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**Community art: the collaboration of The Irish Museum of
Modern Art, John Ahearn and the men's group of Inchicore**

By

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will examine a community art programme at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) in conjunction with the American artist John Ahearn and the Men's Group of Inchicore. This will include a brief discussion of community and public art. Public Art will be introduced to help determine my overall argument as *"Artists who work with the community, and/or who put their art into the community, are all public artists. However distinctions may be drawn between community and public art, even though both operate within the same field."* (Miles, 1989, p.34)

Community Art has been linked with social minorities. Its intentions are to provide an art outlet for minority groups:

"Whether for the elderly to enrich retirement, for people with disabilities to strengthen communication and expression, for people with disadvantages to express their needs, for minority groups to sustain and reinterpret their cultures or for young people to make sense of experiences they suffer or enjoy."

(Miles: 1989, p. 7)

Community art is also connected with social movements and marginalised groups who believe that creative expression is an essential tool in a wider struggle towards radical transformation of society. Nonetheless Community Art is not solely associated with marginalised and minority groups, it is also concerned with groups who wish to create and appreciate art on a community basis. It is linked by a common philosophy that the general arts practice should be open to everyone because it can help to improve the quality of life in areas such as personal confidence, education, participation and creativity. Community art concentrates on particular sections of people such as neighbourhood groups within city, town or village. Participants often have a

clear direction for the project about to be undertaken with specific ideas for creative activity; often groups collaborate with another party and work on a set community art programme. Decisions arise through group collaboration. The artist involved tries to act as a catalyst for the creative potential of the group and to help create art that is central to the lives and works of the community. Groups involved with community art receive "hands on" physical experience and involvement. Community art does not define a specific activity, rather it is an approach to creative activity which involves people on a collective basis.

Public art has come to describe, *"a particular type of setting: generally permanent, and usually architecturally defined art and craft works sited in city centres or urban post-industrial locations undergoing major revitalisation."* (Jones: 1988, p.7.) The term "Public Art" engages in past and present notions of public art which is a vast area which includes everything from classical, to the nineteenth century notion of a hero on a plinth, historical events, war memorabilia, celebrities, social-political art and even graffiti, qualify as being "Public". Many problems arise under the wide umbrella of public art especially when the different groups involved have different notions as to what public art should be. Other problematic areas can include language, communication and participation, and trying to define the very public who will use the area in which the artefact will be placed. Assumptions are often made that public art, "is sculpture in the open air". However it can also be located in less accessible places such as schools, colleges, offices and hospitals. In public art, group participation is minimalised and the community are involved at a different level. Physical involvement is not encountered with once off commissioned public art. It is the artist who creates and provides the ideas and the artefact. The duty of the community lies in decision making - which usually consists of the right to endorse or

reject the finished work of the artists. In this case "the community" will probably consist of a group of loosely chosen people, not the whole of a specific community, but a self defined group.

Community and public art can help to include a larger, wider audience within the art practice by providing an art outlet for people. Public and community art can widen the boundaries of culture so that people can create a culture which is sympathetic to their own real needs and experiences.

For many reasons art has always been associated with the elite within society. Collecting valuable artefacts was and still is a pastime of the elite. Art collections reflected the status and well being of the owner, and collectors collected to seek knowledge and accumulate wealth. Private collections helped to establish the first public museums when, in the nineteenth century, many such collections were transferred into public museums. This is partly why museums are associated with the educated and wealthy. For people existing outside of the elitist structure, art had nothing to do with their lives, and seemed irrelevant to the real world. Most non-art world people do not comprehend the language of art. Galleries and museums are used and are run by middle and upper class art lovers. Museums offer little or no information for visitors who live lives outside of the art world, as if to deliberately conspire against them. For many, galleries and museums are feared institutions, and certain publics refrain from entering the museum at all.

This thesis will focus on the relatively new community art project in operation at IMMA with particular emphasis placed on the Artists in Residency programme at the museum. I will discuss in particular the collaboration

between the men's group of Inchicore, located close to the Museum, and American artist, John Ahearn.

The aims of the community art programme are to encourage and develop active participation in the museum's activities. It is intended to target certain publics who have been excluded from the museum so that they may interpret the artist's or artisan's products; and, as I have already mentioned, it is intended to create a culture relative to people's experiences.

The first chapter examines the emergence of community art in the Republic of Ireland discussing successful community art projects which have derived from IMMA's community art programme. Public art will also be introduced in this chapter. I will discuss some of the routes by which a piece of sculpture can arrive in a public place by using specific examples.

Chapter two concentrates on John Ahearn's approach, aims and objectives in an American context, discussing also his work in Ireland. Parallels will be drawn between his work in the United States and his exhibition at IMMA.

This chapter also discusses the men's group project, examining the difficulties that inexperienced groups encounter with museum strategies and frameworks.

The final chapter engages in the policies of IMMA, analysing the extra-curricular activities that Declan McGonagle, the Director, has included into the museum's brief. I will also look at IMMA's strong and weak points in the Community Arts programme.

CHAPTER 1

More and more people are receiving the opportunity to become involved in the arts. A number of different factors can be linked with this rise in participation. First of all, in Ireland the Arts Council was established under the Arts Act (1951). This saw the Government giving overall control of the Arts in the Republic of Ireland to the Arts Council. The Council wanted, "to create access to culture and opportunities for participating in creative activity throughout 'for all sectors.'" Secondly the introduction of television to Irish homes brought with it an instant centralised world with opportunities to see well known ballets, operas, choirs and arts documentaries. This gave some of the excluded members of society some opportunity to see art forms that were previously the pastimes of the social elite. Finally, the surfacing of community art in the 1980's opened up the arts to a wider audience. Community arts was the main route for access to participation in the arts for many people.

The community arts movement was influenced by three main factors:

1. The increase in unemployment, decay of inner city and the development of sprawling working class suburbs created large areas of disaffected and alienated populations experiencing high levels of social, economic and cultural deprivation. Self-help initiatives in such areas were supported by socially aware artists. (Bowles: 1992, p.5.)
2. Themes such as adult education and women's issues in the late 1970's were influencing the voluntary sectors' approach to tackling poverty, and social inequality.

3. The Arts Council was influenced by policies in Europe promoting greater access and participation. These "European models" encouraged art on a local and regional level. In 1979 the Arts Council saw community art as a primary area for policy development and included it in its budget for the first time in 1980 (Arts Council: 1989, p.9). Recently the Arts Council has brought art into the streets of towns and suburbs organising festivals, drama, mural paintings, art labs, dance and puppeteering.

Assumptions are made that, "the community is where people get along together working in agreement towards similar objectives and rewards". "The Community" doesn't necessarily define a specific group of people. Sometimes it can be seen as a body of people with something in common.

Public and community art are not as simple as bringing what was once private out into the open. Even though community and public art are a part of the existing art structure they require different thinking and attitudes towards existing studio based practice.

Public art in the making usually entails the collaboration of several different and diverse groups such as planners, commissioners, artists, local people and county councils. Often it can be virtually impossible to attain a common ground or agreement from such a variety of groups, especially when different groups involved have different notions as to what public art should be. Artists working in public have to deal with how the private language of their work relates to someone else's perception of the nature of public language. Defining the "public" may be a problematic task especially in cities or tourist towns where the public is constantly changing. Miscommunication and lack of communication can provoke resentment on the part of the public. Public

art and problems seem to be synonymous. Some such dilemmas arose in Eilis O'Connell's Making Waves (plate nos. 1 & 2) in Kinsale.

O'Connell was commissioned by the Arts Council to create a sculpture for the town of Kinsale. The sculpture was a gift from the Arts Council to the town's people to mark their winning of the tidy towns competition in 1986.

When O'Connell had designed a sculpture a meeting was called, and planners, county councillors and the Arts Council attended. The purpose of this meeting was to decide by way of voting whether or not this sculpture was to be created for the Kinsale pier. The sculpture was voted in 9 : 1, and the acting county council accepted the sculpture on behalf of the town's people. To ensure that the council had made the correct decision eight meetings were called at which the sculpture was discussed in detail, (Carty: 1989, p.9). The ceremony to mark the opening occurred on 24th July 1988.

Many locals hated the sculpture and demanded its removal. Even though the County Council had taken some precautions to ensure that people were informed about the sculpture, large numbers of people for whose "benefit" it was created were never briefed on the sculpture.

As far as the public were concerned the sculpture was an imposition of elitist aesthetic judgement for their town, which had used scant taxpayer's money to commission an artwork to the tastes of the professionals.

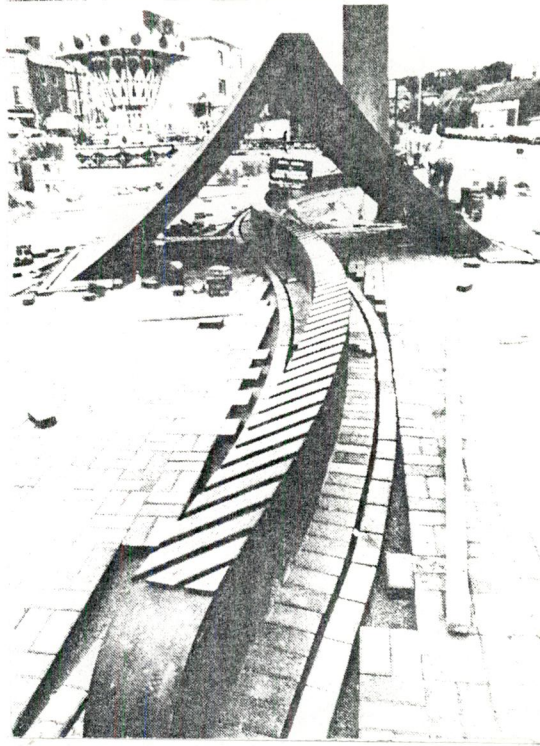


Plate No. 1 *Making Waves* 1988

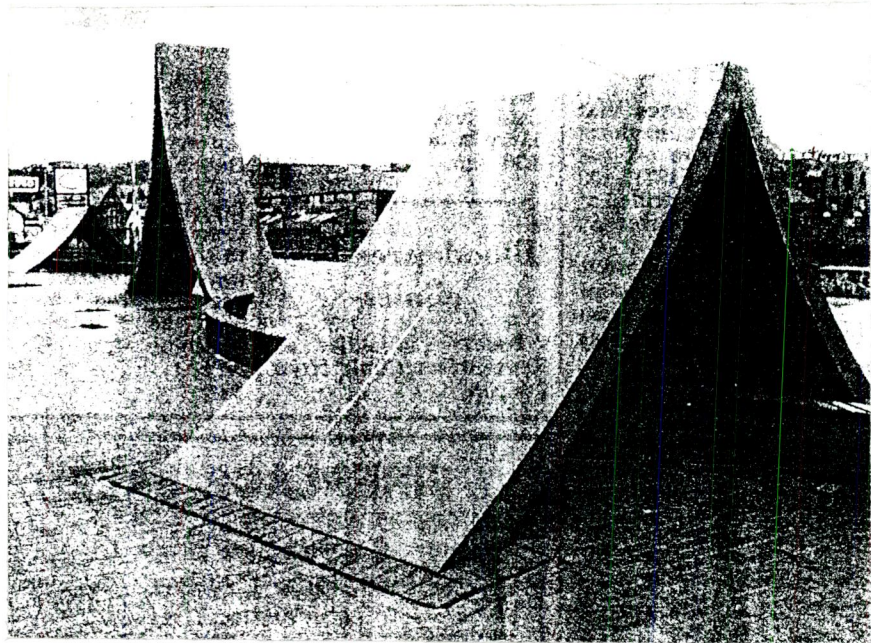


Plate No. 2 Eilis O Connell's *Making Waves* 1988

People began to think of the sculpture as an ugly "heap of scrap" that wasn't in keeping with their historical town, (Cassidy: 1988, p.8.). Others were alarmed by the way in which the corten steel sculpture was streaking and marking. Had the inhabitants of Kinsale been informed of the sculpture, they would have realised that streaking is a characteristic of corten steel - the streaking, brownish tinge becomes blue with age, (Cassidy: 1989, p.7).

The question of safety aspects of the sculpture arose in other arguments, locals argued it was dangerous as its tent-like structure encouraged "children and drunks" to run up and down the slide-like body. Nonetheless the U.D.C. did recognise that the sculpture did meet the highest standards of public safety, (Carty: 1989, p.9).

The notion of the "Public Art" conjured up images of the autocratic ruler, historic events, and the nineteenth century notion of a hero on a plinth for many of the inhabitants. It is easy then to see why people had problems with the language of O Connell's abstract work. Local councillor Collins insisted, "that an object of the sea or an historic event such as the flight of the wild geese (after the battle of Kinsale) would be a more appropriate and traditional image of the town", (Cassidy: 1988, p.8).

The Kinsale sculpture engendered one of the most passionate debates on art in Ireland. Eventually a vote was to decide as to whether the sculpture should be demolished. The Arts Council agreed to make the sculpture more acceptable to the public eye. This consisted of shot blasting the corten steel and covering it with a high resistant tan coloured paint and painting a pool of water around the base. The outcome of which was neither satisfactory for the artist or community.

O'Connell's skills were lost to the community. Public art entails little or no protective rights for artist's work in public places. Richard Serra once commented that at the final project meeting of his controversial Tilted Arc every other party involved had power except himself, (Sheril, 1987, p.34).

Artists risk much more in Public art than in the gallery space. In the gallery world artists are much more respected, and more educated art lovers prevail in this world. The gallery world is less exposed to criticism and doesn't have to please as many people.

It is fair to say that controversial newspaper articles and the County Council gave only the briefest of details of the artist and her work. The continual bickering in newspaper articles unnecessarily defaced O'Connell's character. Large numbers of critical articles of this sort were published, yet all O'Connell had done was to carry out her orders and complete a commissioned sculpture for Kinsale.

Lack of communication seems to have been one of the biggest problems encountered with the Kinsale sculpture. It is not for me to say whether O Connell or the County Council should have informed the people about the sculpture. Both parties should have recognised the importance of informing the public for, in doing so, it could have become possible to serve the real, rather than the presumed needs of the public. Consultation can also act as a protection for the investment in the sculpture.

Local people want to have control over their community and they want to see more inhabitants involved in decision making. The point is not to impose an artist or artefact on the community. Successful relationships and creative solutions have been created through different approaches to public art. An

interesting example of another approach to public art is the route taken for a Tallaght sculpture erected in 1988.

For this sculpture the Arts Council assembled the brief and decided that an adjudication process would decide on a sculpture for Tallaght, the process was administered by the Dublin County Council (Ruane: 1988, p.30).

The Tallaght project used an open investigative approach that included the public from the beginning, avoiding many of the communication problems that arose in Kinsale. A voting system was set up so that people could vote as to whether or not they wanted this piece of public sculpture - one and a half thousand people actually voted. This approach is an inclusive rather than an exclusive approach and tackles many problems hitched to public artefacts. This is not to say that the Tallaght approach is absolute or final, different routes are suitable for different communities.

"Perfect example of Public Art are the Sistine Chapel, pantheon marbles. The baroque era displays how architects, painters and crafts people could integrate their work. Inspiration then was much simpler, it mainly concerned religion or the autocratic ruler."

(Townsend: 1984, p.38)

The relevance of discussing public art in this context lies in its relationship with community art.

Since and before IMMA opened in 1991 the Director, Declan McGonagle, has initiated a community spirit by compiling a scheme that forms a bond between the museum and the community - which has led to the birth of the Community Art and Artists in Residency Programme at IMMA. One of McGonagle's primary concerns is to close the gap between the art public and those outside, the non-art world. His strategies include bringing in a new

constituency - those who have been excluded from the museum structure before.

The community arts scheme is mainly concerned with the geographical location. The museum's education officer, Helen O'Donoghue went out and met some of the communities outside before the museum opened. The communities that the museum are most involved with are Inchicore, Drimnagh, Kilmainham and Bluebell.

The collaboration of community groups has led to the experimental workshops and exploration of creativity in an attempt to improve both mental and physical health and well-being, and to improve people's control over their lives.

Unspoken Truths is the result of an eighteen month collaboration between The Family Resource Centre at St. Michael's Estate, Inchicore, and The Lourdes Youth and Community Services, Rutland Street, IMMA's Community and Education Department, and the Arts Council. This project is an example of the artist in community scheme. The project began in October 1991 and involved thirty-two women. The women involved, explored past and present unspoken truths of their lives through different art mediums. 'Unspoken truths' has raised social, political and psychological issues. The Art Education project allowed the participants involved to explore their own creativity both individually and collectively. The exhibition itself has crossed barriers of gender, class and disability. Each woman produced an artwork that portrayed something of their lives. Exhibits range from an elaborate window-cum-book illustrating, the decline of Mountjoy Square, to an installation depicting the move away from working class women's traditional role in society.

"The relationship between the community groups and the museum's Education Department demonstrates what is possible when resources are made available to the community to encourage art education and enable local groups to highlight and raise social and political issues in a creative and challenging manner."

(IMMA Press Release No. 1)

The group itself gave tours of their exhibition describing their work, sharing creative initiatives being developed at community level. A series of four workshops, discussions and seminars are being organised to provide an opportunity for groups to meet the women and talk about their work.

Groups such as the women's group have avoided museums in the past because exhibitions (among other factors) have had little relevance to their lives. This problem is being confronted by IMMA by including the women within museum projects and changing emphasis on exhibitions.

The Community Arts Scheme is not solely linked with community groups within the geographical location alone, schools and colleges are also included in the community arts projects. The Museum has also chosen to collaborate with three Dublin schools and has set up a five year plan involving pupils, teachers and school management. This is a pilot scheme that the Museum has organised to try and discover the impact of contact with pupils, teachers and schools, and to try and break barriers of language with younger members of society.

In March '92 a very successful project The Chairs Project was exhibited as a result of school collaboration. Second level pupils from St. James' School,

St. Vincent's School and Collinstown Park Community College created mixed media work using the chair, the objective of which was to transform the chair into an imaginative artefact as a means of exploring their environment. Before commencing, the schools received talks from artists who discussed the use of the chair within the design field and within the art world. The pupils imaginatively created their work in the schools (with their teachers) incorporating materials that are not normally associated with the chair. Chairs took on new exciting forms such as Cher, Chairoplanes and cars.

The Museum has also involved itself with the more traditional methods of informing, schools and colleges receive tours of exhibitions in the Museum. General talks are given by artists about key points of exhibitions. IMMA is also involved in the publication of a guide book for second level students.

The Museum is also involved in an Artists in Residency programme which has been underway since May 1994 and is currently being developed. This scheme opens up the workshop to the public, enabling the artist to validate his/her work for the general public so that people can see how images and objects emerge from a process of improvisation and experiment.

IMMA is helping to encourage previously excluded groups within the Museum periphery through community education and Artists in Residency programmes.

It was through the Artists in Residency programme that American artist John Ahearn (who I will discuss in the next chapter) came to Ireland. His visit to the country is part of IMMA's International Artists Work Programme.

CHAPTER 2

New York Community Artist, John Ahearn, came to Ireland in September 1994 by invitation from IMMA to participate in their Artist in Residency programme. It was Ahearn's dynamic approach to Community Art and his ability to communicate that enticed the Museum to invite him to Ireland. In order to place Ahearn's work in context, I intend to trace his career back seventeen years.

In New York, in 1978, the gallery boom had waned, and was at an all time low due to the recession in America at the time. The U.S. government recognised that they needed to provide artists with a source of income, with the result that grants were made readily available for artists to set up non-commercial art spaces. Many of these non-commercial galleries were established in poverty stricken zones. This occurred for many reasons. Firstly because rent was affordable in underprivileged areas. (Author in interview with Ahearn). Secondly it was a trend at the time to change the concept of an art space from abandoning walls to an open arena for use by the community. Community art was partly motivated by the desire to reach a larger and broader audience, open art spaces helped to draw in a larger audience because the community in question was often involved in the art created for the spaces, plus exhibitions were exhibited on their streets. People in poverty stricken areas such as the Bronx couldn't afford to pay into museums so these were the new audiences that community art was targeting. (Goldstein: 1991, p.77)

The Government hoped that such spaces would instigate bonds between artists and community through the collaboration of artists and locals. This

collaboration was also expected to create a community phase through community art projects.

Ahearn began to work in the Bronx, in a local non-commercialised gallery. The grants that the government were giving artists helped Ahearn realise his dreams. Ahearn wanted to draw energy off the streets and depict the Bronx culture - a culture of poverty and American street life.

In the Bronx almost half the population live below the poverty line. (Goldstein: 1991, p.77). The quality of health care is comparable to what prevails in the Third World. Drugs, Aids and disease are rampant, but there is only one physician for every 4,000 residents. Violent crimes are also very high in this area.

The Bronx mainly consists of a Black and Hispanic population who by tradition have not been memorialised in art or given a place in the nation's public monuments and museums. Ahearn made casts of his black and hispanic neighbours recognising the need for different races and classes to be represented in art. Such marginalised groups have helped create the United States but have not been given a part in its history. His murals and portraits portray ordinary everyday folks, the downtrodden, and generally people who have been by-passed in the creation and interpretation of art. Ahearn had a great empathy for the ordinary people especially those who suffered under the hands of others.

Ahearn's objectives were to find a place for the artist in the community and to address large heterogeneous communities. Ahearn found his strength in casting and established himself in the Bronx with his cast portraits. The casting process forces Ahearn to make contact with the Bronx inhabitants,

because he is required to cast people from the community as models. The repercussions of this encourage people to participate in the project, resulting in art that directly represents and involves the locality in the process of creation.

The Bronx sculptures are intended to celebrate racial equality, community pride and ordinary heroes. Ahearn wanted to use the sculptures to hone in on social and cultural issues that concern the Bronx today. Ahearn began work in Fashion Moda (the gallery) in 1979. It was in Dawson Street in 1983 that Ahearn recalls the peak moment of his career when the mural We are Family (plate no. 3) was installed on the gable end of a wall in the community. The mural consists of, left to right, one full figure, five torsos and heads and three portraits of heads and half torsos. The first figure in the mural, Layman, is depicted with folded arms; his erect torso and tilted head are used to convey the power of ordinary people. His bare torso emphasises the size of his muscles demonstrating Layman's physical power. The face is stern and solemn conveying strength of mind and body. The overall portrait evokes the notion of power and dignity. Beside Layman features the sculpture of Victor and Ernest (plate no. 4). The boys are the epitome of innocent, carefree children, the type that are depicted in story books. It is the smiles on the boys' faces, the semi closed eyes and the embrace that help create this naturalised happy go lucky aura. The alternate positioning of the hands and Victor's slightly turned and thrust forward body creates flow and movement within the composition. The organic portrayal of the body positions have moved portrait busts on from the traditional white static sculpture found in American museums. The vest that Ahearn has chosen to portray Ernest in, is typical of American street culture of the era. The children featured in this sculpture are ordinary boys portrayed in a realistic, simple manner.

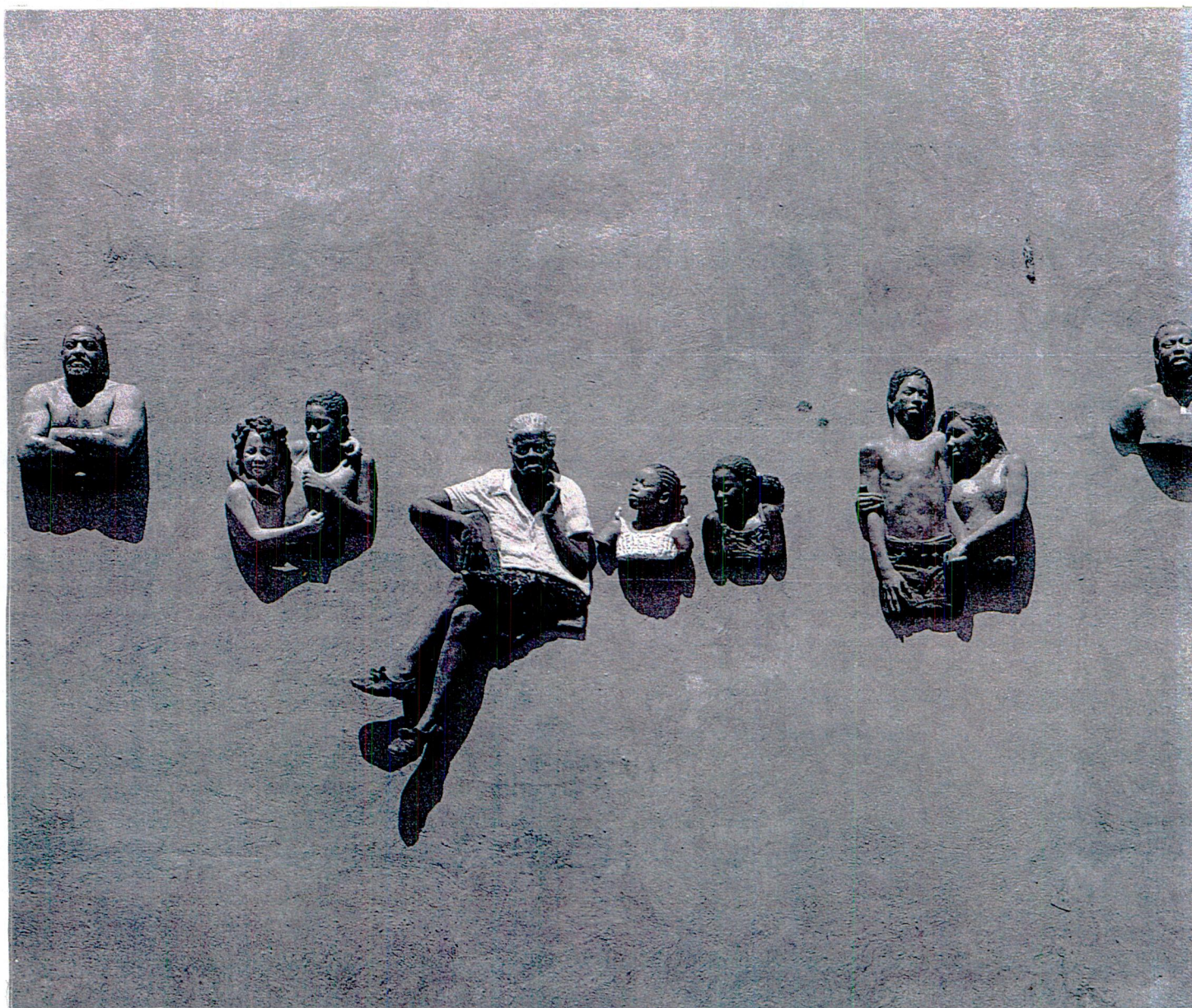


Plate No. 3. We Are Family

[left to right] Layman, Victor and Ernest, Kate, Tawana and Staice, Felix and Iris, and Smokey. Fox Street at Intervale Avenue, Bronx





Plate No. 4 Victor and Ernest 1982

Collection The Foundation to Life Inc.

Adjacent to Kate (the full figure in the mural) is Tawana and Staice who are beautifully conveyed through the use of colour and their fresh summer dresses. Tawana's hair depicts the Afro-American style street culture. Who could guess that these seemingly happy girls reside in a neighbourhood riddled with tragedy and violence? No playground exist for the girls to have fun in, the only play "facility" for the children are the abandoned mattresses on which they play trampoline. Ahearn removes all the background information from the Bronx people so that figures become peasants in timeless space.

Ahearn has cast many young girls on the cusp of adulthood, for example, Bernice (plate No. 5) Esther (plate No. 6). Esther's pose is aggressive but her expression is apprehensive. Life in the Bronx is dangerous and young girls hover between a vulnerable child and a tough number. Their fleeting innocence is captured just as the girls are about to be taken over by new-found sexual power.

Takiya (plate No. 7) is depicted in a proud or defiant mood. Proud because of the way she holds her head and torso, Takiya's static glare helps to heighten her proud posture. One might even say she has an attitude. The first time Ahearn cast Takiya the cast turned out a disaster. Takiya trusted Stefan a boy in the neighbourhood so Ahearn asked him to be his assistant on the job; they went shopping and found a fluorescent orange sweatshirt she would have liked. Ahearn told her it was hers if she would model for a second time, Takiya agreed.

The Rat Killers (plate No. 8) vaguely presents a violent side to Ahearn's sculptures. But even these two figures resemble Greek Kowoi, an urban Huckleberry Finn or even the nineteenth century notion of a hero on a plinth.



Plate No. 5. Bernice 1981
Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Plate No. 6. Esther (in the sixth grade)

Collection the artist



Plate No. 7 Takiya



Plate No. 8 Rat Killers



Plate No. 9 Back to School

The boys epitomise "goodies" killing off disgusting rats, but nothing they will do can rid their community of the existing tragic violence. However, Ahearn's work, the government and Ahearn himself are side stepping issues of unemployment death and drugs, reducing his art to a white man's view of life in an idealized coloured community.

The Back to School mural (plate No. 9) portrays ordinary people partaking in everyday fetes. This mural features people of all ages from the neighbourhood. The mural features a lady looking completely bored leaning out a window, a child riding a bike, a child walking to school and a lady with her daughter shopping for school clothes. "*I wanted a bright kiddy book version of the neighbourhood.*" (Goldstein, 1991, p.77). There is no doubt but this mural does idealise the situation in the Bronx. Unstated in this mural is the fact that these children are among the poorest residents in New York City plus their school is nearly at the bottom of city-wide reading scores. Ahearn's art conveys a romanticised version of life. The mural also portrays a coloured man shaking hands with a white boy. This handshake is an idealistic gesture. Here as in many of his busts the figure becomes a human ideal. The reality is that coloured folk do not want white people in their district and have deliberately shifted white families from the neighbourhood as they see them as part of the white regime that are responsible for the conspiracy against the blacks. (Author in interview with Ahearn). Ahearn's arrival in the locality was met with hostility. Gangs made life difficult for Ahearn by sabotaging his work and stealing his equipment. It is a far cry from the coloured man shaking hands with a white boy. Ahearn had to go to great lengths to gain the trust of the locals; the lengths he went to, to choose a sweater and cast Takiya proves the effort he made to try and bond with his neighbours.

To present this fairy tale tableau Back to School on the wall in the poverty stricken Bronx, is to grasp the tragedy of the Bronx. The portrayal as a whole is symbolic of ideal individuals in an ideal society.

Ahearn's art represented certain minorities for the first time. Up to this in 1979 coloured folks had rarely if ever been represented in museums, institutes, art, and in the media. For them it was an art that said "You exist" and helped give the people a sense of pride, (Goldstein, 1991, p.17).

Despite Ahearn's efforts to keep art outside of the gallery, practicalities such as a source of income have forced him in recent years to exhibit and collaborate in museums. Ahearn received such an invitation from the curator of IMMA to partake in their Artists in Residency programme. Ahearn is of Irish descent and decided to collaborate with IMMA and trade his roots and travel to Ireland. Ahearn met with a group of men in Dublin in June 1994 and ideas were exchanged for a project which proceeded that September.

Men's groups are rare, for example, several community groups around the country have had difficulty getting men involved in community development projects and community arts projects. Men tend to view these schemes as women's pursuits. The Family Resource Centre in St. Michael's Estate in Inchicore have recognised the need to bring more men into the area of community development and have organised a men's group for St. Michael's Estate. The Men's Group have since collaborated with IMMA for community art projects.

Ahearn's project is the group's second art project. The first, Signatures was in conjunction with artist Joe Lee and consisted of colour photo montages using television as a source. The photo montage project was co-ordinated by

the artist and museum as they believed the medium would provide a link for the men and the world of popular television culture. Signatures was the first community art project that the men have worked on. The casting portrait project was to be their second, the duration of which was three months.

The casting process is predominantly technical but often resembles that of a theatrical ritual. The event occurred in the studio in Dublin with friends surrounding the model. (Plate Nos. 10 & 10.1) Two straws are placed up the volunteer's nose to allow him to breathe during the performance. The face and other parts of the body are swathed in alginate and then soaked surgical plaster bandages are arranged over the alginate to hold it in shape. When the plaster has hardened, the mummified person is gently eased out of the cast (Plate 10.2). At this point, plaster is pured into the mould to take a cast of the person. Before casting, the person about to be mummified is extremely scared, and fears suffocation. Ahearn encourages the model to focus on a facial expression such as a smile. It is an act of bravery and trust for the model.

When the cast emerges from the alginate the men begin to work on the busts. This incurs chizelling and filling in order to rectify blemishes that remain after casting. At this point hair is added and sculpted into the head in the form of plaster of paris bandages. Details such as curls and waves have to be sculpted individually. On terminating this process the busts are then painted. The attained casts are of ordinary people with everyday expressions.

When Ahearn met with the group in June '94 a demonstration cast was taken of Al Coulahan (Plate No. 11). Coulahan worked on the cast himself over the summer. The result emulates that of a delicate gentleman, a saint even. The



Plates 10 & 10.1 The Casting of Dani Pico

subtly turned head and the cupped hands are reminiscent of statues of saints that are to be found in churches. I met Coulahan while he was working with the group in September. The man was every bit the gentle personage that I had admired through the art. Coulahan is a big, tall, gentle, serene man and judging by the way he approaches people and holds himself, I think he has suffered much during his lifetime. The cupped hands underneath the torso further intensifies his gentle giving nature. The cast of Coulahan definitely depicts his personality. A man of a gentle serene giving nature. Coulahan crafted and painted his own cast. The cast is beautifully painted, the delicate painting of the skin in conjunction with the sensitive soft shades chosen to colour himself further emphasizes his character.

Before casting, Ahearn encouraged the men to include ideas that would personalise each man's cast. Most of the men created their piece with certain aims and objectives in mind for the finished cast, and they did manage to synthesize character and technicalities within their plaster casts.

Jimmy (Plate No. 12) broke away from the frontal facial view, to cast a side profile of himself gazing longingly at his favourite pint. Decky (Plate No.13) painted himself with his county G.A.A. sweater and the Dublin braid around his neck. There is no deeper meaning reiterated in this work, what we see is what we get. The work is representational. The sculptures involve no action or movement within the busts, as it is the men's first experience of casting.

John Webster's cast was a particular favourite of Ahearn's (possibly because he had to spend so much time on the cast). Webster suffers from a heart problem, so he decided that it would be safer for him if the face was cast

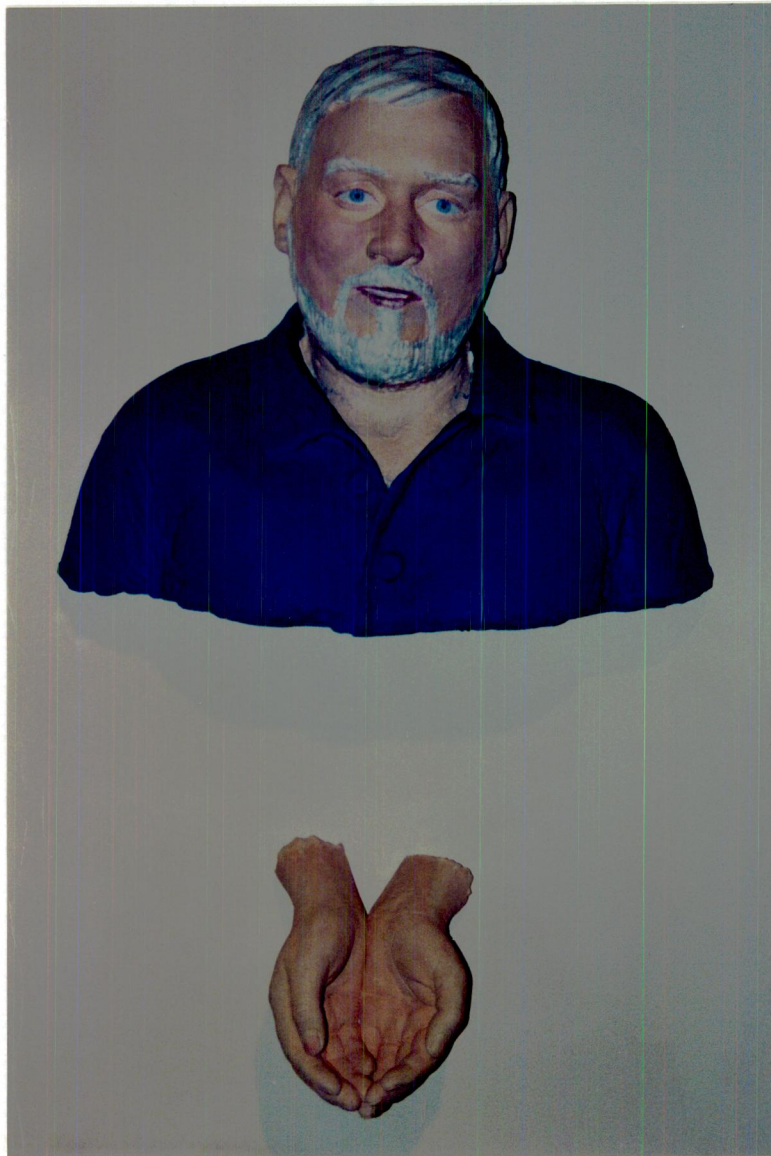


Plate No. 11 Al Coulahan



Plate No. 12 Jimmy



Plate No. 13 Decky

from the nose to the crown, and from the mouth to the chest, in order that one air passage was free to breathe at all times. Ahearn facilitated Webster and meticulously joined the two part cast. Webster, a gentleman, is portrayed wearing a shirt and tie (Webster always wore a shirt, tie and jacket even while working with plaster). The strong bold colour on the bust was applied by Ahearn, using his paint on, dab off technique, helping to emphasise facial skin lines. The red colours in the portrait help give the portrait a warm glow to coincide with Webster's personality. The intense blue that Ahearn has used for the eyes portrays the stoicism of an ordinary man.

As the casting process went on the men mastered the techniques; consequently they became more confident in themselves. This resulted in the development of increased personal input into the casts. They exploited their new knowledge to express themselves.

This knowledge was used to create cast hands. The hands denote symbols of friendship, generosity and peace. The men collaborated to create a large hand mural (Plate No. 15).

This artwork consists of a relief map of Ireland including mountains and surrounding waters. The map is surrounded by eight hands shaking to the agreement of peace. The peace talks are an important and welcome issues in present Irish politics with violence coming to an end in the North. The welcoming of the peace talks are echoed in this mural. The Ireland handshake is an idea clearly expressed, in a professional way. The paint on the mural is thickly applied and monotone in manner. No brush strokes are used to describe the piece or define the artefact, personally, the flat colours do not appeal to me.

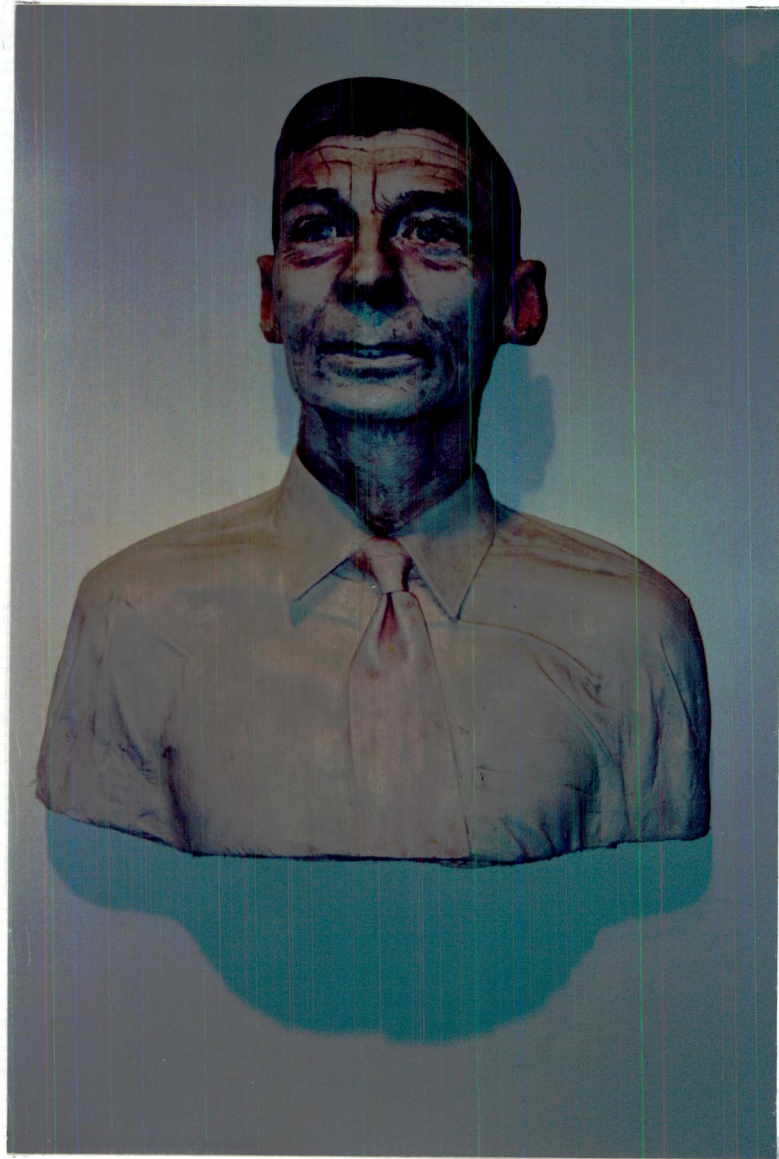


Plate No. 14 John Webster



The mural resulted from the men's ideas. Ahearn considered hands as an inferior body part, and only cast hands in conjunction with the head and torso, never as an individual entity. The success of the men's mural enticed Ahearn to create his own interpretation of the hand mural (Plate No. 16)

Many of the hands that the men cast appear detached and disjointed, (Plate No. 17). This consists of John Ahearn, Brian Healy and two arms wrestling. These two front-on busts appear very static, similar to the traditional white sculpted torsos. If the hands had been incorporated into the sculpture a more organic and naturalised appearance could have been created, similar to that achieved in Victor and Ernest (plate No. 4).

The men's decision to collaborate demonstrates that they are beginning to work together as a group. The making of extra artworks conveys their enthusiasm for the casting.

The men's scant experience left them with no concept of deadlines. While the men's group left the studio at 1.00 p.m., Ahearn didn't depart until 1.00 a.m. In order to have the work completed for the exhibition, Ahearn spent ten to fifteen extra hours on each bust.

"You work with people to tell their story but you end up telling your version of the story because as the deadline comes near you end up doing more work."
(Author in interview with Ahearn)

As a group the men get on extremely well together. There was always a happy atmosphere both socially and work wise (Author in interview with men). At no time did I feel like an outsider while I was at IMMA, watching the men's workshops. Ahearn felt that Irish people are very family orientated, we place less emphasis on the individual, (compared to Americans). This according to

him helps people to get along in groups easier. The men's group is small in number (eight approximately), this is because many men consider art a women's pursuit. The group is slow to increase, but there is no decrease.

Ahearn's initial invitation to Ireland was received from the curator of the museum to work on the Artists in Residency programme, to do his own work. It was only on arrival that he discovered he would be acting as a technical advisor for the men. The role of technical advisor did not suit Ahearn's work modes. Ahearn is without exception a community artist, but he always creates the art for the community; as opposed to the community creating an art for themselves with an artist acting as catalyst. He is ultimately the creator and only uses his particular system to stipulate projects. Ahearn is the manager rather than the assistant. Ahearn sees the art as his work, and wants it portrayed according to his tastes, considerable difficulties stemmed from this situation. Ahearn's inability to walk around "with his hands behind his back" began to take its toll two weeks into the project in Dublin.

Ahearn approached the museum with his frustrations. He pointed out that he needed to create art, not watch it being made. Another project was organised for him to engage in. Ahearn cast a class of St. Francis' Boys School. Employing his own preferred "production" system to cast models (this consists of casting two models simultaneously). At the school he cast eighteen boys and their teacher Father Joe. The class have been sculpted with their school uniforms on them. The expressions on the kids faces are all different, one could almost identify the troublemakers from the quiet boys. All of the boys (Plate No. 18) are portrayed in a jolly and innocent manner. Most of the class are portrayed wearing smirks on their faces. Their mischievous eyes help the viewer to conjure up images of devilment in the classroom. This is heightened through the use of bold colours. Because his sculptures





Plate No. 18 The Boys from St. Francis School

were cast from life each face makes you sense a realm of its psyche. The sculptures of the boys observe the caricatures of male Irish "types". Exaggerated red hair and freckles convey an American's vision of an "Irish boy". The classroom sculptures are similar to his earlier Bronx works when Ahearn cast only half torsos.

It is fifteen years since Ahearn began casting and he has not strayed from this representational work. He has become a prisoner of his own success. Ahearn refers to his work as a continuation rather than a progression and Ahearn intended to create art that stepped beyond the elitist art world. At the beginning of his career he was concerned that the showing of his work in a gallery might destroy the delicate relationships he was building among the people he worked with in the Bronx. Today he has contradicted all of his earlier views by collaborating and showing at major galleries on a regular basis. Regrettably his sculptures have also wound up in the houses and institutions of the structure responsible for the suppression inflicted on coloured and marginalised people in the first place. At the beginning of his career he would not have contemplated collaborating with IMMA.

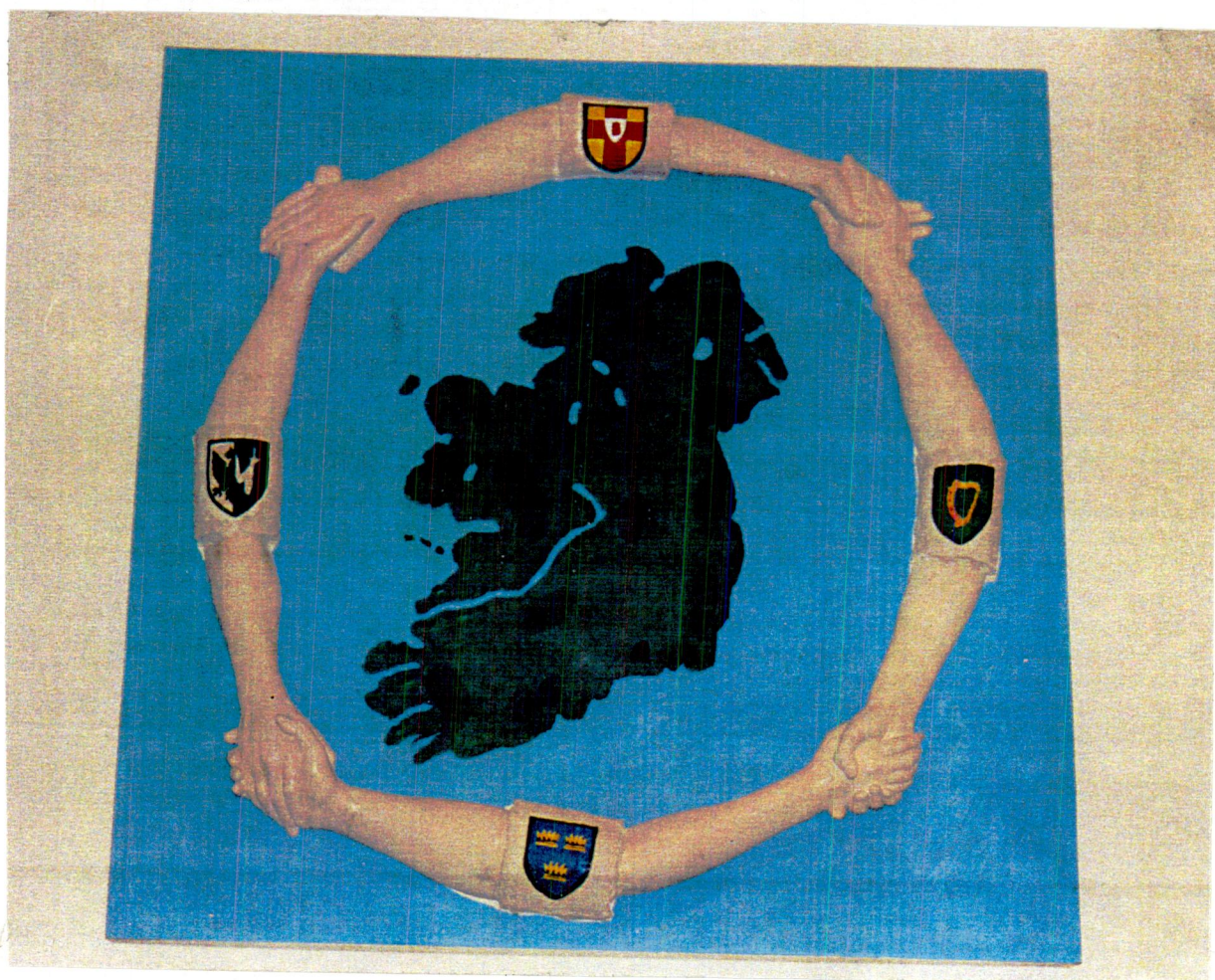


Plate No. 15 Men's Hand Mural

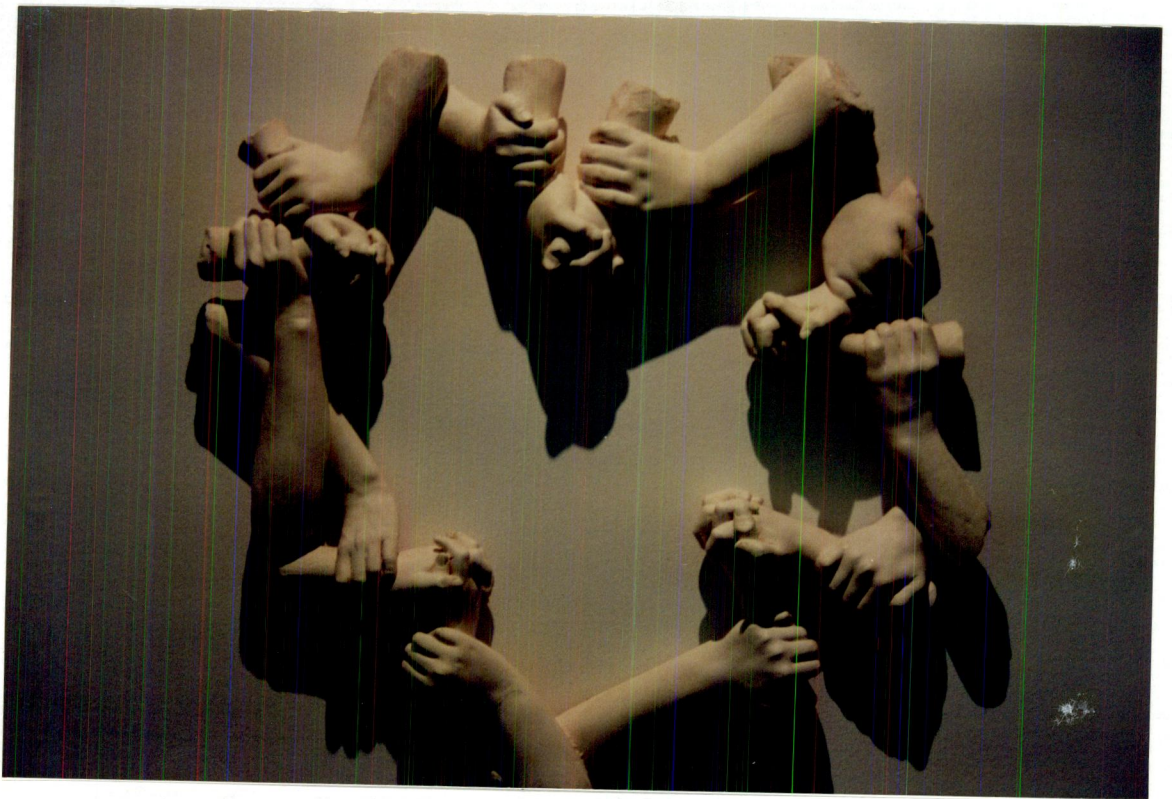


Plate No. 16 Ahearn's Hand Mural





Plate No. 17 John Ahearn and Brian Healy

CHAPTER 3

The final chapter engages in some of the policies of IMMA, analysing the extra curricular activities that Declan McGonagle has included into the museum's brief. I will also discuss the strong points and weak points of IMMA's inclusive rather than exclusive approach to the public.

One of the few tasks included in Director Declan McGonagle's brief was to establish an Irish contemporary art gallery. It was McGonagle's decision to incorporate extra curricular activities into the brief, in the hope of including certain audiences which have been previously excluded from museum. McGonagle recognised that traditional museums and methodology connotated negative images for many people. He realises that museums need to be humanised and made available to a wider public. "IMMA's immediate aims disregard the high connoisseurship, the rarified elitism and the supposed ideological neutrality of a conventional museum" (Hutchinson, 1991, p.10)

To encourage people to come into the Museum, McGonagle decided to popularise, publicise and integrate the museum more fully into the community. Through the Museum's Education/Community Programme the Museum is incorporating a wide range of developments that are relevant to the improvement of the quality of life for people. (see p. 49 for the Irish Museum of Modern Art's Education/Community Programme). These developments are especially concerned with the Kilmainham area.

The relationship between the museum and the Family Resource Centre, St. Michael's Estate, Inchicore has been growing since 1991 when the Women's group collaborated with IMMA in 1991. Groups from the Resource Centre

have been happy with the outcome of the museum's community art projects, and so a proposal for working has been developed for the Inchicore area for 1994/95. For 1995 the Education and Community Department will explore a number of issues that have been identified through their developing contact with community groups.

IRISH MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

EDUCATION/COMMUNITY PROGRAMME

(A) Formal Education

1. Teacher's Workshops, In-service Days, Summer In-service Courses and Contact with Schools
2. Pre-arranged projects on all exhibitions with schools
 - (a) Primary
 - (b) Second level
long-term contact programmes with 5 local schools
(model project)
 - (c) Third level
based at IMMA work/projects with colleges

(B) Community

1. Parent/child event on movement
2. Active Age exhibition and continuing project, touring exhibition
(model project)
3. Women's project triggered by Great Book (model project)
4. Youth projects
5. Children's Workshops
6. Writer's Workshops
projects in developments
7. Traveller's Community
8. Adult Youth Leaders

Since Helen O'Donoghue has instigated bonds between the museum and local community groups, exhibitions now include artwork of certain local community groups.

The Ceremonious exhibition, to mark the opening of IMMA, included the paintings from the local Active Age group. This local community group contributed to the opening, with their exhibition entitled, The Time of Our Lives. According to McGonagle The Time of Our Lives brought in the widest appeal to the opening of the museum.

The exhibition consisted of paintings mainly from postcards, landscapes, interiors, watercolours and oils. The overall theme Inheritance and Transformation incorporated different levels of art. Importance was given to Sunday painters; the type of art that would have been previously rebuked in museums and art colleges: " the whole parish people who had never been in the Royal Hospital and regarded it as a no go area for ordinary people, who have now flooded in to see our work " (IMMA, Press Release No. 4, 1992) The " new public " are people who have always kept away from museums out of shyness and dignity, thinking that museums weren't for the likes of them.

Helen O'Donoghue instigated the bonds between the men's group and the museum. The museum approached the men's group with the option of working with Ahearn. The men decided to participate in the project as Ahearn's casting procedure appealed to them. Community art groups may endorse or reject any project proposed by IMMA, who then usually set about compiling other suitable projects for the group. The men exhibited in the, From Beyond the Pale exhibition.

At the evaluation the men admitted not having seen the exhibition in which they were partaking. They confessed that they " didn't understand" and couldn't relate "to all that modern stuff" (Author in interview with Jimmy) Declan McGonagle has taken some measures to try and resolve the problems of communication between the museum and certain public groups. Nevertheless more effort is needed if the gap between the art critics and those living in the non-art world is to be narrowed, (even if the museum is mainly targeting a certain perceived audience).

The question of language causes anxious debate as does communication. The question of language needs to be explained by the museum to the public. IMMA tends to show sequences of rooms of art with minimal explanation (if any). There is no information as to what the work depicts or how the artist makes the piece.

It could be said that by supplying more information about the artist's intentions that the museum would be "spoon feeding" the public and by not handing things to people on a plate, the viewer would solve and discover things for themselves. However, if the "new audience" that Declan McGonagle talks about is to come into the museum, I believe it is necessary to indicate what the artist is portraying and how the work was approached, in order that the language used be understood. An in-depth knowledge of the artefact is not needed, only a hint of basic information.

It could be said that such minimal information labels are to try and deliberately intrigue and challenge the viewer. I argue that this only further gears the museum toward the artistically and intellectually educated in society - the perceived art public.

A survey of museums was issued to local people in Kilmainham and the outcome established that the main users of the museum are predominantly middle class, educated people. The museum has the task to fill the gap between the museum and the billboard outside, and to exhibit art that a wide range of audiences (not just scholars) can come and learn about in order that the knowledge of artefacts within an exhibition will be shared with the public. Other potential audiences have the right to be informed and enticed to visit IMMA as it is their taxpaying money which helps support the museum. No huge investment of museum budget is required to help pass on information. Groups such as the Men's group could maybe begin to comprehend some of the notions behind the different art languages if a better knowledge of art could be provided for them.

It is fair to say that the museum helps provide support for community art groups and for lesser known artists. Regrettably the museum is only supportive to a certain extent. On asking the men if they owned their work - they didn't know, nothing had been arranged for the work after the exhibition. The museum didn't deny or declare ownership of the work, which I find ambiguous. Firstly, because this concludes that the museum is not directly responsible for the curatorship of the work (the latter being very important as IMMA is partly responsible for the recording of contemporary art/heritage). Secondly, if the museum does undertake responsibility for the work, the possibility remains that the work could become retained in a vault similar to many collections that end up in many museums.

The conventional argument goes that the art created through community art practice is qualitatively much poorer than that created by professional artists. This is probably why the museum does not purchase, curate or accept responsibility for the work. I argue that if the museum will provide and host

community art projects, aspects such as ownership and curatorship should be arranged in order that the community art process would be completed. Loose-ended and semi-completed projects could become prey to the conflicts and dilemmas that come hand in hand with community and public art.

As the museum's main task is to provide art of high connoisseurship, only a small fraction of the museum's budget is allocated towards community art. IMMA is making sure that their interest in community art does not result in a compromise of their standards. Levels of sensitivity, vision, appreciation and understanding will mainly be raised by professional artists.

The museum makes available lectures, seminars and research facilities for the groups. Regrettably most of the above mentioned are geared towards educated intellectual art lovers - thus most of the community groups haven't attended. At the final evaluation of the Men's group project, the curators evaluated the work, not the men. The meeting was bombarded by a series of questions from the curators. This, in turn overpowered the men who minimised their participation to monosyllabic yes/no answers. Sometimes when a group coincides with an institute too many overpowering opinions are available and inflicted on groups. Other than this the men did have free reign over the project. Ahearn admitted that the museum didn't put any restraints on him at all.

Where funding for community art projects is concerned it can be an advantage to collaborate with an institution. Competent committees have the experience and the knowledge to forecast funding and carry out realistic budgets. Local authorities and city councils lack the necessary organs to undertake community art projects. Andrew Bowen, a community artist who works in conjunction with the County Council found that his biggest problems

were funding, facilities and restrictions. According to him the council did want to achieve "great things" but only allocated £50 for a project to be undertaken (in comparison to the men's group whose project cost a few thousand for a few artefacts).

The effectiveness of museum education such as it's community art projects isn't really known yet. All of the groups working with artists in residency programmes are relatively new to the system. Certain groups such as the men's group have had some follow up opportunities to projects. Long-term projects allow participants to dabble with art and master materials, enabling people to try to express themselves clearly, and integrate with the group.

Does community art benefit groups such as the Men's art group at the end of the day, or is it merely a social distraction for their never-ending problems? The question remains a grey area. Community art can encourage critical self evaluation and debate and can also help in the reclaiming of lives if used properly. 1993/94 saw an increase in funding in the country for community arts activity. *government community arts is a cheap* for the ~~government, the country and is a cheap~~ alternative to job creation, it is cheaper to fund a community arts project than it is to put people in jobs. This is possibly why there has been a slight increase in funding from government bodies for community art. The Government can be seen as using public art to contain an already problematic situation.

IMMA's attempts to develop an audience as wide-ranging as possible through community art is beginning to come about. Proposals have been drafted for 1995 community arts activities. The proposal for the year ahead includes (as well as the visual community arts activities) additional performance programmes, reflecting both the museum's series of exhibitions and it's philosophy of challenging traditional expectations. IMMA also hopes that the

museum will be further utilised during the Summer by organising events that will be held in the courtyard and surrounding grounds of the museum.

The men were particularly happy with the outcome of their art project with Ahearn (author in interview with the men's group), but are still very sceptical and unfamiliar with " all that modern stuff " inside the museum. It is their working on site with the community arts project that helps the men keep in contact with the museum. The casting project appealed to them and they enjoyed the project at IMMA. Ahearn also enjoyed the project despite the confusion about his role as a technical advisor at the beginning. Ahearn felt that the community arts programme in operation at IMMA is extremely well curated and highly efficient, never had he seen a museum undertake so many community projects and provide sufficient capital, care and attention for them all.

CONCLUSION

Nobody can argue the importance of IMMA's introduction of community art into the museum system.

However, because only a small percentage of the Museum's total expenditure is allocated to its community art programme, few people get the chance to partake in their activities. Increased funding is required from the Government institutions and grant giving bodies for community arts. The State and its institutions have failed to provide everyone with an opportunity to enhance their creative potential through participation in the arts. Increased funding could then be used to provide opportunities to establish long term groups rather than once off short term projects. Short term projects allow no time to provide the services demanded by communities from community arts. Secondly it limits opportunities for the community art groups to integrate and co-ordinate art work in society. Short term projects do not provide a comprehensive arts experience for participants.

It is uncertain as to whether community arts practice is seen as a legitimate practice in the arts. In a country that is experiencing increased economic pressure from unemployment it is an easier option for the government to provide an escapist route for both the government and its participants. The government need to face up to the problems and not "use" community art as an outlet for the problem of a somewhat failed government system.

There is no doubt as to the phenomenal growth in adult education and creative activities. The Men's and Women's Groups at Inchicore and the active age group are but three examples.

Community art is not confined to the Dublin area but merely the grant giving bodies are all situated in the capital region giving less opportunities to those beyond the Pale.

Everyone has the potential to be creative, creativity can be worked on like any other form of intelligence but facilities and training are needed to help this come about. Without knowledge of creative language the public cannot hope to take part in cultural history nor can they comprehend existing art cultures - which are apparently for our "benefit". Community art has demonstrated that people can and will take creativity back into their own hands, to voice their own opinions or simply as a creative activity. IMMA has begun to pave the way for this type of creative expression within the institutional framework. Nevertheless if creative expression is to have real impact, larger numbers of people need to be included in community arts activities. It needs to occur on a national level with museums, galleries, concert halls and theatres taking part. As J.M. Synge once commented, "*All art is a collaboration*". Let's hope that more people will become included in this collaboration and that other institutes will take example from IMMA's effort to target new audiences for the Museum.

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INTERVIEWS

Helen O'Donoghue, Education Officer at IMMA; time 4.00 p.m. -5.00 p.m.,
date 21.10.94

John Ahearn, Community Artist, at IMMA, Time 12.00 noon - 1.00 p.m., date
1.11.94

John Ahearn, Community Artist, at IMMA, Time 11.00 a.m. - 12.30 p.m., date
7.11.94

Lar Cassidy of the Arts Council, time 12.30 p.m. - 2.00 p.m., date 24.11.94

John Webster of the Men's Group, time 11.30 a.m. - 12.00 noon, date 4.12.94

