Survey sent to post-primary schools, Appendix A.)

It would appear on having read the results of the survey, that there was a total imbalance between the "prehistoric" (and Earlier Art in Ireland) section and the "present" (Contemporary Irish Art) part of this section. It becomes absolutely clear from the survey that under the heading "Art in Ireland - (Prehistoric to Present)", the past or prehistoric is being addressed adequately while the present is practically ignored. In a recent article on some aspects of recent Irish Art, Brian Mc Avera has said that the Irish are often accused of living in the past or more precisely, of making the past live

in the future. I am inclined to agree considering the findings of the survey. The survey proved very successful in that it answered any questions associated with the teaching of Contemporary Irish Art in the classroom situation. Out of the thirty six teachers who replied, three of them actually taught Contemporary Irish Art in their classroom (and two of that three used only the Lourda Sheppard, Sight, Insight, Excite book with no other reference books). The remaining thirty three admitted that they did not teach Contemporary Irish Art within their classroom, explaining that Contemporary Irish Art is poorly documented relative to other periods of Irish Art.

When the teachers surveyed described their feelings on how Contemporary Irish Art was documented in the textbooks (Henry J. Sharpe Art History and Appreciation and Lourda Sheppard Sight, Insight, Excite) they used the following terms "short, snappy and totally inadequate".

The teachers also explained that access to information on Contemporary Irish Art was difficult. They all agreed that there were not enough concise books available where the information could be easily obtained and used directly in a classroom situation. Many of these teachers exclaimed that because the Art History course had so much to be covered, it was very hard for them to get time to sit down and do extra reading from very "elaborate books changing very ornate language into more simple terms" suitable for use in a classroom situation. Thirty one teachers said that they felt that the terms from "Prehistoric to Present" which are written on the examination paper under "Art in Ireland" were totally unsuitable because they believed that in the textbooks as stated already for classroom use, the prehistoric and Earlier Art in Ireland is being excellently covered while the information on

the present is non-existent. The survey suggested that teachers felt many art historians were reluctant to document Contemporary Irish Art because they themselves, are not sure how to critically evaluate this type of work in order to explain it to others. Thus, they choose instead to document the Earlier Art in Ireland although an abundance of literature (plus slides and programmes) is already available throughout the country on this area of Irish Art.

## FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

### Areas of "Art in Ireland" Sections Taught in the Classroom

In general the findings of the survey revealed that the majority of teachers are covering the Earlier Art in Ireland in detail while they are only providing an introduction to the more recent Art in Ireland (especially Contemporary Irish Art). They all agreed therefore, that the Earlier Art in Ireland was being catered for within the classroom while Contemporary Irish Art was being practically ignored.

### Art History and Appreciation Textbooks used in Irish Post-Primary Schools

The most common textbooks used in the Art History class at Leaving Certificate level were the Henry J. Sharpe Art History and Appreciation and the Lourda Sheppard Sight, Insight, Excite. While many teachers also explained that they would use calendars and books for visual reference for the Earlier Art in Ireland they also admitted that they found it harder to avail of more contemporary visuals for the teaching of the later part of the Art in

Ireland section. Teachers maintained that they found it difficult to obtain information on Contemporary Irish Art. In general, therefore, teachers depended on the two available textbooks for visual and written information. While dealing fairly adequately with the earlier periods of Irish Art History in these two text books the information on Contemporary Irish Art is very sparce. Often because of the extensive size of the Art History course and the limited amount of time available to cover it, teachers choose to teach the Earlier Art in Ireland because it is sufficiently documented in textbook form rather than creating extra work for themselves and their pupils in researching Contemporary Irish Art. Furthermore, the teachers surveyed explained that the pupils' options on areas of study were also influenced by the availability of information in these textbooks.

**Questions Most Widely Answered Last Year in the "Art in Ireland" Section (Questions 1, 2, 3 or 4) by the Students of the Surveyed Teachers**

The most commonly answered questions by the students of the teachers surveyed doing the Leaving Certificate History and Appreciation of Art Paper 1994 ("Art in Ireland") were questions 1,2 and 3. These questions are based on the Prehistoric and Earlier Art in Ireland periods. Only two teachers explained that they had a pupil each who answered question 4 which is based on Contemporary Irish Art (but these two teachers had each a class of twenty to twenty-five pupils and only one pupil out of each of their classes opted to attempt this question on Contemporary Irish Art). These teachers thought though they could not, as yet, say whether any of their pupils will be preparing to do this question 4 on Contemporary Irish Art on the "Art in

Ireland (Prehistoric to Present )" section of the History and Appreciation of Art Paper at Leaving Certificate level 1995.

## Teachers Surveyed Teaching Contemporary Irish Art in their Class

There were fifty questionnaires circulated and thirty six completed questionnaires were returned. Out of this thirty six, it appeared that only three teachers were actually teaching Contemporary Irish Art (or at least in some way addressing it) in their classrooms. Two were only using the Lourda Sheppard Sight, Insight, Excite and
Henry J. Sharpe Art History and Appreciation textbooks for visual and written information, the other was using a collection of written and illustrated material.

## How the Teachers teaching Contemporary Irish Art in Class Approach its Teaching

The survey revealed, surprisingly, that two out of three teachers who maintained that they taught Contemporary Irish Art in class, only used the information provided in the Henry J. Sharpe Art History and Appreciation and the Lourda Sheppard Sight, Insight, Excite as reference material. (The survey reveals later though, that the remaining surveyed teachers considered the documenting of information on Contemporary Irish Art within these two textbooks totally inadequate. They further maintained that it was difficult to give pupils any understanding of this area of Irish Art from the information provided on this subject in these textbooks.) The two teachers

who used these books solely as resource material for the teaching of Contemporary Irish Art appeared to believe that the information in these textbooks was "enough" to supply their pupils with a basic introduction to this area of Irish Art. Therefore, if the pupil wanted to further his/her knowledge on Contemporary Irish Art after this introduction, their teachers considered they should undertake further research using public libraries, galleries or museums. Although having said all this, these teachers also admitted that because this Contemporary Irish Art question did involve more work (in their classes) for pupils outside the school, many of their pupils, not surprisingly, opted for the Earlier Irish Art questions as it came closer to examination time for obvious reasons.

One teacher within the "trio" who claimed to teach Contemporary Irish Art explained that she once used catalogues from exhibitions for illustrated and written material, but found them unsatisfactory as often one needed to attend the exhibition in question for the catalogues to be of use. Another teacher explained that she used the book Irish Art and Architecture (From Prehistoric to Present) by Peter Harbison, Homan Potterton and Jeanne Sheehy but she felt that this book emerged as being more directed at Earlier Irish Art than the present Contemporary Irish Art.

These teachers maintained that they decided on what Contemporary Irish artists to teach within a classroom situation from studying the textbooks mentioned and also from studying past Art History and Appreciation examination papers. Past examination papers were distributed to their pupils, who were advised to look for information on particular artists. These teachers who taught Contemporary Irish Art maintained also that they took

their pupils to a Contemporary Irish Art exhibition either in Transition year or in their final Leaving Certificate examination year. They hoped therefore, that this visit would motivate and encourage them to make several visits to other exhibitions if they choose to do further study on this area of Irish Art.

**What Artists do Teachers teaching Contemporary Art usually address and Why?**

Due to the fact that those teaching Contemporary Irish Art basically only use the Lourda Sheppard Sight, Insight, Excite and Henry J. Sharpe Art History and Appreciation as resource material, they have therefore, narrowed themselves to teaching only the Contemporary Irish artists addressed in these books. These teachers also supply their pupils as already stated, with past Leaving Certificate papers and encourage them to choose questions from these papers and find out the required information in order to prepare a satisfactory answer. They encourage the pupils to acquire the following information on the artists addressed in the past History and Appreciation of Art Leaving Certificate papers:

1. *Artist's background*
2. *Influences on the artist*
3. *Artist's style and technique (materials used)*
4. *Selection of Artists works (concentrating on one major piece)*

**Most commonly taught Contemporary Irish Artists using the textbooks mentioned as resource material**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *1* | *Louis le Brocquy* | *Painter* |
| *2* | *Jonathan Wade* | *Painter/Sculptor* |
| *3* | *Robert Ballagh* | *Painter* |
| *4* | *Oisin Kelly* | *Sculptor* |
| *5* | *Jim Fitzpatrick* | *Book Design /Painter* |

These teachers explained that they taught these artists listed above before other Contemporary Irish artists mentioned in the textbooks, because these artists were addressed in a lot more detail, in the textbooks than other artists. They also explained that by covering one or two Contemporary artists they provided their pupils with a basic structure which the pupil could adapt in the researching of various Contemporary Irish artists appearing on the past History and Appreciation of Art papers.

As already stated there were three teachers who taught Contemporary Irish Art in their classes. Two of that three used only the Lourda Sheppard and Henry J. Sharpe textbooks mentioned earlier, but the remaining teacher explained that she used a selection of books from which she took "little bits of information" in order to acquire an overall picture on a particular artist or indeed on Contemporary Irish artists in general.

She agreed that she found it a lot of extra work outside school for herself when preparing to teach Contemporary Irish Art. She explained that the preparation for such an Art History class would involve library visits or

museum visits by the teacher before she could actually begin to give pupils an understanding of Contemporary Irish Art in a classroom situation. Again she agreed that the books available on Contemporary Irish Art are not suitable for use in class because they are either focussing on one particular artist or on the other hand, addressing Contemporary Irish Art in a general way where one receives lists of artists (and one of their major works) but no other relevant information. This is of little use to a teacher or pupil preparing for the Leaving Certificate examination. This teacher explained that she focussed a lot on the past History and Appreciation of Art Leaving Certificate papers. She tried to equip the pupils with information on various artists who appear on these papers making sure that the artists who appeared most frequently were definitely covered. She tried to take the pupils to three exhibitions on Contemporary Irish Art between their Transition year and their Leaving Certificate year. (This would not alone prepare them for question 4 on Contemporary Irish Art under the "Art in Ireland" section but it would also prepare them for the"General Appreciation" section since there is almost always a question based on an exhibition that the pupil may have seen.)

She explained also that she uses a certain amount of the art room budget to equip herself with a selection of written and visual information on this area of Irish Art, so that she could have easy access to the material when it was needed. Catalogues were also used and stored so that she developed a library of material related to Contemporary Irish Art. Having the information available in the school meant that pupils themselves could research Contemporary Irish Art in their own free time taking a little of the work load from the teacher.

This teacher believed though that once the pupils were provided with or exposed to a structure of evaluating and appreciating one or two Contemporary Irish artists (sculptors, architects or painters), they could apply this acquired information to any artist they wished to research.

**Art Teachers Knowledge of Materials Available on Contemporary Irish Art. (This question was directed and answered by all the teachers surveyed.)**

1 Roderic Knowles Contemporary Irish Art

2 Henry J. Sharpe Art History and Appreciation

3 Peter Harbison, Homan Potterton and Jeanne Sheehy Irish Art and Architecture ( Prehistoric to Present)

4 Rosc Catalogues (Titles not available)

5 Catalogues from Exhibitions
(Although seventy per cent of teachers surveyed could not supply actual names of exhibitions from which catalogues were available.)

6 Lourda Sheppard Sight, Insight, Excite.

7 This area is made up of books on specific artists although many of the teachers surveyed could not provide specific titles.

8 Recent Irish Art Series "No.1 Modern Irish Landscape Painting" - The Arts Council.

Many of the teachers knew of books available but did not know the titles of the books. For example, they all knew that there was material available on Jim Fitzpatrick but didn't know the titles of the books.

## The Teachers Own Background

Thirty per cent of teachers surveyed completed the Diploma in Art Design Teaching in the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. These teachers maintained that their exposure to Contemporary Irish Art in this course was actually non-existent. (They were not exposed to it.) However, they maintained that their previous training before entering the teaching world, in the Craft or Design faculties had given them far more exposure to Contemporary Irish Art than that of the Faculty of Education. When asked if they ever taught these artists in the classroom situation they said no because they didn't feel confident with the knowledge they had on them. They didn't really know how to appreciate or evaluate these Contemporary Irish Artists they were exposed to, because in their college years they themselves, had never been taught how to do this. Thus the circle revolves, the teachers while students didn't learn how to appreciate or evaluate Contemporary Irish Art so, in turn, they are also ignoring this area when placed in a classroom situation. (These teachers also claimed that their own exposure to Contemporary Irish Art at post-primary school was non-existent.)

**Reasons for not Teaching Contemporary Irish Art in Class**

The reason given by eighty three per cent of teachers surveyed for not teaching Contemporary Irish Art was due to the relatively large selection of information to be covered in the History and Appreciation of Art course at Leaving Certificate level, they found it difficult to allocate time to research this area of Irish Art which was relatively poorly documented. They admitted that although they could sometimes find books on specific artists they hadn't time to read the books in order to acquire information for classroom use. Again eighty six per cent maintained that they had little knowledge in this area of Irish Art and admitted that they would have to inform themselves on this area before attempting to give others an understanding of it. When asked why they choose the Lourda Sheppard text book Sight, Insight, Excite and Henry J. Sharpe Art History and Appreciation for classroom use (considering they all complained about its inadequacy), they explained that any other book that actually did document or elaborate on Contemporary Irish Art did not use language suitable for the understanding of second level pupils. Furthermore, any book documenting Contemporary Irish Art didn't cater for the Prehistoric or Earlier Art in Ireland. Thus they believed that the Lourda Sheppard and Henry J. Sharpe textbooks provided a text suitable for second level pupils addressing both the Earlier Art in Ireland while, introducing the more Contemporary Art in our country. (They agreed, howeve that this introduction is of little use for pupils preparing to answer this question on Contemporary Irish Art on the Leaving Certificate examination paper).

**The Functions of Museums and Galleries in Exposing Contemporary Irish Art to post-primary pupils and teachers (according to the teachers surveyed)**

The findings here proved extremely interesting in that the survey covered rural schools in different parts of Ireland, who had little access to museums and galleries, while also surveying school in urban areas who because of location had more access to these facilities. The IMMA, (Irish Museum of Modern Art) promotes the work of Contemporary Irish artists on a regular basis throughout the year but teachers maintain that it is often difficult to get to these museums because of the time and money factors. (Naturally because of location, schools in the Dublin area have an immediate advantage here.)

Teachers explained though that with every exhibition IMMA directs, the Education department in the Institution should issue a documented text which could be sent to schools countrywide (even if this only amounted to three sheets of paper stapled together of information on that exhibition), Information such as:

1. *Artists background*
2. *Style, Technique*
3. *Artists influences*
4. *Major works on Exhibition*

This way the pupil would have a basis on which they could further develop research work on that particular artist being addressed in the exhibition. Also this way pupils and teachers unable to attend the exhibitions could

benefit from these documented texts on the actual exhibition. Teachers who are working in rural schools throughout the surveyed areas maintained that although there were many small galleries and museums in their areas, it is not always possible to take a class of twenty five pupils into its buildings because it is not always suitable for large numbers being so localised. Usually these localised galleries exhibit works by local artists which are indeed totally unlikely to appear on question four on Contemporary Irish Art under the "Art in Ireland" section (but maybe useful in answering a question in the "General Appreciation" section, on a museum or exhibition that the pupil may have visited).

**Suggestions made by teachers to encourage the teaching of Contemporary Irish Art**

1 New textbooks were a popular recommendation by the majority of teachers surveyed. Within these textbooks the outline of the "Art in Ireland" course should be considered and information should be allocated substantially to both the Earlier Art and Present Art of Ireland (otherwise the term from prehistoric to present will be no longer applicable under the " Art in Ireland" title).

2 Museums and galleries, especially IMMA were recommended to publish annual documented information on the artists who appear in their exhibitions and forward them to post-primary schools throughout the country.

3 Teachers suggested that IMMA should cater for schools outside the Dublin area. Although there are touring exhibitions, IMMA does not supply schools with enough information on how to enrole for these schemes. Teachers living in rural areas explained that it is neccessary for IMMA to build up a relationship with rural schools who may not be able to avail of the facilities that the Museum provides for Dublin based teachers and schools. Teachers suggested also that there should be more in-service days in IMMA for teachers developing their awareness of Contemporary Irish Art.

4 Colleges preparing Art teachers should take into consideration the Art History course, addressing the "Art in Ireland" section at post-primary school level. Colleges should supply pupils with information on all areas of Art in Ireland so that they can further develop relevant areas if needed. If these students in art colleges preparing to be art teachers are not exposed to Contemporary Irish Art, it is impossible for them to be able to teach it to others or give an understanding of it to post-primary pupils if they themselves, as students received no criteria for evaluating or appreciating it.

5 The Recent Irish Art series should issue some documentation with accompaning slides on Contemporary Irish Art, as they previously issued for the Modern Irish Landscape painting.

The findings of this survey predominantly revealed that teachers who were not teaching Contemporary Irish Art were discouraged from teaching it, by the difficulty involved in acquiring information on this area.

Also the issue of time management with the extensive lenght of the Art History course appeared to be another problem. Furthermore, another very obvious problem was that many art teachers had very little knowledge of Contemporary Irish Art themselves, because they were not exposed to it in the course of their second and third level education.

The survey also revealed that some teachers teaching Contemporary Irish Art used the Lourda Sheppard and Henry J. Sharpe textbooks solely to teach this area of Irish Art, while others used these books, while also referring to other books and catalogues from Contemporary Irish Art exhibitions for resource materials. Still they complained that the documenting of information on Contemporary Irish Art in these textbooks for classroom use was totally inadequate because the Earlier Irish Art periods were well documented while the information on the more present Contemporary Irish Art was totally insufficient and very sparse. The following chapter will involve reviewing the Lourda Sheppard Sight, Insight, Excite and Henry J. Sharpe Art History and Appreciation textbooks for classroom use.

# CHAPTER 3

## REVIEW OF THE TEXT BOOKS

The following chapter will review the text books available for the learning and teaching of Art History and Appreciation at second level in Ireland. The two most widely used are:

1 Henry J. Sharpe
Art History and Appreciation

2 Lourda Sheppard
Sight, Insight, Excite
History and Appreciation of Art

(In the findings of the survey it was evident that teachers considered these two books inadequate for the teaching of Art History and Appreciation. Since the main concentration in this dissertation is on Contemporary Irish Art, the teachers also proclaimed that this area is totally inadequate.)

Firstly, we will review the Henry J. Sharpe textbook and then the Lourda Sheppard book. To conclude the chapter each book will be discussed and it will be decided whether if using either or both of these textbooks a pupil is sufficiently equipped to answer Leaving Certificate questions specifically in the area of Contemporary Irish Art.

**Review of the Henry J. Sharpe - Art History and Appreciation**

In his introduction Henry J. Sharpe maintains that Art is a complex matter and may be viewed from a number of vantage points. Sometimes its function is purely decorative, sometimes religious or magical, sometimes political, always art is a mirror of the society which provided it.

Part I of his book is set out with this idea very much in mind. Rather than seeking to produce a text which would amount to a series of lists of artists, names, dates, works of art, etc (and some potted art histories to just this) he has attempted to show what it is that makes each period distinctive and therefore, why art took a particular form at a particular time.

He explains that the text should be seen as an introduction to a given period or topic which hopefully will lend the pupil, with the art teacher's guidance, to further research. At the end of each section a list of books is provided, which Sharpe maintains can be easily obtained in many public libraries. Charts setting out the names of important artists, works of art etc. are also provided. Maps are included in Part I and III.

Some practical exercises can also be found at the end of each chapter. These relate directly to the ideas already encountered in the text. He maintains that although optional, such exercises, if carried out in art class, should help to reinforce and add interest to ideas which otherwise might remain too theoretical.

There are three sections in this book which consists of one hundred and ninety seven pages of written and illustrated information of Art History and Appreciation.

The three separate sections are:

Part (i) The Development of Art over the Centuries

Part (ii) The Mechanics of Art

Part (iii) Art in Ireland

Again, as already stated we are only concerned with Contemporary Irish Art in this study so we will only be discussing the "Art in Ireland" section which has been allocated thirty six pages and is divided into ten separate chapters:

1 The Neolithic Period 3000 BC - 2000 BC
2 The Bronze Age 2000 BC - 500 BC
3 The Iron Age 500 BC - AD 500
4 The Early Christian Period AD 500 - 800
5 The High Period of Christian Culture
6 The Period of Viking Invasions
7 The Romanesque Period
8 The Anglo-Norman Period and After
9 The Georgian Period
10 The Modern Period

On studying this textbook, it appears that the Earlier Irish Art is covered quite substantially accompanied by illustrations. (However, there are no colour illustrations, which is very important visually for pupils unable to visit galleries or museums or merely in order to motivate pupils to read the book or look at the illustrations.)

The Modern period, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, chapter twenty one, covers the nineteenth century with artists such as John Henry Foley, Daniel Maclise, Nathaniel Hone and Mainie Jellett. Within this section on Modern Art, four Contemporary artists are discussed (although the word contemporary is not mentioned once in relation to these artists, they are just grouped in the section with all the Modern Art period artists.) The information supplied on these four artists provides a basic insight into the artists and at least one of their works. Although discussing four Contemporary Irish artists, Sharpe did not convey to the reader the fact that these artists were actually Contemporary. Although the reader is given information on these painters, Sharpe chooses to ignore Contemporary sculpture and architecture. Therefore, it is reasonable to state that Sharpe's overall treatment of Contemporary Irish Art in this book is not one that would supply the reader with knowledge on Contemporary Irish Art sufficiently to address this area of Irish Art at Leaving Certificate level, with any confidence.

Although the title of Sharpe's book is Art History and Appreciation, it is clear that he actually provides no structure or criteria in this book on how to evaluate or appreciate a work of art (directly in his information or indirectly while discussing other areas of art.) This book seems to only "plant the seed"

in our minds about Contemporary Irish Art but Sharpe leaves it up to the reader to equip themselves with further information on this area. Sharpe takes a different approach though, when discussing Early Irish Art. The information in these chapters is clear, well structured and informative and it's evident how one stage in art development at this time related to the next, from reading the information given. However, in the final chapter on Modern Art no structure for evaluating or appreciating Contemporary Art is included. (A reason for this may be the fact that there is so much research already done on Early Irish Art and there is an abundance of information available on this area while information available on Contemporary Irish Art is scarcer and would involve excess work in order to research material suitable for a book.)

**Review of the Lourda Sheppard**

**Sight, Insight, Excite - History and Appreciation of Art**

In the introduction to this book Lourda Sheppard explains that she proposes to introduce the reader to the History of Art, without confusing them with too much detail. To tell the story of art in plain language is her main aim, how the different movements fit together, to put art in its historical setting and to understand the aims of the artists. To illustrate that each movement and generation of artists was a revolt against the generation or movement before and by understanding this helping us to understand how and why art has changed and evolved to the stage it's at today. She advises the readers to open their eyes, explore the works of art not only illustrated in this book, but in galleries and museums in their locality. Sculpture and Architecture does not lend themselves to illustration in books, she explains, but is best

experienced for itself. She advises the reader to explore their environment and always enjoy "art for art's sake". This book is divided into three sections:

Section I European Art

Section II Art In Ireland

Section III General Appreciation

(There is also a glossary of art terms included at the back of the book) There are two hundred and fifty four pages of written and illustrated information in this book and the section on Irish Art occupies sixty pages of this total number and contains the following sections:

1 Art in Ireland 7000 BC - 2000 BC
2 The Bronze Age 2000 BC - 500 BC
3 The Iron Age 500 BC - 432 AD
4 Introduction of Christianity
5 Medieval Period
6 The Georgian Period
7 Living Art

Since my main concern is Contemporary Irish Art, we will be exploring specifically the chapter on "Living Art", in the "Art in Ireland", Section II. Although a quick glance will confirm that Contemporary Irish Art occupies only a small section of the book and that this area of Art History is not treated in an adequate manner compared to the way the Earlier Art in Ireland

Sections have been treated. (An analysis of the "Living Art" chapter will quickly clarify for us the fact that Contemporary Art is treated totally inadequately.)

The following is a list of artists (architects and sculptors) mentioned within the chapter on "Living Art"

| | |
|---|---|
| August Welby Pugin | Desmond Fitzgerald |
| James Roderic O' Connor | Michael Scott |
| Francis Danby | Evie Hone |
| Joseph Patrick Haverty | Daniel Maclise |
| William Mulread | Fredrick Burton |
| Nathaniel Hone | Walter Osbourne |
| John Butler Yeats | Patrick McDowell |
| John Henry Foley | Paul Henry |
| J.B. Yeats | Sean Keating |
| John Lavery | Sir William Orpen |
| William Connor | Mainie Jellett |
| Desmond R. O' Kelly | Michael Farrell |
| Harry Clarke | John Huges |
| Augustus St. Gaudens | Oliver Sheppard |
| Albert Power | Oisin Kelly |
| Seamus Murphy | John Behan |
| Edward Delaney | Rowan Gillespie |
| F.E. McWilliams | Joan Smith |
| Pat Connor | Michael Bulfin |
| John Burke | Ellis O'Connell |

| | |
|---|---|
| Tom Fitzgerald | Michael Warren |
| Vivian Roche | Brian King |
| Louis le Brocquy | Charles Harper |
| Brian Bourke | Jack Donavan |
| Robert Ballagh | John Devlin |
| Edward McGuire | Martin Gale |
| Jim Fitzpatrick | Pauline Bewick |
| Patrick Scott | Cecil King |
| Deborah Brown | Michael Ashur |

As you can see the list is fairly extensive, there is a variety of Irish artists mentioned. Now, as you can see the word mentioned has been used above and it should be accepted in its strictest form because for the majority of artists in this chapter it was only through a mere mentioning that they were actually addressed. Throughout the chapter the artists names have just been mentioned with no other information provided (written or illustrated). In other areas throughout the chapter there is an illustration with the artist's name below but again no other relevant information accompanying it. This type of documentation is totally inadequate for pupils trying to acquire concise informative documented material in order to answer a question on this area on the History and Appreciation of Art Examination at Leaving Certificate level.

In examining the chapter and considering all the artists mentioned, only a small minority of them were actually Contemporary Irish Artists. (Some Contemporary Irish artists are actuallly underlined). At no point throughout

the chapter did the author actually make reference to these underlined artists as being Contemporary, instead they were just mixed with or included in her mentioning of artists throughout this chapter on "Living Art". The nineteenth and twentieth century artists are all grouped with no differentiation made between them. Within this chapter there were two separate titles given to specific information. The titles were:

1 *Contemporary Painting*

2 *Contemporary Sculpture*

but again at no stage throughout these titled paragraphs on Contemporary painting or sculpture did the author actually once establish what Contemporary Irish Art was, and it was at no point made clear the meaning of the term Contemporary Irish Art. There were artists actually excluded from these sections which should have been considered extremely important to be addressed under these specific titles of Contemporary painting and sculpture, instead these Contemporary artists are mentioned here and there, rather scattered throughout the overall chapter.

Therefore, the layout and structuring of this chapter seems very disorganised. Arranging each artist into his/her designated areas would have been of more benefit to the readers had Sheppard been so determined to use titled areas. Thus, the pupils (or even teachers) reading this book could then associate artists with their correct time in history or even the appropriate section with their associated contemporaries.

Another unsatisfactory feature about the layout of this chapter on "Living Art" is that even when Contemporary Irish Art was addressed it was only in the form of the names of the artists. The amount of information supplied otherwise was as previously stated, totally inadequate for the purposes of answering Leaving Certificate questions. The information in the chapter is so scanty, that it's nearly incomprehensive in expressing the relevant knowledge. It therefore, isn't surprising that teachers and pupils when working against a busy time schedule opt to study the Early Irish Art because at least the information available to them on this area within this book is clearly and concisely provided.

Within this chapter on "Living Art" Sheppard mentioned artists without making connections between them and how they each arrived at their own particular place in art. Contemporary Irish Art is mentioned but the Where, How, What ,When and Why have not been addressed at all in this book. As Lourda Sheppard stated in her introduction though "My advice to you in reading this book is open your eyes, explore the works of Art not only illustrated in this book but Galleries and Museums in your locality"

Therefore, the author is relying on the pupil and teacher to do research work on this introduction that she provides in her textbooks if they wish to acquire further information on this area of Irish Art. (Sheppard is providing an introduction and it's up to the teacher to develop on this information.) After all Sheppard did not state that she was providing a thorough complete documentation of art history and appreciation, she only stated that she was providing her readers with an "introduction" to this area.

Considering therefore that Lourda Sheppard expects most of the work to be done by the pupils themselves, it would appear then that this textbook is unsubstantially equipped with a programme of critical analysis or evaluation in order for pupils to do so when it comes to the chapter on "Living Art". Therefore, a pupil going into a gallery or a museum may be unable to recognise a Contemporary piece and be unable to give their opinion on it concisely and informatively, recognising actually what makes something Contemporary in Art compared with Modern Art in general, but this is the teacher's own problem because they are not obliged to buy this book or even recommend it for their pupils.

**Example of Information supplied in the Lourda Sheppard Sight, Insight, Excite on three Contemporary Irish Artists:**

## TOM FITZGERALD

The Limerick born artist Tom Fitzgerald (1939 - ) is an artist whose source lies in the archaeological remains in his own environment. He uses these remains and a combination of materials - marble, slate, gloss, raffia etc, to reflect his feelings for his environment. (1)

***Leaba Dhiarmada Agus Ghrainne III by Tom Fitzgerald Fig.1***

## JIM FITZPATRICK

Jim Fitzpatrick is a very personal artist whose great love of the tales of the earliest inhabitants of these isles has influenced his work. He uses beautiful celtic patterns with celtic and pre-celtic mythological subjects to create powerful images. (2)

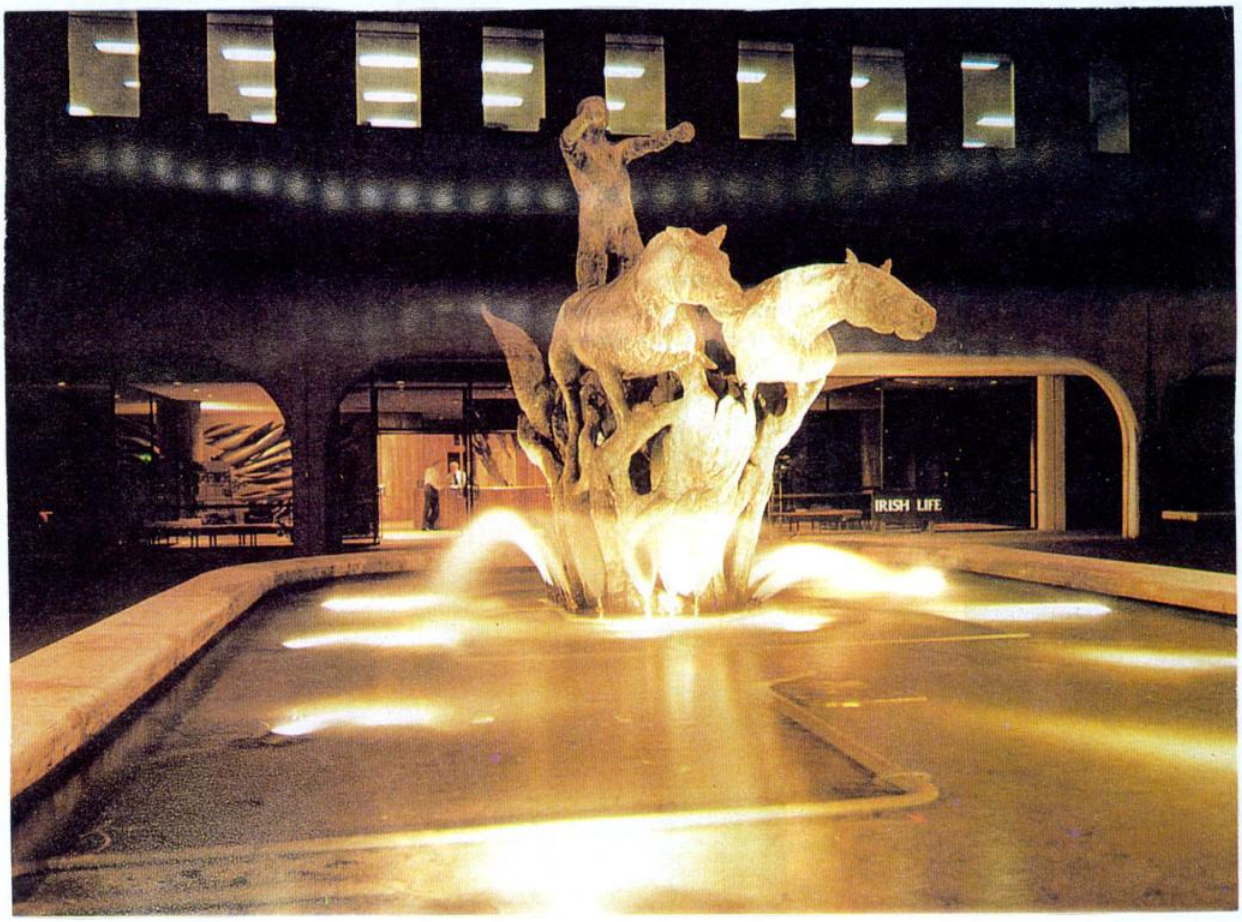
***Nemed the Great by Jim Fitzpatrick Fig 2.***

## OISIN KELLY

Oisin Kelly is one of the best known figurative sculptors in Ireland. Among his many famous monuments to be found throughout the City of Dublin are the Children of Lir, the Garden of Remembrance and the Irish Life Mall monument. Kelly, like Seamus Murphy, looked for simplicity in form though he was mainly a model-making sculptor, working in clay and plaster and then usually casting in bronze. Kelly's subject matter is deeply rooted on our ancient past, using items from celtic folklore. His works are very dramatic and usually larger than life, and his understanding of form and materials have helped to create exciting works that reflect the essence of our celtic tradition. (3)

***The Children of Lir by Oisin Kelly Fig 3.***

***(Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland)***




***Irish Life Monument by Oisin Kelly  Fig 4.***

As can be seen from these examples, the information in the form of text on these Contemporary artists is not detailed enough. Instead it clarifies in our minds the fact that the text provided is just an absolute introduction to the History and Appreciation of Art as stated by the author herself in her introduction in the Sight, Insight, Excite textbook, rightly saying that the book is merely an introduction and teachers must do the work themselves, by research work or further study on the introduction she already provides.

When studying this information given on these artists in the "Living Art" chapter the author doesn't seem to follow any structure when discussing the artists. There doesn't seem to be any set criteria throughout the text, the information just seems to be extracted from other books with no particular questions really being answered within the information for the reader on Contemporary Irish Art. It should have been considered extremely important that if pupils were being introduced to Contemporary Irish Art that they would also be shown a criteria on how to criticise, evaluate and appreciate these works of art. Therefore, pupils themselves, may have been able to elaborate on this type of information given in the Lourda Sheppard book through focussing on their own opinions and thoughts on any particular piece of Contemporary Irish Art. Without a structure for evaluating, naturally pupils will find it hard to put this type of information in the "Living Art" chapter on Contemporary Irish Art into any type of context. This structure of appreciation or evaluation cannot be seen in the approach Lourda Sheppard has taken when discussing Contemporary artists within her book.

A review of the two most widely used textbooks shows that both authors did state quite clearly in their opening paragraphs that they were only providing an <u>introduction</u> to given periods and topics which hopefully will lead the pupil with the art teacher's guidance to further research. Therefore, on considering the findings of the survey where teachers stated that these books were totally inadequate to teach the area of Contemporary Irish Art (specifically), it was the art teacher's own choice to use these books within the classroom situation, thus it was their own fault that they were equipped with inadequate information.

The survey proved that the majority of teachers were relying only on these text books in class for the teaching of Art History and Appreciation but they cannot therefore blame Lourda Sheppard or Henry J. Sharpe for not providing adequate information required to teach this subject. As clearly stated, in their introductions, these authors only provided the introduction to the History and Appreciation of Art. It is up to the teacher and pupil to elaborate on this introduction that the authors have choosen to provide within their textbooks, otherwise teachers should find alternative methods of acquiring adequate information and resource material.

## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 3

(1). Lourda Sheppard, Sight Insight Exite, (Dubin : Folens Publishers, 1987 ), p.265

(2). Lourda Sheppard, Sight Insight Exite, (Dubin : Folens Publishers, 1987 ), p.268

(3). Lourda Sheppard, Sight Insight Exite, (Dubin : Folens Publishers, 1987 ), p.274

# CHAPTER 4

## METHODOLOGY

To open this methodology chapter, I would firstly like to acknowledge all the problems experienced by the teachers surveyed which they explained, discouraged them from addressing Contemporary Irish Art substantially within their classrooms:

1 Teachers lack of knowledge and exposure to this area.
2 Textbooks inadequate.
3 Difficulties in obtaining resource materials.
4 Full timetable/limited time available to do research work on Contemporary Irish Art.

In Chapter 3 when reviewing the textbooks Sight, Insight, Excite by Lourda Sheppard and Art History and Appreciation by Henry J. Sharpe, I gave examples of the type of sparse documentation available on Contemporary Irish Art, thus it is evident that pupils depending solely on these textbooks for information on Contemporary Irish Art will be unable to answer a question on this area adequately at the Leaving Certificate Examination.

Since all the teachers surveyed used these two textbooks, the objective within this methodology chapter is to take a Contemporary Irish artist mentioned and also one that is not mentioned within these textbooks and considering all of the problems experienced by the teachers I will try to see if

it is possible to teach Contemporary Irish Art in a classroom situation by elaborating on the information provided in these texts, or researching an artist with no previous introduction to them, through extra research work. I will try to discover therefore, whether teachers genuinely cannot make it possible for themselves to teach this area of Irish Art. Furthermore, I will investigate the possibility of teachers using these acknowledged problems to justify their own lack of interest and laziness in not researching new material, because of their comfortableness with the accepted norm which is to teach Early Irish Art because the information is readily available on this subject and requires no extra research work by the teacher.

When I first began this dissertation, I had little knowledge on the area of Contemporary Irish Art because of my own lack of exposure to it in second and third level education. As a student teacher, I quickly became aware that there was a lack of attention and interest given to this area by many post-primary teachers. My initial thoughts on this dilemma was that there were no noteworthy Contemporary Irish artists at work or there was no information available on them

Approaching this subject therefore in my dissertation has revealed that there is an abundance of Contemporary Irish artists at work in this country. Artists who have been somewhat unappreciated by the public and who have had little documentation and recognition in the form of written and illustrated material. In 1982, Roderic Knowles published the book Contemporary Irish Art and in 1994 Brian Fallon published Irish Art 1830-1990, in discovering these books I realised that within their texts they provided information on where they actually received the

information supplied in the texts of their books on Contemporary Irish Art. Therefore, I used these two books as a guide in locating resource material. Investigation of these books revealed that they provided an insight to what Contemporary Irish Art actually was and where it fitted into the Irish Art scene in general, while also supplying lists of Contemporary Irish artists. Thus, these books provide for teachers or readers in general lists of Contemporary artists and areas where resource materials can be found on these artists (making research work a lot easier for the teacher). In discovering these two books, I found that they provided a good overall outline onto which I could do my research work on Contemporary Irish artists.

**Review of the Roderic Knowles - Contemporary Irish Art**

Roderic Knowles' Contemporary Irish Art is a visually exciting and informative guide to Art in Ireland today. It contains photographs of the work of almost one hundred artists, texts and commentaries by artists themselves and by many of Ireland's most prominent and authoritative writers on art, and importantly, a directory of description, comment and information on the work and careers of two hundred and thirty four artists, arranged alphabetically.

Contemporary Irish Art is the first book to present to the general reader and art lover, an overview of the work of artists in Contemporary Ireland. It is, in this sense a "live" work, with the focus being on creative output, performance and events of recent years. Although the first attempt at a representative publication, the author sees his purpose, not as authoritative, exhaustive, nor comprehensive, but, simply as documentation.

> For this reason it avoids imposing historical, aesthetic or other theoretical perspectives and shows Irish Art today in all its plurality of styles, disciplines and viewpoints - as it is. The product of monumental research over a period of many years in a field that has been seriously under documented. (1)

**Review of Irish Art 1830-1990 By Brian Fallon**

This book is grouped into nine sections

1 The Irish Romantics

2 Maclise: The Irish Victorian

3 The French Connection

4 The New Century

5 The Gold and Silver Age

6 Into the Modern Movement

7 Irish Sculpture

8 The Crafts Revival

9 The Modern Epoch

In the introduction to this book the reader is told that Brian Fallon traces the development of Irish Art from its roots in the Romantic movement through to the present and shows how without being overtly nationalistic or political, it has reflected the growth of national self-consciousness and the evolution of Irish culture from a provincial, colonial stage into a fully fledged tradition in its' own right.

Although I applaud Fallon in his setting Contemporary Irish Art in an historical context with the rest of Irish Art, I am disappointed though that Fallon hasn't elaborated more in discussing some of the artists he has mentioned. Fallon, within this book discusses excellently the development

of Irish Art, addressing the importance of specific museums and galleries (and other institutions) in the promotion of it. Thus this type of documentation assisted me enormously in my research of resource locations and institutions for Contemporary Irish Art, along with developing through its text an overall knowledge and understanding of Contemporary Irish Art and where it fits into the overall Irish Art scene, although it provides little informative text of actual Contemporary Irish Artists.

Since this book by Brian Fallon has only recently been published (1994), there was an article entitled "Irish Art: The Pathetic Fallacy" discussing some aspects of the book in The Sunday Business Post (November 27, 1994). However, this review is somewhat less complimentary that my prior statements. The writer of this article, Vincent Jamison is reviewing the book as a comment on Irish Art in general through the ages, whereas I am only concerned with its documentation on the more Contemporary Irish Art.

**Irish Art: The Pathetic Fallacy**

(Blaming the writers for the neglect of the painters does not make the art better) By Vincent Jamison

Brian Fallon, chief critic of the Irish Times, has make a spirited defence of Ireland's claim to be considered as a Nation which has achieved much more in Art than the Book of Kells. But his case for a strong Irish Art tradition is weakened by the opening sentence of his book "Irish Art in the eighteenth century is not greatly interesting" he says; indeed, it was, in effect ,a "provincial English school". Fallon makes more serious claims for Irish Art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but he spoils the overall judiciousness of his criticism by railing against the literati, at home and abroad, who have conspired to make Irish Art a "historico-cultural non event", while Irish literature "has gained a world hearing from Yeats to Seamus Heaney".

There is something of a pathetic fallacy in the argument. The painters and their work should stand for themselves, and no amount of lamentation about the minority status of the fine arts will do anything to inflate the reputation of the practitioners. There might, however, have been a more interesting discussion, which Fallon could have developed in a different sort of book, of the varying degrees of success of writers and painters in casting off the cloak of provincialism. How did Jonathan Swift, for example, acquire a unique and unchallenged voice as one of the greatest prose stylists, while moving in the same provincial eighteenth century circles as his fine art contemporaries?

And why is James Joyce among the greatest of the Modernists, ranking with Picasso in the sheer scope of his achievement, while Fallon serves up as a representative of Irish painting and sculpture - which he says is "known only to a minority of scholars and cognoscenti" - one Jack Yeats, brother of W.B. and Fallon's proud choice as "Ireland's greatest painter". There certainly has been a vogue for Yeats' paintings in recent years, and there are those who are prepared to argue that his work is as good as the poetry of his brother, W.B. But to others who, inevitably, view the later Jack Yeats, the prism of European Modernist art, he can seem quite a minor painter, muddily expressionist in some of his so-called masterpieces, such as "There is no night" (1951), which Fallon reproduces, and much more at home in some of his more modest earlier works, including the National Gallery's "Liffey Swim" (1923), or even "Before the Start" (1915), which is also reproduced.

Fallon is entitled to his assessment of Jack Yeats, but hardly to the claim that the "international fame" of Joyce, particularly in America, "has does a great deal to shape the standard image of Irish culture abroad" From this extraordinary starting point, Fallon jumps to the more obvious conclusion that the Irish are registered as a race with the "gift of the gab" - Joyce, Yeats, Beckett and "a few other writers with a world reputation and of course, the IRA - that and nothing else".

It is, in the end, as damaging an assessment of the world view of Irish culture as Fallon's own attack on the men of letters who are deemed responsible for the sad neglect of the Irish painter. (2)

**Research Work Procedure**

Disappointingly within my research work, I discovered that although there were many books available on Irish Art, very few actually devoted any space within their texts to Contemporary Irish Art. Within the books I discovered though on Modern Art or that period related to Contemporary Irish Art, many of the books contained illustrations and no written material which was useless for anyone requiring information for use in a classroom situation.

Within my research I looked at sixteen books (see Appendix B) and out of that number I found three books that contained small paragraphs on the sculptor, Oisin Kelly. Although firstly, I ignored these paragraphs when seen in isolation, when the information from the three books was put together, I received some very relevant written material and some excellent illustrations (which I later developed into slides). The three books were:

1 Sight, Insight, Excite by Lourda Sheppard
2 Irish Art and Architecture by Peter Harbison, Homan Potterton and Jeanne Sheehy
3 Irish Art 1830-1990 by Brian Fallon

Within my reading of the book Irish Art 1830-1990 by Brian Fallon, I realised that he provided an extensive list of resources from where he acquired information for his book. Throughout this list of resources Brian Fallon made reference to a Catalogue on Oisin Kelly, The Works of Oisin Kelly, the Sculptor. Although I requested information on acquiring access to this catalogue from The Arts Councils in Northern Ireland and the Republic, I

have not yet received a reply from either. Thus, I located this catalogue at the National College of Art and Design Library in Thomas Street in a file devoted to the Irish Sculptor (which incidentally only consisted of this catalogue). Using this catalogue and the information obtained in the three textbooks previously mentioned, I began to research my lesson.

**Part I** of my methodology deals with the introduction provided in one of the textbooks, through supplementing this introduction using an established art teachers timetable and considering the problems expressed in the survey, I will see if elaboration on this introduction will allow me to teach a class on Contemporary Irish Art (using also the visuals in the textbook).

**Part II** of my methodology will involve researching a Contemporary Irish artist that I have no prior knowledge on. Therefore, the approach to teaching and researching will be vital in my ability to teach a successful class. I will be noting throughout my research whether the problem explained by teachers of resource material being inaccessible is totally valid.

**Methodology Part I**

**(Supplementing information to the Introduction provided in the Lourda Sheppard, Sight, Insight, Excite)**

In the Lourda Sheppard book Sight, Insight, Excite, she addresses the Contemporary Irish sculptor Oisin Kelly, but unfortunately the introduction she provides would not equip a pupil with enough information to attempt question four under the "Art in Ireland" section on Contemporary Irish Art.

Therefore, using this sculptor and the information already supplied in the textbook and using the timetable of an established art teacher, I will aim at acquiring information through research work in a limited time from resources which teachers maintained they cannot find.

After four hours (over a week), researching the Contemporary Irish sculptor, Oisin Kelly, the following Art History lesson was given to a Transition year group. This is *my approach* to teaching Contemporary Irish Art to this Transition year group.

## LESSON PLAN

**Art History Class on the Contemporary Irish Sculptor, Oisin Kelly.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **THEME** | Contemporary Irish Art.<br>The Sculptor, Oisin Kelly. |
| **AIM** | To create an awareness of Contemporary Irish Art through the work of the sculptor, Oisin Kelly. |
| **LEARNING OBJECTIVES** | To explore sculpture (Irish Sculpture) through a selection of slides on the work of Oisin Kelly. |
| **PROCESS** | Through a selection of slides we discussed the work of Oisin Kelly. We discussed the term "Contemporary" and the term "sculpture" as an opening to the lesson and then we continued with the following information being discussed supported by slides of the work in question. |

Firstly I supplied the pupils with a hand-out with the summary of the lesson in point form, so they could follow me as I went along or just reread this information when needed. I requested that each student read the hand-out at home and revealed that the opening of the next Art History class would involve questions on the hand-out. (This way hopefully, everyone would make sure they read the hand-out for the next Art History class and I also knew that they were definitely retaining some of the information given to them through this reading and discussion in class.)

## Irish Sculptor, Oisin Kelly

Around 1947/48 Henry Moore offered Oisin Kelly a place in his class at Chelsea Polytechnic. He took two terms off at St.Columba's and spent the winter in Chelsea under Moore's influence. He did a lot of work studying the body, (they always worked from real models). The studying of anatomy was extremely important in Moore's classes but this limited Oisin's ability to express what he might feel about the subject. This close detailed study often restricted spirited Kelly.

Oisin Kelly's own spirit began to show in one of his most famous and most splendid works, "The Step Dancer". It is a pitch pine carved figure of an Irish dancer. The figure immediately conveys dancing but also that special form of dancing, the grave-faced, arms rigidly held-to-the-side manner of traditional Irish step dancing where all emphasis is on foot patterns of intricate rhythmic movement. This abstract notion of dancing has been completely understood by Oisin Kelly and accurately expressed in his sculptures of many dancing figures.

*Demonstration involving some members of the class expressing the pose of and Irish dancer reinforcing how well Oisin Kelly has captured this image.*

Slide I Ceili Dancing Slide

*Discussion and Information on Ceili Dancing Slide.*

This piece is an abstract form in which as in traditional dance and music, rhythm and pattern are paramount. One aspect of traditional Irish dancing which has alienated much of the modern Irish public is the visual part of the female dancer's costumes and it is to be noted that Oisin Kelly's dancers are male, attired in their ordinary clothing or knitted jerseys and tweed trousers, so that he is able to convey the hard rhythmic excitement of Irish dancing divested of the silliness of modern childrens' cabaret attire.

*Discussion on whether the students believe the dancing costumes take from the dancing itself.*

Slide II Ceili dancers
(Couple dancing together)

*Demonstration of this pose using one of the students.*

Oisin Kelly was also commissioned to do work for churches both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland, most of them for Catholic churches even though he himself, was a protestant. He became what many young artists aspire to nowadays, a genuine community artist.

Oisin Kelly was brought up by his father to revere the old Irish mythology. It was only when reading fables, legends, and old stories from Irish history that Oisin realised that ancient Ireland could have an exciting modern form.

*Discussion on the film "Into the West", where there is a scene where "Tayto" falls off the horse and refers to the legend of Oisin and Tir na Nog. "Tayto" falling to the ground pretending he has been turned into an old man. Discussion on how Oisin Kelly would have captured this pose.*

Oisin Kelly was able to sharpen and reset old images of movement that had become old. He has done this through religious art and in traditional Irish legends. The image is not forced upon us, it is not spelt out to us with all its' features but it is recognisable and that is what makes it in itself realistic.

| | |
|---|---|
| Slide III | Horse and Rider |
| Slide IV | Chariots of Fire |

*Discussion on the forms being recognisable even though we cannot see all their features. Why are these pieces recognisable even though all the features are not present?*

As his church work and sculpture became well known, Oisin Kelly began to get commissions from political work, portrait heads of patriots, poets, and politicians.

| | |
|---|---|
| Slide V | Jim Larkin (O'Connell Street) |
| Slide VI | Detail of Jim Larkin |

*I informed each student of the history behind this piece as many of the students never heard of Jim Larkin.*
*Cross curricular links here between the history teacher and the Art teacher would be necessary as one usually assumes that the class already has a certain amount of general knowledge whereas this class proved quite the opposite. I found myself supplying them with a lot of information such at the 1916 Easter Rising, and the story of the Children of Lir before they could begin to understand the work of Oisin Kelly.*

His largest public piece was the "Children of Lir" group in the Garden of Remembrance in Parnell Square, Dublin. The Garden of Remembrance commemorated those who died in the 1916 rising in the Struggle for Independence. He worked for many years on this project, using the legend of the Children of Lir, as a theme of fundamental change brought about by the Rebellion of 1916 and the War of Independence. It was a time in history when people were changed, "changed utterly" as Yeats had said, as the Children of Lir were changed from children to swans. He had originally been thinking of an abstract piece for this commission - an abstract solution to a metamorphosis from child to swan, but he thought that the public may not understand it if it was totally abstract, so he opted for a realist enough solution, and the final work suffers slightly from predictable difficulty of making a convincing realist rendering of children turning into swans.

*Each child will have a photocopy of this Children of Lir" piece in their handouts.*

Slide VII Children of Lir

*Discussion on the story of the "Children of Lir".*

The sculptor spared no pains in getting to grips with the study of the swan's anatomy and having tried in vain to get a carcass of a swan from Dublin Zoo, he finally got one or at least got a carcass from Dublin Cat and Dog Home; through the efforts of the garden's architect. He took it home and lightly boiled it so that he could remove the flesh and study the bone structure. The casting for the "Children of Lir" group was done in Florence at the Marino Marinelli foundry in 1970.

While his religious work has a certain Byzantine stillness, tempered by his own or possibly an Irish characteristic of warmth, his secular sculpture is very often concerned with movement: the series of dancers, for example, the birds, the fish, the cattle, the horses and riders, mythological figures or charioteers, the footballers, hurlers, rugby player and the marchers.

Birds and their movement in flight have always interested him and it is symptomatic that he should have chosen the "Children of Lir" as the theme for the Garden of Remembrance rather than "the figure of Eire sad and proud"

| | |
|---|---|
| Slide VIII | Herd of Cattle |
| Slide IX | Shoal of Fish |
| Slide X | The Footballer |

*Discussion on how he depicts a crowd or group of people or animals in movement.*

**Each member of the class was then distributed with the following information in the form of hand-outs.**

1 List of Major Commissions. (Appendix C)

2 Ten main points related to the slides and classroom information. (Appendix D)

3 Two photocopies of Oisin Kelly's sculptures. (Appendix E)

As you can see from the lesson provided on Oisin Kelly, it is possible to obtain information, but I will admit that the information is not easily accessible. My research work, as I said earlier, began firstly by looking through the most recent books written on Irish Art, those by Brian Fallon Irish Art 1830-1990 and Roderic Knowles Contemporary Irish Art. On studying these books, I became aware from the Acknowledgements in these books where these authors actually received their information.

Within the Brian Fallon text, I realised that there was a Catalogue available on Oisin Kelly, so I went to look for it in the NCAD library. Thus, I found a file on Oisin Kelly which disappointingly only consisted of this Catalogue. Therefore, using this Catalogue, published in 1978, by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Republic, the Contemporary Irish Art text, the Irish Art 1830-1990 and the Irish Art and Architecture (from prehistoric to present), I structured my lesson, collecting relevant information and visual materials (which I turned into slides using the illustrations in the books and Catalogue).

I do agree that the information is hard to find but I would recommend that although Brian Fallon's book on Irish Art may not contain an excellent informative text on Contemporary Irish Art, it does provide a list of resource areas where information can be obtained. Knowing where to look for the resource materials is the hardest barrier to overcome. Once one knows where to find information, it becomes easier to tackle the subject of Contemporary Irish Art.

I believe that it is necessary to compliment these theory classes with practical work, so that the class can put the theory into practice, so this class began a sequence dealing with structure and form where they created interlocking vessels based on the theme of Early Irish metal work decoration. Thus the pupils were using a past idea relating to Early Irish Art history to create a Contemporary clay piece.

**Methodology Part II**

**(Researching Contemporary Artists with no prior information or exposure to them.)**

In the same way, this Transition year class were also introduced to Taipeis Gael who are Contemporary Irish Weavers in Donegal. Some of the students were taken to IMMA in Autumn 1994 to see the weavers at work in their workshops. On returning to class, I structured a practical lesson where the pupils worked along the same principles as the Donegal Weavers, using mythological or landscape scenes unique to their area of habitat. The pupils suggested that they weave the head of a horse because of the relationship of wild stray horses with Clondalkin. Thus, the process began.

We worked on a large scale weaving, while also introducing creative embroidery into the lesson sequence. The creative embroidery, as did the weaving project involved observational drawing and colour studies before the pupils actually arrived at the craft stage. The project worked well and the pupils are going to Glencolmcille in County Donegal to Taipeis Gael on May 19th, 1995 to show their finished weave and embroidery to the weavers from which they took their inspiration and motivation.

*Weave Fig.5*

*Creative Embroidery Fig. 6*

On having researched both Oisin Kelly with the help of an introduction in the textbooks and also Taipeis Gael with the help of IMMA through practical workshops, I found it necessary to agree with teachers that there is not enough accessible resource material available for the teaching on Contemporary Irish Art. Although there were catalogues available as suggested in the Brian Fallon text, on having written to the Arts Council requesting access to these catalogues, I have not yet received a reply. Thus, again I was left to carry out my research work on my own.

Research work revealed that, there is a need for a book on Contemporary Irish Art which may provide a process for evaluating and appreciating it. Furthermore, as provided in the Brian Fallon text and Roderic Knowles text, it is essential that an institution such as the Arts Council of Ireland issues a concise booklet on where resource material can be found on Contemporary Irish Art. In collecting information for my lesson on Oisin Kelly and Taipeis Gael I found it necessary to relate to the resources mentioned in the Acknowledgements of the Brian Fallon and Roderic Knowles texts. Research involved collecting small pieces of information from a number of books and assembling them to get an overall picture of a specific artist. Again this sort of work depends on the teachers own motivation and interest. If teachers are uninterested because of their lack of knowledge of this area of Irish Art, they may not devote extra time to researching Contemporary Irish Art. Thus, even though there is some information available, the teacher's own lack of interest and lack of knowledge in this area will prohibit them from researching it.

## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 4

(1). Roderic Knowles, Contemporary Irish Art (Dublin : Wolfhound Express, 1980).

(2). Vincent Jamison, "Irish Art : The Pathetic Fallacy." The Sunday Business Post November 27, 1994.

# CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this dissertation the objective is to examine Contemporary Irish Art and its' teaching at post-primary level. Firstly, to investigate further into this area, a survey was issued to fifty post-primary Art teachers throughout the country, and the findings of this survey revealed that there were numerous problems which arose to discourage teachers from addressing Contemporary Irish Art at Leaving Certificate level.

Frequently within the survey, teachers voiced their dissatisfaction with resource materials and especially the textbooks for use in class on the documentation of Contemporary Irish Art, but the truth remains that these two particular textbooks by Lourda Sheppard and Henry J. Sharpe were never prescribed or recommended by the Department for the teaching of Art History and especially not the teaching of Contemporary Irish Art. Therefore, the teachers themselves choose these textbooks Sight, Insight, Excite by Lourda Sheppard and Art History and Appreciation by Henry J. Sharpe for classroom use and if they therefore, find the information unsuitable or sparse on specific areas of Art History it's up to the teacher to decide not to buy them any more or otherwise supplement the information in them with extra research work and resource materials /information which the teacher must undertake to acquire. Therefore, it's unfair to blame Lourda Sheppard and Henry J. Sharpe totally for the absence of the teaching and learning of Contemporary Irish Art within our classrooms. After all, Lourda Sheppard stated clearly in her introduction to her book

> In writing this book, I propose to introduce you to the History of Art, without confusing you with too much detail.....My advice to you in reading this book is open your eyes, explore the works of Art not only illustrated in this book but in galleries and museums in your locality. (1)

and Henry J. Sharpe stated within his introduction to his book that

> The text should be seen as an introduction to a given period or topic, which hopefully will lend the student, with the art teacher's guidance, to further research. At the end of each section a list of books will be found. These should be fairly easily obtainable, many from public libraries. (2)

Therefore, it is clear that the authors never expected their books to be observed as concise art history textbooks but only as a general introduction onto which the teacher and pupil can base further research work.

A surprising revelation was that teachers seemed to have had little exposure to Contemporary Irish Art within their own training as Art teachers. From my experience as a fourth year student of the National College of Art and Design nearing completion of the Bachelor of Art in Education, I have only been exposed to Contemporary Irish Art twice within a four year period, on a two hour visit to the Irish Museum of Modern Art. These visits though, were based around visiting exhibitions from other countries (I did not go specifically to view the work of Contemporary Irish artists). Therefore, if the student art teachers are getting so little exposure to Contemporary Irish Art, how can we expect them to have the confidence, ability or criteria to teach this area of the course to others at post-primary level.

It is not surprising therefore, that so many of the teachers surveyed taught Earlier Irish Art because at least there is an abundance of information and

research work already available on this area, whereas Contemporary Irish Art involves the teacher doing extra research work often outside the school environment. Thus, this unsatisfactory exposure of art students (especially those training as Art Teachers) to Contemporary Irish Art causes a problem when these third level students become Art teachers in our post-primary schools. They are unable to address and expose their pupils to this area due to the fact that they did not get enough exposure or knowledge in this area themselves. Another underlying problem related to the teaching of Contemporary Irish Art in our classrooms was the time factor and the overall size of the Art History course to be covered by teachers and pupils. Teachers maintained that they choose to cover Earlier Irish Art because it was well documented in the textbook and it was easy to find information on this area, whereas they avoided the more present Contemporary part of the Irish Art because the information was not easy to find and one would have to spend extra time researching it, time which the teachers maintained they did not have to spare. Teachers also complained about the relationship between post-primary schools and museums and galleries, especially the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Teachers explained that IMMA and other galleries and museums, could do a lot more in the form of documented material on Contemporary Irish Art which could be issued to schools countrywide.

## IMMA's Programme Presently for Post-Primary Schools

IMMA's Education and Community Department has developed a two-strand programme for second-level schools.

**STRAND I**

This is a broad programme for second level schools in general

- Talks for second level school teachers in preparation for taking a group to the exhibitions.
- Tours of the exhibitions for pupils and teachers throughout the school year.
- Talks by artists and specialists at key points of the exhibition programme.
- Publications aimed at second level.

**STRAND II**

IMMA has developed a working relationship with three Dublin schools, the pupils, the teachers and the management as part of a three year pilot project. The aims of this project were:

- To develop ways of working with particular classes/groups/students over a period of time.
- To explore the impact of this contact with the schools, the pupils and the teachers.
- To explore the possibilities of its application to other schools.
- To develop closer links with the Department of Education.

After each stage, the project was evaluated and where appropriate the results exhibited at IMMA Exhibitions to date, Chairs 1992, Responses 1993, The Self 1993/1994. Further development of this strand will be explored in the context of the Artists Work Programme 1995.

As we can see IMMA is at the exploratory stages of any ventures with these Education programmes but it is essential that these exploring activities and projects take place in order for IMMA to come up with a method for the Museum to form a relationship with pupils and teachers which will benefit schools countrywide.

Therefore, throughout the findings of the survey I became aware that there were actually many underlying problems experienced by teachers addressing Contemporary Irish Art in a classroom situation. While I accept all these problems, I believe that the problem doing the most damage to the teaching of Contemporary Irish Art in the classroom, is that of the teachers themselves having so little exposure in their training to this area.

***With realisation of these problems I recommend the following issues to be addresses so that the teaching and learning of Contemporary Irish Art can be made more accessible to both pupils and teachers at post-primary level***

**TEACHER TRAINING**

Training Colleges need to further develop the teaching of Contemporary Irish Art within their own curriculum so that these student Art teachers have not just an awareness of Contemporary Irish Art but an understanding and knowledge of it so that they can provide their pupils with a criteria to evaluate and appreciate it when in a classroom situation. Thus, if the teachers are exposed and informed on Contemporary Irish Art while at college they will have the informed background to approach this area when teaching at post-primary level.

## TEXTBOOKS - RESOURCE MATERIAL

As already discussed the two textbooks most widely used in a classroom situation for the teaching of Art History and Appreciation are the Lourda Sheppard Sight, Insight, Excite and the Henry J. Sharpe Art History and Appreciation. These books are chosen for use in the classroom by the teachers but they only provide an introduction to Art History. In order for teachers to build up on this information they must do further research work along with using these books as a general outline to the course. Otherwise, they must abandon these books completely, and form new resource materials using notes and illustrations gathered from a wide variety of books in order to give a more substantial knowledge of the History of Art especially Contemporary Irish Art to their pupils.

If the teachers find the books totally inadequate they should not use them, but as a student teacher I can empathise with most art teachers in that these books are the only texts available that give an overall general outline of the Art History course to be covered for the Leaving Certificate. Furthermore, these books are also suitable for the classroom because the language is easy to understand while other more concise books on Art History may be more difficult to follow by the pupils.

Having said all this though, it's extremely necessary to elaborate on certain areas within these textbooks where the authors have not provided enough information in order for pupils to answer questions on specific areas on the Leaving Certificate Examination such as the area on Contemporary Irish Art section.

Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher to acquire and build up a sort of library of extra notes and illustrated material if one should be faced with a possibility of using these books in the class. Again this involves research work on the teacher's behalf.

Teachers also maintained, that they could not find material easily on Contemporary Irish Art. Research throughout this dissertation has proved that although there are very little books devoted specifically to dealing with the subject of Contemporary Irish Art, there are definitely a selection of books and catalogues attributed to specific Contemporary Irish artists.

Unfortunately, research work for the teacher involves going through books on Irish Art in general with the hope that there may be a documentation of some sort addressing Contemporary Irish Artists within it's text. Although the documentation on Contemporary Irish Art is unsatisfactory "it's reality" and although it's existence is sparse it is up to the teacher to avail of what is actually there, unless some teacher or art historian decides to write a book in the near future on Contemporary Irish Art dealing with a variety of Irish artists and some of their major works.

From my experience as a student teacher, the only way to build up a large variety of material on Contemporary Irish artists is to take relevant information and illustrations from a selection of books, magazines and catalogues, until one acquires an abundance of information relevant to the particular subject that one wishes to discuss. This information can only be found and accumulated by the teacher going out and looking for it,

throughout museums and galleries ie IMMA and Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art and book shops ie Easons, Fred Hanna's and libraries countrywide. For teachers who do not reside in Dublin the above also applies. For example, teachers in Donegal and post-primary pupils could visit the Taipeis Gael Contemporary Weavers in Glencolmcille, Country Donegal (who create very Contemporary Weavings - using Donegal landscapes and mythological /legend themes) and get information and "hands on experience" from the Weaving Workshops that they provide in their studios. Taipeis Gael appeared in the Artist Work Programme at IMMA in 1995, where schools came into the workshop blocks at IMMA and worked with the actual weavers. Surprisingly, though when a selection of post-primary art teachers from Donegal were asked about Taipeis Gael and its artists they had little knowledge of them. Thus, I think that this is an example of teachers not exploring and researching Contemporary issues which are accessible to them. Furthermore, through addressing these working Weavers in Glencolmcille, Country Donegal, these teachers would be addressing the requirements stated necessary by Frederick Palmer for a full intellectual and aesthetic growth which is that, " we rely on a knowledge of cultural relevance, an appreciation of past achievements and an understanding or current ideas and initiatives". (3)

## IN-SERVICE DAYS

The survey revealed astonishingly that art teachers were unequipped to deal with Contemporary Irish Art at post-primary level because of their own lack of knowledge and exposure to it at third level training college. Therefore, I believe that in-service days where teachers could discuss

problems and inform each other on resource materials, while also receiving guidance from an informed authority on the subject of Contemporary Irish Art and it's teaching at post-primary level, would be of extreme benefit to these teachers.

## MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES/GOVERNMENT BODIES

These institutions such as IMMA and the Arts Council need to promote Contemporary Irish Art to the public thus hopefully creating an interest and awareness of it in society. Furthermore, to facilitate post-primary schools, they need to issue documented material of Contemporary Irish Art and make it accessible to schools countrywide such as Francis Ruane, Recent Irish Arts series issued by Arts Council of Ireland in 1981 which consisted of slides and documented text of Modern Irish Landscape painters.

If the following recommendations are addressed it is evident that we as teachers can begin to address the subject of Contemporary Irish Art within our post-primary schools.

## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 5

(1). Lourda Sheppard, Sight Insight Exite, (Dubin : Folens Publishers, 1987 ), p.2

(2). Henry J. Sharpe, Art History and Appreciation, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan), p.1

## APPENDIX A

***Survey circulated to fifty post-primary schools throughout the country (investigating the place of Contemporary Irish Art in our Art Classes at post-primary level).***

**Q1 When teaching the Art in Ireland section of the History and Appreciation of Art at Leaving Certificate Level, what areas of Irish Art do you usually choose to concentrate on generally each year (or do you allocate equal time to all areas both past and present)?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

**Q2 What questions did your students choose to answer last year on the Art in Ireland section of the History paper in the Leaving Certificate examination? (Questions 1, 2, 3 or 4)**

_____

_____

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_____

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_____

**Q3 In the past have any of your pupils ever choosen to answer question four which is usually based on Contemporary Irish Art? Do any of your pupils intend to answer question four this year?**

**Q4 If they do not answer it, why is this so?**

**Q5 Do you as a teacher of Art, Craft and Design teach Contemporary Irish Art in your classroom? Do you ever cater for or address this Contemporary Irish Art question in class as part of the Leaving Certificate examination?**

**Q6 If you do teach Contemporary Irish Art, how do you teach it, what books would you use and what artists would you usually choose to teach?**

**Q7 When teaching Contemporary Irish Art what would determine for you what artist to teach?**

**Q8 Can you name any books that you know are available on Contemporary Irish Art in general and also books that would have been of particular help to you for its teaching in class?**

**Q9 If you do not teach Contemporary Irish Art, why not? What are the factors that stop you from teaching this area of "Art in Ireland" section considering that there is a question on this particular area of Irish Art on the Leaving Certificate examination paper carrying the same marks as the Earlier Art in Ireland questions?**

**Q10 Do you think that the information given on Contemporary Irish Art in the Henry J. Sharpe Art History and Appreciation and the Lourda Sheppard Sight, Insight, Excite textbooks is adequate in order to prepare pupils to answer a question on Contemporary Irish Art on the Leaving Certificate examination paper?**

**Q11 In your own background in art history and appreciation, how much exposure did you have to Contemporary Irish Art?**

**Q12 Do you believe that Museums and Galleries around the country or in your own locality do enough to promote Contemporary Irish Art in society and especially in schools?**

**Q13 What do you think needs to be done in order for information on Contemporary Irish Art to become more obtainable or accessable for teachers and students in order to addressContemporary Irish Art adequately in class?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

***Thank you for taking the time to complete and return this questionnaire.***

## APPENDIX B

Arnold, Bruce, AConcise History of Irish Art. London: Thames and Hudson,1968.

Bodkin, Thomas, Four Irish Painters, Irish Academic Press,1987.
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Harbison, Peter, Potterton, Homon and Sheehy, Jeane, Irish Art and Architecture;from Prehistory to the Present. London:Thames and Hudson, 1978.

Hewitt, John and Catto, Mike, Art in Ulster. 2 vols. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1991.

Kennedy, Brian, Irish Painting. Town House, Dublin, 1993.

Keogh, Dermot, Twentieth Century Art;Nation and State. Dublin: Gill and Macmillian, 1994.

Knowles, Roderick, Contemporary Irish Art. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1980.

Sheppard, Lourda, Sight, Insight, Exite. Dublin:Folens Publishers, 1987.

Sharpe, Henry, Art History and Appreciation. Dublin: Gill and Macmillian, 1976.

Sutton, Deny (ed.), Aspects of Irish Art ( Exibition catalogue ),National Gallery of Ireland, 1974.

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## APPENDIX C

## MAJOR COMMISSIONS

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|---|---|
| 1949 | *Our Lady of Fatima*<br>Holy Rosary Church, Ennis Road, Limerick. |
| 1957 | *St. Bridget*<br>Church of St. Bridget, Curragh Camp, Co. Kildare. |
| 1961 | *St. Peter*<br>St. Peter's Church, Milford, Co. Donegal |
| 1963 | *St. Christopher*<br>Church of Our Lady Queen of Heaven, Dublin Airport. |
| 1964 | *St. Patrick*<br>St. Patrick's Church, Murlough, Lifford, Co. Donegal. |
| 1966 | *The Children of Lir**<br>The Garden of Remembrance, Parnell Square, Dublin 1. |
| 1970 | *Working Men*<br>County Hall, Carrigrahane Road, Cork. |
| 1971 | *Sir Roger Casement* |
| 1975 | *Crucifix*<br>St. Andrew's Church, Westland Row, Dublin 2. |
| 1977 | *James Larkin**<br>O'Connell Street , Dublin. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **1977** | ***Grasshopper***<br>**St. Mary's Girls Primary School, Strabane.** |
| **1978** | ***Chariot of Fire****<br>**Irish Life Centre, Dublin.** |

## APPENDIX D

## OISIN KELLY

1 Oisin Kelly was born on May 17,1915 in James' Hospital and died in 1981. His father, William S. Kelly, was a schoolmaster who taught in St. James National School. His mother was born Elizabeth McLean and there were just two children in the family. Oisin was taught by his father at St. James N.S.,until he was eleven when he went to Trinity College, where he took a moderatorship in French and Irish, and won a travelling scholarship to Germany. His stay was cut short by a kidney stone ailment which made necessary his return to Ireland.

2 Oisin became a schoolmaster, like his father and so strong is this tradition in the Kelly family that all of Oisin's six children are also teachers. His first teaching post was in Clones High School where he also attended courses in carpentry and metalwork at the local technical school.

3 In 1942 he married and started work in Waterford in Bishop Foys school. It was in Waterford at the local School of Art under the Principal, Robert Burke, that he started to carve. He then got a job in St. Columba's College in Rathfarnham, on the lower slopes of the Dublin Mountains, near his home in Templeogue where he spent the rest of his life.

4 Went to Henry Moore in Chelsea Polytechnic. (Oisin took two terms off at St. Columba's and spent the winter in Chelsea.)

- Worked constantly with models
- Studied anatomy
- Strict realism

Oisin didn't get to put much of his own personality and feelings into his work at this time. - (Depicting Reality.)

5 When Oisin came back home he began to show his own spirit and energy in his work - energy, personality, spirit , movement, expressing rhythm and movement in his work eg "The Step Dancer" and "Ceili Dancers".

6 Oisin Kelly was commissioned to do work for Churches. The religious work has a certain Byzantine stillness, tempered by his own or possibly an Irish characteristic of warmth. His secular sculpture is very often concerned with movement: the series of dancers, for example, the birds, the fish, the cattle, horses and riders, mythological figures and charioteers, the footballers, hurlers and rugby players, the marchers.

7 Children of Lir

What was the story behind the Children of Lir?

Why was this theme chosen for the sculpture in the Garden of Remembrance?

**8 Jim Larkin**

**Where is it and what is the story behind it?**

**Chariots of Fire - Where is it?**

**9 Birds, cattle and people/groups of people - Movement.**

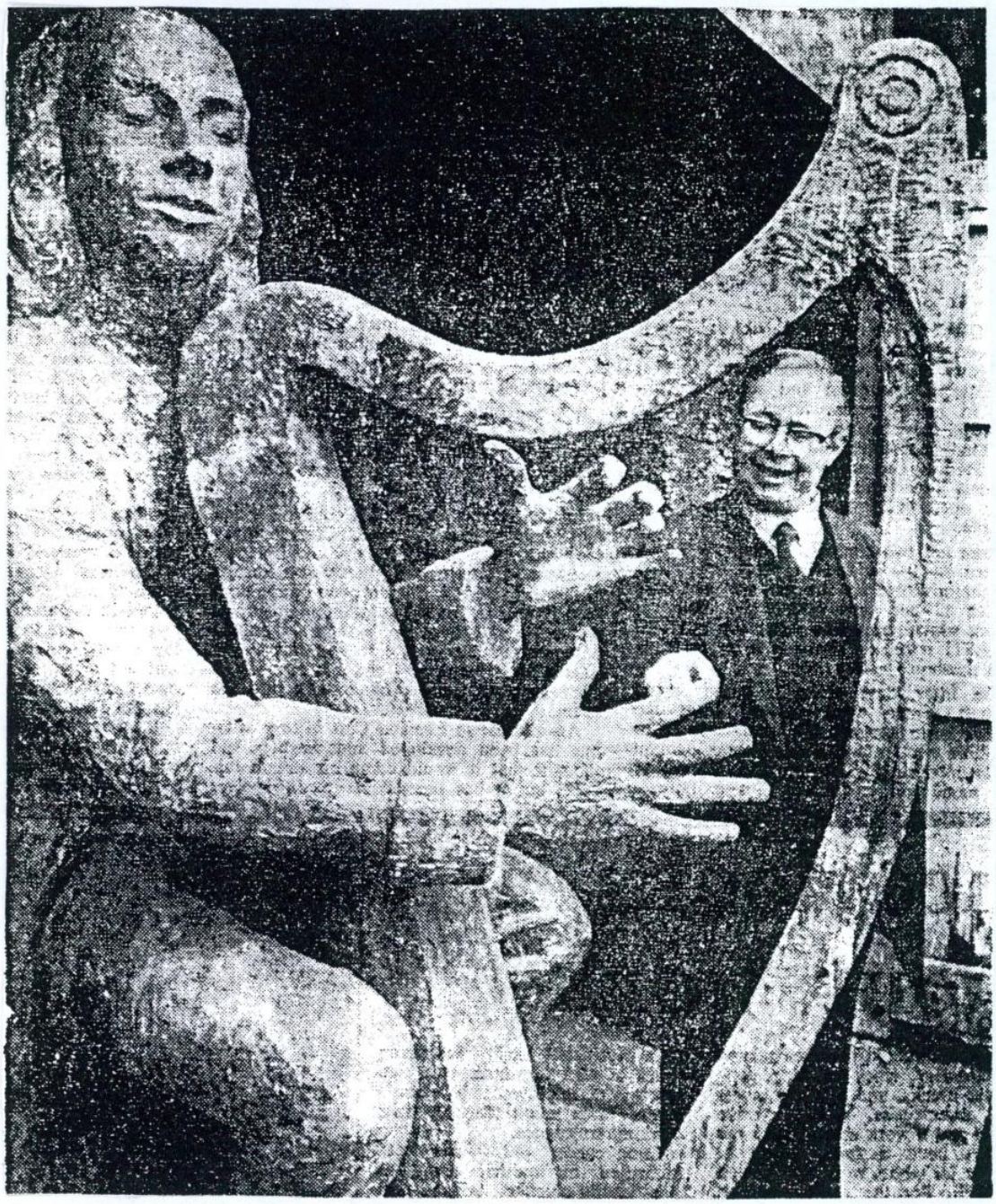
**10 The Legends of Ireland, mythological figures, Traditions of Ireland, people and faces of Ireland, groups of people and animals together.**

**Movement, realism, poses, creating an atmosphere ( What it would be like to be in that crowd), expressive - capturing the moment.**

**(Some words above to keep in mind when discussing Oisin Kelly)**

# APPENDIX E

***The Children of Lir in the Garden of Remembrance, Dublin, by Oisin Kelly.***



***Memorial to Turlough O'Carolan in the Dublin Art Foundry by Olsin Kelly.***

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