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Commemorative Images of Women: Dublin Millennium 1988

by

Wendy McCarroll

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Introduction

Monuments celebrate people or events considered significant in the past and important for the future. In Dublin, there are few monuments which commemorate women. Monuments are there for the most part because of a need for symbols of national identity. They therefore should represent a shared common experience in order to function as commemorative art. The aim is to transfer popular memory to official history.

The absence of female symbols and the preponderance of male ones in society indicate that women have been treated differently by society. Women share a different economic, social and political history which for the most part is 'invisible' and not officially recorded. Women are not celebrated or honoured as often as men. A survey done in 1989 by Mary Clark, Dublin Corporation archivist (see Donovan, 1990), showed that of the sixty memorials around the city only two were for women: Statue of Countess Markiewicz, St Stephen's Green, plaque to Margaret Burke Sheridan, Fitzwilliam Square. Since then the situation has only slightly improved.

In this thesis I look at the conceptive images which have been imposed on women. These are perpetuated by the current system of selection and patronage of public art and by the current ideology surrounding the portrayal of women. I look at the work of three contemporary artists who were commissioned to produce pieces for the 1988 Dublin Millennium. In particular, I explore the significance of the three depictions of women produced by these artists, and examine how the artists and subjects were selected and supported. Images of women affect their social, psychological and spiritual development. Warner (1985, p. xx) says,

But a symbolized female presence both gives and takes value and meaning in relation to actual women, and contains the

potential for affirmation not only of women themselves but of the general good they might represent and in which as half of humanity they are deeply implicated.

Unfortunately, the statues there are of women in Dublin, are rarely about real women. They concern women because of the effect the portrayal of women has on the public perception of women. "Nonetheless, I still think there is a residual impact - these images are impinging on my subconscious image of myself in a way which is destructive, denigrating, limiting." (Smyth, 1987, p. 15). This thesis considers how images of women have been used and how this use of 'woman' as symbol has affected the idea of femaleness.

I also discuss the cultural processes that bring images of women into existence. How might this process be better adapted to enhance the vision women have of themselves? How might more monuments to 'real' women be erected to those who have made a significant contribution to society?

Ideas about men and women are evident in the imagery society has of them. Also, existing imagery may in turn affect ideas on men and women. Men are portrayed as authoritative and active whereas women are depicted, for the most part, as symbolic and passive. There is an imbalance in the amount of images there are of men compared to the amount there are of women. There is also an imbalance on a conceptual level because men are portrayed more positively than women. The image that truly represents women attempts to redress the imbalance of commemorative images of men and women.

Chapter 1

Popular Images of Women

This chapter explores the meaning of 'image' and what influences images. The significance of images for the individual is considered. Three contemporary images are looked at for what they communicate about women and about the society which creates such images. They are *Annalivia* by Éamonn O'Doherty and Seán Mulcahy, *Molly Malone* by Jeanne Rynhart, and *The Meeting Place* by Jakki McKenna (see Illustration 1(a), (b), (c).).

The definition of 'image'

Images of women are imitations of the female body. The images I am examining are figurative statues of women. In turn, an image may also be a conception of what woman is. Ideas of femaleness are culturally coded in that ideas evolve over time and are influenced by external factors. There are two aspects of *image of women* I would like to consider. The first concerns ideas *about* women. There is a social and historical conception of Irish women which is derived from folk imagination. The second aspect concerns ideas *by* women. Ideas by women on how women should be portrayed imply or entail the pursuit of an image that is as truthful about women and as life-enhancing as possible.

Historical image

According to Ní Chuilleanáin (1985), evidence of mythological female figures is found in the stone Sheela-na-Gig carvings of early Christianity, for example, the carved figures on White Island, Fermanagh. They are found too in the pages of literature, where mythological figures have inspired poets, writers and revolutionaries. The historical depictions of women can be traced through the benign,



Illustration 1(a): *Annalivia*



Illustration 1 (b): *Molly Malone*



Illustration 1(c): *The Meeting Place*

the horrific and the obscene (Ní Chuilleanáin, 1985, p. 2). St Brigid, as an example of a Christian saint, is a benign image, as is the Virgin Mary. The Badhb of old Celtic lore and the more modern banshee are examples of the historic, horrific female image¹. The Sheela-na-gig were obscene reminders of the power of sex. They are linked to the tradition of the fear of Eve, the temptress and symbol of the spirit of evil. All these historical images have currency today (for example, the cult of the Virgin Mary; the heroines of *Fatal Attraction*, *The Final Seduction*, *Basic Instinct*; iconography of S&M and prostitution).

The benign image of women is also officially enshrined. The Irish Constitution sees women as housebound wives and mothers. "By her life within the home, woman gives the State the support without which the common good cannot be achieved." (1937 Constitution, Article 41.2). In contrast, the depictions of Countess Markiewicz are shaped by their relationship to the image of woman as powerful, mythical and horrific. There are similar illustrations of Mother Ireland, Britannia, Victory and Liberty cast in the same mould (see Illustration 2).

It could be said that women are seen in the context of their role whereas men are seen as individuals. The individual woman is therefore to a large degree invisible. Women's history is only occasionally recorded in standard history, when an individual woman achieves within criteria by which men are judged. Countess Markiewicz, for example, is commemorated for her active role in fighting for independence for Ireland.

Images are significant according to Ní Chuilleanáin (1985, p. 3) because "people make use of images as exemplars to learn about life, to achieve maturity, and to launch themselves towards the objects of

¹The badhb is pre-Christian and associated with warfare. Morrígan, badhb and macha (or nemhain) were collected known as the triple deity Morrígan. The Morrígan was a great queen or unpleasant woman. The badhb was an ugly hag, and the macha was a repellent creature to whom heads were sacrificed. As the badhb could not be transformed into a Christian god, she probably became what is known as the banshee or harbinger of death. (Wood, 1985, p. 17)



Illustration 2: *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), by Delacroix



their life's struggle." However, images of women in Ireland often obliterate the reality of women's lives. Meaney (1993, p. 230) sees a direct link between images of Mother Ireland and self-sacrificing Irish mothers. Women assimilate ideas about their roles. Sexual identity is conditioned by those patterns of behaviour that are seen as being available to one or the other sex. The choices and level of achievement possible are closely connected with the idea people have of themselves. A lack of positive, real images of women could be read by women as implying that they have no potential, no hope.

Woman as sign

According to McGrath (1987, p. 256), "What woman is depends on how she is described". Women have been described as hysterical, narcissistic and childlike at one time or another according to men's ideas of femininity (see Malcolm, 1991, pp. 318-334; Coward, 1978; Weigel, 1985, p. 80; Mulvey, 1973, p. 131; Freud, 1905). Another area that illustrates the transference of men's ideas of femininity on to female subjects is female eroticism. Tickner (1978, p 263) examines erotic imagery. She sees the Western voyeuristic tradition as coming under the labels of 'fantasist' and 'realist'. The expression of erotic fantasies she sees as best characterised by either Romantic or Decadent images which isolate woman into a more effective symbol by frequently showing her alone. The images which best typify the fantasist genre are the extreme images of woman dominant over man or in contrast submissive to him, or of woman masturbating or engaged in lesbian foreplay or sex. The range of images is traced from the victimised *Susannah and the Elders* by Rembrandt for example, to the vengeful *Diana and Actaeon* by Titian to the devious sexual temptresses Circe, Medusa, Delilah, Judith (for example, by Caravaggio) and Salome. According to Mulvey (1973, p. 131),

Women are constantly confronted with their own image in one form or another, but what they see bears little relation or

relevance to their own unconscious fantasies, their own hidden fears and desires.

Male artists, in creating images of women, have projected male fantasies and fears onto the image of woman. These male fantasies are evident in the writings of Freud - in castration anxieties, for example, which are said to arise during the Oedipus Complex. Mulvey (1973) attributes male fascination with the visual representation of women to the consequences of the resolution of that complex. Mulvey (1975, p. 128) sees conflict arising between the fantasy female present in male minds the reality of the female which psychoanalysis believes men cannot come to terms with. There is an element of unattainment or mystery in using the female form as a receptacle for those thoughts and fantasies that the artist does not understand.

The realist aspect of Western European voyeurism, according to Mulvey (1973), appears to accommodate women as equal and active sexual partners. But the images produced in much pornography, for example, or in the work of artists such as Picasso, are still produced by a male artist for a male audience. As Berger (1972, p. 56) says, "The spectator-owner will in fantasy oust the other man or else identify with him." Erotic art is therefore not about women but of women. It is erotic at the cost of virtue and is related to the stereotype of woman as Eve, the temptress or whore.

Woman is everywhere in art, but she is also absent. The female body

bears torches, lifts victorious wreaths, grows copper wings and raises aloft a ring of neon stars; whole buildings rest on its marble heads. It sells cars, beer, shaving lotion, cigarettes, hard liquor; it sells diet plans and diamonds, and desire in tiny crystal bottles. (Atwood, 1994, p 2.)

The female body is used to mean many things except the essence of being female. According to Tickner (1978, p. 264), "She is not the

expression of female experience, she is a mediating sign for the male." The female image in its variations is the consequence of the absence of women from the making of a female image. As de Beauvoir (1949, quoted by Tickner, 1978, p. 339) put it, "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view which they confuse with absolute truth." The contribution of women to the image of woman has been limited by the lack of opportunity which has disadvantaged women for centuries (see Nochlin, 1971) and by the social constraints imposed on them, where expectations about gender coloured objective viewing of their achievements (see Greer, 1971; Chadwick, 1990; Tufts, 1974; Nochlin, 1971; Möhrmann, 1985).

Tickner (1978, p. 273) claims that "We are dealing with the sign 'woman' emptied of its original content and refilled with masculine anxieties and desires." By this she means that the images imposed on women are based on male perception of femaleness and not on ideas by women about themselves.

Role models

The female body is not a noncolonised space which women can return to. It is culturally coded, but Coward (1987, p. 145) states that the prevailing view is that images, idioms and customary forms of behaviour are produced spontaneously by an individual. They are perceived as neutral reflections of attitudes and images which already exist in society. She points out that society increasingly uses visual images in acts of communication with associated persuasive intentions. There is a modern requirement therefore to be visually as well as verbally literate; by this Coward means that the public must learn to read images accurately.

Dworkin (quoted by Fisher, 1987, p. 322) discusses how man has used objects "to feel his own power and presence". Women have traditionally been included in this category as exchangeable and disposable possessions. Complicit with this attitude is advertising

through its persistent use of women which focus primarily on sexuality (see Illustration 3).

Advertising represents men as controllers and producers and women as consumable and consumers (Dworkin, 1981, p 21.). The roles women play in advertisements reinforce the roles ascribed to women throughout Western tradition. These roles are 'natural' in the sense that the role of women is to bear children and nurture them and to support men, but not to enhance their own lives. Meaney (1993, p. 230) says that the extent that women exist as a function of their maternity in the dominant ideology of Southern Ireland became evident during the referendum on the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution (regarding abortion).

Images of women in the new state

The new nation's value system had more in common with the value system of the traditional-minded, rural-oriented society and hence with the virtual exclusion of women from public life. Though Irish women assumed equality in times of war (see Wood, 1985, p. 14; MacCurtain, 1985, p. 49), this was not so in peace. Women were central to the Irish Revolution of 1916-21 by resisting colonisation rather than accommodating the oppression and engaging in the resistance through the paramilitary organisation *Cumann na mBan*.

The wording of the 1937 Constitution reflected the popular ideology for women of the time. It stressed the family as priority, work for married women as selfish distraction, and the romanticism and sufficiency of marriage and the home as fulfilling. This ideology was reinforced and authorised by a rise in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s of commercial, journalistic and political propaganda about women's behaviour, interests and limitations. This ideology was broadcast as crude advertising propaganda, entertainment and also as psychological and sociological theory providing stereotypical role models for women.

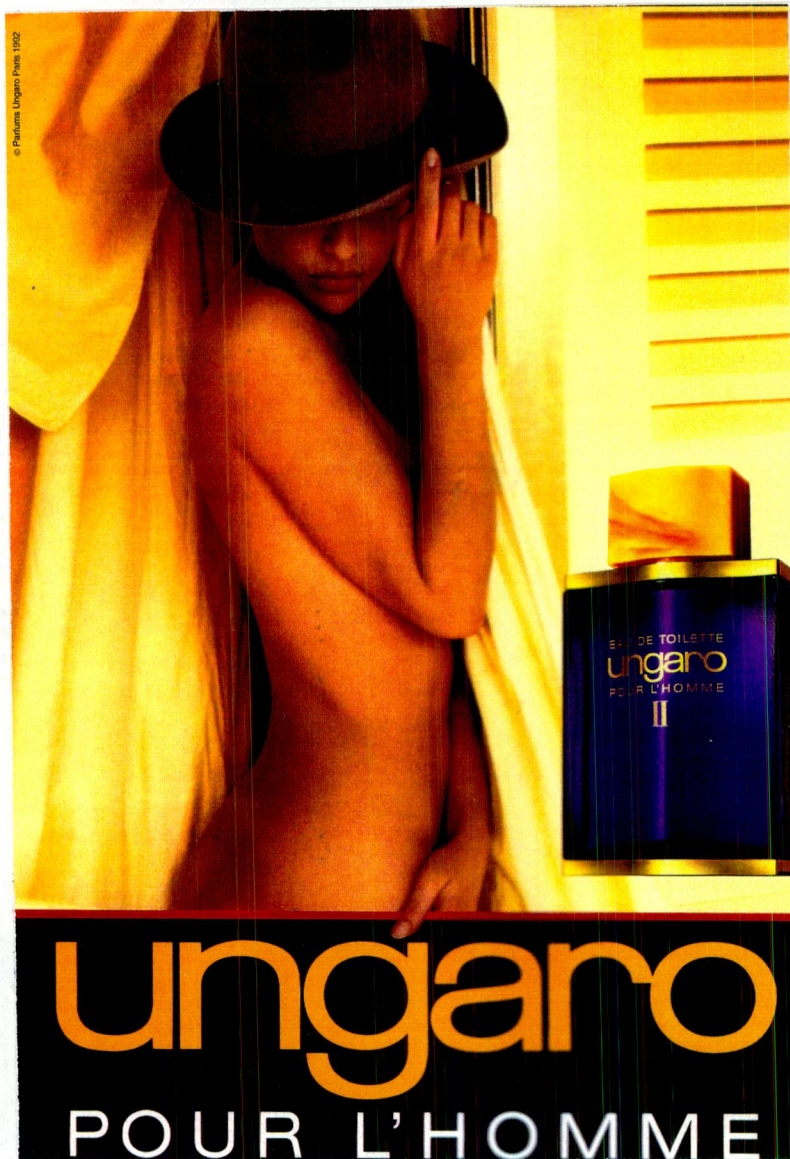


Illustration 3: Advertisement



Far from the ideals of a new republic, the Irish state's laws and social provisions were repressive of the liberty of women. There was no contraception, and there were unequal wages and higher taxes for married women. There was little improvement right up until the 1970s when membership of the E.E.C. forced progressive legal emancipation on an unwilling male-dominated Irish legislature by making it obvious that the rights of women in Ireland had been denied (see Ní Chuilleanáin, 1985, p. 51).

Heroines of the Dublin City Millennium, 1988

"Language is non-visual but nonetheless creates highly significant images" (Smyth, 1987, p. 13) It is difficult to separate the construction of femininity through language from the creation of women through visual images. The Irish literary imagination has stored certain gender stereotypes of women over the centuries. The mythological heroines are charged with power - Queen Maeve, Sheela na Gig and the Banshee. Twentieth century literary heroines were the result of a departure by writers such as Shaw and Joyce away from the ideology of the dependent female. The heroines were, however, disempowered because they were abandoned, isolated and martyred - Joyce's Molly Bloom, Pearse's Mise Eire, O'Casey's Juno.

As part of the 1988 Dublin City Millennium celebrations, a number of sculptures were commissioned for various sites around the city, some with mythological or literary themes.

***Annalivia* by Éamonn O'Doherty and Seán Mulcahy**

Annalivia is based on the Celtic female river god immortalised by Joyce as Annalivia Plurabelle in *Finnegans Wake* in 1939. The image itself is very traditional in that it reads as a Celtic female motif. "In the nationalistic tradition the memory of Ireland's Celtic goddesses has been crucial, particularly in reference to their combination of ferocity and sexuality, and their Earth Mother role in validating rulers by their

union with them." (Loftus, 1990, p 22.) It is powerful. It is big, in the patriarchal tradition which reads big as significant. It depicts a powerful but ugly young woman. There is a suggestion of god-like immortality.

The head and breasts are the dominant features on the figure but she is not an erotic figure despite the long hair which has traditionally been a symbol of femininity. She is an Earth-mother figure yet her maternity reflects the Western European tradition of unsensual and passive motherhood. She does not communicate with the viewer. Her eyes are fixed and stare straight ahead. The architectural structure of which she is a part invites the viewers to sit with their backs to her and by implication, ignore her.

She is a symbol, a tribute to the civic power that put her there but she also tells us more, she tells us about the mind-set that is society.

Annalivia is not an image of woman for women. Smyth, 1989, p. 32 says of *Annalivia*,

It uses 'woman' as a sign in a discourse from which women, imaginatively, economically, politically disempowered, are in effect and effectively excluded.

I think it is an ironic piece which demands a response. In the tradition of counter-monuments it "stirs memory of something about which citizens already have mixed feelings, or seeks to 'mix-up' the feelings of those who claim an unthinking certainty." (see O'Byrne, 1994, p. 13). I see it as relating to counter-monuments in that the icon does not function as such a traditional icon should because society reads traditional icons differently. This icon illustrates that society's thinking is 'mixed-up'. The existence of *Annalivia* brings us closer to the truth in that it is a representation of many ideas but ultimately, it is not about women.

Molly Malone by Jeanne Rynhart

Bruce Arnold called her awful and vulgar and cried for a stop to "the city being cluttered up with mediocre bronze figures which mean little, and move us even less" (Arnold, 1993, p 8). What is interesting about the *Molly Malone* monument is that she conflicts with the image of Molly Malone, the character, alive in the minds of Dubliners. The statue does not look like the poor, naïve waif of a girl established in the public imagination. Despite historic authentication, the monument does not conform with the public perception of the character Molly Malone, which is derived from the ballad about Molly Malone.

Molly Malone is a symbol of Dublin. The proposal to install her was part of the commemoration of the Millennium and, therefore, patriotic in sentiment. Strangely, the monument does not convey the hardship of the life of the ballad character. There is little movement in the piece and its features are exaggerated and pedantic. The piece is sited on a low platform which places the figure neither on ground level nor on a pedestal, but somewhere in limbo.

I see it as a confused piece. The style of the figure is reminiscent of the traditional use of "the human form and especially the female form to decorate the seats of authority and prestige" (Warner, 1985, p. 19). Dublin Castle and the Four Courts are decorated with such female forms. *Molly Malone* is similar to the traditional figures in that it is decorative, bosomy, narrow of waist, round of hip, and the dress material hugs and wraps the figure. The confusion is that it also stands as a piece in itself. It represents the well-known character Molly Malone and the legendary characterisation of her image.

Her identity juxtaposes historical fact and legend and is obscure because legend places her in the nineteenth century whereas unproven historical records place her in the seventeenth century. The sign is a mix of artistic convention and seventeenth-century social reality.

***Meeting Place* by Jakki McKenna**

Jakki McKenna's piece represents a new departure in monuments to women. It is socially realistic, and about women. It is no coincidence that the piece is placed definitely on ground level.

The figures are big and bulky, and their ordinariness is interesting. It is a very fresh piece in that it departs from tradition on a number of levels. The simple garb and strong practical shoes make the women more real because the cloth is not used to accentuate the body shape and is neutral rather than decorative. The pose is a very natural one and again departs from tradition in that female figures are usually shown in artificial poses. Also, the women are different ages; one older than the other. Traditionally female figures are beautiful and young. Old women are usually portrayed as ugly. The very ordinariness of the women is therefore a departure and it is most unusual to see aged women in monumental form.

The difference in ages and the plainness of the figures creates a sense of narrative. Figures of women are usually seen in their roles as wives or mothers so it is refreshing to see a piece where it is possible to imagine them as having an identity as individuals engaged in conversation (see Illustration 4).

In a city where the absence of female statues and the prominence of male statues is evident, more statues of recognition and celebration of women are needed. There should be statues to women from all sections of society.



Illustration 4: *The Meeting Place*, close-up

Chapter 2

Commemoration

This chapter explores both the purpose and function of art in public spaces and what justifies putting a piece in a specific site. The role of the patron is discussed. The chapter covers how the artists of the three sculptures were selected and how the subjects of the pieces were chosen. The procedures followed by the individual artists are described. The artists' briefs and intentions are examined as well as the procedures of the artists.

Purpose and function of art in public places

The function of commemorative public art in times gone by was to honour heroes, generally male, and for the most part for public deeds. Another function was to commemorate the patron in a power statement intended to acknowledge the importance of the patron. A third function was to reward benefactors, those members of society who had behaved altruistically. In Ireland, the formation of the new state and the business of nation-building led to a preoccupation with national identity. Mother Ireland as a visual image emblematic of Ireland is based on the memory of fierce sexual Celtic goddesses and on the figurative style of allegorical females such as Liberty and Hibernia. A need for shared traditional symbols was expressed in the sculpture of the time, and in the desire to build monuments to national heroes such as Pearse and Countess Markiewicz.

There was a shift in emphasis in commemorative public art in the 1980s best exemplified by the identification of public art as an academic subject. Courses of formal study were set up. The area of public art, especially what it meant to place art in the public space, was researched.

The discourse on public art suggests certain criteria for what constitutes accountable public art: it should be site-specific and it should be socially relative. A piece designed for an interior exhibition space cannot fulfill the same function as a piece that is designed for public space. A museum or gallery is a "site of pilgrimage", according to McGonagle (1990, p 42), in that people visit with the intention of seeing the piece. This is entirely different from placing a piece of sculpture where it must conform with the function of the environment in which it is put.

The *Molly Malone* piece is an example of public art that is not accountable because it does not relate to the site appropriately. It is not enough for a piece to be placed outside in order to be site-specific; the piece must relate to its environment. The environment should be clearly defined. This is one of the problems that *Annalivia* faces. The environment is a main street. There is not enough space around the piece. It has to compete with the heavy traffic flow. It is also under 12' high and so is dominated by tall buildings, trees, and monuments on pedestals.

It will be perceived visually and socially. Visually it is important that the piece enhances the site through consideration of scale, material, and form. In order to be socially relative, it should convey aspects of the culture, not in the didactic mode of public statuary of the past, but in an informative way that makes a statement of the position of contemporary art in society. It should enlarge our knowledge of the artists' concerns, which in turn are a reflection of our society. According to Rose (1989, p. 25), an accountable piece of public sculpture may in turn create a historic patina about our civilisation and the remembrance of our history. It is therefore important that evaluations are made by qualified persons as to what is installed in the public space.

Contemporary public art takes two routes; it attempts to abstain from politics in mythological pieces such as *Molly Malone* and *Annalivia*, or it is socially conscious as in *Meeting Place*. The

mythological themes are ambiguous and may obscure history, whereas the socially conscious pieces are more direct and accountable. The parallel existence of the two routes is illustrative of the current zeitgeist.

Role of the patron

Many companies were eager to sponsor public art for the Millennium because it generated a sense of pride in the city and its people. Funding for public sculpture relies on patrons in Ireland.

Annalivia was sponsored for £72,000 by the benefactor Smurfit. The Sculptors' Society of Ireland (SSI) were at the time in the process of coordinating a collaborative scheme, with architects and sculptors working together on a 'Pillar Project'. Artists were to design a replacement for *Nelson's Pillar*. The plans had to be scrapped because the Corporation commissioned O'Doherty to install *Annalivia* without debate or consultation with the SSI or the Artists' Association of Ireland (AAI). Planning permission was not even sought. A monument to an industrialist now stands near the spot that marks the centre of Dublin in the public perception, near the original site of *Nelson's Pillar* (see Illustration 5).

Rynhart was sponsored by Jury's Hotels and obtained further sponsorship from AIB. *Molly Malone* was installed on the whim of Matt McNulty who was anxious to decorate the city in time for the Millennium. His comments in the press about "fun sculpture" and sculptors taking their work too seriously (Woodworth, date/page unavailable) are frightening - it is obvious that he does not engage with the subject or understand the implications involved in placing sculpture in a public place.

McKenna had to work to a restrictive budget. AIB sponsored ten Millennium statues for £40,000, which mean that she would have had to work with a budget of £4,000 for *The Meeting Place* but she



Illustration 5: Inscription mentioning Jefferson Smurfit

secured £7,000 from Arnott's. One of the bronze bags consequently bears the Arnott's logo. Though patrons play a major role, in that without sponsorship these pieces would not have been realized, the sponsors' role also gives them determining powers.

Fear of art works causing offence or proving unsatisfactory introduces a censorial element into commissions. Thus the briefs are often restrictive and the fate of the piece is left to the discretion of the sponsor. Baggaley, (1990, pp. 31-32) states that the role of the patron questions the conditions of meaning in public art. Interventionist and issue-based work is censored and controlled by the patrons. He cites the 1988 Metro Billboards Projects UK, as an example, where the sponsors (Metro executives) withdrew backing for the site-specific works because of the works political message. The pieces were exhibited together on a specially constructed location. The context of meaning was therefore completely changed because of the intervention of the sponsors.

Patrons prefer the traditional and established over the innovative and radical. It is important to address what function public art has, as well as who it benefits. McGonagle (1990, pp. 42-43) sees patronage in Ireland as linked to the colonial past. He considers that ownership of public space stems from the English social convention of ownership of land and the deployment of public art in the form of ceremonial monuments. "A picture emerges of an entire environment being marked, claimed for ownership by one value system through its public art, over others." McGonagle (1990, p. 43) The best solution, according to Kelly (1989, p. 51) to the patronage problem would seem to be a combination of both state and private patronage. If the state sets up essential structures it would provide a continuity of patronage. Private enterprise would then be more about an innovative interest in specific projects and less about corporate power statements.

Selection procedures

According to the SSI's *Code of Practice for the Commissioning/Purchase of Art for Public Places*, both the AAI and the SSI should be represented, and artists or artists' representatives should be in the majority. It is also recommended that there should be a community representative. Both O'Doherty and McKenna state that the public representatives should be visually literate and that the Arts Council and the SSI should be brought in. Before installing *Annalivia* and *Molly Malone* the Corporation ought to have consulted with the Art Advisory Committee to the Corporation which, though dealing exclusively with the Municipal Gallery, are briefed to advise on matters of municipal art. The need for a dispassionate, expert advisory committee to oversee commissions of public sculpture for the city became obvious after the uproar over the selection procedure (described in more detail below) of O'Doherty and Rynhart. Ciarán McGonigal, committee chairperson (AACC) stated "Our brief does allow us to advise the Corporation on other matters if they ask for our advice. At the moment they rarely do." (Woodworth, date/page unavailable.)

When asked by the present author, O'Doherty, McKenna and Rynhart do in fact agree that the fairest selection procedure is through open competition, with a selection panel consisting of representatives of the art establishment and of the community, with the majority weighted in favour of artists or artists' representatives.

Éamonn O'Doherty and Seán Mulcahy

In the case of *Annalivia* the method of selection was controversial in that Dublin corporation had selected a site for a fountain for the Millennium and approached Smurfit to sponsor the work. Smurfit then commissioned Mulcahy who contacted Éamonn O'Doherty to work with him on the piece.

Jeanne Rynhart

Jeanne Rynhart was selected through open competition by a panel made up of representatives of Dublin Corporation, Bord Fáilte, and the Millennium Committee. Rynhart won the commission over about 80 other artists. The panel was not weighted in favour of artists or visually literate representatives. Also the selection was not judged in an anonymous way. These factors would have an effect on the decision and final choice of the artist.

The piece was sponsored by AIB and the Jury's Hotels Group. *Molly Malone* was commissioned on the personal initiative of Matt McNulty while he was Managing Director of Dublin Promotional Organisation Limited, which was the group set up to stimulate and coordinate activities during the Millennium. He approached Brenda McNiff of the Irish Times Collection who had commissioned from Rynhart small pieces in the past, for advice on an artist to realize his idea for a monument to Molly Malone. The historical background was researched with the help of Brenda McNiff who acted as Project Manager.

Jakki McKenna

The procedure to select McKenna was considered to be a fair one by the artistic community. Dublin Corporation approached the SSI with the proposal to commemorate the Millennium through sculpture. They obtained sponsorship from AIB for £40,000. Ten sculptures were commissioned on sites specified by the Corporation around the city, with each artist getting a budget of £4,000².

Jenny Haughton was appointed by the SSI as coordinator. The committee was made of up Arts Council members, SSI members, and the Corporation had a representative. Architects and environmentalists

²The sites were Pimlico, Ballymun, St Catherine's Park, O'Connell Street, Liffey Street, Essex Quay, South Great George's Street, Clontarf Link Road, Gardiner Street Park, and St Stephen's Green/Baggot Street corner.

were invited in, so it was a good selection weighing in favour of arts people³. One hundred and fifty-two entries were received in maquette form. Each maquette remained anonymous until the final ten had been chosen, and each piece was voted on anonymously. An anonymous method has advantages and disadvantages. It means that an established sculptor with vast experience competes with an ever-increasing pool of artists. However, the quality of the maquette and proposal would suggest it was by an established artist. If the procedure is not anonymous, artists are selected according to their experience as well as their proposal, and it is difficult for emerging artists to compete.

The only criticism of the procedure for selection of *The Meeting Place* is that the community was not represented on the committee. However, once the artist was chosen, meetings were called in the communities of the ten specified sites. Each artist talked about what was going to happen in the area at that stage.

Artist's brief and intention

Éamonn O'Doherty and Seán Mulcahy: *Annalivia*

The conditions of the brief were that it should be completed within six months, it should fit the site and not interfere with the flow of traffic on either side, and it should not be more than 12' high. This last constraint O'Doherty came to regret as the lack of height to the piece made it hard to read (conversation with O'Doherty, 12 December 1994). He believes this constraint was imposed for fear of conflicting with the ghost of *Nelson's Pillar* which was originally situated nearby.

³The selectors were Leo Higgins, sculptor, SSI member; Brian Maguire, artist, AAI member; Pat Seagar, Millennium Committee member; Terry Murray, Dublin Corporation Parks Development; Frank McDonald, architecture critic, Irish Times; Dermot Egan, AIB Deputy Chief Executive; Michael Crimmin, Public Art Development Trust of Great Britain.

His intention was to relate it in scale and materials to what already exists in O'Connell Street. He chose bronze and granite as the most suitable materials for O'Connell Street. If it had been possible he would have used Portland stone, rather than granite, for its durability and finish. He also remarks on the fact that the granite was chipped in Wicklow while the bronze was cast in Henrietta Street and consequently the figure does not sit as well as he would like and is unharmonious. In addition, because of the timescale, there was very little time for adjustment in thinking. Thus the initial sketches were translated into form with very little changes.

O'Doherty studied the site by taking photographs of all the existing monuments in O'Connell Street and of a lot of architectural detail. He was particularly interested in the narrowness and length of the site which dictated the form.

He chose *Annalivia* because it was a Millennium commemorative piece, because the river is the reason Dublin is here at all, and also because the Annalivia image is strong "both in folk mentality, it appears in folk songs, and it has very strong literary allusions to *Finnegans Wake*" (conversation with artist). In addition, he wanted to contrast with the political, vertical "axe-grinding" male monuments on O'Connell Street, by making an apolitical, horizontal, mythological female monument.

He considers the monument successful in that it is used daily for meeting, resting and discussing, and also functions as a symbol of Dublin in tourist publications. O'Doherty asserts that it appeals to people on both a popular and an intellectual level. He says, "It's meant to be a popular piece of carnival art, but with a little bit more permanence." He feels that public art has to be approached quite differently from private and gallery art. It should not illustrate some piece of obscure philosophy that the vast majority of people would be totally uninterested in, it should not indulge in "whimsy" or in "ideas that may have a very short currency". I agree.

O'Doherty feels that *Annalivia* successfully deconstructs what is on O'Connell Street because it changes everything. It takes a typical O'Connell Street monument and knocks it out flat. It changes the sex of the protagonist. It therefore "changes the tension from being one of pretentious pomposity to light-hearted celebration of our common culture and what makes the city what it is". (Conversation with the artist.)

He feels the media hype over the proposal was good publicity for the neglected visual arts. Though a lot of press coverage was of a humorous nature, as in the Daily Star's photograph of a busty model posing on concrete blocks, there was good serious coverage as well. He feels the initial negative reaction from the artistic community was rash, ill-informed, and motivated by outrage at the way he had been commissioned and not selected by the fairer method of open competition. The artistic community commented as follows. Conor Fallon, sculptor, thought a model of the Liffey was anti-sculptural in that it would be too high at the north end. Vivienne Roche thought it was being done too quickly with no room for change. Patrick Pye said it was preposterous, though he had not seen proper drawings, and suggested replacing it with a reference to *Nelson's Pillar*...without the British hero. (Walker, 1989, pp. 16-19)

Ailbhe Smyth (1989) criticised the piece for portraying a passive woman and "embodied disembodiment" that had been "de-eroticised" with a blank, speechless expression. O'Doherty responds by saying she is a powerful woman with a look of tolerant amusement on her face (see Illustration 6). Smyth sees it as a

monumental assertion of the power of the patriarchy; massive appropriation of woman, sign and symbol; pompous denial of woman's right to self-definition; emphatic affirmation of the negation of women excluded from the generation of women. (Smyth, 1989, p. 33)

This comment is symptomatic of a perception of artists' images that refer to a mythological past rather than address an actual,

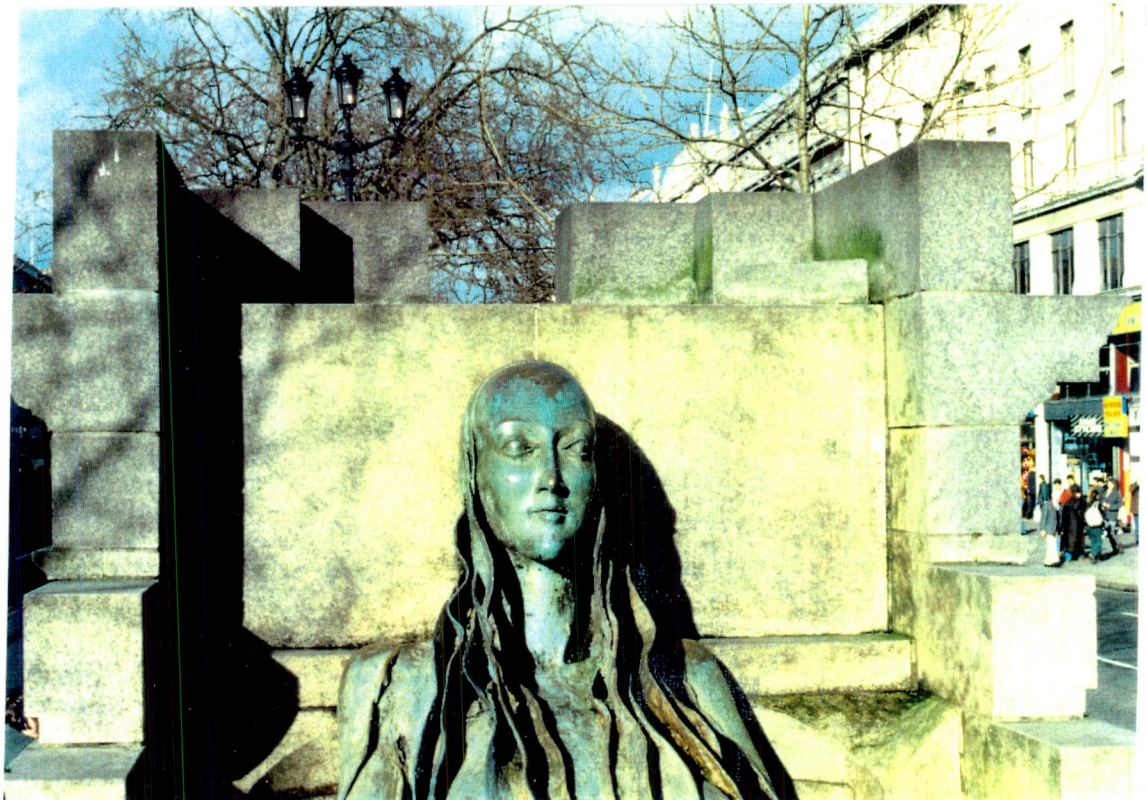


Illustration 6: Face of *Annalivia*

contemporary subject.

Monuments are fascist, according to Gerz (quoted in O'Byrne, 1992 p 14). They serve to remind us of a received account of history by telling us what to think or reassuring us again of what we already think. In attempting to remain neutral or address a large, diverse audience, apparently apolitical themes of a mythological nature are often chosen as emblems of shared cultural ideas common to all. However, as is clear from Smyth's article, the issue of the use of woman as sign is a political one and is therefore far from neutral. Neither is the use of the symbolic form of the female figure a shared cultural idea, as women have a different perception from men. As Warner (1985, p. xx) puts it,

although the absence of female symbols and a preponderance of male in society frequently indicates a corresponding depreciation of women as a group and as individuals, the presence of female symbolism does not guarantee the opposite.

Jeanne Rynhart: *Molly Malone*

The brief specified that it should be Molly Malone, of figurative style, and that it should be subject to authentication by the National Museum. The Grafton Street site was specified. Bronze was chosen for its durability and "touchable" finish (correspondence with the artist). Rynhart modelled the piece in clay slightly above life-size to allow for shrinkage, to keep it on a "human-friendly" scale while allowing for some diminishing at "stand-back range for holiday snaps" (correspondence). There is, however, not much room to stand back, and it is in a thoroughfare rather than in a defined space, making it difficult to take photographs without getting in people's way.

Rynhart seems to have focused on the historical element of the commission. She mentions the Provost's House in T.C.D. as an example of restoration Dublin, but has not noted any other elements,

architectural or otherwise, of the environment as influencing the design of the piece.

Though she is not convinced that Molly Malone actually existed, Rynhart's *Molly Malone* is based on a typical seventeenth-century trader and prostitute. This is because of the discovery of a birth certificate of a Mary Mallone which links the legendary figure to a real seventeenth-century woman. Rynhart sees the piece as issue-based but does not specify what those issues are. I can only suppose that the issues relate to the difficulties women faced in the seventeenth century, poverty and diseases linked with promiscuity perhaps.

Rynhart defines the function as providing a natural visiting point for tourists with cameras. She feels that the media have responded favourably to her piece, and chooses not to comment on the sexual overtones of some reportage.

Men reacted favourably to the buxom, six-foot Molly and wheelbarrow or 'tart with the cart', as City Manager Frank Feeley labelled her. Lord Mayor Ben Briscoe hugged her; Jury's Hotels Managing Director, Michael McCarthy, planted a kiss on her pouting lips, while Mr Feeley patted her ample bottom. (Shiel, 1988)

Rynhart is disappointed at the reaction of the art establishment, which is negative. Adrian Munnelly, Director of the Arts Council, as Registrar of Aosdána, wrote to Matt McNulty expressing his members' "universal depreciation" of *Molly Malone* and stated it to be "entirely deficient in artistic point and merit" (Woodworth, date/page unavailable).

The controversy around the selection procedure may have fuelled this heated denunciation of the piece, as it coincided with the proposal by Matt McNulty to commission from Rynhart a further twelve statues or "fun sculptures" as he called them. The Sculptors' Society stated that

Public sculpture should be commissioned by open competition and that, in any case, no one sculptor should be given responsibility for such a large number of works, given the impact they would have on the city. (Woodworth, date/page unavailable.)

I would agree that more responsible professional selection procedures should be followed with respect to public sculpture. *Molly Malone* was installed on the whim of Matt McNulty. This is scandalous, given that guidelines for the installation of public art have been published, by the SSI, for example.

Jakki McKenna: *The Meeting Place*

Jakki McKenna was one of the artists selected by open competition, by a committee comprising representatives of the Arts Council, SSI, local corporation, architects and environmentalists. The committee was weighted in favour of visually literate people. The brief supplied to the artists asked for site-specific works that would incorporate the history, the community and the utilisation of each site and celebrate Dublin. The budget given to McKenna was limited to £4,000 inclusive of materials, with the materials to be vandal- and fireproof. McKenna had originally thought of stone. The time constraints and budget ruled that out so she decided on bronze. She was concerned at how few sculptures to women there are in Dublin and wanted to create a monument to women. She wanted to site it on O'Connell Street under the statue of Jim Larkin to contrast the women, discussing, quietly getting on with things, with the men shouting on pedestals.

The corporation would not assign a site on O'Connell Street so she chose Liffey Street instead. It interested her because it had space around it and because it was a shopping area, near Hector Grey's and the Sunday market.

The figures are based on a painting McKenna did of two shoppers she observed in Leitrim who regularly met for a chat with their

shopping on a Saturday. Her work is indirectly socially conscious; in *The Meeting Place* one of the figures is older (modelled on the artist's mother), while the other is younger because she likes the idea of mothers and daughters, old women and young women, talking. The expressions are very serious and she says this is because at that time in particular (1988) women were discussing serious issues like abortion and divorce and how it affected them.

She chose 'shoppers' because she is concerned at the way women are always seen dragging heavy bags or weighed down with children, while men are seen without domestic burdens. There are so many shoppers dragging bags around Dublin with nowhere to rest.

McKenna feels that people respond favourably to the piece. An in-built feature, which appeals to children is that one of the shopping bags is a child-sized seat. Media coverage was positive, according to McKenna, apart from one report which referred to "the two broad bottomed women" (conversation with the artist). The artistic community, however, did not respond. McKenna puts this down to the fact that the piece is figurative and not in vogue in contemporary artistic terms. It could also have been that comment was not invited by the press as it was commissioned and installed without controversy.

She states that it is important to get the balance right because a piece must be accessible to the people while being meaningful. Her work is very serious but she wants people to interact with it, to sit beside it, to climb on it or to pose beside it for photographs. McKenna feels that there is still a role for commemorative art and that more women should be commemorated, even on pedestals like men. This was her first attempt at using bronze, having used wood in previous works, and though she feels the piece has successfully achieved her intention she would have liked the modelling to have been better.

Chapter 3

Redressing the Imbalance

This chapter is about the imbalance in commemoration of women and commemoration of men. It is about the significance of this imbalance for women. It is about identifying and dealing with society's inherent sexism as exemplified by a lack of visible celebration of Irish women in the urban fabric. Strategies for dealing with this imbalance are examined. The work of the Irish Women's Archive is looked at as one organization that addresses the imbalance.

Imbalance

Historians nurture group memory, but for the most part historians have not served women well. In order to make meaningful decisions about women's lives it is necessary to have individual personal memories as well as knowledge of the history of the groups women belong to. Feminism is about researching and writing women's history (see Ecker, 1985; Nochlin, 1989, Tufts, 1974; Parker and Pollock, 1987). Even today, different roles and behaviours are expected of men and women. Feminism grows from the perception that the sex role prescribed by society conflicts with the knowledge women have of themselves and their development as adults. It challenges the stereotype of the female as best fulfilled and most useful to society in the role of wife and mother. To such a role is subordinated the development of other talents. The responsibility for the organisation of society is left to males. Friedan (1965) called this stereotype the "feminine mystique".

There are many statues to men in Dublin but few to women, and those that are to women are rarely about women. According to Warner (1985, p. 12),

The female form tends to be perceived as generic and universal, with symbolic overtones; the male as individual even when it is being used to express a generalized idea.

The lack of monuments to women in Dublin supports the argument that women are invisible in history. This lack amounts to an objective measure of women's oppression. Once such sexism is exposed, it may be easier to eliminate.

The political, social and economic structures of Irish society have included systematic limitation of women's autonomy and freedom of action. No similar limitation applied to men. It is therefore difficult to understand why such an injustice is rarely studied along with the male history of the country. Margaret Ward (quoted in Bradley, 1993, p. 15) cites Roy Foster's *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (Penguin, 1988) as an example of the way women's history is left out of standard history books. Foster omits the suffrage movement from the main text, apart from a reference to some members of the Ladies Land League going on to become suffragettes. For the period 1880 to 1922 only three references to individual women are made, as footnotes mainly, and rarely as part of the main text. The nineteenth-century women's Emancipation Movement in Ireland, for example, and the reasons behind it, are not studied in any depth despite their obvious importance. As Cullen (1994, p. 119) says,

It is difficult to see why an organisation of society which gave men a monopoly of access to political and economic power and excluded women from virtually every avenue of approach to these should be something which historians of Irish society should not see as important aspects of that society.

Inherent sexism is also evident in the manner in which monuments of women are referred to locally. The monuments in Dublin are the constant victims of Dublin wit in that they have humorous nicknames: from *Wolfe Tone* to 'Tonehenge', *The Thomas Davis Memorial* to 'Urination Once Again', *The Golden Tree* to 'The Goolie'. The

nicknames given to the monuments of women are also humorous. They differ in that the references to women are particularly derogatory and emphasize the virtue of the women in some way: *The Meeting Place* to 'The Slags with the Bags', *Molly Malone* to 'The Tart with the Cart', *Annalivia* to 'The Floozie in the Jacuzzi', *Memories of Mount Street* to 'The Hoor on the Skewer'. I do not see this nicknaming as deliberately sexist. It is symptomatic of the manner in which women have been regarded in the past and which is still apparent today. Women are still not seen as important or significant in the history of their societies. We have images in society of women not as active and leading, but as passive and following.

Intervention

According to Cullen (1994, pp. 115-116), the first stage of intervention is to recognize that women are invisible in history. Having established that women have not been commemorated equitably with men, through monuments, plaques, naming of buildings, streets or such like, it is important first of all to search for those individual women who have achieved within the terms of criteria by which men are judged. There are monuments to Countess Markiewicz and Maude Gonne who fall into this category, but there are many other women who, though controlled by prejudiced economic, social and political regulations, achieved an extraordinary amount for their time. Cullen (1994, p. 121) tells us that there is evidence that there are differences in the relative position of men and women throughout history which cannot be attributed to nature, but to political, social and economic laws, regulations and customs. These controlled what was acceptable for men and women. For example, she cites the Parnell family: Charles, Fanny and Anna Parnell were all committed nationalists, but Charles went to public school, university, inherited an estate, entered Parliament and led a political party. These opportunities were not available to women. While Anna did lead the

Ladies' Land League, as a woman she could not attend public school, go to university, enter Parliament or lead a political party. The sisters' income came not from inheriting an estate, but from an allowance settled on them by their father and another brother.

It is then necessary to examine the contribution of a wider range of women to the political, social and intellectual movements that bring about change in society, not only in the already identified areas of male-centred history, but also the social and intellectual movements of independent women's groups as well as mixed-gender groups.

The next stage of intervention, according to Cullen, is to focus on women as a distinct group defined by their shared sex with a history of continuity and change. She sees women as a subset of society defined by their sex.

Scannell (1994, p. 200) states that women had no part in framing *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (1937). Only three of the 152 T.D's who had an opportunity to comment on the draft were women. Protesting women's organisations were kept out of the Dáil. These groups were particularly opposed to Article 41.2:

1. In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State the support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
2. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

One group that is currently working on redressing the commemorative imbalance is the Irish Women's Archive⁴. The Women's Commemoration and Celebration Committee (WCCC) was set up in 1989 with the purpose of commemorating women of achievement. They organised seminars and conferences on women's

⁴Directors Marie Heaney, Meadhbh Ní Chonmhidhe, Eilish FitzGerald, Mary Campbell, Nuala Cullen, Dr Mary Rita Donleavy, Carmel Foley, Dr Margaret MacCurtain, Joy Rudd; Chief Executive Monica Barnes.

achievements and contributions. They also organised an exhibition commemorating *Ten Dublin Women* in the Dublin Civic Museum September-November 1991, as well as a schools' essay competition. The WCCC was set up as a registered company and applied for charitable status with an Advisory Board representing diverse and rich traditions of culture and life as experienced by women. The WCCC is now the Irish Women's Archive and has established networking links with country and regional groups in genealogical and historical research. They aim to commemorate women who have contributed to political, social and intellectual groups which provoke change. The female writer and nationalist Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan (1776-1859)⁵, was the first omission from standard history to be celebrated - with a plaque in Kildare Street on May 1, 1990 (see Illustration 7).

Mary Robinson is extremely significant for women and would be a current example worthy of commemoration (see Smyth, 1994, p. 251).

⁵ Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, was a Dublin 'character'. Author of more than seventy volumes, she was admired as well as reviled in her lifetime for her determination to assert her independence as a woman writer in an age of discrimination; for her radical and democratic opinions; and for her pioneering form of nationalism. Her portrait hangs today in the National Gallery (painted by French artist René Berton). Her influence and reputation were such that in 1837 she was the first woman to be awarded a pension for her service to 'the world of letters'. (See Campbell, 1990.)



Illustration 7: Plaque to Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan

Conclusion

An awareness of the significance of images should be cultivated in society. More socially realistic images of women should be on view. For too long the fantasies of men have been projected onto the female body. Women have lived through the fantasies, often assimilating them.

Public monuments provide evidence of how women's images have been used, often by the ruling hierarchy, not to celebrate women but to represent abstract concepts. The allegorical statues such as Justice that adorn Dublin Castle, for example, and the mythological figures such as Mother Ireland in Merrion Square, are symbolic. The only monuments in Dublin that specifically celebrate women are - *Countess Markiewicz*, Merrion Square, *The Meeting Place*, Liffey Street and *Catherine McCauley*, Leeson Street. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the ideology behind allegorical and mythological images is flawed. It is wrong not to recognise and celebrate women's contribution to society. The symbolic use of the female figure in corporate power statements should be an aspect of the past and not a prospect for the future.

The co-existence of the three monuments - *Annalivia*, *Molly Malone* and *The Meeting Place* - and the fact that they were executed in the same year speaks volumes. *The Meeting Place* is the most successful of the three because it fulfils the brief to incorporate the history, the community and to celebrate Dublin. It is accessible and meaningful to the public. It contributes to the shared group memory of women. It has presence and is in a defined space. The success of the piece reflects on the selection procedure which I consider fair and which followed the SSI's guidelines. It is a significant piece in that it is socially realistic and about women. It gets away from the perception of women in their roles and not as individuals. The plainness and

'real' ages of the figures supports this. Unfortunately, such work is rare and more pieces depicting women in real situations are needed.

The lack of meaningful images of women is a symptom of the historians' - including 'image-makers' - regard for women which is not value-free but biased. Therefore, it is important that public art be the result of a responsible, professional process. Expert advisory committees, where they exist, should be utilised. Established guidelines should be adhered to. A combination of state and private patronage should be in place. Patronage affects the theme, form, materials and site of the piece.

The intention of the artist and the intention of the commissioning body are not the same in many cases. The Millennium saw some well intentioned but misguided commissions. The idea behind the commissions was often to prettify the city for the celebrations. This is evident in the time-scale afforded many of the artists; six months in the case of *Annalivia*. It is also evident in the perceived apolitical themes given to the artists. But mythological images where women's bodies are used are not apolitical because using 'woman' as sign is political.

Since the Millennium (1988), according to the Dublin Arts Report there is a new tradition of public sculpture which is attributed, in large measure, to the co-operation of Dublin Corporation and the SSI, and the establishment in 1990 by Dublin Corporation of a Public Art Advisory Group. The Report states that it is necessary to replace 'public art' with 'social art' meaning that the artist and the public should work together in a shared space.

The provision of visual role-models for women should be the result of responsible and conscious decision. It would help to have more women, educated in visual awareness, on advisory panels. The installation of public works that celebrate women is a neglected area. The imbalance must be rectified if women are to understand the importance of having a shared, common history which I see as separate from the common history of men.

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¹ See NCAD file on Jeanne Rynhart.

² See NCAD file on Éamonn O'Doherty.

³ See NCAD file on Jakki McKenna.

