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# ARTISTS AS DESIGNERS OF TAPESTRY: LOUIS LE BROCQUY, PATRICK SCOTT AND MARY FITZGERALD.

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

There are several options from which to choose when working within tapestry today, but the one which appeals to me is the artist/weaver collaboration. As a textile student myself, I feel very narrow-minded and slightly brain-washed when it comes to tapestry. My entire appreciation and general understanding of this discipline has all developed from my time within college. As a result of this and quite understandably so, I have always thought of the designer and weaver of a tapestry as being one and the same. Therefore, the process of a painter designing a tapestry and then giving it to a relitively anonymous weaver to be woven, absolutely fascinates me.

This thesis aims to take a closer look at the artists' difficulties and successes in designing for tapestry instead of the much documented struggle of the skilled weaver.

The artists I have chosen to examine are Louis Le Brocquy, Patrick Scott, and Mary Fitzgerald, three very popular and widely recognised, practising Irish painters, who have at one time, or still are today, designing for tapestry. Through interviews and research of their work I hope to give a comprehensive insight into their reasons for and processes of working in tapestry. I also intend to compare their finished tapestries with their paintings. Do similarities and differences occur, if so why, and is there any sort of relationship between these two bodies of work?

Because the history of tapestry has been such a turbulent one, I find it necessary to give a brief sketch of how it has evolved, in order to explain how William Morris and Jean Lurcat both pioneered methods to save the declining art of tapestry in the late 1800s and 1900s respectively. Although this is all established information, it is essential to include as it will show where a lot of points I intend to discuss have their roots and, in turn, will strengthen and clarify my overall discussion.

The role played by both the artist and weaver over the centuries has been an unsettled and much disputed one, as will already have been clearly shown. But as it is such an integral part of my thesis, I will take a closer look at it and the contraversial points arising from it: Is an artist's cartoon not merely a transference of his paintings into wool? ; and so on. I will take and use examples from throughout the history of tapestry and my own personal knowledge and experience of the subject to give an overall view of both sides of the arguement.

## CHAPTER 1: HISTORY.

The art of hand-woven tapestry is many thousands of years old; the technique used is still the same today, but the way in which it is used has changed and evolved over the centuries. These changes are both very interesting and important to my discussion. For this reason, I am going to take a brief look at the motives for these changes and subsequently the effects they have had on the art of tapestry as we know it today.

The art of making tapestry is "an old and honoured skill" (Philips, 1994, p.1) which dates from ancient times and has played a very important role in our lives throughout the centuries. During the 14th and 15th centuries it was impossible to over estimate the importance of tapestry. It was used mostly for decoration, for example, wall-hangings, furniture coverings and occasionally for personal wear. The images found on these tapestries were normally scenes from history, legend or mythology, events from the Bible, flowers and even coats of arms. During the Medival and Gothic periods, about 1400-1510, tapestry design and weaving were regarded as being at their highest order of perfection.

But this perfection was not to last and in the 16th century a revolution occured. Pieter Coecke Van Aelst, a leading Brussels weaver, was commissioned by Pope Leo X to weave the Acts of the Apostles from cartoons designed by Raphael, for the Sistine Chapel. Raphael drew and painted the cartoons in the exact form and size needed and sent them to Flanders to be woven.According to the writings of Giorgio Vasari, the

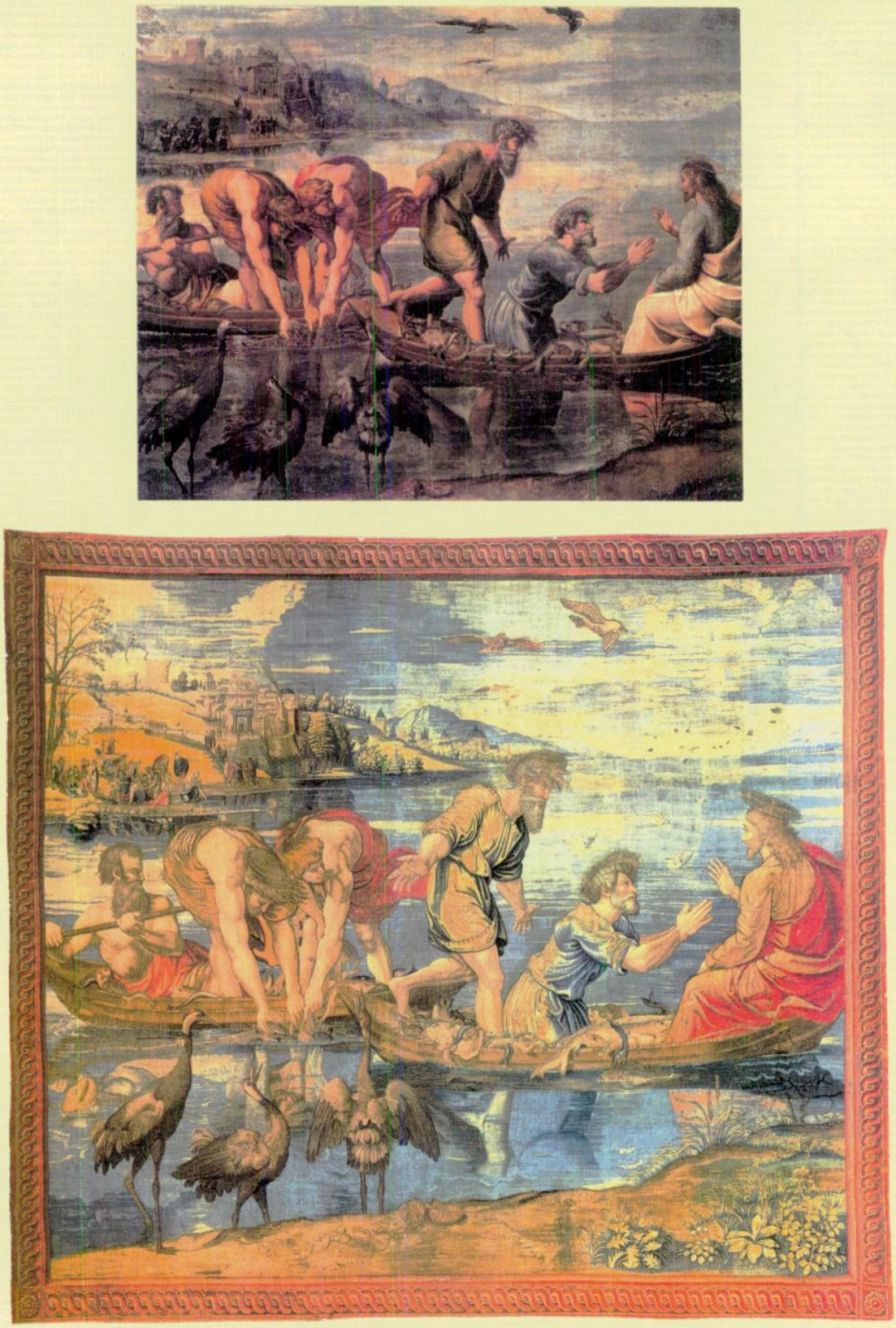

Fig. 1. The Miraculous Draught of the Fishes, one of Raphael's famous cartoons for the Acts of the Apostles series of tapestries, seen here are cartoon and finished tapestry.

completed tapestries were so beautiful that all who saw them were amazed to think that it could be possible to weave "the hair and beards so finely and to have given such softness to the flesh merely by the use of threads....." (Phillips, 1994, p.58), (Fig. 1)

Nobody who had designed tapestry cartoons before Raphael "had commanded such immense prestige or such slavish respect" (Phillips, 1994, p.58) and so an age in which the artist took creative control from the weaver began. By the end of the 16th century the impact of what Raphael had done gripped the world of tapestry. Nearly every artist with any sort of recognition tried his hand at designing cartoons to be woven into tapestries. Instead of the relaxed and easy going partnership between designer and weaver which had produced many beautiful pieces of work in both the Medieval and Gothic periods, there was an impersonal collaboration, with the weaver being used to slavishly imitate what was in front of him. Gradually the cartoon became more of a detailed painting rather than a sketch, with each tone, mark, line and colour being dictated by the artist. The end result was that tapestry became more and more like a woollen or silk copy of a painting and therefore began to compete with them.

As the paintings to be copied became increasingly sophisticated, a much larger colour palette was adopted to achieve a subtler form of shading and the extraordinarly fine detail that was necessary. The tapestries from this era became so similar to paintings that it became difficult to tell them apart. It was as if they were trying to conceal the very fact

that they were actually made from wool.

Throughout the 17th, 18th and first half of the 19th centuries, tapestry continued in this same vein, with the weavers copying the artist's cartoons; in some cases the cartoons could be finished oil paintings. In the 18th century, tapestry seemed to loose the magnificence it had commanded in previous years and became merely decorative. It is important to remember that technology at this time was also beginning to establish itself. A lot of workshops were forced to close during this period because tapestries that at one time might have covered your walls, were having to compete with cheap and novel wallpaper. To add to this, lifestyles were changing as were living spaces and tapestry was being forced to adjust. It was a combination of all these factors that led to tapestry's eventual decline.

It was not until the second half of the 19th century that we see any real attempt to re-establish the art of tapestry to the position it had once held. The first person to tackle this issue was William Morris (1834-1896). Morris was of course the man responsible for setting up 'Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company', a company which broadly aimed at re-marrying the decorative arts, such as, metalwork, furniture and textiles, with the fine arts, namely sculpture and painting. Morris maintained that the division between the two had served to trivialise the decorative arts and he wanted to restore them to their former glory.

Morris was both very critical of and dismayed at the tapestries being


Fig. 2. Flora Designed by William Morris with figures by Burne-Jones, 1890, (3.1 x 2m)

produced at the time, and was convinced that a new school based on Gothic concepts "was the only remedy that could save tapestry from oblivion" (F.P and E.S Thompson, 1980, p.158). According to H.C Marriler, Morris:

> wished to revise the art on it's pristine Gothic lines, when tapestries were designed and woven as hangings with simple colours and little more perspective than would be permissable in a stained glass window
>
> (F.P and E.S Thompson, 1980, p.159)

A number of tapestries were produced at Morris's workshop, Merton Abbey, during it's time, the first being around the end of 1881. Morris and Burne-Jones initally worked together on designs and, even as production increased, there was always a collaboration between a variety of artists and designers on the tapestries. The designs of these tapestries (Fig.2) were very similar to some early Renaissance needlework, while typically the more sophisticated techniques of the 17th and 18th centuries were strongly ignored.

William Morris played an important role in the history of tapestry. However his success was not such that a number of people began to produce tapestries in order to become overnight successes. But, through his amazing amount of lectures on the subject, Morris made the public realise that what he was doing was new and innovative, and, more importantly, he made people aware of and involved in tapestry who previously might have had little or no interest in it. In a lot of ways

Morris was a prodigy and was way ahead of his time. If he had lived to be over 100 years old, he would have found a strong ally in the Frenchman, Jean Lurcat.

Jean Lurcat (1892-1966) was, in my opinion, the most influential man in the history of tapestry to date. Lurcat was not a weaver at all but rather a painter. In the late 1950s he saw the 14th century Apocalypse tapestry, woven between 1337 and 1380 by Nicolas Bataille, in the castle at Angers (Fig.3) and he was immensely impressed. After this visit, he became completely involved in tapestry and, like Morris, his ideal dream was to return tapestry to the style and technique that had existed before the time of Raphael.

In 1939, in an attempt to halt the slow death of French tapestry, Marcel Gromaire, also a painter, and Jean Lurcat were appointed to offically work with the Aubusson weavers in the hope of finding some way to re-establish French tapestry. The Germans had just invaded France and living conditions were practically impossible but still Lurcat set about achieving his objectives. He started by reducing the colour palette at Aubusson to around 45 tones and completely banned the use of perspective. He also insisted on a much looser, coarser texture on a finished tapestry, so that it could not be mistaken for a painting. By creating such a system of working, Lurcat could begin to realise his goal of breaking away from making picture-like tapestries: "he sought to create an art-form combining the vision of the designer with the inspirational interpretation of the weaver - to make tapestry a joint

Fig. 3. Apocalypse of St. John, a set of 6 emormous panels (5.53m high and altogether 145m long), woven by Nicholas Bataille between 1337 and 1380.

creation."(F.P and E.S Thompson, 1980, p.160).

Lurcat gathered many French artists around him in Aubusson and between them they designed many great tapestries and were absolutely crucial in reviving the weaving community there. This big impact made by Lurcat from about 1945 onwards, seems all the more impressive as the world had been starved of creative and colourful art throughout the war. Lurcat's work gave new directions, initiatives and much encouragement to artists and a whole new lease of life to tapestry. He also felt that since the fresco was becoming extinct, tapestry would be the ideal substitute. He argued that the "robustness and mobility of tapestry " (Phillips, 1994, p.140), meant it was better suited to the ever-changing modern tastes and interiors.

One of Lurcat's most famous achievements was, of course, the launching of the continuing Biennale exhibitions, at Lausanne, Switzerland in the early 1960s. By organising these exhibitions, Lurcat gave independent artist-weavers, a chance to show their work and, more importantly, created a centre for the discussion and cross-fertilization of new ideas and techniques. These exhibitions, which continue to take place today, are still the most important and prestigous meeting-points for tapestry weavers from all over the world.

Not only did Lurcat preach his new ideas; he also practised them, as is very evident from both his designing and weaving of more than 1000

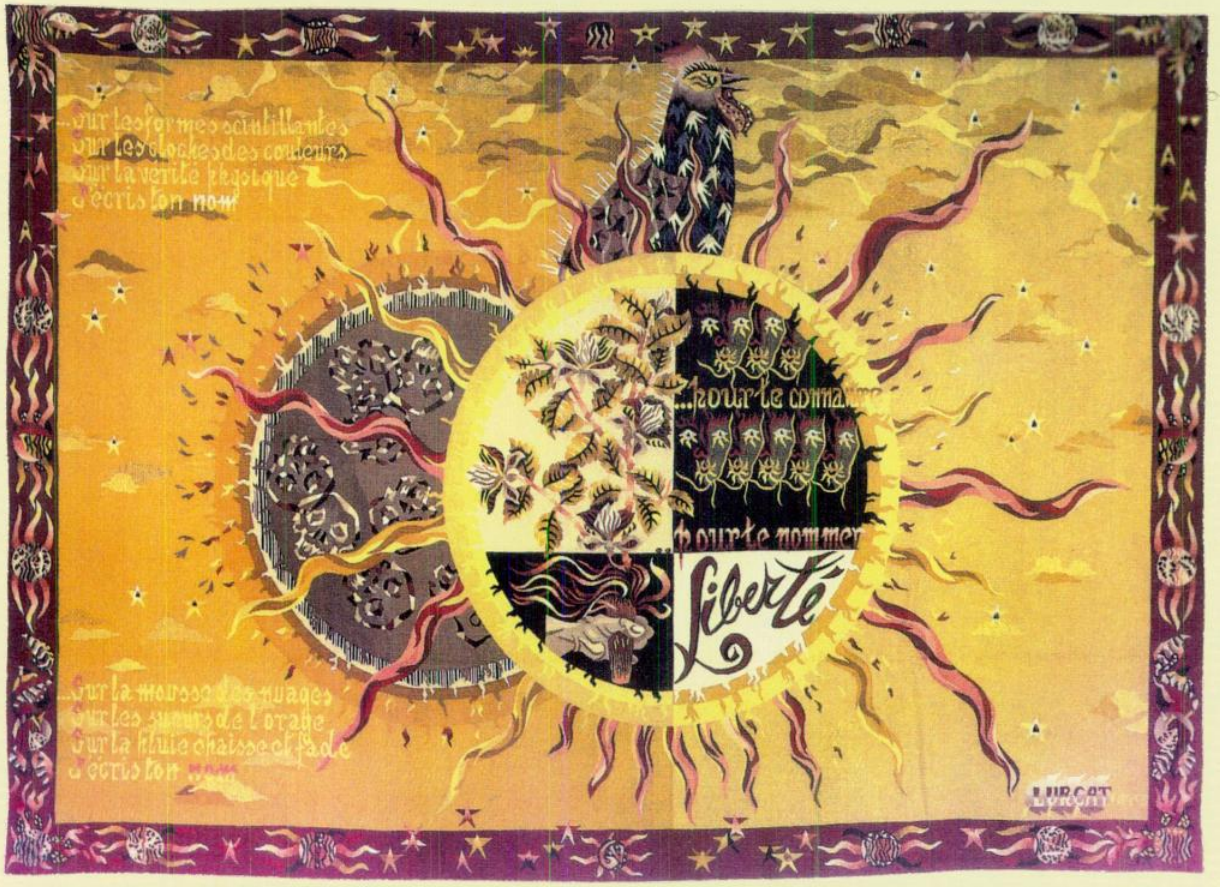


Fig. 4. Liberte, 1943, (2.83m x 3.30m) Designed by Lurcat and woven at Aubusson.

pieces during his lifetime (Fig. 4) He was still working on his most formidable work in both size and concept, Le Chant du Monde, 10 huge panels woven with complex imagery in which death and war feature strongly, at the time of his death in 1966.

Lurcat was certainly a key figure in influencing tapestry to follow the path it has and in getting it to the position we are familiar with today. Despite all the euphoria he generated by his new ideas at the time, he could not return tapestry to the innocent art it had been before Raphael; too much had happened for anyone to achieve this. I feel that perhaps his main contribution was the breaking down of old ideas and attitudes that had tapestry stuck in the rut it was in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was his strong feelings for and belief in tapestry that encouraged more and more artists to become interested in it as a form of expression and, in turn, it began to reclaim it's place as a major art form, which it had gradually lost over the years.

The history of tapestry has been a turbulent one. Everything seemed to change after Raphael designed cartoons to be woven, the painter became too important and subsequently the weaver lost almost all importance. I do not feel that this was the sole reason for the slow death that tapestry experienced over the centuries, because people, life-styles, living-spaces, were all changing and as a direct result of this tapestry seemed to loose it's magnificance.

Had it not been for both Morris and Lurcat, tapestry could have remained like this forever. These men realised exactly what had happened and was

happening at the time and set about trying to restore tapestry to it's prestigous place among the arts. Both were very sucessful in their own right, but possibly Lurcat more so. This was more than likely as a direct result of his location, France, which was recognised as the centre of great tapestry and also his timing, just after the Second World War, when people were completely dismayed and seeking some new directions.

## CHAPTER 2: THE ROLE AND RELATIONSHIP OF THE ARTIST AND WEAVER WITHIN TAPESTRY.

As has been quite clearly illustrated in the previous chapter, the process of tapestry-making took quite a twist in the 16th century when Raphael was commissioned to design cartoons. This event meant that the world of tapestry was never going to be quite the same again. The entire relationship between the designer of the cartoon and the weaver of that same cartoon became a highly controversial issue.

Up to the time of Raphael, tapestries were woven by following a type of cartoon, which was actually more of a line drawing or sketch and even this was only used as a loose guide. Certain shapes, lines and even colours might not always remain true to the original. This process of working was very informal and relaxed allowing both the designer and weaver to quite freely make changes and decisions. But following Raphael's full sized paintings for the series of tapestries commissioned by the Vatican, the painted cartoon became popular, where every detail was drawn and painted for the weaver to copy. And this was where all the contraversy began.

Before Raphael, the weaver had a certain amount of freedom. When working,the weaver could change parts of the design just because he felt like it, because he preferred it another way or maybe in a different colour. But after Raphael, the weaver's job was altered and he could no longer make any decisions that might influence the final piece. His role

was stripped of any expression and freedom, and reduced to one that required him to mindlessly transpose each colour, line and tone of a finished painting into his medium.

This, in turn, led to yet another arguement, which raised the whole question of whether the weaver's role was to copy or to create? It was felt, quite strongly by the weavers of course, that tapestries were becoming nothing more than woollen copies of paintings, woven so finely that the two looked amazingly similar unless examined very closely. This literally meant that tapestry was being reduced from it's position as a great art to one that provided a service similar to that of a modern day colour photocopier.

A solution to this problem sounds simple enough; just get rid of the painters and let the weavers design the tapestries. But unfortunately this could not be done. The fact was that the tapestry world needed the painters in order to revive the industry. Painting was and still is generally better known and more prestigous an art than tapestry. For this reason painters were approached and asked to design tapestries. In France, for example, in 1933 many great artists such as Picasso, Miro, Dufy and Lurcat were commissioned to design cartoons (Fig. 5). Although all that emerged were picture-like tapestries more costly than the originals, "influential attention had been drawn to the plight of tapestry" (F.P and E.S Thompson, 1980, p.186). So too in Scotland, in 1949, the same approach was adopted and the Dovecot Studio in Edinburgh contacted artists such as Henry Moore, Louis Le Brocquy and Graham


Fig. 5. Amphytrite, designed by Raoul Dufy in 1936 and woven at Aubusson, (2.4 x 2m).

Fig. 6. Travellers, 1948, designed by Louis Le Brocquy and woven in the Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh.

Sutherland, who all submitted designs to be woven (Fig. 6).

Although the weavers were glad of this work and undoubtedley a lot of these commissions kept certain studios from completely closing down, they were still totally frustrated. The fact was that the weaver was meant to weave up a cartoon created by an artist who presumably knew next to nothing about the discipline he was designing for, and yet it was the artist and not the weavers that would reap all the final praise and reward. As Jules Guiffery said:

> Could we not leave it to the weavers, who have all been through a long apprenticeship, more liberty and initiative to pick the colours, the effect of which they know better than anyone else?
>
> (Madeline Jarry, 1980, p.9)

This long and very drawn out argument has ensued initially as a result of Raphael's commissions way back in 1515. As with so many arguments, there can of course be no correct or incorrect answer. As a textile-student myself, I find it very easy to take the side of the weaver. Tapestry, for one not used to it, is an amazingly slow discipline and even the smallest piece can take weeks. From having the experience of weaving a small one myself, I don't know that at the end of it all, I could be happy being only an anonymous part of all that work, with the tapestry only being recognized and praised on the basis of the painter's involvement. But I now know that this is quite a romantic view of tapestry. The people who weave up artist's designs are professionals; it is their job and they enjoy doing it.

It must also be realised that the job of the artist is not an entirely easy one either. Many artists over the years, have had tapestries woven from their paintings and not all of them have been successful. In fact, a lot of tapestries have fallen well short of the qualities achieved in the original paintings. An artist must also find it very difficult to remain within the technical boundaries of tapestry. It is so easy just to swipe a brush across a canvas in two seconds flat, without even thinking about it and it's consequences. Tapestry is the complete opposite to this. Everything must be well planned out all in advance; no one piece of the tapestry can ever be more than a couple of inches ahead of the rest. In 1969 when David Hockney was working in collaboration with the Dovecot Studio on a piece, he told Archie Brennan:

> that he found it fascinating - that what he could do with a brush in a matter of minutes took them literally days - there was a long silence and no comment.
>
> (Master Weavers, 1980, p.88)

Tapestry is a truely amazing medium. It possess chameleon-like characteristics which make it possible for an expert weaver to re-create virtually any qualities that can be achieved on paper - be it watercolour, pencil drawing, lino-block or dry-point, for example (Fig. 7). It can even go as far as to re-create a 3-D sculpture, with every detail including scale and textures being perfectly simulated. Because of these quite unique characteristics that tapestry boasts, it's not very surprising that it has fallen victim to much abuse and contraversy over the centuries.

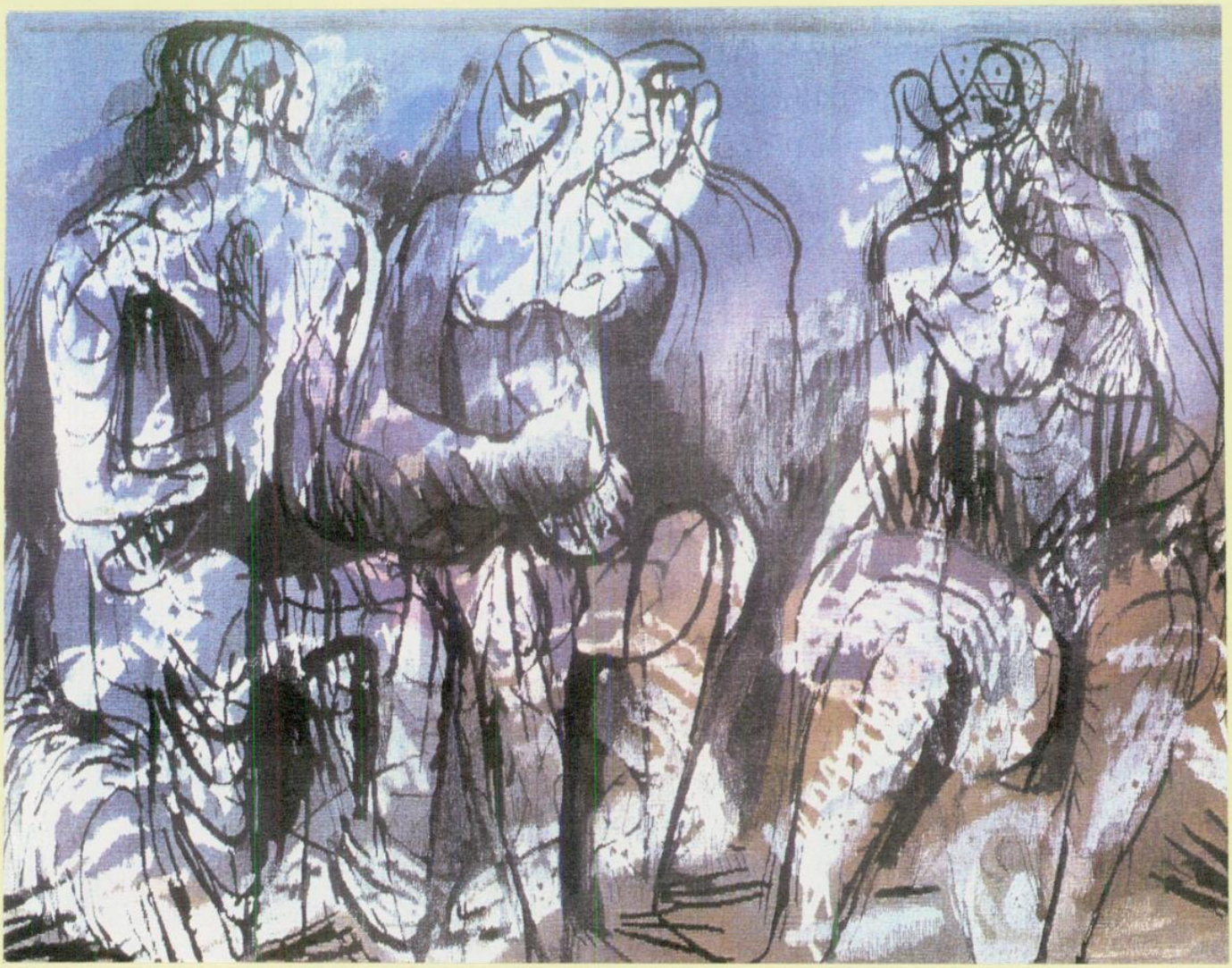

Fig. 7. Three Seated Figures by Henry Moore, 1940-41. Watercolour and wax crayon, woven by the West Dean Studios.

But it seems quite obvious to me that both artist and weaver need each other. An artist does not want to become a tapestry weaver and a weaver does not necessarily want to become an artist. It is some sort of understanding and comprimise between the two that will produce a harmonious relationship and in turn result in high quality pieces of work. To be successful and well-known as an artist is an amazingly difficult task and only a handfull of people within a lifetime will actually realise this dream and become another Leonardo or Raphael. So this would suggest that the ones who actually succeed must be truly gifted and unique, possessing something that all the others lacked.

Weaving in comparision, is generally considered to be a skill and young boys served apprenticeships to learn this skill. Of course there will always be tapestry-weavers that are more skillful and rise above all the others, but it is easy for a lot of people to learn this skill and be relatively competant at it. As Micheal Touriere, a French tapestry artist and painter said:

> A good cartoon badly woven will still make a good tapestry, but if one lets the very best weavers weave a bad cartoon that will never make a good tapestry.
>
> (Glibota, 1981, p.159)

I am not saying that the weavers should in any way play an inferior or secondary role, more that they should recognise the part they do play and it's importance. What would be the point in an artist designing for tapestry, if there was no-one to weave it up? This similar situation

appears in many different disciplines today. Fashion is the classic example. Are we aware of who actually sews up Vivienne Westwood's clothes? No, but if there were no skilled people to do it, then there would be no clothes!

The weaver must also advise the tapestry artist as to the suitability of designs. What is extremely easy to do on canvas, could prove just too time consuming to translate into a tapestry. Although the weaver may have only learned a skill, his advice to the almost ignorant artist is crucial to the overall success of the piece. So it would seem that a strong and very understanding relationship between the two is the best recipe for successful tapestry-making.

Probably the best example of this successful partnership is the Dovecot Studio in Edinburgh. A weaver, Archie Brennan, was head of the studio at the time of Lurcat's revolutionary ideas, and it was these, ideas that, influenced him to revise the working processes in the studio which led to it's eventual success.

> The weavers have had exceptional success in translating other artists' work, principally because Archie Brennan was so tactfully skillful. For where a musician may interpret a composer's music with impunity, to tamper with an artist's picture is usually considered something close to blasphemy. He was able more over to build up a marvellous rapport with many of the artists involved and under his direction the Dovecot went from strength to strength working with many top British and American artists.
>
> (Hodge, 1980, p.42)

This method of working involves close collaboration between both parties. The design is discussed and analysed, changed and changed again. Trial samples are woven and opinions given, until finally everybody is agreed. By no means is this a speedy operation; it can take days, weeks and perhaps even months, but once this difficult groundwork has been carried out, each tapestry designed and woven after this becomes easier.

With the artist and designer working in this manner, it also means that the final tapestry will never be just a copy of the original cartoon. The cartoon must be subjected to the weaver's criticisms and advice, so much so, that in particular cases the finished tapestry might not resemble the cartoon from which it originally came at all.

> The designer must be sure that the weavers understand his intentions, as weaving is not a mere reproductive process, and how the weavers interpret the marks he makes can have an enormous difference on the treatment of the design.
>
> (Harold Cohen, 1980, p.13)

The artist and weaver working together sensitively, should produce a strong and very successful collaboration and subsequently produce high quality tapestries. This is not only to do with such obvious reasons as the artist not wanting to spend the necessary hours weaving up a

tapestry or the weaver having no desire to design his own cartoons. Today more practical reasons are called into play.

A tapestry is a very expensive investment for anybody, and quite naturally it would feel more worthwhile paying the required price for a tapestry designed by a well known artist, rather than that by a practically un-known fibre artist. Time is also another very important factor to be considered. If an artist is commissioned to design a tapestry, they will then take their design to a workshop, such as V'soske Joyce in Galway, where it will be woven up by a team of professional weavers. Up to seven or eight people could be working side by side on one tapestry, which means that it could be completed in a matter of months. In comparision to the fibre-artist, who, at the most might have one or two helpers and more than likely has to sustain a day-job to support themselves, subsequently their tapestries could take years to complete.

All these factors effect the three artist's I have chosen to discuss, as the general body of their tapestries have all been for commissions. Therefore it is more sensible and practical for the commissioner's of a tapestry to approach an artist working in collaboration with a workshop, rather than the independant fibre-artist. The cross-fertilization of the artist's innovative designing and flair with the weaver's patience and skill, should produce the most amazing pieces of work, all of which we are fortunate enough to be able to witness today.

## CHAPTER 3: LOUIS LE BROCQUY, PATRICK SCOTT AND MARY FITZGERALD'S INITIAL INVOLVEMENT AND METHODS OF DESIGNING FOR TAPESTRY.

Taking a glance at the history of tapestry-weaving over the last 3000 years, it will become quite evident that the role of an artist as a designer of tapestry has only existed during the last 450, all of which has been discussed at some length already. Ireland however, does not have such a long history. Tapestry was introduced by the Heugenots in the 17th century and during the 18th century tapestry workshops existed in both Dublin and Kilkenny.

Although this lack of history exists, there have been quite a few names synonymous with the world of Irish tapestry. The best known of these are painters. I have chosen to examine, Louis Le Brocquy, Patrick Scott and Mary Fitzgerald, definitely three of the best and most successful painters to have been involved with the art of tapestry in Ireland.

I intend to take a closer look at how their involvement with tapestry occured, and using the guidelines discussed for a successful collaboration between painter and weaver working within this medium, in the previous chapter, where exactly do they fit?

Louis Le Brocquy is a most distinguised living, Irish painter who was born in Dublin in 1916. After an early period of self-training in Europe, he returned to Dublin and began to paint. He soon developed a unique personal style and started out on the road to becoming a successful painter. His talent has not only been limited to painting and his years of creative work so far, have included drawing, graphics,

design and, of course, tapestry.

Patrick Scott is also a successful and distinguised Irish painter, who was born in Co.Cork in 1921, and is a contemporary of Le Brocquy. After studying architecture in U.C.D, he entered the world of painting and soon began to find success. Scott, not unlike Le Brocquy, was very open to and interested in a variety of different media, one of which quite obviously included tapestry.

Mary Fitzgerald although slightly younger than the other two, is considerably well established already. She was born in Dublin in 1956 and, after studying sculpture in N.C.A.D, went to University in Japan to learn about painting and papermaking. At the moment she is enjoying continuing success with both her painting and tapestry designs.

As painters working within their chosen discipline of painting, I found it very interesting to discover how they became associated with tapestry to begin with.

Le Brocquy falls into the category of artists who were approached by the tapestry industry during the energetic post-war fervour for reform and improvement. Although this revelution had its roots mainly with Lurcat in France, it found an equally energetic counterpart in the previously mentioned Dovecot Studio in Scotland (Fig. 8). It was this studio who in 1948, approached and commissioned Le Brocquy, among others, to design for tapestry. In an interview with Harriet Cooke in the Irish Times, in 1973, Le Brocquy described his own involvement with tapestry as

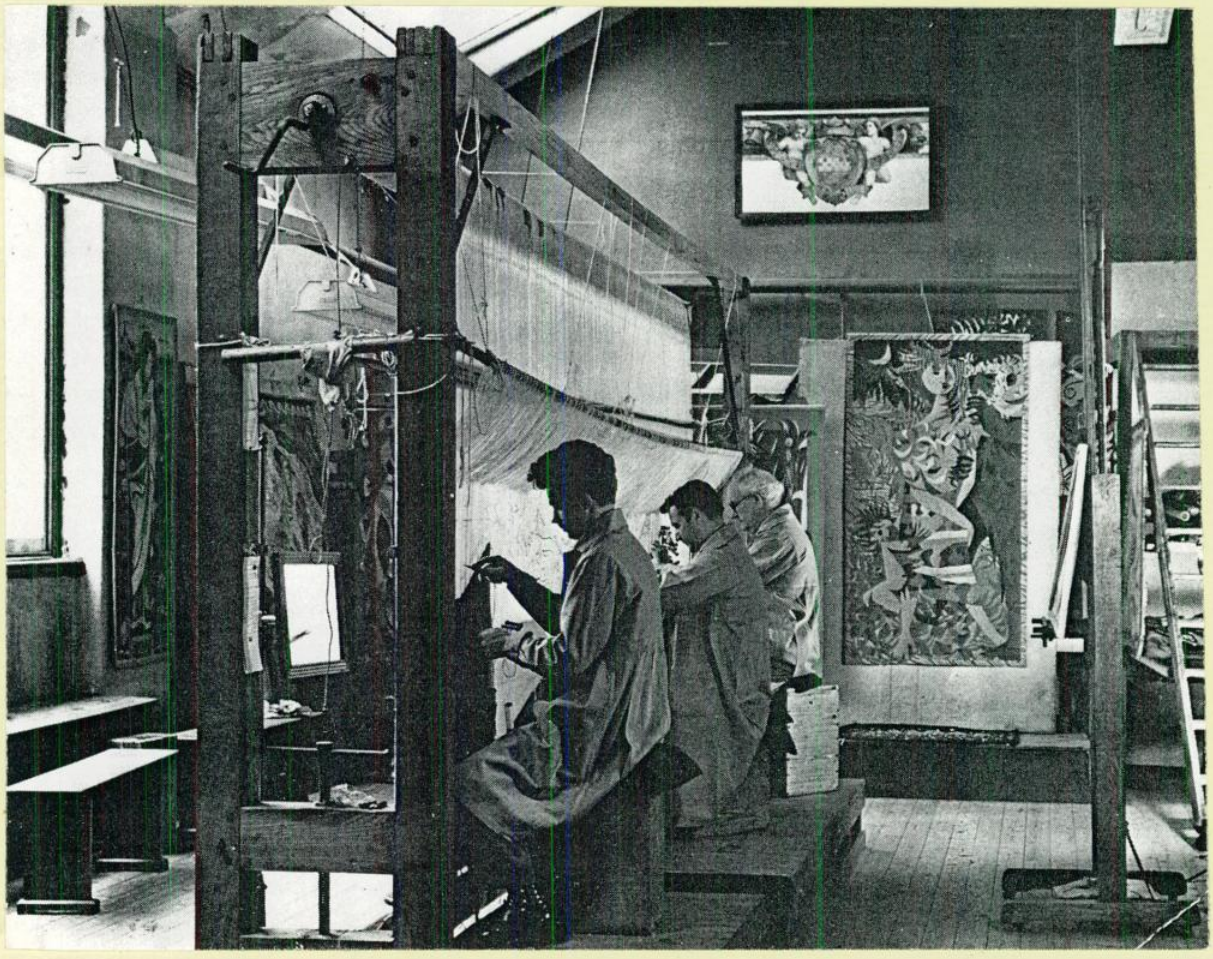

Fig. 8. The Dovecot Studios. Weavers working at a high-warp loom dating from about 1960. Notice Le Brocquy's Tinkers in the background.

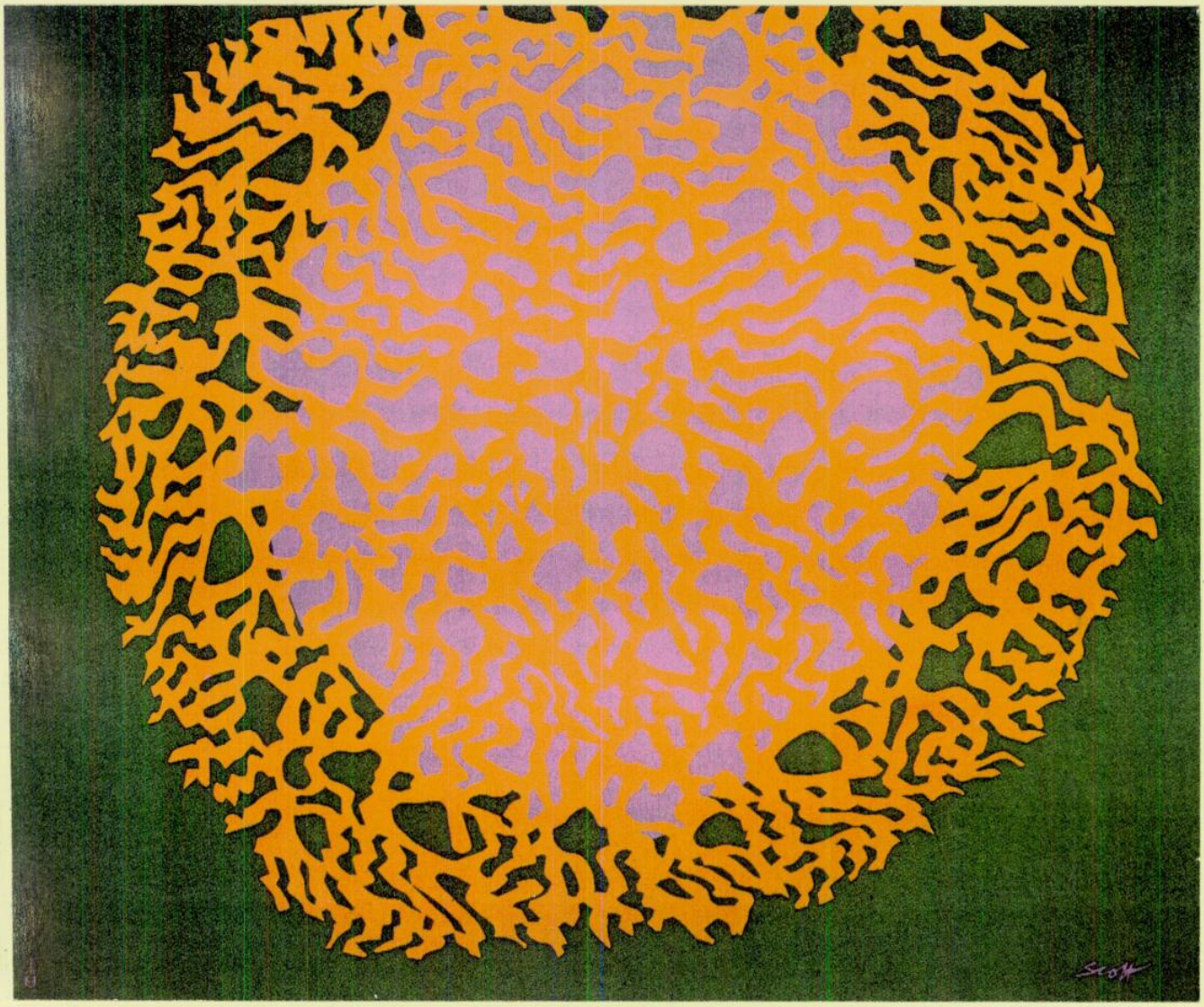

Fig 9. Shangarry by Patrick Scott, wool tapestry woven at Aubusson. A variation on his first tapestry that he designed for Michael O'Flaherty's house in Kinsale.

something he had "rather stumbled into by accident".

Pat Scott was also approached, not by a studio but rather by an individual. Michael O'Flaherty was familiar with and possessed a couple of Scott's paintings and so commissioned him to design a tapestry to hang above his bed, in his well known house designed by Robin Walker (of Scott, Tallon and Walker) in Kinsale (Fig. 9).

Mary Fitzgerald, not unlike the other two, was also approached and asked to design a tapestry, although strictly speaking the technique she uses is not actually woven, rather a gun is used to punch the fibres into a backing cloth. Her task was considerably more complicated than a straight-forward hanging. It involved designing a tapestry to cover the stairs in the Government Offices in Merrion St., during their refurbishment in 1993,(Fig.10). It was from these first commissions that all three artists came in contact with tapestry and due to the high quality of the finished pieces of work, they were either approached again or decided themselves to continue working in this medium.

As I have gone to some depth to clarify in Chapter 2, the fundamental difference, for me, in whether an artist will actually design successfully for tapestry, lies in the cartoon (Fig. 11).As Louis Le Brocquy said;

> For any designer who has made a cartoon by this direct method of Lurcat, and by the indirect, copy-a-painting method of shall we say, Boucher, there can be no remaining doubt in eye or mind as to the superiority

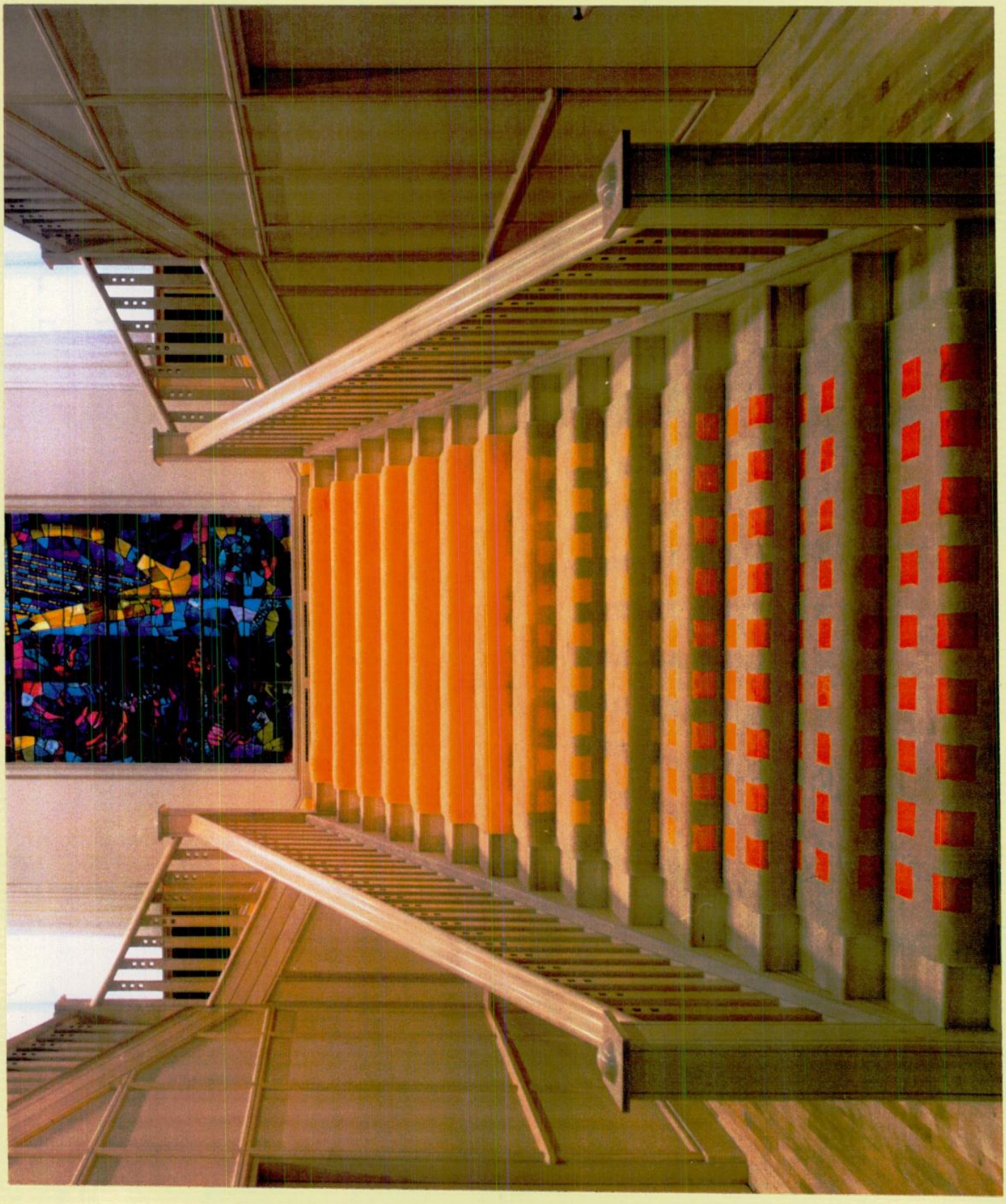

Fig 10. Mary Fitzgerald's tapestry to cover the stairs in the Government offices in Merrion Street.

Fig. 11. Example of a cartoon and finished tapestry made by following Lurcat's revolutionary methods, Trois Guerriers, 1925.

> of the former when comparing the two resultant tapestries.
>
> (Walker, 1981, pp.30, 31)

Not surprisingly, Le Brocquy is a big fan of the 19th Century tapestry reformer, Jean Lurcat. Unlike other artists designing for tapestry at the time, Le Brocquy would not allow his paintings to be directly copied by the weavers; instead he practised the rigorous methods of Lurcat.

> In this the artist produced a full-scale graphic design for his tapestry, annotated with numbers denoting areas of particular colour in a range of dyed wools. The design was thus conceived like a musical score, in initally imperceptible colour indicated by signs. The realization of the the woven work added its own surprise to the graphic conception.
>
> (Madden, 1994, p.94)

Louis was actually fortunate enough to have had the pleasure of a visit from Jean Lurcat to his studio in London. By this stage tapestry had become so important to Lurcat that painting had become fragile and vunerable and lost all significance. Louis of course, still held painting as his priority but listened intently to and was "particularly delighted" by Lurcat's theme proclaiming "the woven interdependence of all things" (Madden, 1994, p.94-95). Both Patrick Scott and Mary Fitzgerald also use a technique of designing which is similar to that devised by Lurcat. They use a simplified, graphic-type outline of images, with areas of different yarns made clear either by corresponding colours or written notes. (Unfortunately, I have been unable to get hold of the cartoons used by any of my chosen artists.)

Lurcat's method of designing using the full-scale linear cartoon (Fig. 11), seems to me to be the perfect technique employed by painters when designing for tapestry. It still allows for a good weaver/designer relationship, which I shall examine shortly, but essentially it imposes no particular style on the designer. The images created by this method are usually quite graphic and in no way can an artist designing like this be accused that their finished tapestries are a mere transference of a painting into wool. It is blatantly obvious from the work of these three artists that Lurcat's method is successful in rejuvenating some of the Medieval qualities of tapestry that he admired so greatly. This method also put an end to the stream of 'woven-paintings' that were so regularly produced prior to this. And according to Le Brocquy it is also one of the most practical and straight-forward ways for him as a painter to successfully design and have his tapestries woven.

Of course, not everything can always be easily communicated through just a cartoon and again this stresses the need for a good understanding relationship between designer and weaver. Both Scott and Le Brocquy have worked with the Aubusson workshop in France, and all three have worked with V'Soske Joyce in Oughterard, Co.Galway. Subsequently they have realised the importance of a close collaboration, and work in a way that involves many trips to consult with the weavers. Firstly, a number of trial samples are woven up so the weavers can be left in no doubt as to the effect that the painter wants achieved. The actual size of the cartoon and exact colours to be used must also be worked out. Typically the artist would return to the weave studio, at regular intervals to

check on progress, or if a problem occured and of course again, prior to the completion of the tapestry to give any final pieces of instruction or advice. And in no way will a piece of work that the artist may be unhappy with leave the weaver's studio.

As a particular designer works with the same studio, a familiarity will grow, allowing for less communication and more understanding. Pat Scott most definitley achieved this through his numerous designs woven by V'Soske. He needed this understanding as he used "the sculptural possiblites of relief" (Walker, 1981, p.30), in several of his tapestries, and even went as far as to actually pioneer methods of making tapestry using V'Soske's hand-knotted, carpet-making technique.

> It is obvious that he is well aware of the scope of his materials, and can exploit the potential of each to achieve touches of pure genius.
>
> (Kavanagh, 1980, p.12)

When I asked these three artists about how they felt in relation to the person or persons actually weaving their tapestries, I got the impression, and maybe not surprizingly so, that they had not really given the subject much thought. In no way did any of them seem to be taking the weavers for granted or undervaluing their contribution. Quite the opposite, they had complete trust in them and were amazed at their patience and dedication. Scott was particularly impressed with the way in which eight could work side by side and no marks or blemishes would appear in the finished tapestry (Mercier, Dublin, 1995).

But the fact is that most of the work these artists do are for commission and these tapestries, no matter how enjoyable or refreshingly different they may be to work on, are expected to be of a high quality and a very professional finish. For this reason, the artists see the weavers as providing a skill in order to produce a finished piece of work, in the same way that Mary Fitzgerald might empoly a skilled metal-worker to cut and weld metal to be used in her paintings and, as the artist herself said, "anyway, an architect does not build the buildings he actually designs" (Mercier, Dublin, 1995).

But why are artists, rather than the people more closely involved with tapestry, asked to design for it? This has again to do with the practical and modern reasons that I have previously discussed in Chapter 2, such as time, money and so on. Therefore it is more straight-forward for a painter to become involved in, and subsequently very successful at designing tapestries today.

It's quite natural then that, Louis Le Brocquy, Patrick Scott and Mary Fitzgerald have all had much success within the field of tapestry. But an equally important factor involved in their success has been the method with which they design. Lurcat's input has been absolutely crucial. Le Brocquy has used his technique directly and the resulting tapestries are excellent examples of it's brilliance. However, Pat Scott and Mary Fitzgerald have taken Lurcat's method and developed it a step further. They still use his graphic style of cartoon, in this way making sure their tapestries will never be just be woven copies of their

paintings. But because they also used raised areas within their designs, they must have an even stronger relationship with the weavers than would be necessary when designing using Lurcat's method. It is this aspect of the entire process that appeals to me so much. As successful and influential as Lurcat's method has been, a person with little or no knowledge of tapestry could quite easily design one just by taking the basic outline of a simplified image and filling in the correct numbers in the corresponding areas, rather like a paint by numbers.

But when an artist chooses to use 3-D elements within their designs, it forces them to become involved with the more technical side of tapestry in order to understand what is and isn't possible. Here both parties must use their vast knowledge and expertise to form a close and more personal relationship.

Of course, I am not saying that Le Brocquy's work is any less successful than the other two because he mightn't have such a close collaboration with the weavers; in fact, he is possibly the best known out of all three for his work as a tapestry designer. But as a weaver at heart myself, I feel it is better to see the painters actually realising and exploiting the full potential of tapestry, as can only be achieved with the expert help of the skilled weaver.

## CHAPTER 4: AN EXAMINATION OF LOUIS LE BROCQUY, PATRICK SCOTT AND MARY FITZGEALD'S WORK AS BOTH PAINTERS ANDA DESIGNERS OF TAPESTRY.

It would appear that Le Brocquy, Scott and Fitzgerald all design for tapestry using a technique that should successfully avoid their tapestries being just a "mere translation or transference " of their "paintings to a woollen surface" (Walker, 1981, p.30). But do they all achieve this objective? In order to answer this question, amongst others, it is necessary to take a closer look at both their paintings and tapestries. What relationship, if any, do these two bodies of work have with each other? It is very interesting to notice the similarities and differences that can occur between both paintings and tapestries. Why do these changes occur at all? Perhaps it is something to do with the fact that tapestries are meant to be decorative. Might these artists assume the role of a designer rather than that of a painter when they plan their tapestries?

For all three painters, I believe painting will always remain paramount in their lives, but how seriously they regard other media is very important. In an interview with Harriet Cooke in the Irish Times on May 25th 1973, Le Brocquy described his fascination with tapestry:

> I always found it a kind of recreation involving completely different problems, it is refreshing in a sense that one is exhausted in a different way.

Pat Scott too sees tapestry as a medium completely removed from painting. He starts his tapestry designs "from a totally different

premises" than his paintings, "like as if I was making a table or chair or something, I would make it in a different way" (Mercier, Dublin, 1995). So it would seem that both these men separate tapestry from their main body of work: painting. The tapestries they design might contain some similarities to their paintings, but that is where it ends.

In complete contrast, Mary Fitzgerald realises that although tapestry can never imitate a painting, her work is a complete body, with everything feeding off each other. Naturally she must make considerations when designing for tapestry that she might not even think about when painting, but she does not separate tapestry from the rest of her work or treat it any differently. In fact, she finds it quite similar in many ways to painting. Fitzgerald is very fortunate to actually be able to work in this manner. Her style of painting, with areas of flat colour and 'calligrapy-type' marks, means that her work translates into tapestry quite easily and effectively.

Mary Fitzgerald claims that the similarities, both in imagery and style, between her tapestry and paintings are completely sub-concious. To her, tapestry design is a continuation or extension of her work as a painter: as she said in an interview with Ciarn Carty of the Sunday Independant, on November 21st, 1982: "each piece is a springboard for another". This statement can be effectively backed up by a closer examination of her work in both media.

Fitzgerald's paintings are austerely abstract, gestural, calm, measured

and minimalistic in their form and approach. Abstraction is the voice with which she has chosen to articulate her thoughts and emotions. This sparse and minimalist approach was reinforced by her time spent in Japan; she said in conversation with Felicity Woolf in September, 1991, that it made her "aware of the language of space and structure".

> Her work is based on the grid, and its tensions derive from the balance of opposites: light and dark, geometric and gestural shapes blankness and clutter. Essentially free gestural marks are bounced off a grid in a way reminiscent of Felim Egan. Fitzgerald has made increasingly elaborate arrangements of composites that allow her to establish complex sequences and inter-relationships.
>
> (Dunne, 1987, p.69)

Although Aidan Dunne is referring to her paintings, the same could be a pplied to the analysis of her tapestry designs, especially her series for A.I.B in the International Financial Services Centre on the Custom House Docks, (See Figs. 12-15). The fact that they are a series of four tapestries immediatley draws a parallel with her painting. Fitzgerald is well known for using a number of pieces running in a series around an exhibition space. For example, in an interview with Felicity Woolf about The Drawing Room, 1986 (Fig. 16), Fitzgerald explained:

> These paintings form an unbroken circle around the exhibition space. The colour tones move from light to dark and through to light as they progress from one painting to the next.

It is in this same vein that the tapestries work. There is one situated on all four floors immediatley opposite the doors of the lifts. Not unlike The Drawing Room, they run from a cold blue on the 1st floor,

Fig. 12 & 13 Mary Fitzgerald's tapestries for A.I.B. in the I.F.S.C.

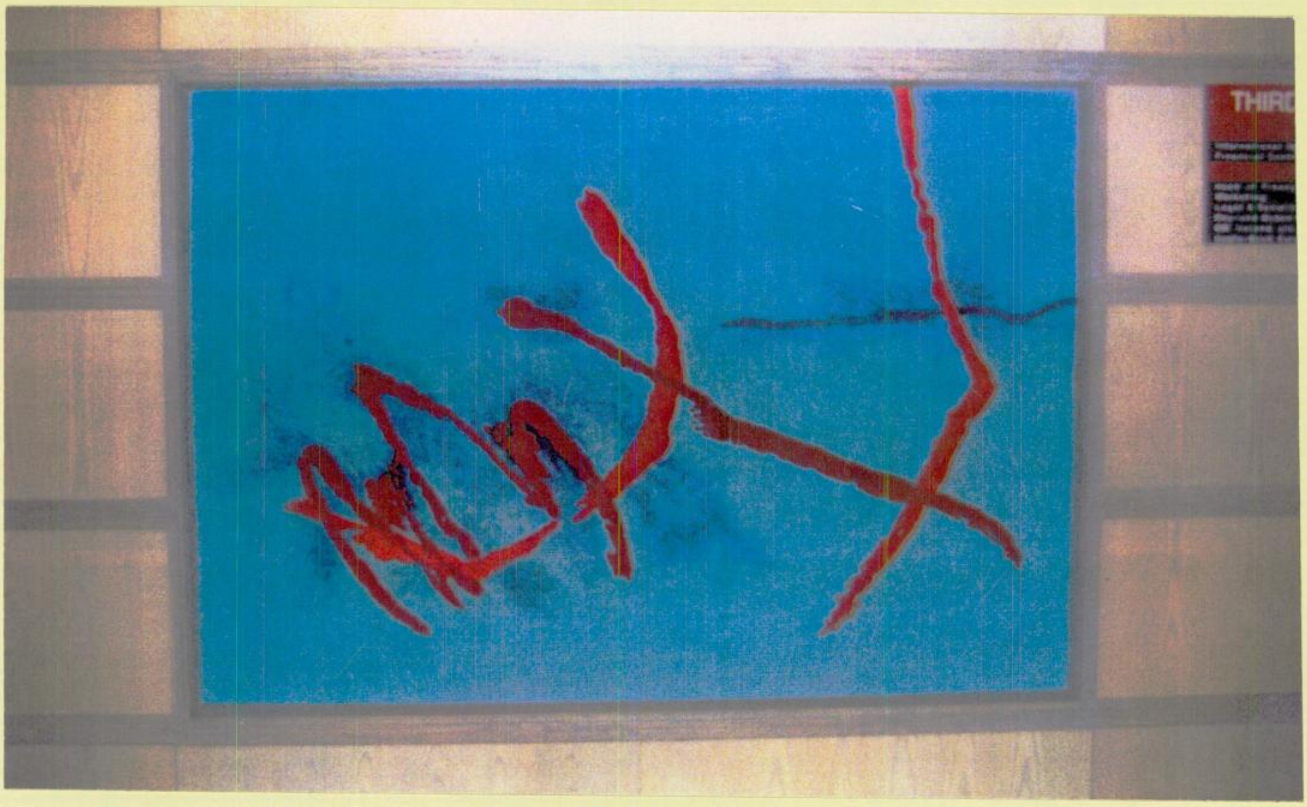

Fig. 14 & 15

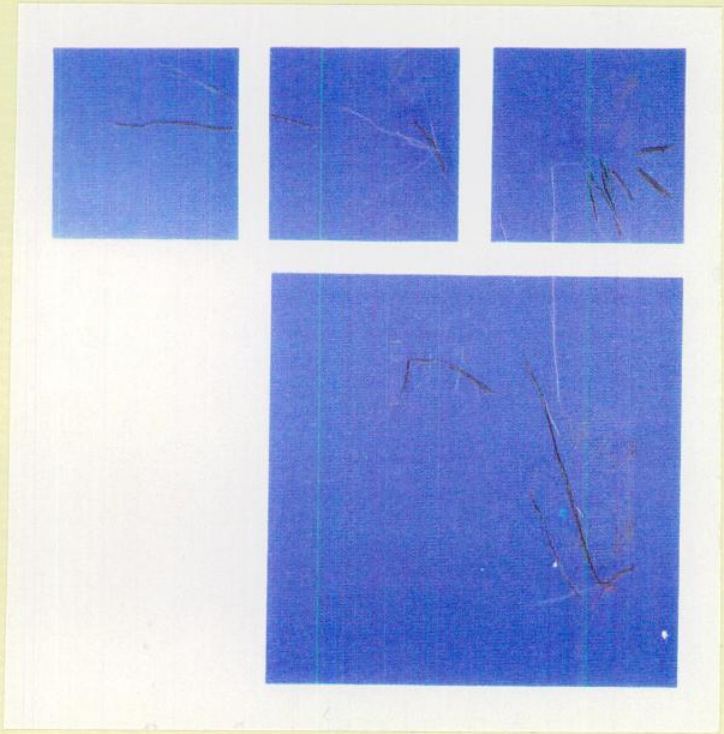

Fig. 16 The Drawing Room 4, cobalt blue to black, (230 x 230cm), by Mary Fitzgerald. Acrylic, graphite and pastel on canvas.

progressively through to a much warmer orange on the 4th.The tapestries essentially consist of a flat coloured background with Fitzgerald's familiar casually placed washes of colour and rather elegant minimalist calligraphie-type marks. It is important though not to misconceive these marks as being oriental. Any similarities occur through her use of the traditional Japenese kanji-brush, and Fitzgerald remains adamant that the influence of the Orient has always been much more subtle and indirect than this.

Her familiar use of thick swipes of pigment across flat areas, have quite obviously influenced the way in which these fluid gestural marks are raised from the surface of the tapestry, as in (Fig.17). Fitzgerald has always been attracted to 3-D, and actually studied sculpture in college, only beginning to paint in her final term. She really admires tapestry for its raised 3-D effects that can be easily exploited. Her 1991 Counteract (Fig.18) and 1993 Continuum (Fig.19) series, are good examples of her fascination with 3-D, but provide an amazing contrast to her other works, as her familiar drawn marks are completely absent. These works consist of mixed media, with perspex, tracing-paper, muslin, glass, nails, steel bolts, chains and thread all being utilised.

In her most recently completed tapestry to date, she had been approached by the architect Ronald Tallon to design a tapestry for the new Science building in Trinity College. The finished piece (Fig.20), bears an unbelieveably strong resemblance to the previously mentioned Counteract (Fig.19) and Continuum (Fig.19) series.

In fact at first glance it would be very easy to mistake one of her

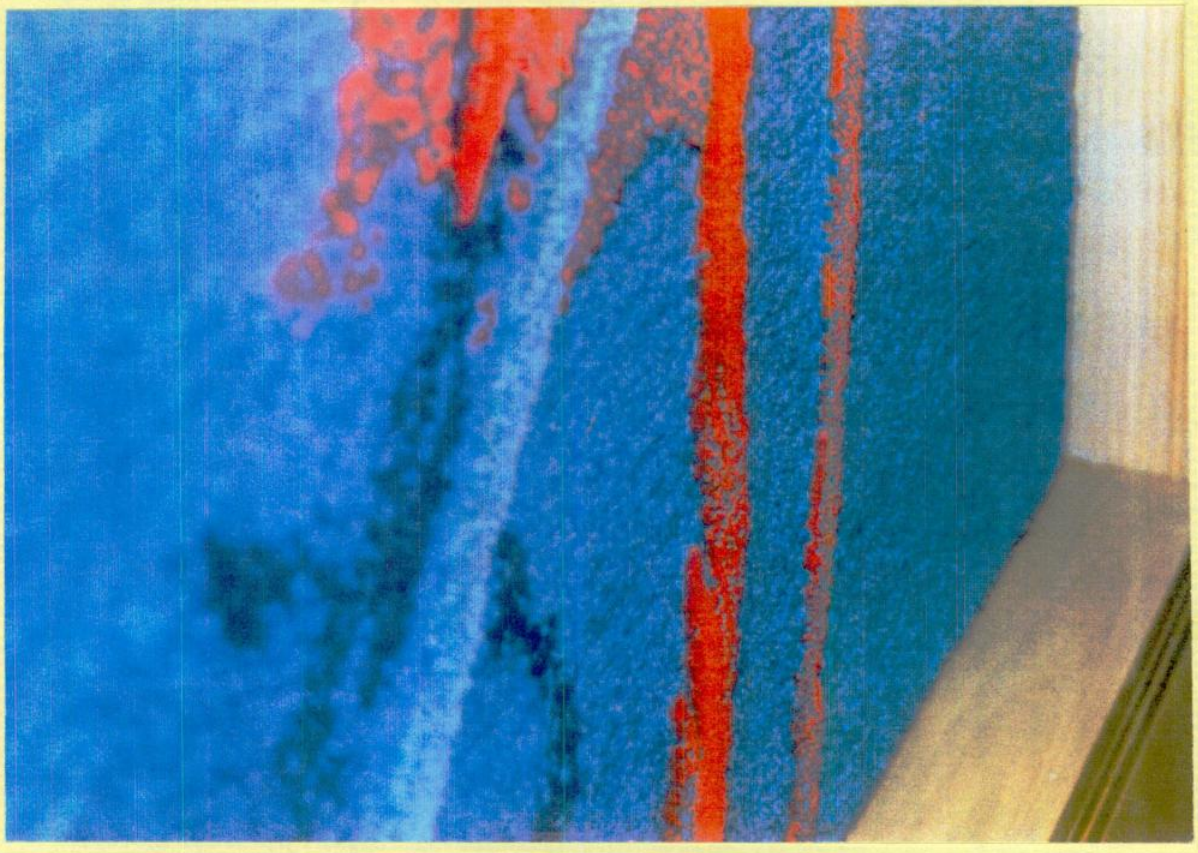

Fig 17. Detail of the second tapestry in the I.F.S.C., showing raised area within tapestry.

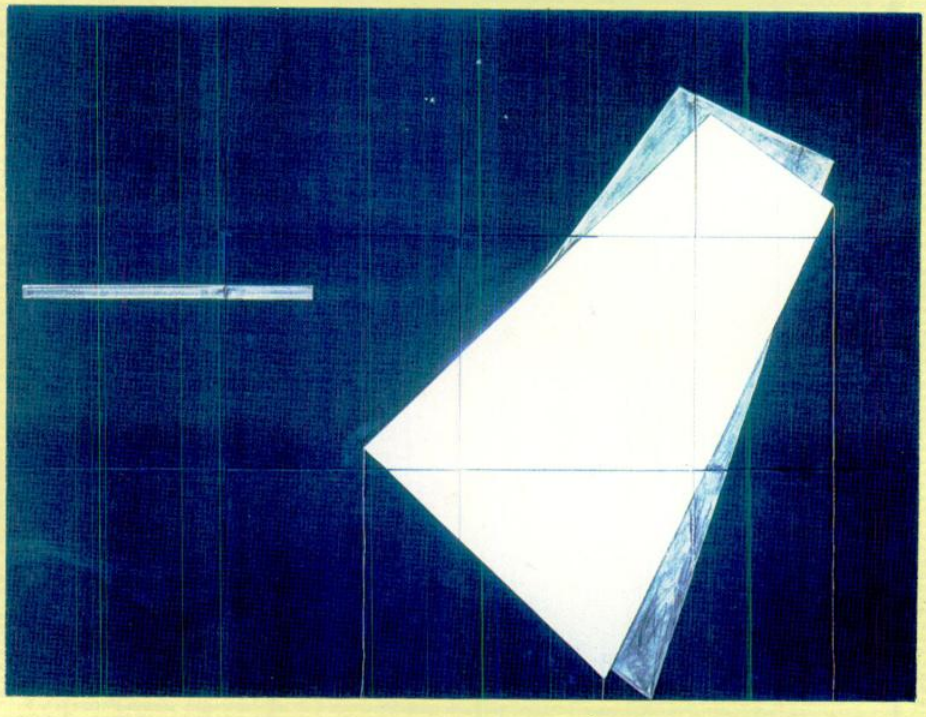

Fig 18. Counteract 1 by Mary Fitzgerald. Plaster, wire, string, charcoal, acrylic on canvas (194 x 259cms)

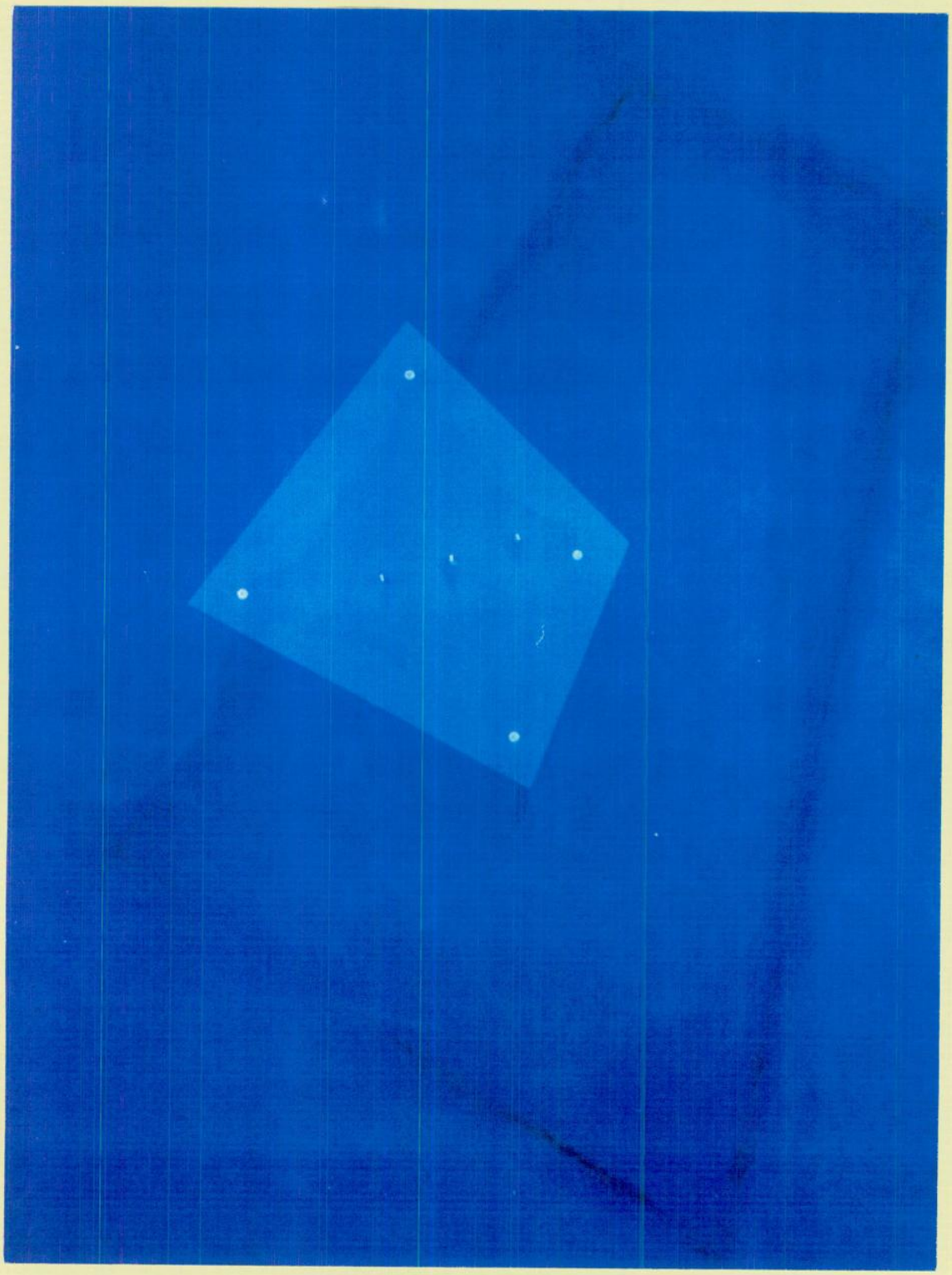

Fig 19. Vertex, oil, charcoal, plate glass, muslin and steel bolts on canvas (96 x 72ins), from Mary Fitzgerald's 1993 Continuum series.

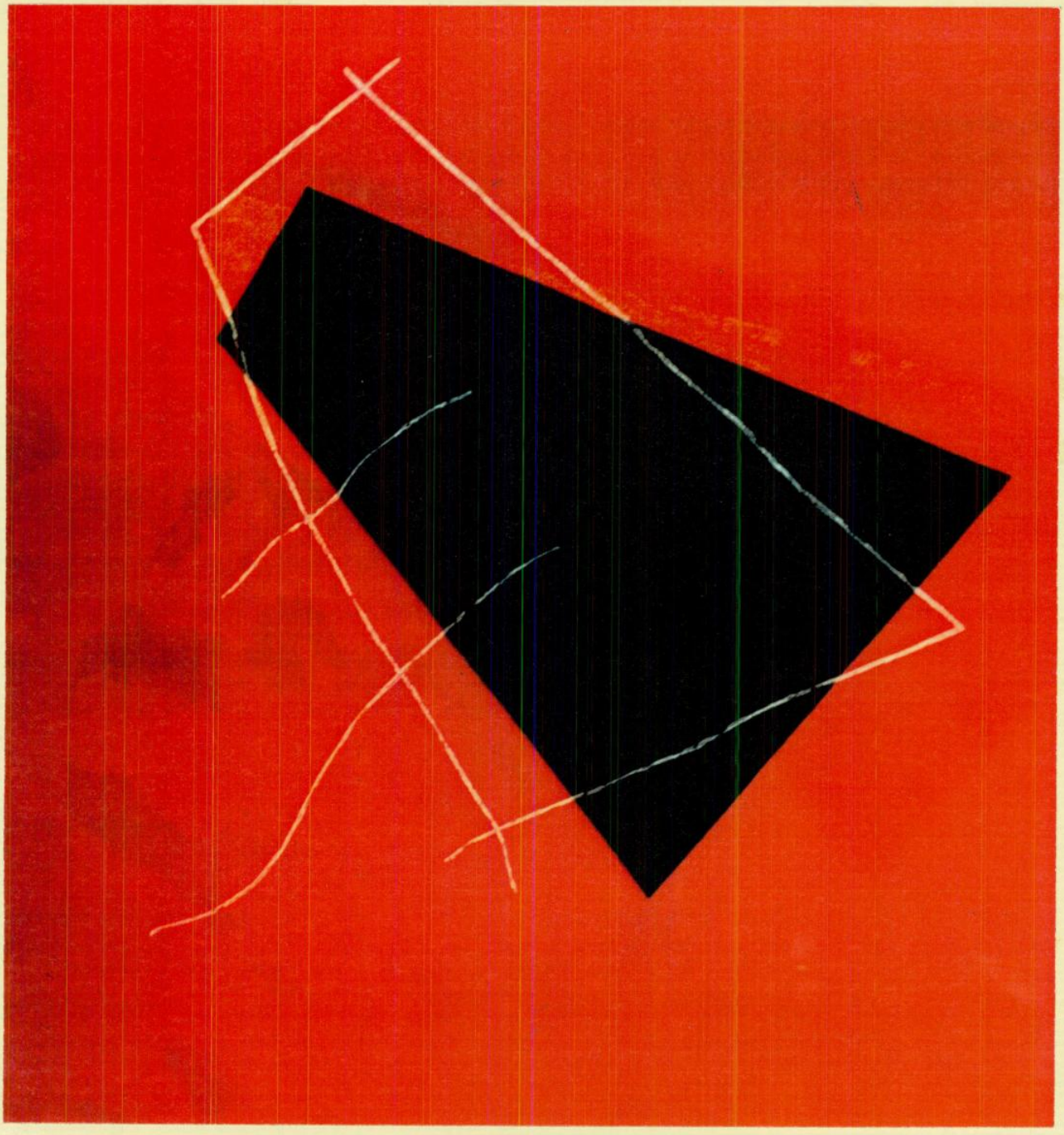

Fig 20. Mary Fitzgerald's tapestry in the Science building in Trinity.

tapestries as actually being a painting. Although Fitzgerald herself claims that a tapestry could never imitate a painting, especially so in her case as she uses a tufted pile technique which "catches the light and looks absolutely amazing, a quality which would be impossible to re-create on paper" (Mercier, Dublin, 1995). Even so, a close examination of her drawings and paintings (Figs. 21 & 22), and her work as a designer of tapestry (Figs. 12-15 & 20), will instantly highlight the amazing similarities that occur between the two bodies of work. The compositions of and marks made within these pieces remain completely constant.

Even though Fitzgerald's tapestries do bear a strong resemblance in many ways to her paintings, there is something about it that I find quite refreshing. As I have shown, her work as a painter is very abstract, already containing a design quality to them, which means that they translate equally as successfully into the medium of tapestry. Mary remains quietly confident that her tapestries are in no way direct copies of her paintings, but that they are extensions of her work as a painter. In this way then, it seems to me that she is actually using the chance to work within tapestry as a form of expressing herself, compared to either Le Brocquy or Scott, who although both use certain imagery from their paintings in their tapestries, think of the entire process as being completely removed from painting.

All Mary Fitzgerald's work in tapestry so far has been through commission, and according to her this is the main factor that makes any

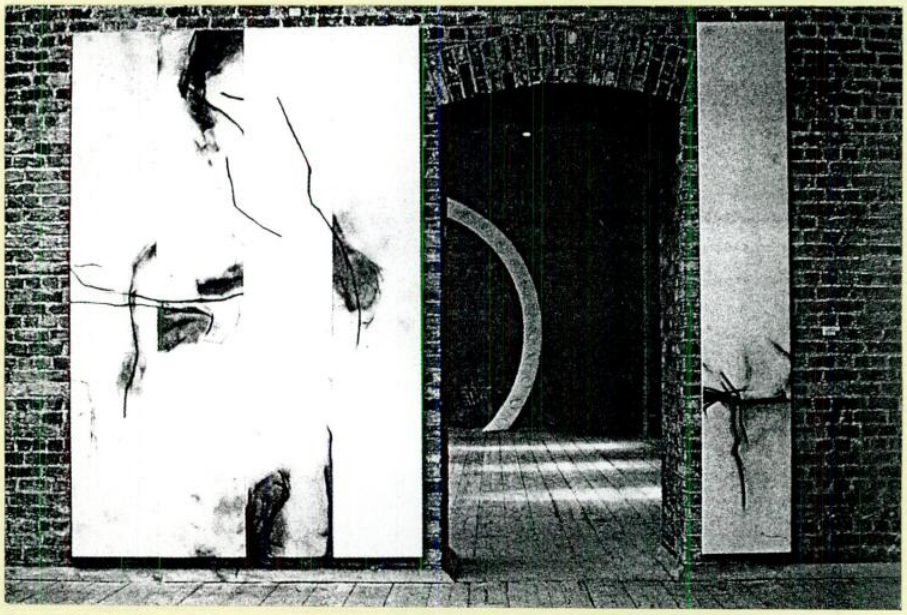

Fig. 21. Drawing in five parts, 1987, acrylic, graphite and charcoal on 5 canvases, each 300 x 50cms.

Fig 22. Cross Reference 4, 1988, oil, pastel and charcoal on 4 canvases, (60 x 60cm).

changes in her work occur. "It's exactly like making a piece of sculpture for a building, you have to think about exactly where it is and what is going on around it" (Mercier, Dublin, 1995). For example, in her carpet design for Bank of Ireland's, La Touche House in the I.S.F.C, she drew inspiration from the geography of the Liffey bed, but still had to ensure that the furniture to be placed there remained in harmony with the design and that a darkish colour was used in the areas that would recieve most use.

> Today hand-woven tapestries are often found in large public buildings and company boardrooms, which have more or less taken the place of the great Medieval religous institutes as the main patron of the arts.
>
> (Phillips, 1994, p.14)

It is because of this that such practical reasons must be considered when one is involved in tapestry design. A tapestry is usually very large and once hung in a specific location will almost definitley remain there, unlike a painting which can be easily moved. The people working in and around the piece must not be swamped by it and because they can either be up close to it or at a distance from it, it must work well from both viewpoints. But this is not an entirely new phenomeon to Fitzgerald as in all aspects of her work, the relationship it has with it's audience has been important, as she said in conversation with Felicity Woolf:

> I work in series, in installation format where each piece has a spatial relationship to the others and to the environment it inhabits. In this way the work has a physical relationship to the audience who share the same space, it begins the process of communication with the viewer.

Because of these very practical considerations, Mary Fitzgerald feels a certain degree of pressure when designing for tapestry. When she is painting, she feels comfortable knowing that, if she dislikes a piece when she is finished, she can bin it and start again. But tapestry is both time-consuming and expensive, so she can sometimes be a bit cautious when designing for commission knowing that it "must look good and be right" (Mercier, Dublin, 1995).

In contrast to Mary Fitzgerald's close relationship between her tapestries and paintings, Le Brocquy and Scott both appear to be completely different men when dealing in these two media, "each medium seems to express some different aspect of the man's personality" (Kavanagh, 1980, p.12).

> Although tapestries form only a small part of his overall creative output, they are nevertheless in remarkable contrast to his other work. Here he uses vibrant colours - giving real meaning to the phrase 'all the colours of the rainbow'.
>
> (Kavanagh, 1980, p.13)

This quote was written after an exhibition of Pat Scott's Rainbow-Rugs (Fig. 23), on June 27th, 1980, in the Kilkenny Design Centre. To someone unfamiliar with Scott's work as a painter, these rugs would appear, decorative and perfectly acceptable. But when they are seen next to his paintings, with their palette of muted mauves, browns, whites and their minimum forms of sophisticated simplicity, (Fig. 24), it is hard to

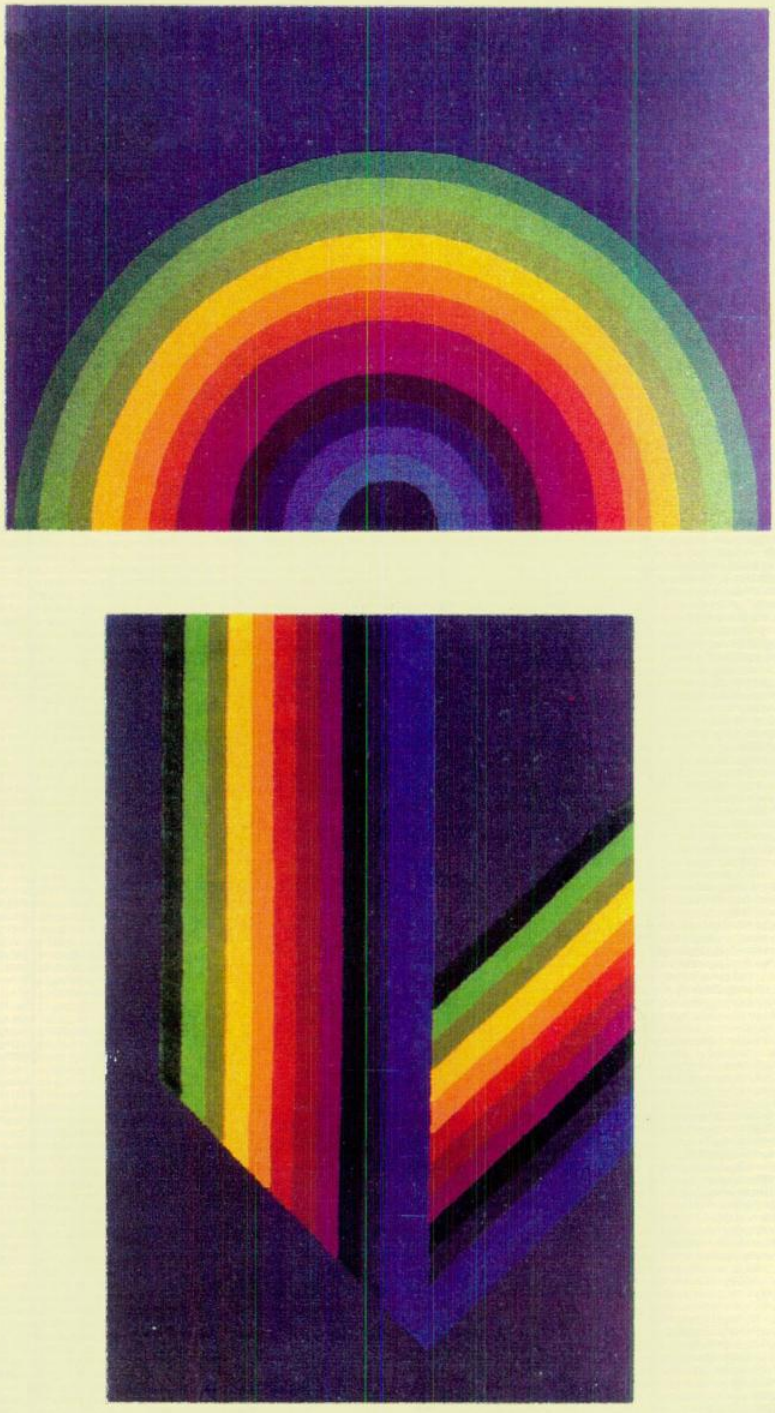

Fig 23. Patrick Scott's Rainbow Rugs.

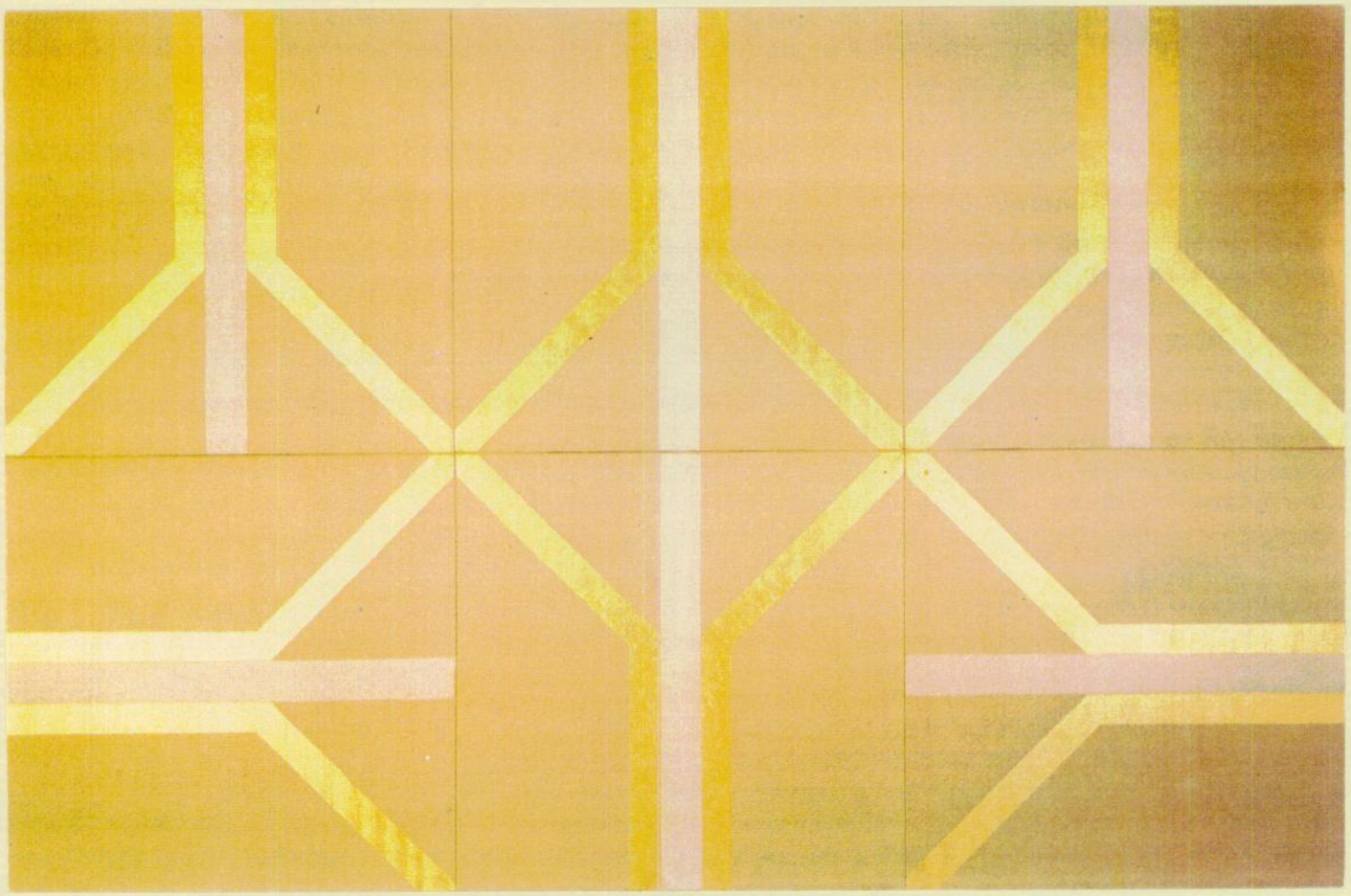

Fig 24. Patrick Scott's Goldpainting 38, (244 x 366cms), gold leaf and tempra on unprimed canvas.

believe that one man could be responsible for two so dramatically opposing bodies of work.

Pat Scott has been a very popular painter and designer of tapestry for 50 years and his many works are spread throughout Ireland in both private houses and public buildings. His paintings are not concerned with portraying people or everyday scenes and usually develop through discoveries of technique rather than deep and wonderful philosophies. They have a very strong sense of order and geometric rigour, an obvious influence from his time spent as an architect. A lot of unprimed bare canvas is visible with very faint areas of thin, pale white bringing up geometric patterns. These pieces are extremely subtle and in many cases are heavily dependant on light, with qualities of mindfulness and restfulness, leaving a lasting impression of tranquility, as in (Fig. 25). In complete contrast, his tapestries are intensley colourful, loud and vibrant in design (Fig.26). Many of them do, however, bear a strong link with his paintings, the most obvious being Scott's obsessive and recurring motif, the circle.

Scott has worked with the theme of the circle in many of his tapestries throughout the years, such as that for the Bord Failte Eireann office in Paris, which exploited his now familiar use of brilliant colour and subtle sculptural cropping of the surface. The big tapestry in the entrance hall of the 1967 Berkley Library in Trinity College also exploits the 3-D sculptural possobilities of tapestry while continuing and developing the theme of the circle and spiral.

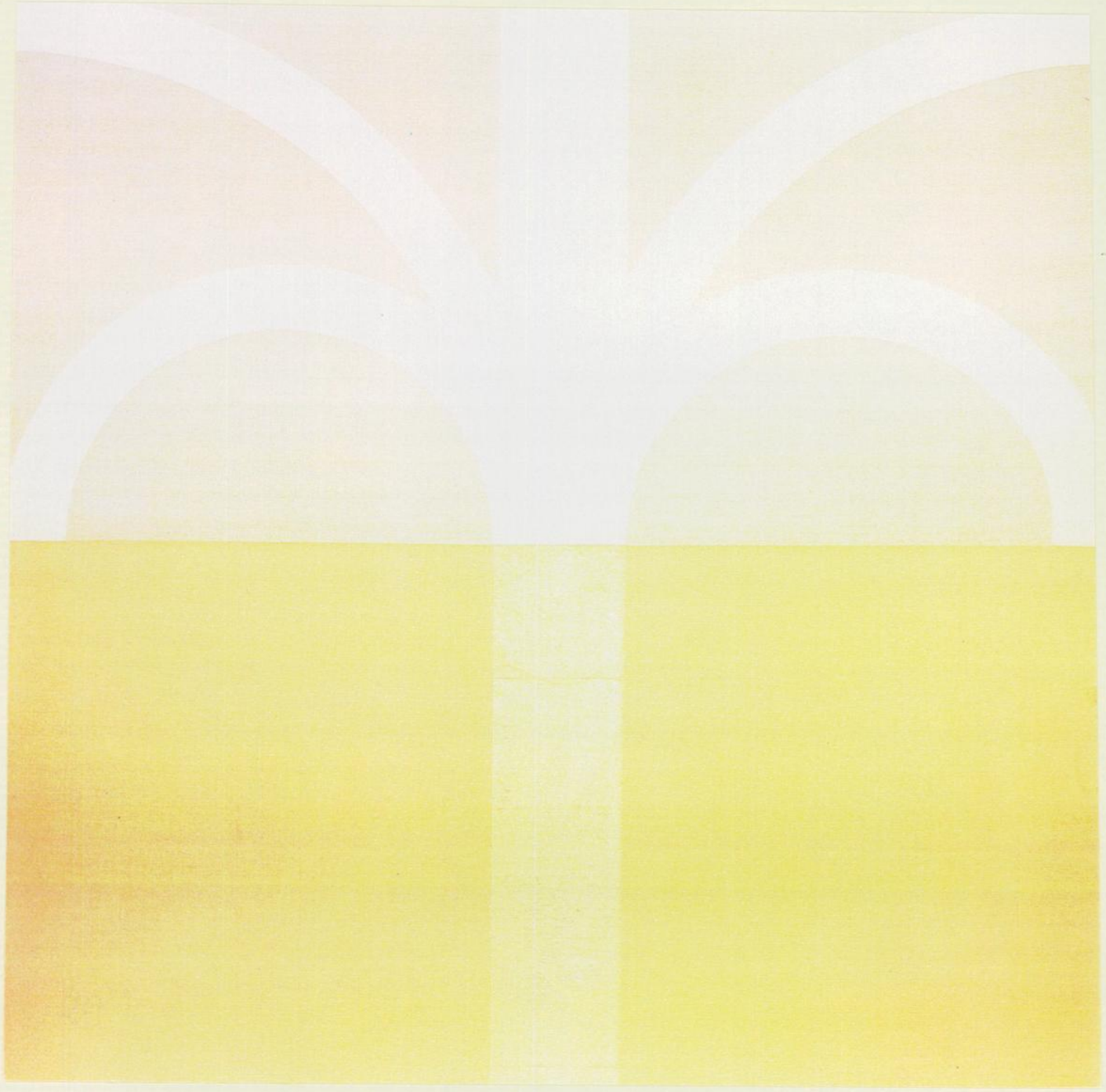

Fig 25. Goldpainting 48, 1968, (122 x 122cms), gold leaf and tempra on unprimed canvas.

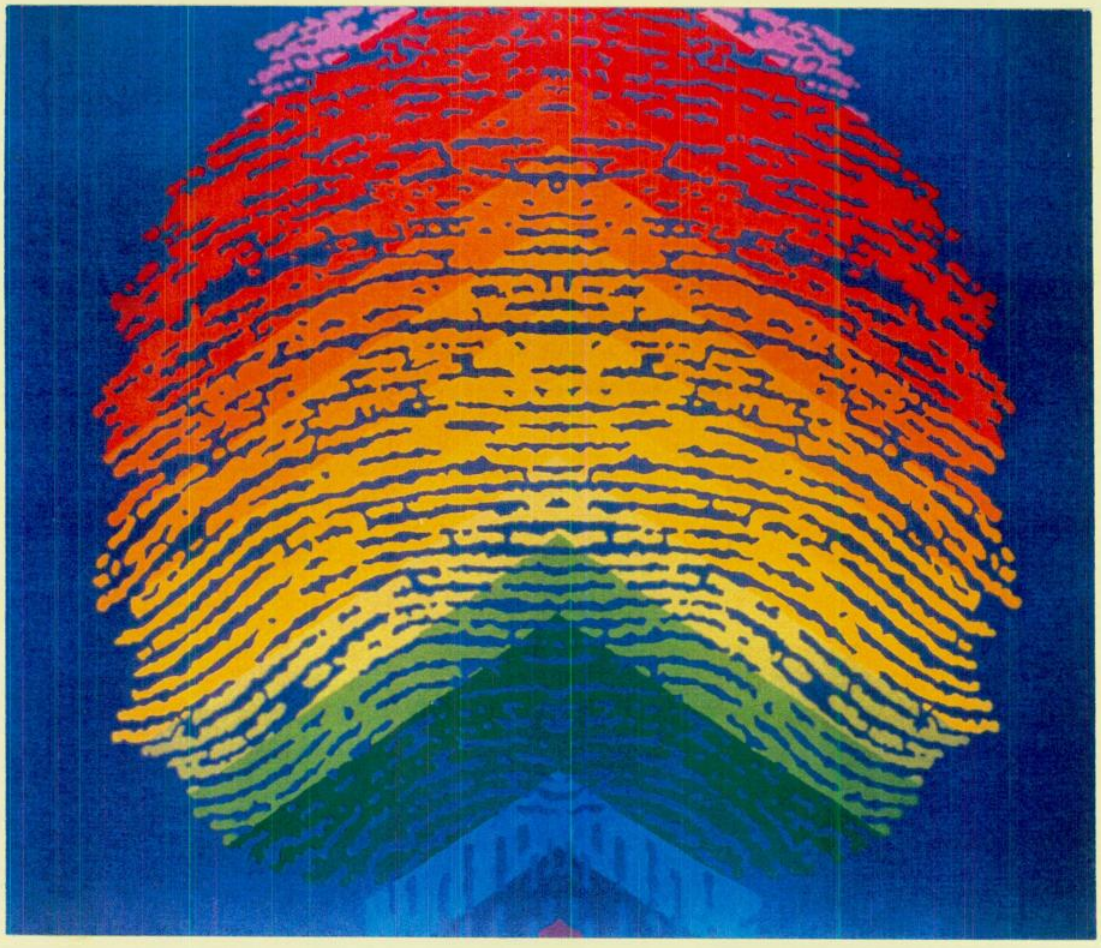

Fig 26. Patrick Scott's Tree of Life.

Fig 27. Eroica.

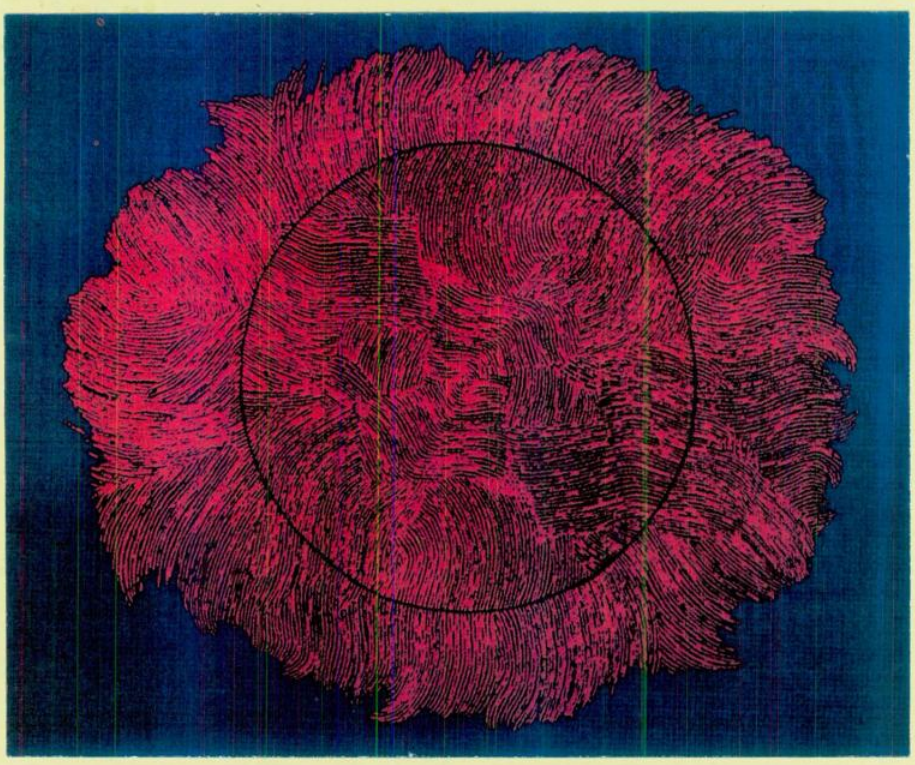

Fig 28. Blaze.

These eventually led to his two most spectacular works, Eroica (Fig. 27), and Blaze (Fig.28), commissioned by the architect Ronnie Tallon for the Bank of Ireland in Baggot St.:

> In the large hall to the left, there is a magnificent tapestry by Patrick Scott, which in my view is one of the greatest tapestries made this century.
>
> (Scott, 1979, p.7)

Both of these tapestries, amongst others, were woven from designs taken from the artist's actual thumb-print.

Blaze (Fig. 28), was woven at Aubusson in 1972 and at 17ft x 21ft, is one of the largest in the world. It combines:

> All the elements of Patrick Scott's art : brilliant colour which changes most subtly inside the inner circle of the ever-recurring sphere, the sphere itself contrived by a simple line-break in the weaving to set the scale, space and gravity of the vast flaming sun-device, the whole work as simple and dazzling as the sun, with the infinitely complex linear pattern deriving from the intimacy of his own skin.
>
> (Walker, 1984, pp.18-19)

Eroica' (Fig. 27), the second in the series was also woven in Aubusson in 1979 and although smaller in size than Blaze, is much more brilliantly coloured. It uses a device that Scott appeared to be fond of and can be continuously seen in many of his paintings and other tapestries (Fig. 29). This method consists of letting the image run off the cavas or tapestry in such a way as to emphasise "a portion of a larger element which continues beyond the work" (Walker, 1984, p.19).

Upon questioning Scott as to any reasoning behind such explosions of

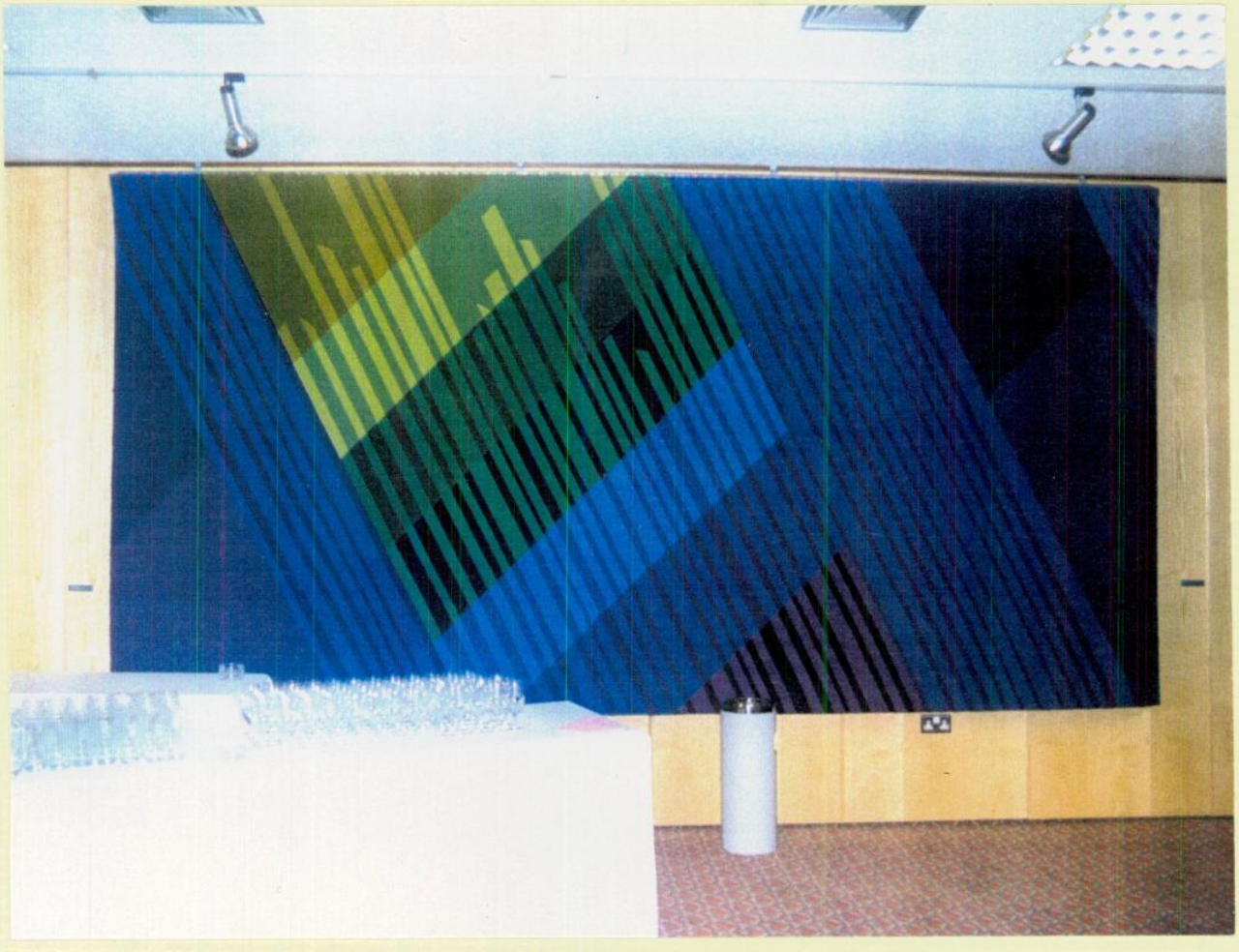

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Fig 29. One of Scott's tapestries in ~~Bank of Ireland~~ in Ballsbridge, showing the many devices he uses in designing.

colour in his tapestry designs, I received the impression that he was not entirely sure. He expressed complete distaste for 17th century tapestries, which he felt just copied paintings and bore this in mind when designing himself. Perhaps then, he did not want to make the same mistake as so many before him had, and so made absolutely sure that his tapestries bore no resemblance what-so-ever to his paintings, by taking them to the most opposite extreme possible. He used these bright colours right from the beginning, in his first tapestry design. Maybe he kept using them because of their refreshing diversity in relation to his paintings, or just because he liked them, but whatever the reason, they have proved very popular. For instance, when recently designing a tapestry for the O'Rielly Hall in U.C.D, he was specifically asked to use a "belt of colour" (Mercier, Dublin, 1995).

Only one of Scott's many tapestry designs have not been for commission and, therefore, he quite naturally finds it very important to consider the interior he is designing for and always insists on seeing it first. He will take time in deciding the best space for his tapestry, one which will "form a sort of architectural entity, I hate tapestries just hung like paintings on a wall". Most of Scott's tapestries are hung right up to the ceiling and as often as is possible, fill a whole space, "so you don't get the feeling that they are just spots on the wall" (Mercier, Dublin, 1995). This thought process is obviously a direct result of Scott's 15 years spent as an architect. For these reasons his tapestries tend to be quite big and, as I have mentioned, Blaze is one of the largest in the world. Scott loves working on this huge scale, as the

biggest painting he has ever done in one piece was only 3m x 2m; although he has worked larger, but only in sections.

Scott designs tapestries with any work he has done as a painter far removed from his mind; the very difference in his use of colour is a good example to support this statement. As he never paints people or everyday scenes and instead prefers to use a form of abstraction, I feel his paintings appear to have heavy design-like qualities. As Cyril Barrett remarked when opening Scott's exhibition on the 31st of August, 1980, in Kilkenny Castle during Kilkenny Arts Week:

> His connection with Kilkenny Workshops raises the question, which has often been raised, whether he is an artist or designer. This, as I argued in the Kilkenny Workshops years ago, is a foolish question, a question raised by failed critics trying to make themselves look important. The works in this exhibition may look like designs. But designs for what? Even if they were designs, they are still works of art in their own right. One might as well say that Raphael was not an artist but a designer, because his pictures were made into tapestries.
>
> (Walker, 1981, p.40)

Of course, Pat Scott is essentially a painter and quite obviously a very talented and successful one. It is his clear, clean, sophisticated and simple, bold shapes combined with developing experiments in colour and texture that make his paintings so uniquely different from that of his contemporaries and give them, as James White described in his XXX Venice Bienalle catalogue introduction in 1960, "a sense of fitness to satisfy one who is inherently a designer as well as a painter" (Walker, 1981,

p.38). And it is these very elements of his work that can be seen echoed in his tapestries, making them both enjoyably different from his paintings as well as very successful.

As with Pat Scott, Louis Le Brocquy has been described by James White as a totally different man when designing tapestries. Le Brocquy's work can be divided into two groups, his work up until the mid-1960s which delt with themes such as travelling people and Irishness, and from the mid-1960s on, in which he dealt with his well known head-images. Le Brocquy's work in tapestry also reflected these changes.

The design of his earliest tapestry, Travellers (Fig. 6 & 30-31), in 1948,kept with his main preoccupation of the time, which was travelling people.

> The pictorial treatment of the figures was strongly influenced by Picasso but the weaving of the tapestry with its overall surface of leaves and shadow patterns was much indebted to Lurcat, so that an intruiging cross-fertilization of the styles of Lurcat and Picasso took place in the forms of an Irish travelling family.
>
> (Walker, 1984, pp.15-16)

Le Brocquy's paintings at this time portrayed the tinker's ordinary everyday habits. This is the only occasion throughout Le Brocquy's painting career that we get a chance to see him use bright colours. Travelling People, painted in 1946 (Fig. 32), bears a number of similarities to Travellers, woven in 1942 (Fig. 6). The compositions are

 1948?

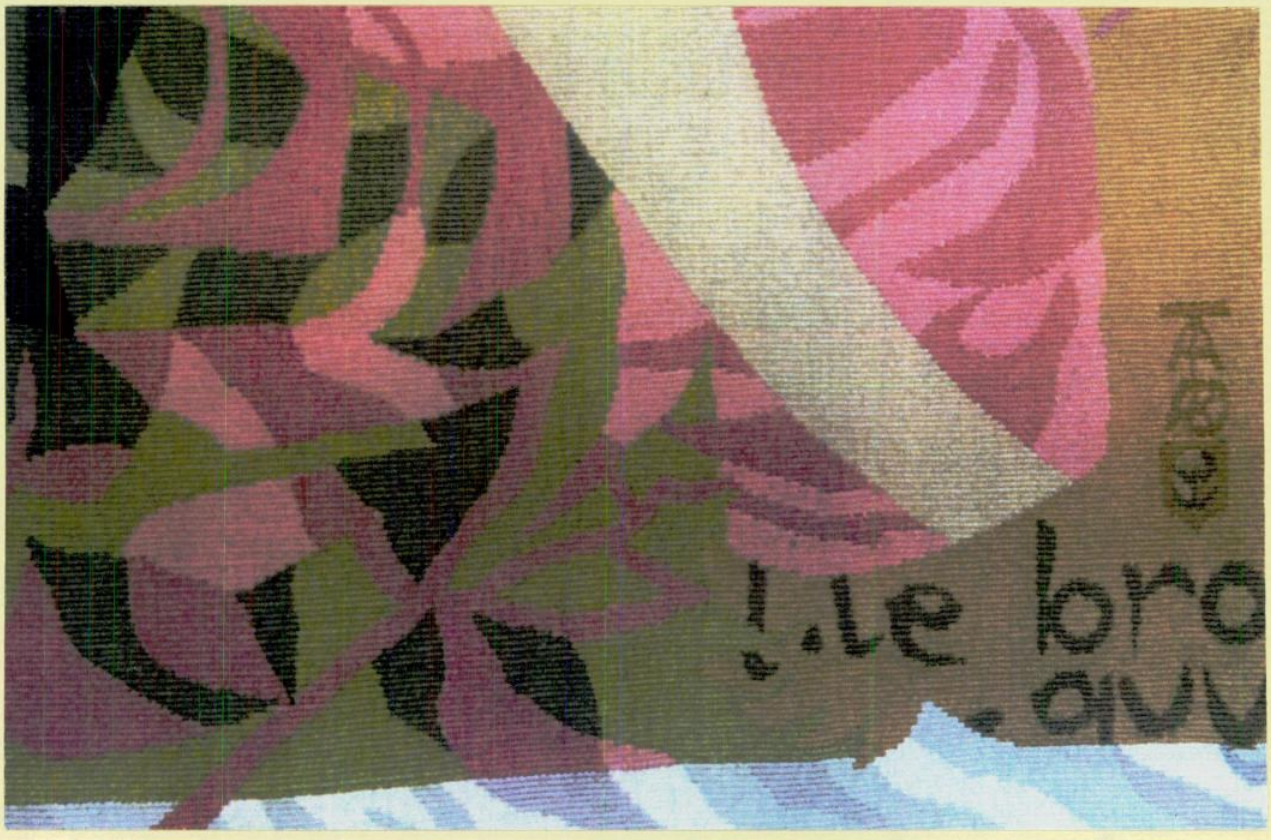

Fig 30 & 31. Close ups of Le Brocquy's tapestry, Traveller's, woven in 1942.

Fig 32. Travelling People, 1946, oil on hardboard, (40.5 x 30.5cms).

both quite alike, with the strong horizontal figure of the woman appearing both times within the family or couple unit. But as we know and have come to expect from Lurcat's method of designing, similarities in themes may occur, but the tapestry will never even attempt to reproduce any painterly qualities. In this case, the tapestry with it's flat, patterened surface has quite a strong decorative quality to it, compared to the more expressive and painterly approach shown in the painting.

The second of Le Brocquy's tapestries is probably one of his best known, Garlanded Goat, woven in 1949 (Fig. 33). Again, the subject reflects his preoccupation with Irishness, which has bled into all areas of his work. This tapestry was designed after a visit to the annual Puck Fair in Killorglin, Co. Kerry. It portrays the proud he-goat, King Puck, the hero of the fair looking strong and dignified, surrounded by a heavily patterened border. Robert Melville, a London critic, has written of it:

> Apart from a few of Lurcat's it is the
> most successful tapestry I have seen
> and a superb latterday example of
> the Celtic art of surface decoration.
>
> (Walker, 1981, p.29)

The fact that Le Brocquy used Lurcat's method of designing is a credit to both men, but also a marvellous achievement for Lurcat, as Le Brocquy's tapestries are perfect examples with which to illustrate the success of his method.


Fig 33. Garlanded Goat, woven in 1949, designed by Le Brocquy.

In 1963, Le Brocquy hit a bad patch and after 25 very creative years, everything just seemed to grind to a halt. It was after a trip to Paris in 1964 that he was re-inspired and began to develop a theme that was to invade all his work to come: the Celtic head-image. This, coupled with the fact that he was illustrating the early Irish epic, The Tain, for Thomsas Kinsella's translation in 1969, gave rise to his next series of tapestries.

The first was commissioned by P.J Carroll and Company's factory in Dundalk, which is situated close to where the actual epic took place. The Tain, which is an Irish word for 'gathering of a large crowd for a raid', gives the tapestry its theme (Fig. 34).

> It is a large work (407 X 610 cms) with its surface completley covered in multi - coloured heads all facing the spectator. These heads retain the relentless individuality of single beings having no relationship to their neighbour, lacking order, there are no military ranks, no imposed external form, the mass of heads is held together by an inner, inherent order, like a flock of plover.
>
> (Walker, 1981, p.51)

As with his earlier series of tapestries, these also bear strong resemblances to his paintings. Le Brocquy saw the Celtic idea of the head as the embodiment of the human being and described it as, "the magic box that holds the spirit prisoner" (Walker, 1981,p. 44). It was from this concept that his powerful yet austere white on white series of presences began (Fig. 35). These paintings feature just one single head

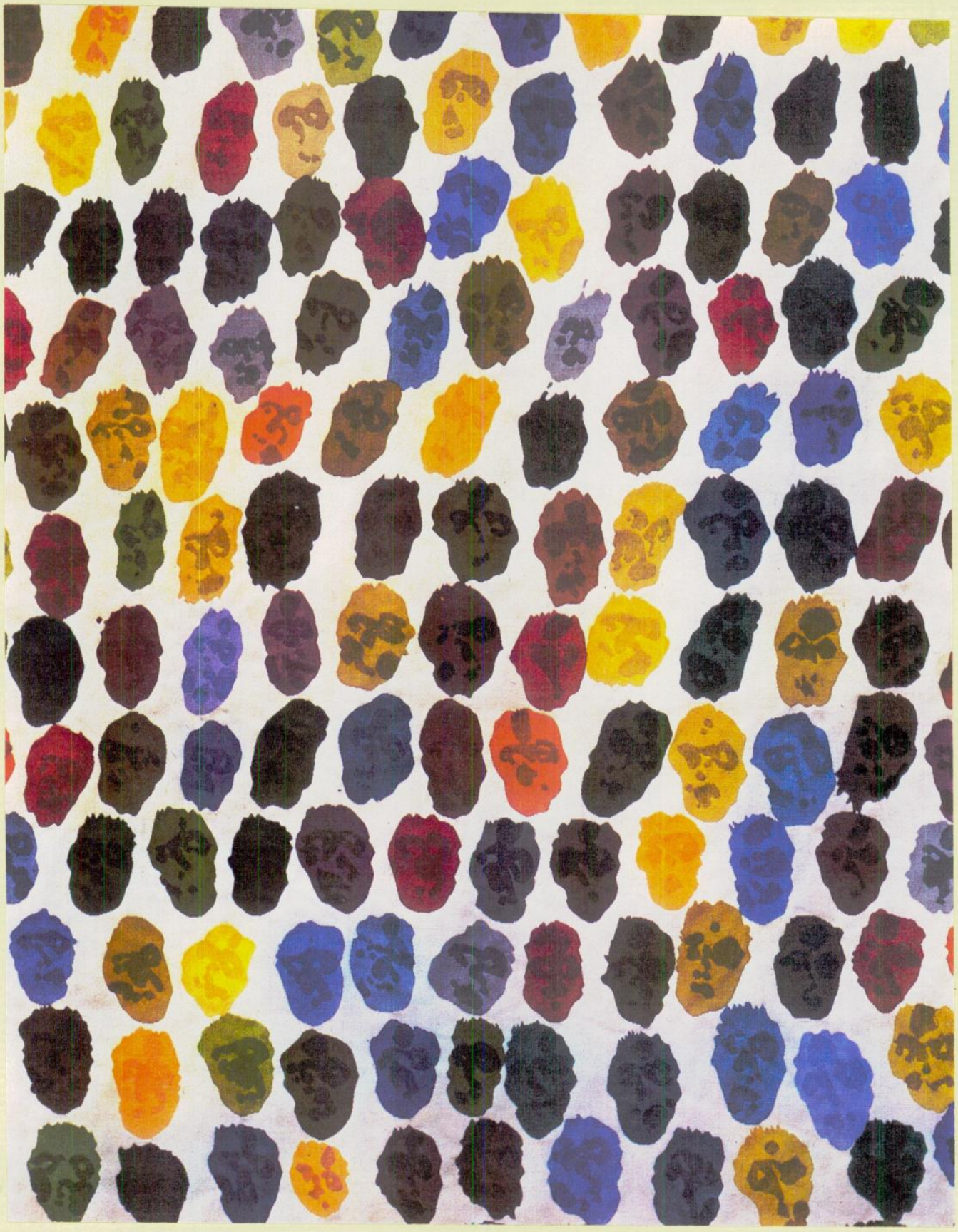

Fig 34. The Tain, designed by Le Brocquy. (407 x 610cms).

Fig 35. Occluded Image by Le Brocquy, 1971.

emerging from the canvas, a departure from his earlier style of compositions. There is also a change in Le Brocquy's use of colour. As (Fig. 35) shows, in his series of head paintings a good use of colour can be seen, although very subtle with a lot of white being used. In the Tain tapestries he uses areas of strong, bold colour, a trait of his which is not unlike Patrick Scott's work.

> His natural gift to design led to his being commissioned to design tapestries in Britian. In this medium the need for colour and pattern which could be woven gave him an outlet into a different area of creation which has earned him acclaim in another discipline.
>
> (White, 1986)

Following the large Carroll's tapestry, Le Brocquy designed a series of six smalier ones in 1973. One of these tapestries 'Men of Connaught' (Fig. 36), shows rows of black heads, casting a grey shadow behind them. His use of shadows and shading was literally turned inside out following a trip to Spain, "going was confounded with coming, backwards with forwards, shadows appeared in front, substance which cast them behind" (Walker, 1981, p.34). Evidence of this can also be seen in his paintings, for example (Figs. 37).

All Le Brocquy's series of Tain tapestries, share the common theme of the head unit translated into a vast honeycomb style structure, quite a brave concept but one which in this case works terribly well. He uses a variety of colourways, some in pale,delicate pink tones, others in more eye-catching combinations of primary colours with black. This, coupled

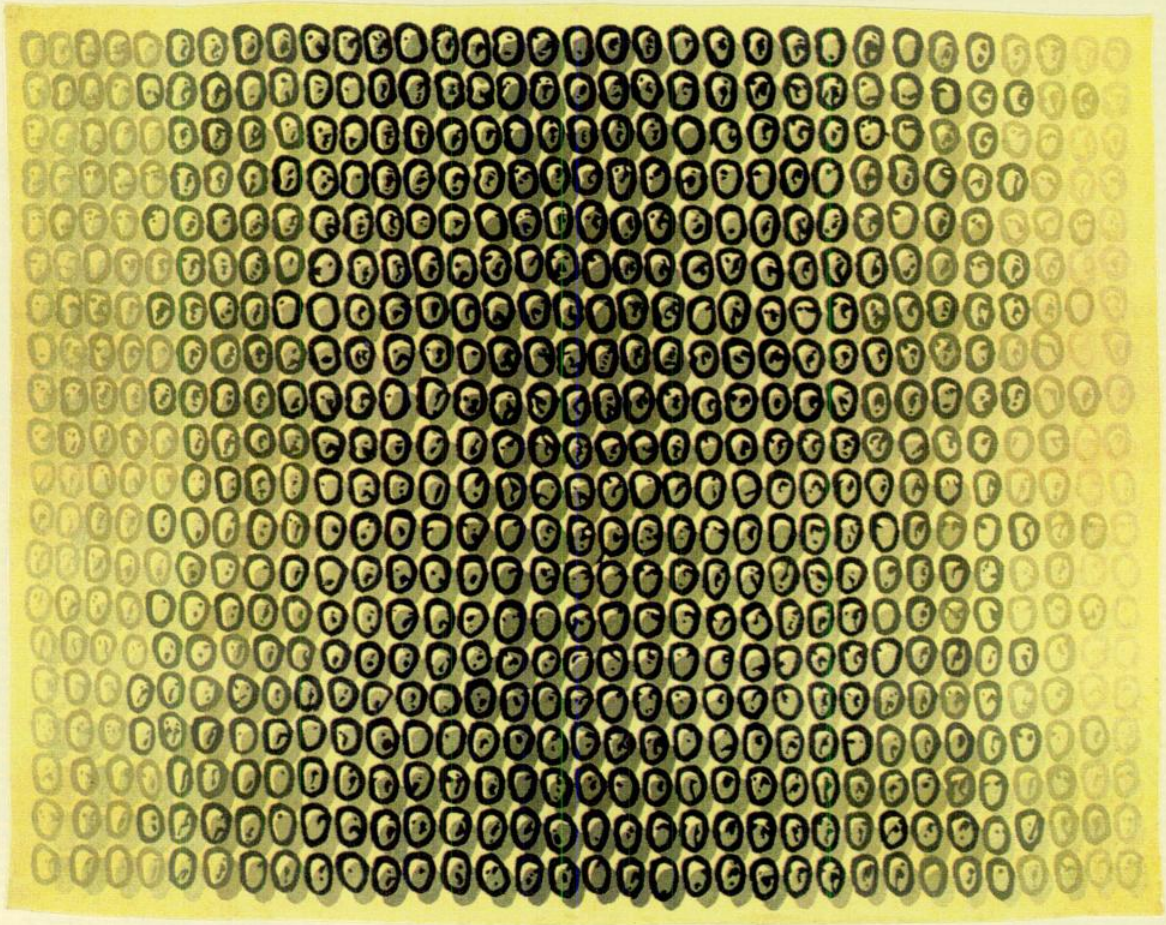

Fig 36. Men of Connaught, designed by Le Brocquy, woven in 1973.

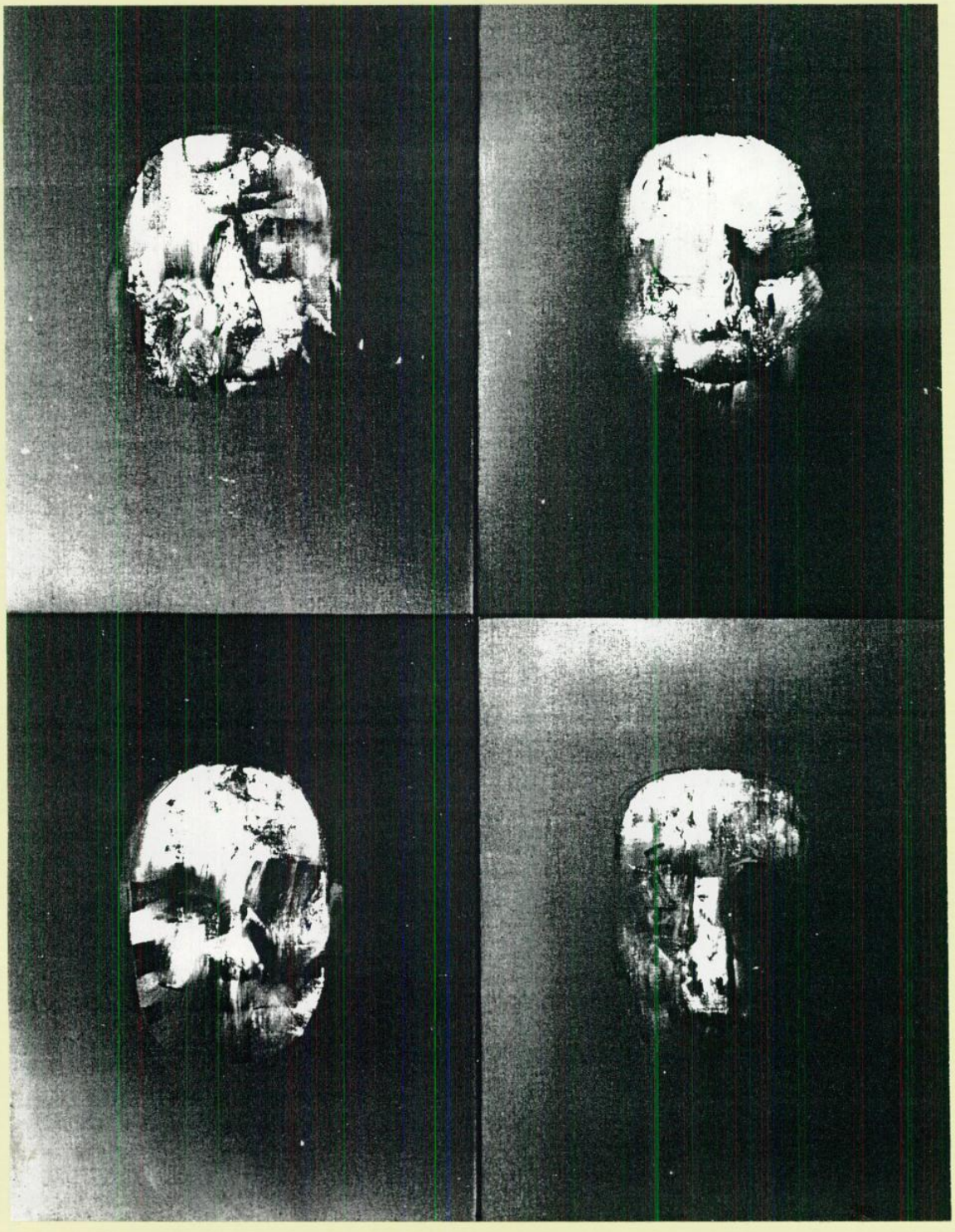

Fig 37. Quatre cranes sur modeles et peints, 1967, (82 x 66cms), oil on canvas.

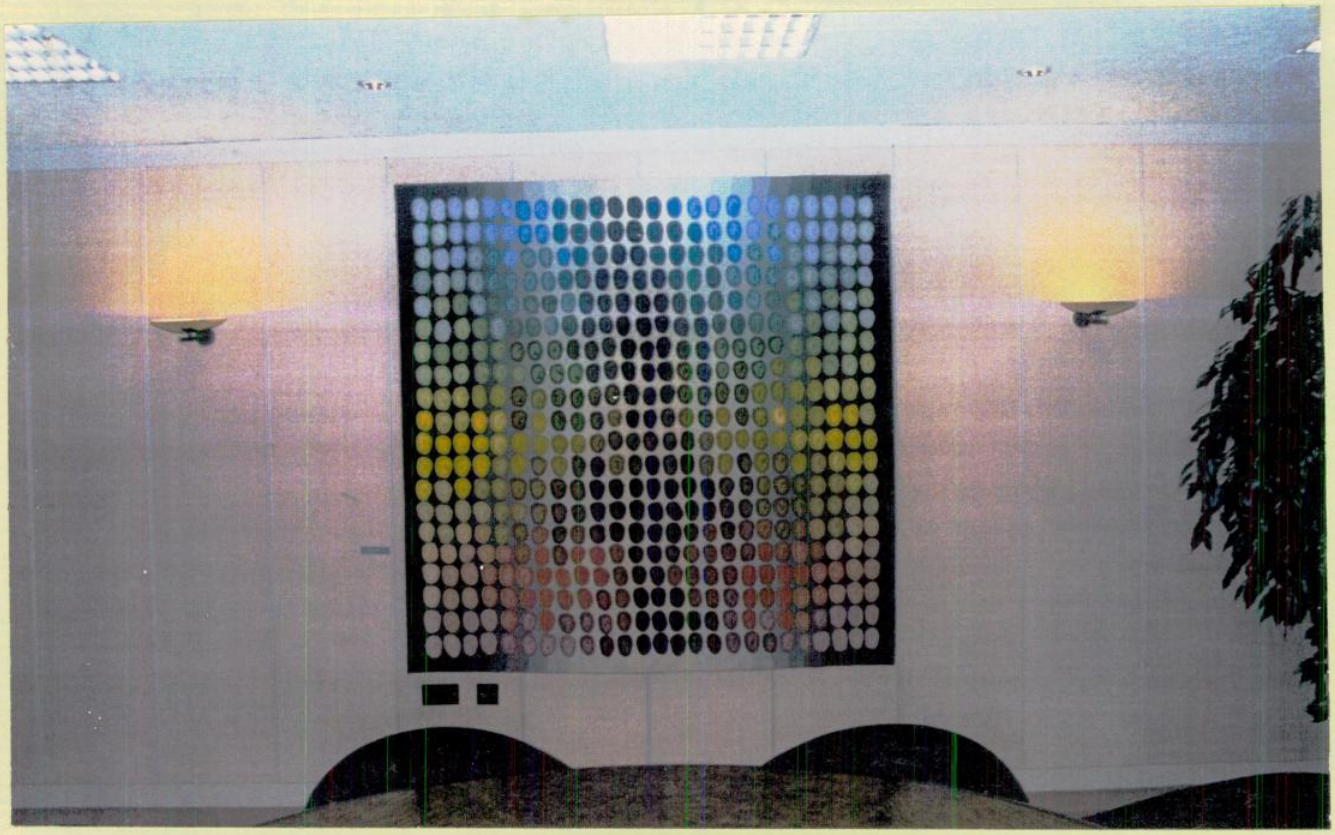

Fig. 38 & 39. The Tain, designed by Le Brocquy and close up.

Fig. 40 & 41. The Tain, close ups.

with the fact that all of these tapestries have been re-produced many times, gives the impression that Le Brocquy views his tapestries as being unashamedly decorative and exploits this fact to it's fullest potential, see (Figs. 38-41).

It is obvious that all three artists retain links between both their paintings and tapestries, but all do so in different ways. Mary Fitzgerald quite simply designs for tapestry in a way very similar to painting, confidently reassured that her tapestries will never be a reproduction of her work as a painter, as Harold Cohen, a painter who has collaborated with the Dovecot Studio's on many pieces of tapestry said: "A piece of woven textile can never be 'like' a piece of painted paper" (1980 p.14). In contrast both Scott and Le Brocquy use similar imagery and content in their paintings and tapestries while their use of colour takes a most dramatic twist. They both see tapestry as something with different problems and solutions, and therefore their use of different colours and approach to re-curring themes appear. These bright colours that they both have resorted to are considered decorative, and why not?, as tapestries are essentially decorations for interiors.

Although all artists may design in slightly different ways, by no means does this make anyone of them a better designer than the others. As long as their completed tapestries are not just woven copies of their paintings and work successfully in their own right, when seen independantly, I believe them all to be successful.

## CONCLUSION

Before I began my research I had quite a romantic view of tapestry, romantic in the sense that I believed it was all one-way traffic, with the weaver being thoroughly abused by the artist who recieved all the credit. I soon learned that this was not entirely correct.

True, at one stage, particularly during the 17th and 18th centuries, this was common practise, with the weavers job consisting of nothing more than copying a painter's work. However, all this changed, due to the dynamic work of both William Morris and Jean Lurcat.

Today things are slightly different. A painter who is involved with tapestry, works in conjunction with a weaving studio. Here their tapestries are woven by a team of people who are professionals, they like and enjoy their job, and in no way do they feel used or abused by the painter who actually designs the tapestry. This means that finally, a harmonius relationship between both painter and weaver can be realised.

With this essential harmony firmly established, it allows space to more closely investigate the artist designing for tapestry.
It would appear that Louis Le Brocquy and Patrick Scott both design for tapestry with any work they have done as painters firmly removed from their minds. Links between both their paintings and tapestries only occur through images and themes that they were obsessed with at the time

of designing. In fact, this is the only link between their paintings and tapestries, and in some cases it is quite difficult to believe that the one man was responsible for two so dramatically opposing bodies of work.

In contrast, it can sometimes be difficult to tell whether Mary Fitzgerald's tapestries are not actually paintings. For her, designing for tapestry is a continuation of her work as a painter, with any differences between both bodies of work occuring only as a result of very practical and modern reasons.

The reason for this huge difference between Le Brocquy and Scott's work and that of Fitzgerald, is to do with age differences. The fact is that both Le Brocquy and Scott were beginning their careers as tapestry designers in the late 1940s when Lurcat's revolutionary ideas were paramount. They both saw the mistakes made in previous centuries when tapestries were nothing more than woollen copies of paintings, and so in adopting Lurcat's method made a concious decision to ensure they did not do the same. Therefore, such dramatic changes in their use of colour as both artists and designers, can quite obviously be seen.

Mary Fitzgerald subscribes to a different and possibly more modern school of thought. She designs tapestries as an extension of her work as a painter, firmly convinced that something on paper can never be re-created by a piece of woven textile.

All three artists' work in slightly different ways but this does not

make any of them any less successful than the other, as long as their tapestries work independantly of their paintings, I believe them all to be successful.

All three have good, understanding relationships with the weavers who work on their designs. For me, as a textile student, this is a very positive point of their work within tapestry. Scott and Fitzgerald have both used the 3-D qualities of tapestry and so have a slightly better relationship than Le Brocquy might, with their weavers.
The struggle of the unsung hereos of tapestry : the weaver, is not of such importance today, as fibre-artists; people who want to both design and weave their own tapestries, can do so.

This thesis aimed to take a closer look at the artists working within tapestry, and at the resulting differences between their paintings and tapestries, and possible reasons for it, rather than the much already documented struggle of the weaver.

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