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*THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN,  
FACULTY OF DESIGN, CRAFT DEPARTMENT.*

*AN EXAMINATION OF THE  
KALACHAKRA SAND  
MANDALA EXHIBITION  
IN THE DOUGLAS HYDE  
GALLERY.*



(Fig.1.)

*by  
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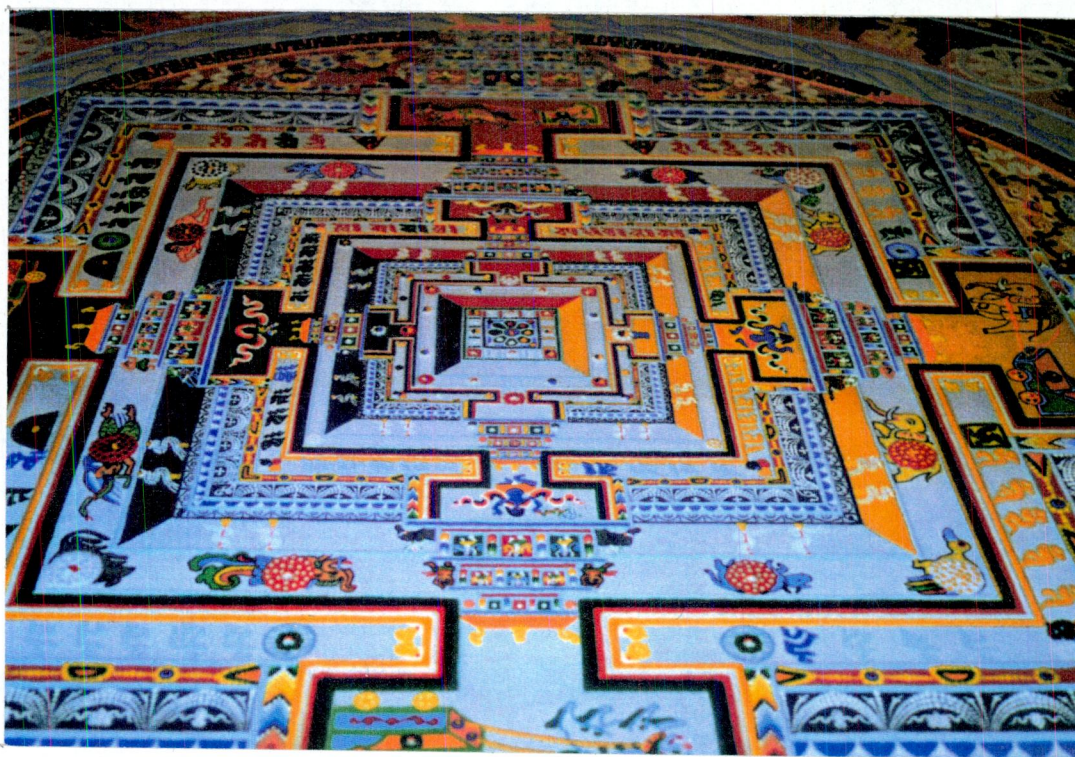


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## INTRODUCTION

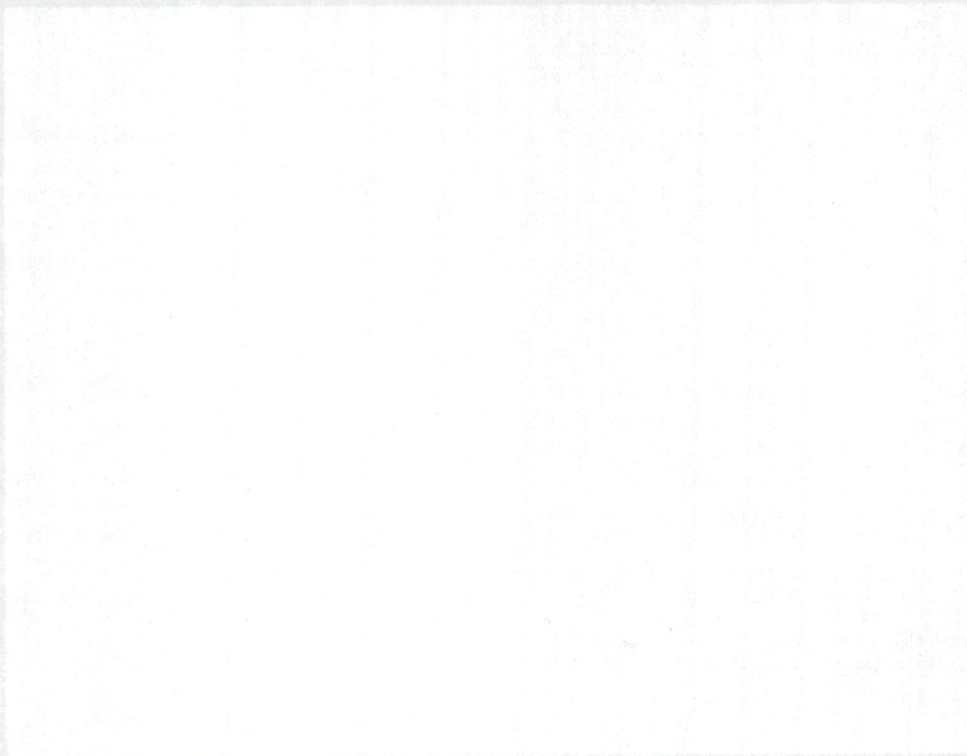
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The Kalachakra Sand Mandala was exhibited in the Douglas Hyde Gallery from the 9th - 28th of February 1994. It was an intricate meditational pattern made of coloured sand, and was constructed in situ by a team of five Buddhist monks.(Fig.3, p.5b) Photographs from Tibetan life, painted scrolls called Thankas, a video about the Kalachakra sand mandala and a picture of H.H. The XIVth Dalai Lama were also displayed in the gallery during this time. The monks commenced the three week duration of the exhibition with an opening ceremony and created the mandala over the following twenty-one days. Following the completion of the mandala, the sand was ceremoniously swept up and then carried in a large procession by several hundred people from Trinity College to the River Liffey(Fig.4p.5b), where it was poured into the water as a beneficial offering to marine life and the environment. (Fig.5b, 6a)



Fig5..THE PROCESSION TO THE LIFFEY.





The exhibition attracted an overwhelming number of viewers which 7  
are estimated to have been over twenty five thousand, this beat all  
records of attendance for any one exhibition at the Douglas Hyde  
Gallery.

The act of making this mandala forms a spiritual exercise, or  
ritual; contemplation of it is regarded as a method of prayer or  
meditation. The act of hosting the Kalachakra mandala exhibition at  
the Douglas Hyde Gallery caused quite a stir because of its religious  
significance, and because it raised the question of whether or not it  
was a suitable exhibition subject for a contemporary art gallery.  
According to John Hutchinson, he received negative and questioning  
comments from members of the "art world" concerning the  
appropriateness of the mandala exhibition.

There was also controversy about the political aspect of the  
show, as part of the Dalai Lama's aim in bringing the mandala to  
Ireland was to create an higher awareness of the Chinese  
Communist Party's occupation of Tibet.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the validity of these  
controversial ideas and determine whether or not the Douglas Hyde  
Gallery in its capacity as a contemporary art gallery, was justified in  
hosting a highly religious display which also held strong political  
connotations. This examination is carried out through following a  
series of steps which investigate different aspects of the Kalachakra  
mandala exhibition.

Firstly the aims and objectives of both parties involved in the  
exhibition are considered; that is the hosting gallery and the  
exhibiting artists. In order to understand the Buddhist's motivation  
for coming to Ireland and performing the sand mandala, one has to  
view the mandala exhibition from a Buddhist perspective, so the  
first chapter of the thesis deals with Buddhism. A brief historical





overview of Buddhism is given in the first section. Section two gives 8  
an explanation of Buddhist beliefs and an insight into the meaning  
of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala and its method of construction.  
Chapter one is then concluded with a summery of the Buddhist's  
reasons for performing the mandala.

The next step is to focus on the hosting gallery, which is of  
course The Douglas Hyde Gallery. Chapter two introduces the  
gallery, states the director's reasons for hosting the mandala  
exhibition and examines the reasons why some members of the  
Douglas Hyde Gallery's Board of Directors had reservations  
regarding hosting the mandala. The next section investigates Gordon  
Campbell's motives for helping fund the show, it looks at his  
opinions about art in general, and his view of the Kalachakra Sand  
Mandala in an artistic context.

In section three of the second chapter exhibitions based on  
the theme of spirituality and identity, preceding and following the  
mandala show at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, are examined and  
compared to the Kalachakra Sand Mandala in order to decide  
whether or not it forms a continuum of this theme. This is an  
important step in justifying whether or not the Kalachakra mandala  
can be termed as contemporary 'art' in the western sense. If it is  
'contemporary art' then there should be no problem with exhibiting  
it in a contemporary art gallery.

To conclude this thesis, public and press reaction from  
newspaper articles and letters to editors are examined in order to  
establish whether there was support or condemnation of the  
mandala show in Ireland. This also includes a brief coverage of the  
kind of reaction the Kalachakra Sand Mandala recieved in other  
countries where it was exhibited.



The research for this Thesis included interviewing both John Hutchinson, the Douglas Hyde gallery director, Gordon Campbell, the main sponsor of the Kalachakra mandala exhibition, and Romio Shrestha a Buddhist Thankha painter. It also involved many visits to the Buddhist centre in Kilmainham, Dublin, and to the Douglas Hyde Gallery. Numerous articles from newspapers, exhibition catalogues and magazines were used to compile information about the Kalachakra Mandala exhibition and the other artists discussed within the thesis. Sally-Ann O'Reilly's documentary film about the Kalachakra Sand Mandala exhibition at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, also proved to be a very useful source of information for researching this thesis.





Fig.6, page 9b. A WOODEN EMBODIMENT OF THE BUDDHA.



## CHAPTER ONE.

### **Section.1. A BRIEF SUMMERY OF BUDDHIST HISTORY, FROM ITS ORIGIN TO ITS POLITICAL SITUATION TODAY.**

In analysing any work of art or exhibition it is essential to examine both the artist's personal motivation for creating the work in question, and the subject matter which spurred this motivation. Any work of art may invite differing interpretations, but in order to gain the most comprehensive understanding of a piece it is necessary to obtain some background information about it. Likewise in order to view the Kalachakra mandala from a Buddhist perspective and to understand their motivation for performing the mandala in Ireland, it is essential to have (even a limited) knowledge of Buddhist history and to be aware of the present status of this religion in Tibet. The following quote from a review of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala exhibition in *Circa* magazine verifies this fact; "*Cultural difference rendered its (the mandala's) symbolic significance largely lost on a viewing public with relatively limited knowledge of Buddhism.*" (Byrne, and Mc. Crea, *Circa*, Volume no.68 Summer 94.)

### **THE ORIGINS OF BUDDHISM.**

The word *buddha* has a dual meaning; awakened and flourishing. It denotes anyone who has fully awoken from the sleep of ignorance and confusion (has been enlightened) and in whom the qualities of wisdom and compassion flourish without limit.

The historical personality known as 'The Buddha' *Buddha Shakyamuni* (Figs.6.p,9b.), is believed to have been enlightened in the late 6th century B.C.. He was born in Gautama, the part of northern India that is now Nepal, in 563 B.C.. He was the son of the Gautaman king, and for 28 years he lived a life of great luxury in





**Fig.7, page 10b. SHAKAMUNI BUDDHA SEATED ON A LOTUS THRONE.**



his father's palace where his every whim was gratified, and where his father could deliberately protect him from a knowledge of the horrors and difficulties of life. But venturing one day beyond the palace gates, Shakamuni came upon the signs of truth; a sick person, a feeble old man, a corpse and an ascetic. This made him realise that humanity was mired in suffering. So with a feeling of renunciation deep in his heart, and leaving behind a life of pleasure and worldly greatness, he fled the palace by night and set off to find the cure for suffering.

He first sought the instruction of two religious teachers, then he tried extreme ascetic practices for six years, but both proved unsatisfactory so he returned to a natural regime and sat down under a Bodhi tree in profound meditation. He reached the conclusion that suffering is caused by ignorance, and that it can be removed by right living and enlightenment. Thus he became the Buddha or *Enlightened One*; and starting in Benares, he spent the next forty years of his life as a wandering teacher sharing his discovery of the way out of suffering; a truth that he had discovered both by himself and within himself. (Fig7,p10b.)

At that time the dominant elements in Hindu religion taught that the most effective way of terminating the perpetual cycle of birth, death and rebirth created by law of *karma* (the circumstances of one's birth being determined by one's actions in a previous life), was through the performance of expensive rituals by the Brahman priests. The philosophical development of the Vedic literature, through the Upanishads, had already brought about a reaction to this, so Shakyamuni's teachings of repudiating the gods and declaring every individual to be responsible for his own salvation, without priestly assistance, were listened to with respect and eagerness.

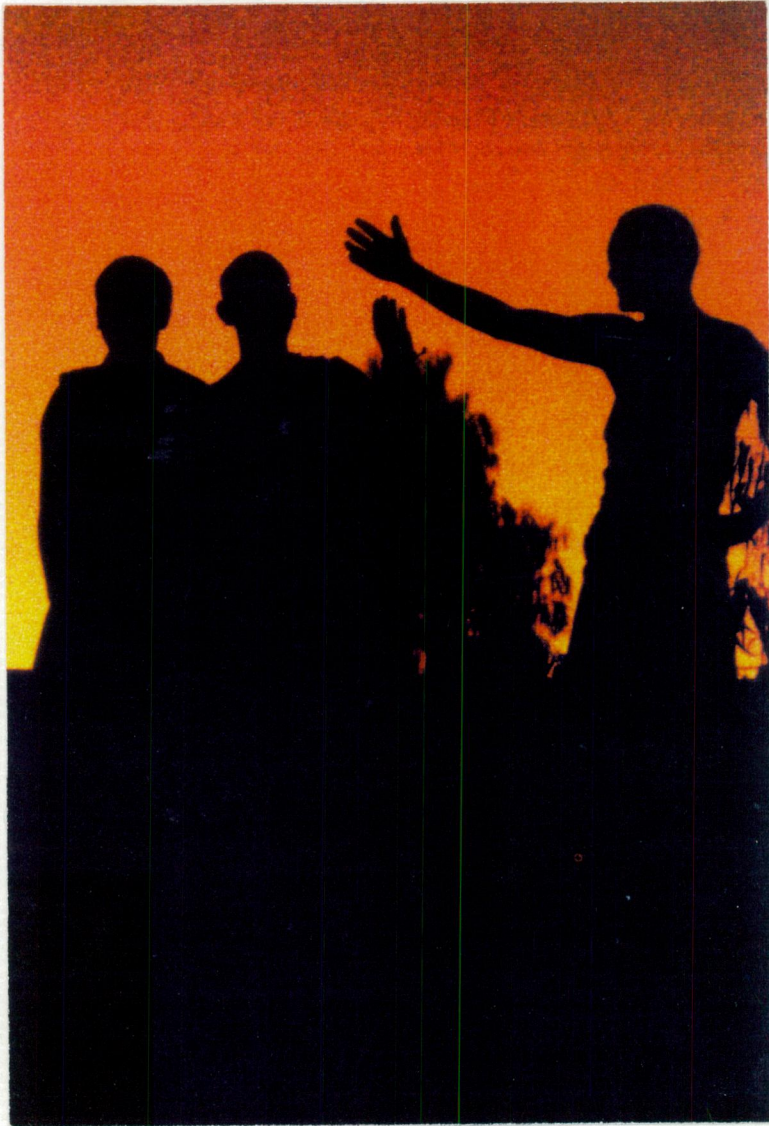




Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings, or *Dharma*, condemned the two extremes; a profitless life of indulgence and sensual pleasure, and an equally profitless one of self mortification. He urged people to take the 'Middle Path', so called because it relies neither on extreme asceticism nor on sensual indulgence. According to Shakyamuni, this was the way by which one might gain insight, knowledge, tranquillity and enlightenment. He formed an order of monks which removed all restrictions of caste, placed the same requirements upon all members, denounced extreme ascetic practices and emphasized moral principles. His monks wore yellow robes and their equipment consisted of an alms bowl, a tooth pick, and a razor with which they kept their heads shaven. Buddhist monks of today still wear yellow robes, with burgundy one beneath, and they still keep their heads shaven. Buddha Shakyamuni is not worshipped as a god or regarded as saviour. He is rather, an ideal, a teacher and an inspiration to his followers on their own journey to this awakening.

The teaching of Buddha spread across Asia in the centuries that followed his death, and today Buddhism is a world religion, the only Indian religion to achieve that status and influence. The many Buddhist sects that have evolved over the course of time differ slightly in their monastic organisation, dress, tutelary deities and in their meditational methods. However no matter what form of Buddhism, Zen or pure Land, Hinayana or Mahayana, and no matter from where, Ceylon, China or Tibet, the essence of Buddhism is the same and is summarised in the Buddha's first teaching on the four noble truths which are as following; the truth of suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, and the path to the end of suffering. All of the various Buddhist schools have interacted with each other through the years and continue to do so; swapping





**Fig.8, page 12b. A GROUP OF TIBETAN MONKS.**



information for their mutual benefit and co-operating together in a spirit of mutual help and respect. (Fig 8, p12b.)

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM

In Tibet, Buddhism is said to have begun about 650 A.D, but it met with fierce resistance from the shamans of the native Bon religion and didn't really get going till the next century. In 787 A.D. their first monastery was built, and since then a great tradition of Tibetan Buddhism has been established. Over the centuries with the influence of different cultures and civilisations, correspondingly varied styles and traditions of Tibetan Buddhism have developed not only in Tibet but all over the world. For instance there are three active Tibetan schools of Buddhism in Ireland, the Gelupa, the Nyimaga and the Karma Kagyu.

Up until the 1950's the 'Yellow Church' founded by Tsong-Kha-Pa (1327-1419) ruled Tibet. Then just as the Tibetan Buddhists were celebrating the 2,500th anniversary of Buddha Shakyamuni's enlightenment in 1950, they suffered the commencement of Chinese Communist Government's invasion. The XIVth Dalai Lama was forced to flee to Namgyal monastery Dharamsala, in the Indian Himalayas. There he presides over his Tibetan government in exile. Namgyal monastery has acted as a refuge to Tibetan Buddhists ever since the 1950's when the Chinese policies of re-population closed the monasteries in Tibet itself. Namgyal is also home to the team of monks who performed the Kalachakra Sand Mandala in Dublin.

Since the exile of the Dalai Lama the 'Holy Land' has ceased to exist. Its social structure is being dismantled; its priestly artifacts such as books images and paintings are being destroyed or removed, and its inhabitants ushered into the satisfactions of an





**Fig.9, page 13b.** MILITARY PRESENCE BEING SHOWN BY THE CHINESE COMMUNIST SOLDIERS at Lasa (near Tsetang) Tibet. Photograph by Tibetan Information Network, Observer 11/12/94.



industrialized and militarized society. The purpose of the Tibetan population as seen by their communist invaders, is no longer to uphold the Buddhist faith, but to guard the Chinese People's Republic against attacks from India.

#### THE PRESENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN TIBET.

Over the years Tibetan activism has dwindled under the sheer force and severity of the Chinese occupation. For example, in November 1994 numbers of up to 40-50,000 troops were brought into Tibet on show in an effort to intimidate any independence demonstrations.

In a disturbing article written in The Observer newspaper in December 1994, we learn how officials in the town of Tsetang, East Tibet, have recently issued orders to monks in the local Chongye monastery banning them from begging or, as they prefer it to be termed, receiving donations in public. This is detrimental to monastic life as they rely on this means of financial support, not only to bind them to the community, but to finance pilgrimages elsewhere. Cut off from this resource many of the Chongye monks will never gain the qualifications to teach. This prohibition coincided with strict new regulations forbidding the sale of photographs of the exiled Dalai Lama, and another ban forbidding Tibetan communist party members and government officials having shrines in their homes. (Fig 9,13b.)

The communist political commissioners are also scheming to financially choke the monasteries by urging farmers to spend their surplus crop profits on stereos, televisions and other gadgets sold by Chinese traders, instead of following the traditional practice of donating any cash profits to the local monasteries.



Bit by bit the Chinese are slowly imposing their ways on the Tibetans using a combination of human resources, military might and hard cash. The Chinese Communist Party seem to have no respect for Tibetan traditions and their beliefs. Another example of this is their plan to build a hydro electric power station on the Yamdrok Tso, a lake held so holy by the Tibetans that none bathe in its waters, and no fish or stone may be taken from it. (The Observer News Paper, 11/12/94, page 15)

To the regret of the Dalai Lama there are now seven million Chinese settlers in Tibet and only six million Tibetans. In his capacity as a politician, he now travels the world on behalf of his people and their faith. The Dalai Lama has very successfully worked to resettle 100,000 Tibetan refugees and to preserve the Tibetan religion and culture. Unfortunately his appeals to the United Nations on behalf of the Tibetan people were unsuccessful. The Dalai Lamas visit to Ireland for the Kalachakra sand mandala exhibition acted in one respect, as part of this campaign to spread an awareness of the Tibetan situation and also to achieve world peace.(Fig.10,p15a.)

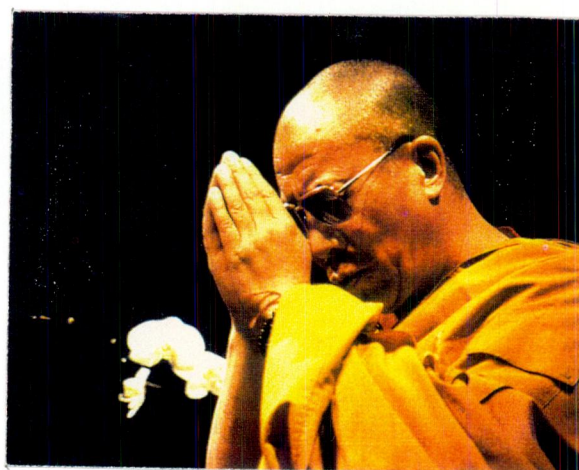


Fig 10. H.H. The Dalai Lama.





Fig.11, page 15b. A CELTIC MANDALA, by Courtney Davis.



## Section 2; THE MEANING AND SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KALACHAKRA SAND MANDALA.

The word mandala means magic circle. Mandalas are not only found in Buddhist culture, they are universal; we have our own Celtic mandalas with their special content from the art of the ancient Celts.(Fig 11,p.15b) Mandalas are ancient magical symbols which represent ideas of the universe, and in doing so present a physical and visual tool for meditation.

According to Buddhist tradition, a mandala can be formally represented in different media, for example precious jewels, flowers, dyed rice, coloured stones or coloured sand. In this case the team of Tibetan monks have used very fine coloured sand which has been ground from precious stones. Sand is used because it is easily dismantled or swept up, and so is in keeping with the whole ideology of impermanence within the mandala. In Tibetan tradition mandalas are created for rituals of initiation, in which a teacher grants permission to advanced pupils to engage in the meditation of a particular deity. The creation of a sand mandala is one of the Vajrayana rituals and before 1950 mandalas would never have been performed outside a Buddhist temple. So exhibiting the Kalachakra Sand Mandala in an art gallery is quite a novel idea for Buddhism.

Each mandala is a sacred mansion, the home of a particular meditational deity who represents and embodies enlightened qualities ranging from compassion to heightened consciousness and bliss. Both the deity Kalachakra, which resides at the centre of the mandala, and the mandala itself are recognised as pure expressions of the Buddha's fully enlightened mind. Symbolically the deity confers the initiations and the mandala is where the initiations take place. Through the initiation ceremony the seed of enlightenment in





Fig.12, page 16b. THE COMPLETED KALACHAKRA SAND MANDALA.



each person's mind is nourished by the dynamic process of visualising and contemplating the mandala.

The Kalachakra mandala, also known as the wheel of time, is a memorised pattern which follows age old traditions dating back to 600 B.C. when it was taught by Shakyamuni Buddha.(Fig.12,p.16b) Over the centuries the teaching has been transmitted in a unbroken lineage from teacher to student. It was introduced to Tibet from India in the 11th century and during the 18th century the VIIth Dalai Lama introduced it to the Namgyal monastery. This continuous lineage extends to the XIVth Dalai Lama of our time.

The intricate pattern of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala, which measures nearly two metres in diameter, comprises a circular border enclosing concentric circles, which in turn enclose a large square divided into four triangles, within which are further circles. It is like a two dimensional representation of the divine residence of the deity Kalachakra, and his consort Vishvamata. The Kalachakra Mandala is made up of five different mandalas; the mandala of enlightened great bliss, and the mandalas of wisdom, mind, speech and body. It is a blue print for the imagination representing an ideal world visualised in complete purity. The outer circles of the Kalachakra pattern are a representation of the cosmos, are based on astrological calculations taken from the cosmos and its cycles. The centre of the palace, where Kalachakra and Vishvamata reside, is protected by four gate houses each of which is a different colour, representing the four points of the compass. They also represent birth and death amongst other things.

Through the symbolic colours of Kalachakra's four heads, he embodies the reconciliation of anger and desire through peace and calm. Kalachakra's principle head has a blue black face representing wroughtfulness; his right face is red with desire; the middle face is yellow symbolising meditative concentration, and the left white face is







peaceful. There are 722 deities in the mandala, and Kalachakra is the principle one. Together these deities symbolise various manifestations and aspects of both consciousness and reality and are all part of the ultimate wisdom of the Kalachakra deity. They represent aspects of the positive energies in the universe and in all our consciousness, and invoking them not only clarifies the mind and the heart but it is also believed to be able to set up a field of consciousness which can bring peace and prosperity to the community, and purify the environment. So the act of performing the mandala in our country represented a sincere gesture from the Buddhist monks for the well being of the Irish people. The vast amount of symbols included in the mandala would require an in-depth study in order to understand or interpret them. For our purposes, however, a visual account of these symbols in the illustration of the mandala will suffice. (Fig.12,p.16b & Fig.13,p.18a & )

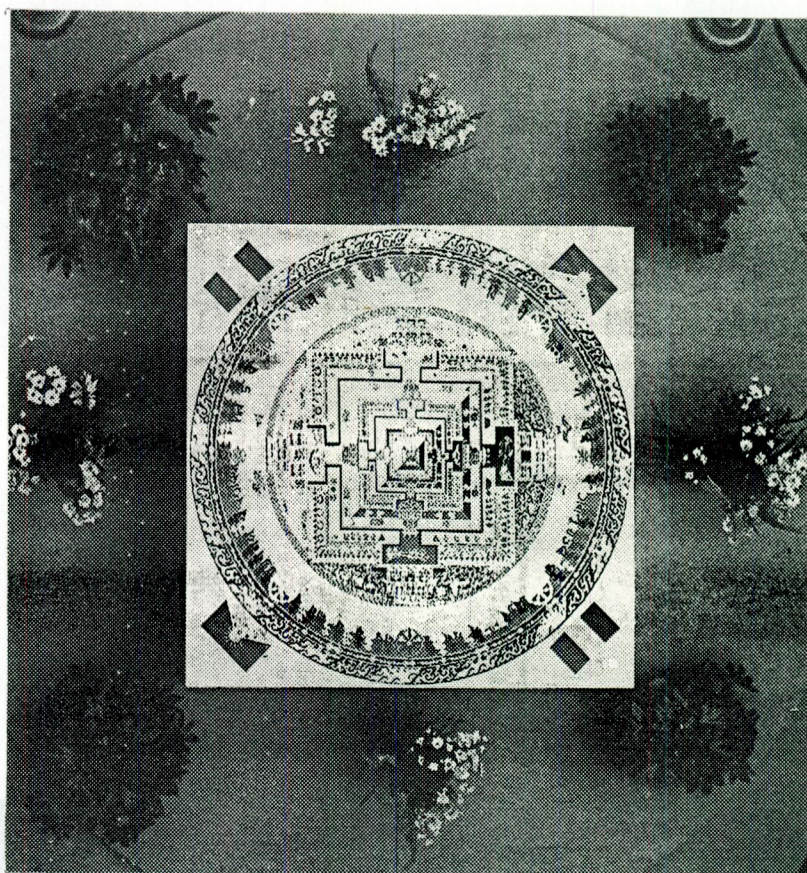


Fig.13. THE COMPLETED KALACHAKRA MANDALA IN THE DOUGLAS HYDE GALLERY.





**Fig.14, page 18b.** THE DALAI LAMA DELINEATING THE MANDALA IN BARCELONA. Photograph Neil Cooper, January 1995.

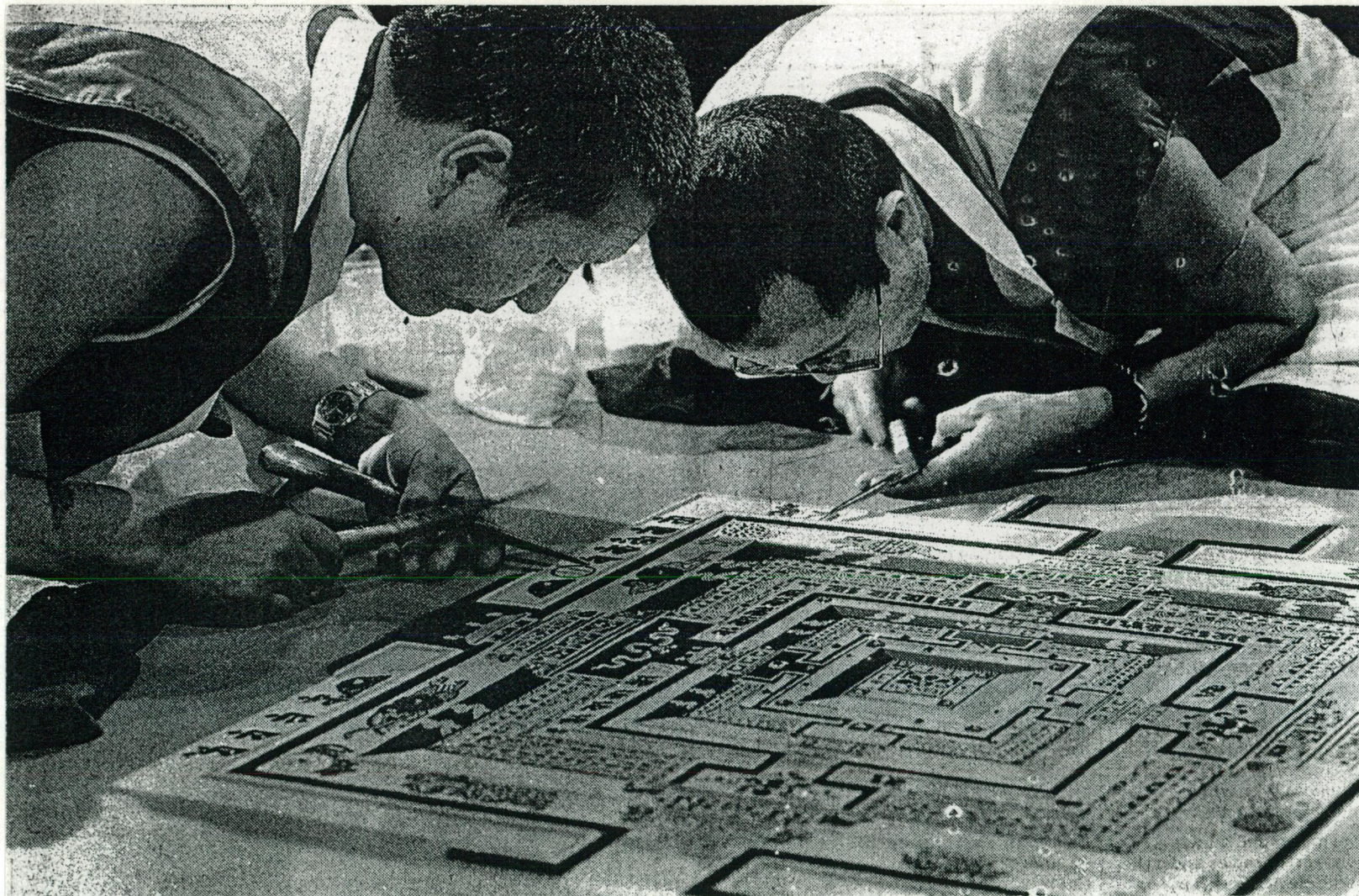


### HOW WAS THE MANDALA CONSTRUCTED?

With Lama Thinlay, the head monk acting as group coordinator, the other four monks worked together as a team creating the mandala, two monks applied the sand while one watched out for mistakes and the last person made the tea!. The exhibition commenced with an opening ceremony in which the monks wore magnificent robes and head gear which were dyed with the primary colours of the mandala. The five monks, Lama Thinlay Nepali, Lobsang Tashi, Tenzin Thaye, Tenzin Khunkhen and Tenzin Khentse chanted incantations with a most unusual deep throaty sound. They danced and chanted around the mandala base, a raised wooden box called a *Theg-pu*, while ringing their ceremonial bells in synchronisation. They believe the sound of the bells invokes a deep silence of the mind, and the energy of the dance is used to prepare themselves for this harmonic creation. After this ceremony, the team of monks drew out the architectural lines of the mandala with a ruler, compass and white ink pen onto the *Theg-pu*. (Fig 14,p.18b.) The sand, coloured with vegetable dye, was then applied through small metal funnels, called a *Thekpus*, which were rasped against each other in order to produce a fine stream of sand. This rasping of *Thekpus* creates a unique sound which along with the unusual chanting, added to the atmospheric quality of the mandala exhibition. According to Buddhist belief the sound of the *Thekpus* is symbolic of the interconnectiveness of all forms of life. The monks began at the centre of the mandala and carefully and meticulously worked outwards, bearing in mind that mistakes cannot be rectified.(Fig.15p.19b.)

Before commencing the mandala's destruction, the monks prayed requesting that the seven hundred and twenty two deities





**Fig.15, page 19b** TWO MONKS AT WORK ON THE MANDALA. Photograph  
by Derek Speirs, Sunday Tribune 13/2/94



return to their sacred abode. Lama Thinlay assured onlookers that the dismantling of the mandala was an appropriate part of the natural order, as they believe that the mandala was created strictly according to text, therefore then they cannot have created that which already exists. They believe that the best way to preserve the tradition of mandala making is to destroy each one that is made.

After the praying was complete, Lobsang Tashi leaned forward and took a pinch of red sand from one of the outer circles so as to begin the process of destruction.(Fig16,p.20a) A piece of sand was taken from each of the deities, working inwards till Kalachakra and Vishvamata were removed.(fig.17,p.20b) The remaining sand was then swept up and placed in a special urn. Sand mandalas are always returned to a water source, so the sands of the Kalachakra mandala were processionally carried down to the River Liffey, where it was ritually dispersed into the waters after the monks had prayed to the water deities for acceptance.



Fig. 16. THE DISMANTLING OF THE MANDALA.





**Fig 17, page 20b.** THE DISMANTLING OF THE MANDALA. Cover photograph for the wheel of time.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Section 3; THE BUDDHISTS MOTIVATION FOR PERFORMING THE KALACHAKRA MANDALA IN IRELAND.

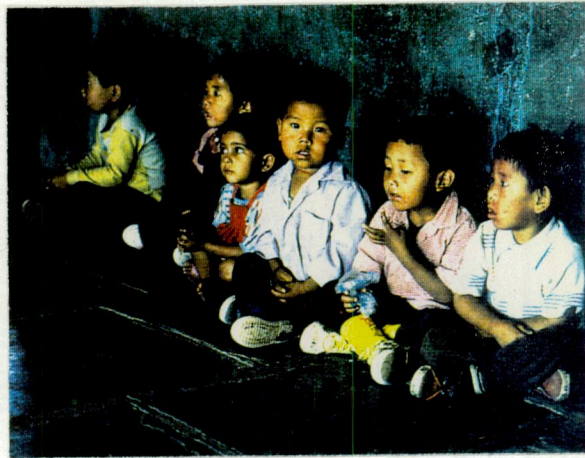
The main reason for bringing the Kalachakra sand mandala to Ireland was to spread world peace. It acted as part of H.H. The Dalai Lamas International World Peace Programme, as according to him, the Kalachakra deities create a favourable atmosphere, reducing tension and violence in the world. He explains that,

*"It is a way of planting a seed, and the seed will have Karmic effect. One doesn't need to be present at the Kalachakra ceremony in order to receive its benefits."* (The R.A.A London, gallery guide 1994. Page 3.) Perhaps the Dalai Lama considered the Kalachakra Sand Mandala to have particular relevance for peace in the North of Ireland, and maybe it did contribute to the announcement of a ceasefire only five months later.

The mandala has also been performed in America ; Wisconsin, Madison in 1981; in the Natural History Museum, New York in '88; and in Los Angeles in '89. It came to Montpellier France in '88; to London in '92, and the last place it was performed (at the time of writing) was in Barcelona in December '94. It has travelled the world spreading Buddhist philosophies according to Kalachakra.

In addition to spreading peace, the symbolic purpose of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala was to re-introduce the value of impermanence to western civilisation. This was an equally important reason to the Buddhists. We in the western hemisphere have become very attached to everything, both materially and physically. Buddhists believe that nothing in this life is permanent everything comes and goes, and the Kalachakra Sand Mandala serves as a reminder of this. It was ritually created only to be





**Fig.18, page 21b. TIBETAN CHILDREN IN AN INDIAN NURSERY.**



**Fig 19, page 21b.A TIBETAN WOMAN AND HER GRANDCHILD.**



ritually destroyed. In Shakyamuni Buddha's final teaching, he reiterated the importance of this value by saying, "*Everything that is compound must decay.*" (Clifford, P.16 1989). To a western tradition once so intent on permanence, and the production of masterpieces, such a spiritual attitude may seem alien, but to a Buddhist it is the very impermanence of the revealed object that makes it precious. There is a lot our culture can learn from eastern philosophy, a lot that we knew already but have become blind to because we are so caught up in the whole industrial and material focus of the west.

However it's the Dalai Lama's political motivations in bringing the Kalachakra mandala exhibition to Ireland, already mentioned in the introduction, that have caused the controversy. The inclusion of elements such as the Tibetan flag, a video and photographs of Tibetan life and a picture of the Dalai Lama in the Douglas Hyde Gallery reinstated the political aspect of the exhibition.(Fig.18&19, p.21b) They "*contextualised and substantiated the positing of the mandala as an assertion of the authenticity of Tibetan culture as distinct from that of atheistic communist China.*" ( Byrne & Mc.Crea, Circa Vol no. 68 Summer 1994). Supporters of the Dalai Lama who call for an independent Tibet, were bound to see the Kalachakra Sand Mandala as an opportunity for reminding people of the oppressed Tibetan population. According to John Farrell (in his article about the Kalachakra mandala in Social and Personal magazine, Jan 1994), as soon as plans for the Kalachakra show were announced, the director of the Douglas Hyde Gallery found himself in the middle of a political debate, which questioned the justification of hosting such a show.

In conjunction with this political facet however, the Kalachakra mandala's highly religious aspect raised the question of its suitability as an exhibit in an art gallery. In Sally Ann O'Reilly's



documentary film about the Kalachakra sand mandala in the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Lama Thinley explains that the monks motivation for performing the mandala, was religiously based, and that they don't have the same artistic ambitions and aims as conventional artists.

*I think there are many reasons behind why we now exhibit or show the Kalachakra mandala as a cultural offering.....The monks don't have the intention of becoming specialists or professional artists; it is part of 'their' studies, part of 'their' practices in a monastery. There are some that are not very good, but the motives behind doing this practice or meditation 'are more important, in other words', what you are trying to achieve is more important than what you create.*

Although the monk's intention was not to create a work of art as we would see it, does this constitute enough reason to deny the Kalachakra Sand Mandala the title of art, as was implied by the controversy it raised?. And should such an ostensibly religious event have been held in an art gallery at all? These questions are addressed and answered in chapter two which deals with the Douglas Hyde Gallery.







## CHAPTER TWO

### Section 1; THE DOUGLAS HYDE GALLERY

The Douglas Hyde Gallery is situated in Trinity College Dublin. It is a non-profit making company which was established jointly by the Arts Council of Ireland and Trinity College. Its financial support comes partially from the state, and from a large number of individual patrons and companies (such as 'The Gap') who act as sponsors.

The Douglas Hyde, along with the Irish Museum of Modern Art and The Municipal Art Gallery, is considered to be one of the main contemporary art galleries in Dublin, and probably the south of Ireland. In his essay which is included in the retrospective catalogue of the Douglas Hyde Gallery, 'A New Tradition', Aiden Dunne mentions the importance of the gallery's role both as a venue for contemporary art, and in hosting foreign exhibitions.

When questioning the suitability of the Douglas Hyde Gallery as an appropriate location for the performance of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala, it is important to note that it is one of the few locations which could organise the finances to run such a show. During the interview, John Hutchinson (the gallery director) explained that it was a costly exhibition to run; expenses such as the transportation of the five monks and their accommodation for the three week duration of the show, all had to be covered by the gallery. Commercial galleries would never dream of hosting something like the Kalachakra show as it would have been economically non-viable.

The gallery's programme of events is ultimately decided by the director, but first has to be proposed and approved by the Board of Directors. At the time of the mandala exhibition this consisted of; David Spearman, Harry Crosbie, Marie Donnelly, Kathy



Gilfillan, Catherine Marshall, Roger Stalley, Frances Ruane, and Michael Warren.

John Hutchinson.

John Hutchinson was appointed director of the Douglas Hyde gallery in February 1991, succeeding Meadbh Ruane. He began his career at the National Gallery of Ireland where he was employed for eight years. After that he worked as a writer, critic and a lecturer; writing for a variety of journals and newspapers. He had collaborated with the Douglas Hyde Gallery on different projects before commencing work there, notably on the series of exhibitions "Irish Art in the Eighties". He also has a degree in oriental studies, which was an added advantage to him where the Kalachakra Sand Mandala was concerned.

Hutchinson first got the idea to invite the Buddhists to Ireland after having seen the mandala successfully performed in the Royal Academy of Arts, London, during November and December 1992, with not only a strong but a positive reaction. He later decided to propose his idea of inviting the Namgyal Monks to Ireland to the board of the Douglas Hyde Gallery. John Hutchinson's proposal was met with mixed reaction, some were all for bringing the monks to Ireland, while others had reservations about the plan because they envisioned two main problems with putting on a show of this nature.

Firstly because the Kalachakra sand mandala derives from such a religious nature, and its making forms a religious ceremony, it was more than likely going to cause some controversy in an predominantly conventional, catholic country where there are bound to be those who are opposed to religious influences other than their own. Although their previous exhibitions shared notions







of culture and spirituality with the Kalachakra Sand Mandala, the Douglas Hyde had never shown anything so orthodoxly religious. A quote from John Hutchinson describes what exactly is different about the Kalachakra Sand Mandala, and why this might cause a problem

*Its a much crisper and better defined art form than any thing we would normally show. Its is less exploratory, less investigative and more a continuation of a tradition. All this is very contrary to the general thrust and energy that goes into contemporary western art.* 1

Perhaps those members of the board who had reservations about the show, feared the accusation of not using the contemporary art gallery appropriately. The second reason some were hesitant about hosting the Kalachakra Sand Mandala was because of its previously mentioned political connotations.

So why did John Hutchinson think that the Kalachakra mandala was an appropriate subject to add to the existing agenda of the gallery? According to him there were two aspects to the programme of the Douglas Hyde Gallery, one was art which dealt with the spiritually transcendent, the other was art that dealt with the question of identity. In Hutchinson's own words;

*The idea being that you would have some thing that was tending towards being other worldly, and in comparison you'd have art that was very much more down to earth, dealing with social problems, sexual identity, political identity, so on and so forth. I hope to set up some sort of dialectic or tension between these two aspects. (O'Reilly, Film '94.)*

Hutchinson felt that 1 mandala encompassed both these ideas in the one work of art, the spiritual aspect being the mandala itself,





**Fig.20, page 26b.** FOUR MONKS WORKING ON THE MANDALA IN THE  
DOUGLAS HYDE GALLERY, photograph Frank Miller, Irish Times  
7/2/94.



and the identity and social aspect indicated by the virtue of it being exhibited in order to raise people's consciousness about Tibet.

However, while he had no problem with independent events which might spin off the Kalachakra mandala, he was careful not to endorse, implicitly or otherwise, either the practice of Buddhism or the political claims of a free Tibet.

Because the political emphasis of the Kalachakra mandala exhibition was quite apparent, Hutchinson was anxious that the event remain contextualised in terms of the Gallery's larger exploration of 'identity'. He also made it clear that it was not a conscious decision to parallel the political problems of Northern Ireland, or any of our ancient traditions with those of Tibet, even though they may share many similarities.

Hutchinson found it most fascinating to see how harmoniously the group of monks worked together, despite the fact that they were operating within extremely close proximity to other. (Fig 20,p.26b.) He hoped that the people who saw the mandala would realise that they were being offered a unique opportunity, in that they were allowed to witness the whole process of the making and they were never likely to see something like this happening again. He also hoped that they would want to come and be a part of it. Hutchinson genuinely considered that the exhibition was very special and wanted people to share and experience this.

An interesting point Hutchinson made in relation to spiritual aspect of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala was that assuming that the mandala functions as the Buddhists believe it to, in other words that even regardless of whether one knows what's happening, the making of the mandala, its construction and what it contains does itself have a direct effect on the audience. Then perhaps the aspect of Irish personality or culture which responds to things spiritual







and religious, which to a degree has been suppressed or diverted over the past decades, even centuries, would be reawakened as a result of having witnessed the mandala.





Fig.21, page 28b. GORDON CAMPBELL, photograph from Social & Personal, January 1994.



## CHAPTER TWO.

### Section 2; GORDON CAMPBELL AND HIS REASONS FOR SPONSORING THE KALACHAKRA MANDALA EXHIBITION.

Gordon Campbell, (Fig21, p.28b) the owner of the well known clothes company 'The Gap', was one of three sponsors of the mandala show, the other two being Group Air France, and Trident Holidays. Campbell has previously sponsored shows such as the Ralph Steadman exhibition in the Douglas Hyde Gallery. Campbell is the only sponsor dealt with in this thesis for three reasons, firstly his company 'The Gap' was the main sponsor of the show, secondly after reading the interview with him in Social and Personal Magazine (Jan '94) which revealed his strong views concerning art, an unusual characteristic to find in a clothes merchant, I thought he would be an interesting person to question about the exhibition and thirdly, John Hutchinson recommended him as an appropriate person to interview.

The main question I asked Mr. Campbell was why he had so willingly agreed to sponsor the Kalachakra exhibition. He simply answered that he did so for the single reason that it was a means of spreading world peace. As a company owner he had no commercial basis for sponsoring the Kalachakra Sand Mandala exhibition, unlike the Steadman show. Since it was the first time anything like this had been exhibited in The Douglas Hyde, it was impossible to predict what kind of reaction it would receive. He had no idea when starting out on this venture that it would attract crowds of over 25,000, which in turn acted as a very successful advertisement for his company. The success of the Kalachakra mandala exhibition has given Campbell the incentive to contribute towards the funding of the Mexican "Day of the Dead" exhibition which is scheduled for October 17th-December 2nd 1995.







Apart from the good publicity for his company, what did Gordon Campbell feel he personally had gained from his sponsoring of the Kalachakra Mandala exhibition? He claims that he enjoyed meeting interesting people through being involved with the Kalachakra, or any exhibition that he sponsors. He feels that people who have dedicated their whole lives to art are more open and searching.

Although his initial answers were brief, his strong opinions about religion and art seemed to suggest that there was more to Gordon Campbell than he was disclosing. This became especially apparent when he was questioned about his feelings concerning the controversy over an exhibition of such a religious nature as the Kalachakra Sand Mandala being exhibited in the Douglas Hyde Gallery. According to Campbell there can only be one religion, one truth and that's God (in the universal sense), so in his opinion the religious aspect of the show wasn't a problem.

As for the question of whether or not the Mandala can be termed as art, Gordon Campbell regards everything as art. This includes such things as aspects of day to day living, or doing anything creative. He disagrees with critical processes of examining and deciding what is or isn't to be called art, because he doesn't think anyone has the right to do so. He has no time for art critics, or people who criticize things unconstructively, just for the sake of argument.

Campbell regards Marcel Duchamp, the famous French conceptual artist, as being 'the' great master because of Duchamp's open minded views about art and what people call art. Campbell seems to thoroughly agree with Duchamp's theory of conceptualism, and I'm sure he would join the artist Donald Judd in reiterating







Duchamp by saying "*If someone says it's art, it's art*". ( Stangos p.261. '94)

Duchamp more or less introduced the notion of conceptual art way back in 1917, when he took a urinal, signed it 'R. Mutt' and entered it as a piece of sculpture titled "Fountain" in an exhibition that he was helping to organise in New York. In exhibiting this ready made form of art, Duchamp implied that art could exist outside the conventional 'hand made' media of painting and sculpture and beyond the considerations of taste; his point being that art related more to the artists intentions than to anything he did with his hands or felt about beauty. He planted the seed of an idea which challenged and upheaved views of art for many years to follow, but the movement termed *Conceptual Art* didn't really come to fruition till the mid sixties. *Conceptual Art* is a term that was originally coined by Edward Kienholz in the early sixties, it was one of several interrelated, overlapping alternatives to traditional forms and exhibition practices. The Conceptual movement seems to have ended sometime in the around 1974 or '75, but its ideas have carried over to subsequent art movements and are still evident in contemporary art today. A new and stylistically diverse generation of artists has gradually emerged, these artists are working out fresh ways of giving form to their ideas in complex, colourful visual terms which use ideas of conceptualism. Examples of this kind of art work can be seen in the Douglas Hyde Gallery today, some of which are included in the examination of other artist's work in section three of this chapter.

If we take Duchamp's conceptual theory which states that art relates more to the artist's intentions than to anything he/she does with their hands or felt about beauty, and compare it to the monks motivation for creating the Kalachakra Sand Mandala, an interesting





parallel is revealed. The monks who performed the mandala considered the religious motivation more important than the creation itself as we can clearly see from Lama Thinley's encapsulating description of the Buddhist's mental approach to making a mandala,

*"What you are trying to achieve is more important than what you create. "*

Surely this gives sufficient evidence that the Kalachakra Sand Mandala can be termed as a form of conceptual art, and thus can be described as possessing features commonly found in contemporary art. If this is so, then we can dismiss the objections raised by members of the so called 'art world' against the Kalachakra Sand Mandala. Objections which were based on their argument that the mandala exhibition didn't qualify as contemporary art, and didn't belong in a contemporary art gallery.

The following quote from Gordon Campbell clarifies the conceptual element within the Kalachakra Sand Mandala, and demonstrates how the conceptual idea of temporary or time based art, reflects the Buddhist theory of impermanence ;

*.... all art comes from spirit, spirituality, an inner spring of beauty. 'The Kalachakra Sand Mandala' is definitely an art form in its own right, but it derives from spirituality as you can see from just looking at the image and the concept behind it , like everything else - it comes and goes - so brush it away, pour it in a river, let it flow around the world.*

(Farrell, p. 54. Bridging the Gap, '94)

So far in this thesis we have seen two opinions, that of John Hutchinson and of Gordon Campbell, both of which reinstate that there is no reason why the Kalachakra mandala shouldn't be called art. We have established that the only reason why there was controversy over this in the first place, was because the Kalachakra





is a traditional subject and doesn't conform to certain peoples opinions of what the western world regards as contemporary art.

To further support the justification of the exhibition of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala exhibition in the Douglas Hyde Gallery, the next section compares the mandala to other art exhibitions in the Douglas Hyde, pointing out their common features and their differences.



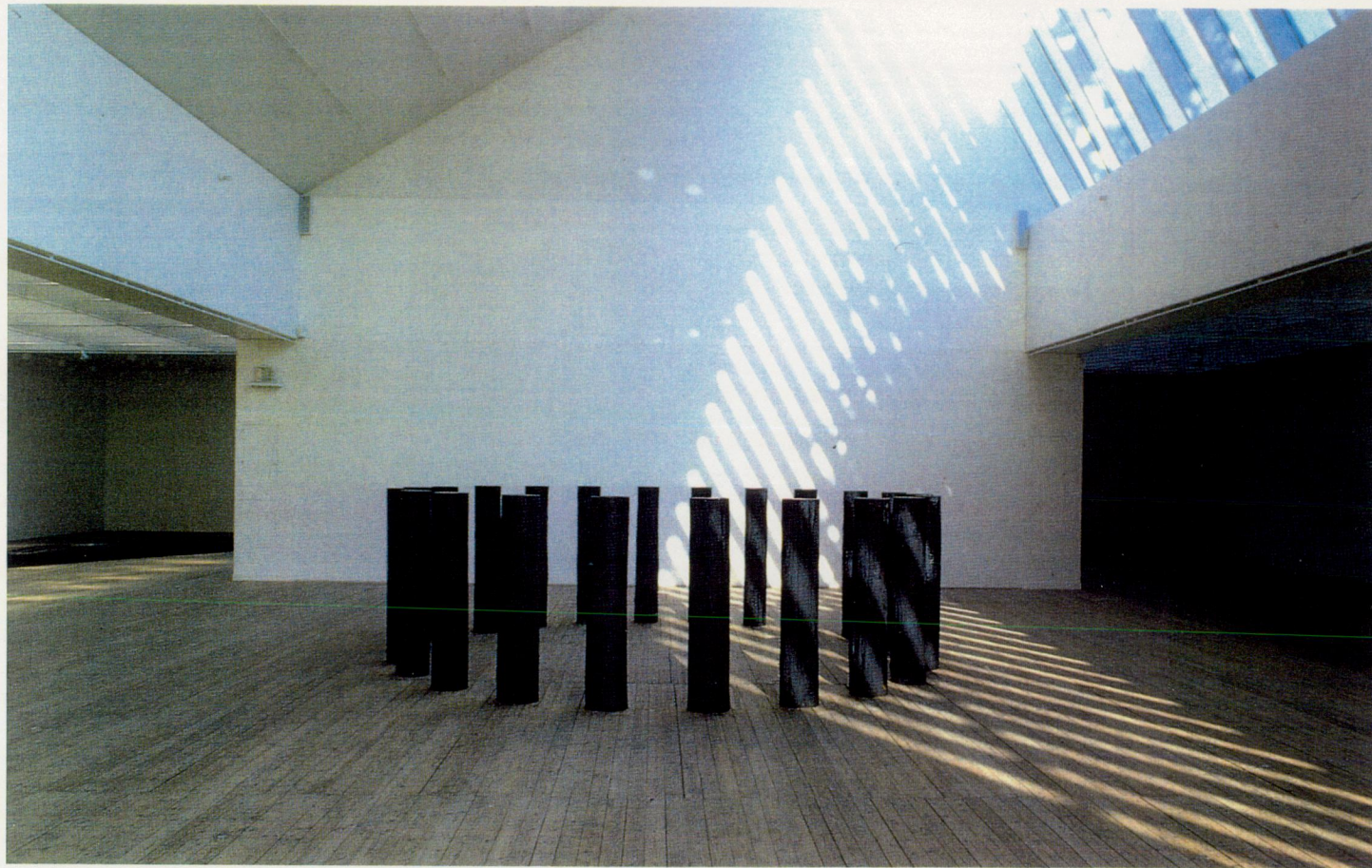


Fig.22, page 33b. *UNTITLED*, BY TOSHIKATSU ENDO 1983.



## CHAPTER 2.

### Section 3. OTHER ARTISTS WORKS BASED ON THE SAME THEME OF SPIRITUALITY WHICH HAVE BEEN EXHIBITED IN THE DOUGLAS HYDE GALLERY.

The four exhibitions which I have chosen to compare and contrast with the Kalachakra Sand Mandala are, in chronological order, firstly Toshikatsu Endo's '*Earth, Air, Fire and Water*', exhibited from the 8th January till the 8th of February '91, secondly Nikolaus Lang's '*Numga and Goonya*' exhibited from the 27th of October till the 4th of December '93, thirdly Shirazeh Houshiary's '*Dancing Around My Ghost*' exhibited from the 20th of December till the 29th of January '94 and fourthly Jimmie Durhams '*Original Re-Runs*' exhibited from the 27th of October till the 29th of January '94, just before the showing of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala.

Toshikatsu Endo

Endo's exhibition consisted of three large pieces of sculpture and a large charcoal drawing. The first was a circle of standing wooden forms with hollowed tops full of water (Fig.22,p.33b). The second piece was a huge pile of charred wooden blocks, and the third one was a large circle of hollow bronze which gives the appearance of having been broken and re-assembled.

He works mainly with wood, often combining it with water and usually subjects it to the ravages of fire, there-by reflecting the concept of impermanence as seen in the mandala. (Fig23,p.34b) In his essay entitled *Starting with a missing Aspect* from the catalogue of the exhibition held in the Japanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 1990, Endo describes his work as stemming from a profound sense of absence. This could be likened to the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, which stress the *sunyata* or 'emptiness' of





**Fig.23, page 34b.** ENDO'S USE OF CIRCLE SYMBOL, AND ITS SUBJECTION TO THE RAVAGES OF FIRE.



reality. Tibetan Buddhism echoes similar thoughts and teachings, and these teachings are among the many elements of Buddhist philosophy included in the Kalachakra Sand Mandala.

Endo's repeated use of the circle reminds us of the deep symbolic significance of the circles which contain the Kalachakra Mandala. They conjure up a magical, and powerful feeling of rituals and prayer. According to John Hutchinson *"Endo's use of the circle, a traditional Zen symbol of the perfect void (like the absent presence that he strives to realise), would be better understood with some grasp of the meaning of 'sunyata'."* (Hutchinson, page3, Endo Catalogue Jan/Feb '91). This, like comprehending the elements of Kalachakra would requires a lot of research and study. Fortunately for the viewer however, a suggestion of this state of being is directly conveyed by the sculpture itself. Just as with the Kalachakra mandala, even without understanding all the Buddhist symbols therein, one can still get an feeling of the Kalachakra's meaning from just looking at it.

As Brian Fallon commented about Endo's exhibition,

*"The pieces in themselves are not especially remarkable, and the materials - apart from the bronze - are humble and ephemeral.... Together however they create a vibrant almost magical ambience and draw you .... into a kind of charmed circle."* (Fallon, Irish Times 10/1/92)

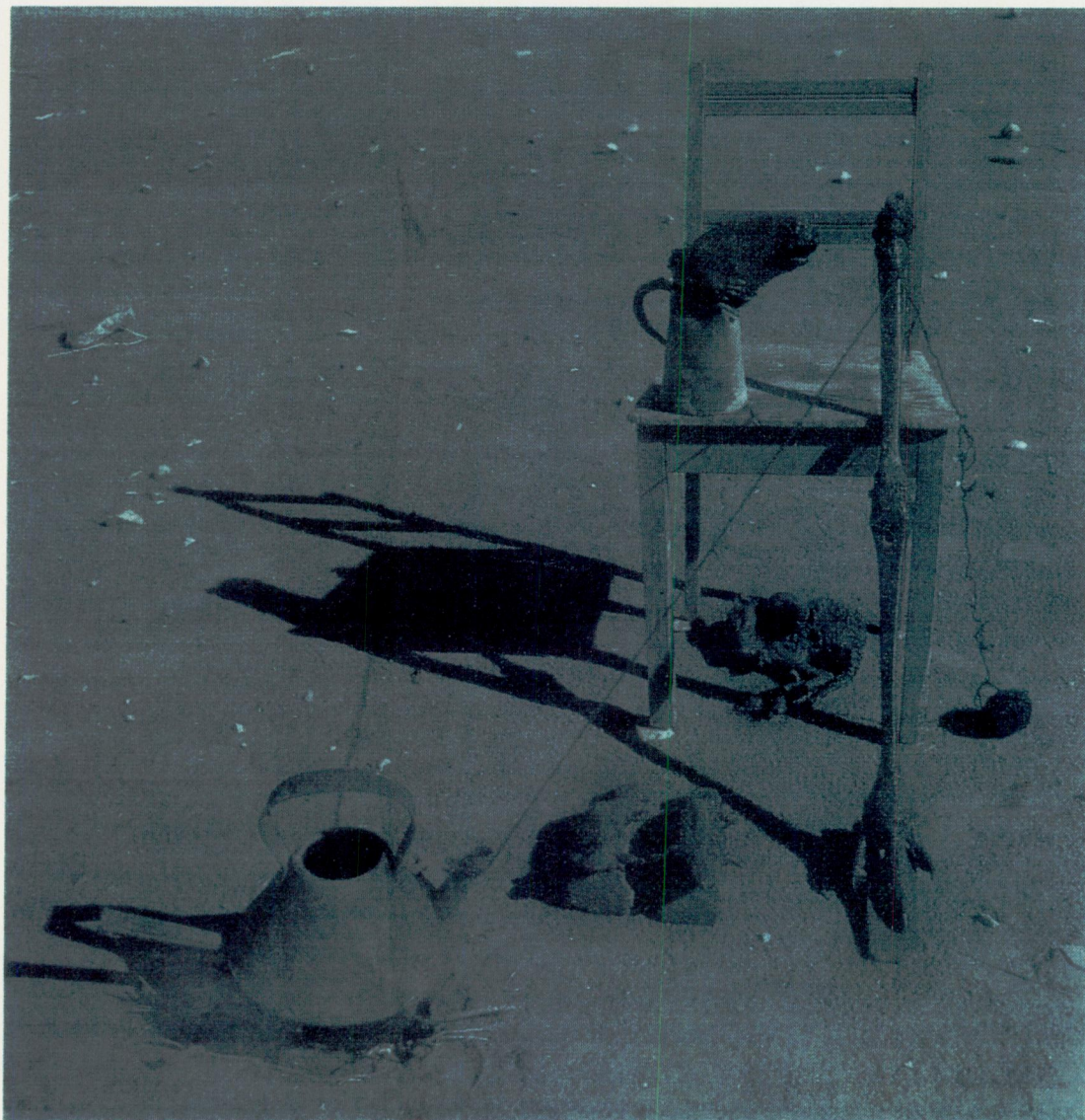
Endo's use of natural media is another link to the Kalachakra's 'at one with nature' philosophy. Sand and vegetable dyes are the media used. to execute the mandala. However, Endo's employment of these materials in a minimalist manner is totally removed from the richly detailed Buddhist mandala. He is well known for his



# NUNGA AND GOONYA

NIKOLAUS LANG

27 OCTOBER - 4 DECEMBER 1993



DH8

**Fig.24, page 35b.** COVER PHOTOGRAPH FOR GALLERY GUIDE to LANG'S  
*NUMGA and GOONYA.*



obsession with elemental, ritualistic and prehistoric themes and in many ways his works parallels the themes of spirituality and identity found in the Kalachakra Mandala.

Nikolaus Lang

Lang, a German artist with a background in wood carving, comes from Oberammergau in Bavaria. He developed an interest in anthropology in the late 1950's, and began to study Aboriginal culture while in London during the sixties.

In his show '*Numga and Goonya*' (Fig.25p.37b), which means 'black fellow and white person', Lang explores the alienation of the Aborigines caused by the white settlers in Australia. Lang's exhibition embraces the same strong political and cultural connotations as the Kalachakra Sand Mandala show. Here again we see a conscious decision to create an awareness amongst western societies of the plight and oppression of another culture. Lang's work highlights the destruction of the Aboriginal culture. The Aborigines like the Tibetan's, have been deprived of their rights in their native land by inconsiderate invaders. In the Aborigines' case the invaders are the white farmers, in the Tibetan's it's the Chinese Communist party.

Through the examination of the aboriginal environment and culture, both in the past and the present, Lang reveals aspects of conflict between Aborigines and the white settlers who have more or less disregarded their existence, and negated their culture, just like the Chinese government have done to the Tibetans. Lang explores the relationship between the two conflicting civilizations, while celebrating the flora and fauna of the land that links them.

Lang is fascinated by the traditions and practices of the Aboriginal culture and tries to give the most authentic





representation of this culture he possibly can by practicing these traditions himself. For example, using his previously acquired skills with wood work, he practiced the traditional Aboriginal techniques of woodcraft, and immersed himself in reenacting other traditional Aboriginal customs. The virtue of repeating these traditions reflects the same attempt to preserve traditions as we see in the monks practice of Kalachakra. Both Lang's exhibition and the Kalachakra Mandala exhibition show the Aborigines' and Tibetan's fear of their culture being threatened by the respective invading parties. The Tibetans have already had so many of their Buddhist artifacts and monasteries ruthlessly destroyed by the Chinese military, that they possibly feel the need to bring rituals like the practice of Kalachakra to the rest of the world so as to create an awareness of, and simultaneously strengthen these traditions. Lang in his reenactment of Aboriginal customs is doing much the same thing on behalf of Aboriginal culture, that is reinforcing and creating an awareness of Aboriginal culture and tradition.

One of the customs that Lang reenacted was the ancient Aboriginal tradition of making an annual trek during which they collect various artifacts along the way, like for example different coloured ochres, bones, stones etc. In his extended visit to South Australia between 1986 and '89 Lang reenacted this journey and the Aborigines search for ochre in the Flinders Ranges. One of his pieces entitled *Colour Field-Ochre and Sand*, is based on this particular part of his journey. It consisted of about one hundred neatly placed piles of sand and ochre arranged in straight rows which formed a larger rectangle, resembling a sample range of colours for an artists palette. The strength and richness of the colours was amazing, they ranged from deep purples to white and vivid yellow. Of all the art works in Lang's exhibition, this piece





**Fig.25, page 37b.** *HUNTING AND BEING HUNTED*, LANG '93. Photograph by Pat Langan, Irish Times 27/10/93.



probably had most in common with the Kalachakra Sand Mandala because of firstly the shared medium, that is sand, and secondly because of the labour intensive and delicate procedure of placing the sand and ochre in little round piles. Also, the fact that the piece was compiled from part of the Australian soil gave a reference to territory and identity of the land. This is a reference we also recognise in the Kalachakra Sand Mandala exhibition, as part of the purpose of exhibiting it was to make know the fact that the Tibetans have been deprived of their rights in their own land. Similarly Lang was creating an awareness of the Aboriginal land being taken over by colonial settlers.

Both Langs exhibition and the Kalachakra Sand Mandala are very alike in terms of medium, method of display and sharing of similar cultural messages. The main difference between them is that Lang's is an original creation by its artist in an artistic language recognisable as contemporary art, and the mandala is a strict repetition of an ancient religious tradition in a Buddhist language of symbols and images. Many of the representational colours and images in the mandala can also be found in contemporary art works, such as the use of black to represent wind, or gateways indicating a passage or opening into another area of thought or intellectual discovery. Since there was no question about Lang's *Colour Field-Ochre and sand* being termed as art, it brings to mind why the validity of the Kalachakra Mandala should be questioned. Is this enough reason to deny the Buddhist creation the title of being a 'work of art'? It seems unlikely.

Other pieces in Lang's show included ochre-dusted hemp fibre casts of mummified kangaroos and dingos which were assembled with mining and agricultural artifacts in a piece called *Hunting and being Hunted* (Fig.25,p.37b) This piece reflected the Aborigines'



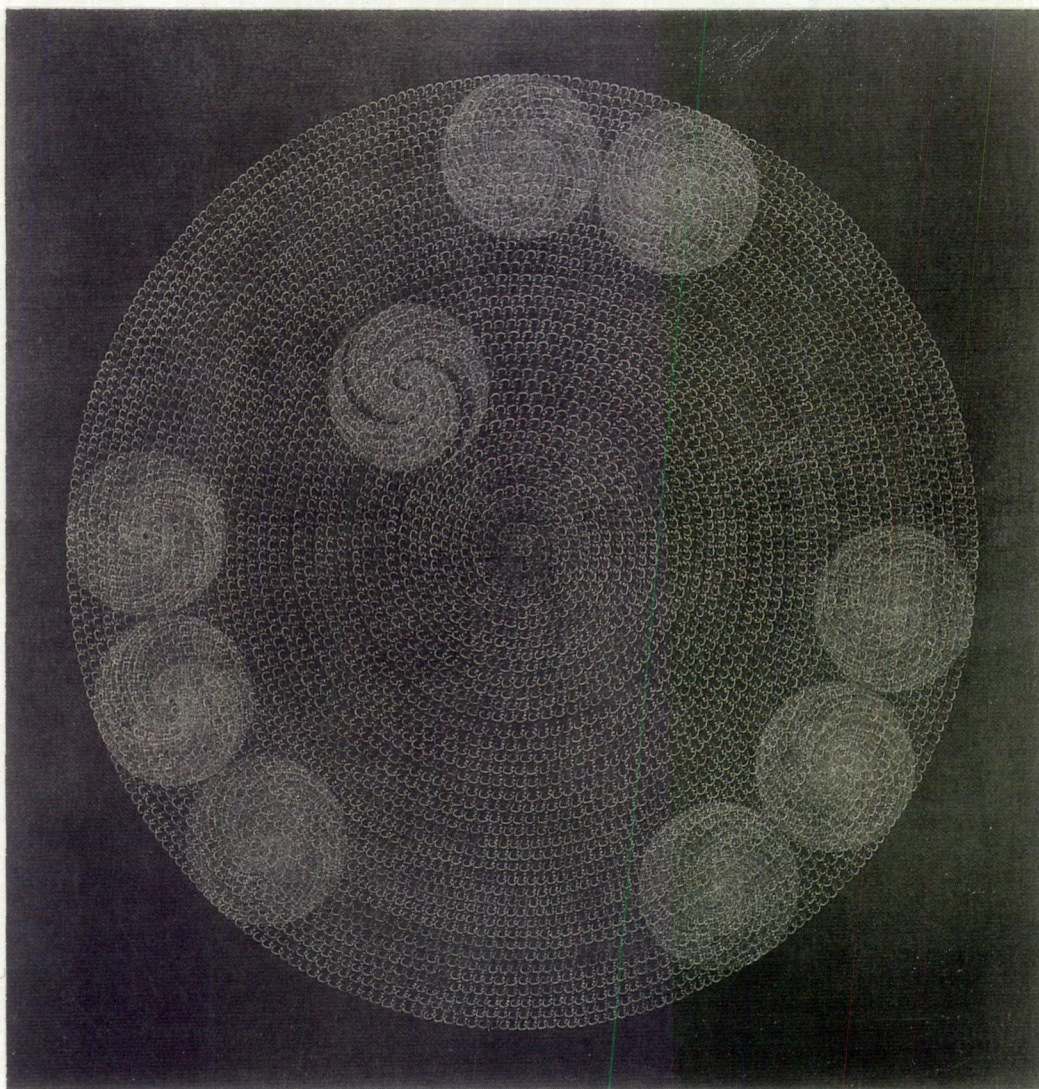


adaption of white settlers artifacts and their use in juxtaposition with their traditional Aboriginal creations. Around the room hung colour photographs of things like skinned kangaroos, which presumably refers to the white sheep farmers hunting practices. They also added a documentary, and sinister dimension to the exhibition. This is similar to the inclusion of photographs of Tibetan scenes in the Kalachakra sand Mandala Exhibition, because they served as a reminder of the atrocities resulting from the Chinese occupation of Tibet, and the denial of the Tibetan population's human rights.

*Culture Heap*, the third sculptural piece in Lang's show, consisted of an accumulation of found objects such as bones, fragments of porcelain left by the white settlers and adapted by the Aborigines for their own use, and ancient Aboriginal tools, all of which Lang had worked on and assembled in a sculptural piece. This piece serves as a reference to the fact that Lang is a white outsider looking in on and commenting on a black culture. In an ironic way he equates himself with the viewers of his show. In the same way the majority of the viewers of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala were looking in on a foreign culture, one with which they can sympathise.

Apart from the fact that Lang includes three dimensional work in his show, the big difference between the two exhibitions was that in the case of the Kalachakra the artists were part of the culture that they were demonstrating. The making of the mandala forms part of a monks life and religion, and not a temporary pursuit of a contemporary artist. Though in Lang's case, his art work seems to be his religion, and as we have seen from this exhibition he totally immerses himself in his work.





**Fig.26, page 39b.** PIECE FROM HOUSHIARY'S *DANCING AROUND MY GHOST*  
1994. Graphite and acrylic on aluminium, 100X100X1.5cms



Shirazeh Houshiary.

Houshiary was born in Iran in 1955, she studied at the Chelsea School of Art in London. Described by John Hutchinson as ascetic and minimal, her work reflects both her cultural background and her concerns with late twentieth century western art. Apart from the obvious affinity of a shared eastern background, Houshiary's work bears many similarities to the Kalachakra Sand Mandala exhibition. Her work is also based on tradition and philosophy, which is in this case the Sufi tradition and the writings of the Philosopher Jalaludin Rumi. Many of Rumi's philosophies also reflect the Buddhist teachings found in the Kalachakra Mandala, for instance the following words written by Rumi recall the Buddhist's philosophy of the inter-connectiveness of everything.

*"a secret turning in us...makes the universe turn... Head unaware of feet... and feet unaware of head. Neither cares they keep turning."*

Houshiary's exhibition entitled *Dancing Around My Ghost*, consists of seven two dimensional pieces, executed in graphite and acrylic on paper, and mounted on aluminium, and a group of box like sculptures. Unlike the bright and colourful Kalachakra Mandala, the colour scheme of Houshiary's two dimensional work is monotonal, she uses only black, grey, and white which are complimented by the silver of the aluminium frame surrounding them. Each of these pieces has a solid black square with lots of tiny white marks drawn on top.(Fig.26p.39b) These marks consist of repeated chants of Arabic words such as *truth, I am breath* or *I am God*. This repetition of Sufi phrases reminds us of the repetition of Buddhist tradition in the making of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala. According to Sheila Gorman her work is also similar to that of the Buddhist monks in that





*the act of making the work, the painstaking concentration and self control, beginning at the centre and working outwards, becomes a meditation in itself an act of withdrawal from the corporeal conscious world, a journey from a known centre. It evokes the Sufi belief of finding God at the centre of the self.* (Gorman, Dec/Jan 1994, The Douglas Hyde Gallery exhibition guide.)

All Houshiary's work is informed by Sufi numeric tradition and follows a carefully calculated pattern, similarly the pattern of the Kalachakra Mandala is based on patterns calculated and derived from astronomical studies. Although her work can in one way be compared to the Kalachakra Sand Mandala in that it reflects the continuation of a tradition in its repetition of Arabic symbols, the huge difference between the two shows, is that Houshiary's work is a very original and personal interpretation of these traditions. Houshiary's use of Arabic words in her work also likens it to the Kalachakra Mandala in the respect that the majority of Irish viewers were alienated from the pieces' meaning because they didn't understand the language. Unless the viewer possessed the required information for understanding both Houshiary's work and the Kalachakra Mandala, they could only view the work from a distance and not fully understand the meaning of the pieces. Having said this, Houshiary does use combinations of symbolic shapes and colours which are commonly found in contemporary art and have universal meaning. For instance the balance of black and white tones in her two dimensional work could be taken to represent the balance of positive and negative, male and female and so on. The Kalachakra Mandala is also about balance as we can see clearly from its symmetrical composition, and when we look more closely, the careful placing of deities who deal with aspects of physical and



ORIGINAL RE-RUNS  
JIMMIE DURHAM

16 MARCH - 30 APRIL 1994



DHg

**Fig.27, page 41b.** COVER PHOTOGRAPH FOR GALLERY GUIDE TO DURHAM'S  
*ORIGINAL RE-RUNS.*



emotional balance which are necessary for the maintenance of individual and world peace.

Jimmie Durham.

Durham is a native Cherokee North American Indian who paints, creates sculptures, writes essays and is a political activist. He describes himself in a somewhat humorous tone as being a 'good Indian' who comes from the west, loves nature, has a particularly close connection with his environment and a great affinity with spiritual matters. His show entitled "*Original Re-Runs*" (Fig.27, p.41b), was comprised of a series of brilliant bricolage sculptures, some punning signs and a lot of text, either as text drawings or as miscellaneous notes. It was a kind of mock anthropological display which had a sharp sarcastic edge. His work articulates common perceptions of Indian life and culture, and then undermines them. The aim of it being to dispel the often patronising conception we have of his culture. Similarly the creation of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala dispelled misconceptions people may have had about Buddhism or the Tibetan political situation, by giving viewers the chance to witness a Buddhist ritual first hand.

Durham's work subtly mocks our well meaning enthusiasm for Native American authenticity, which either reduces his culture to the stereo types that western observers want to see, or else results in the mass-production of imitation folksy artifacts that Native Americans make for the tourist market. The Irish equivalent would be the typical little Leprechaun statues and shamrock covered wooden spoons.

From just looking at Durham's work it is obvious that he is angry and bitter about the way in which his culture has been





abused, displaced and misrepresented as a result of the invading white colonials. Like the Tibetan Buddhist monks, Durham's ancestors, the Cherokee Indians were forced to leave their lands because of violent attacks by white European settlers.

It is interesting to note Durham paradoxical employment of European forms of technology and communication as means of reprisal against the European culture which caused so much destruction to his own. The Dalai Lama has also become used to using modern technology, which is often Chinese made, as a tool in his campaign to spread an awareness of his peoples' plight.

The sharp sarcastic wit which characterises Durham's work sets a totally different atmosphere to that of the Mandala exhibition. *Original Re-Runs* exuded an electric buzz of cynicism and humour, while the Kalachakra Sand Mandala had a peaceful and positive aura. It is surprising to find such contrasting atmospheres produced by two shows which shared more or less the same political functions, which was to create an awareness of the unjust occupation of their native lands.

The essential difference between the two exhibitions is that they employed completely different methods of construction and arrangement to convey their political message. Durham's show was an erratic composition of bricolage sculptures which burned with feelings of passion and rage, while the Kalachakra Sand Mandala was a tightly controlled and meticulously created art work. Durham's use of pseudo archeological finds blatantly mocked the viewer and undermined our common perceptions of his culture. On the opposite end of the scale the Kalachakra Mandala was as authentic as it could have been in a venue other than its traditional setting, which would have been a Buddhist temple.





Durham feels that Ireland has quite a lot in common with his own land in both a political and a spiritual sense. In the following quote from his book 'A Certain Lack of Coherence', Durham describes his reaction to reading about Irish history;

*I was shocked by the long duration and viciousness of the English oppression of Ireland; but I was equally shocked by the de-humanisation set up by English linguistic terminology. Both the massacres and their justification, and then the specific vocabulary used against us by the English, and by the English who call themselves 'Americans', had been tried and proved on Ireland. (DURHAM,1993, page,150.)*

It is interesting to note that the political oppression of both Ireland and North America by the English is very much the same as the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Although Durham might not make direct reference to these particular political similarities in his "Original Re-Runs" exhibition, it is worth noting these are the kind of underlying ideas which form the basis of his work.

#### Summary.

There are only three principal differences between the work of the four artists described in this chapter and the Kalachakra Sand Mandala. They are as follows; firstly all four artists exhibited alone whereas the mandala was a group project. Secondly they are personal interpretations of a particular subject and the mandala is not. Thirdly in each of the four exhibitions mentioned above we do not see the whole process of the making as we do in the creation of the mandala.

However apart from these differences, the Kalachakra Sand Mandala and these four exhibitions have a huge amount in common. They are all expressions of spiritual and cultural identity. Since the





mandala successfully fulfilled the role of demonstrating these two ideas or, if you like, contemporary themes of spirituality and identity, there is no reason why it shouldn't be displayed in a contemporary art gallery, or termed as a contemporary work of art.

As for the political issues raised by the whole Kalachakra show, Nikolaus Lang raises political issues which are just as strong in his work, and there is no doubt that Jimmie Durham's exhibitions do the same, so this factor shouldn't stand in the way of exhibiting the Kalachakra Sand Mandala. The Sand Mandala exhibition is a different form of art than what we are used to or expect to see in a gallery like the Douglas Hyde. In this chapter we have we have established that it is an art form, and could be validly termed as performance art, time based art or cultural art. The fact that the Buddhists who created it held no aspirations to be recognised as artists should not take away from the beauty of their creation, or the crediting of their skill and self discipline. On the contrary it should rather increase our appreciation of the monks modesty and lack of pretension.

The fact that creation of the sand mandala may not have allowed room for any personal interpretation on the part of the monks who have recreated it over the centuries, constitutes an argument which seems to undermine the validity of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala as art work. But the original creator(s) had to have used their own initiative in the first creation of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala, even within the perimeters of the Buddhist teaching from which it derives. If this is so, then we can dismiss the conflicting argument and justify the mandala as a valid art work.





## CONCLUSION

As part of the conclusion to this thesis, press and public reaction to the Irish exhibition of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala are examined and considered so as to evaluate the success of the exhibition, and further support the argument justifying the Douglas Hyde Gallery's hosting of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala.

By and large, the press reviews of the mandala exhibition were positive and supportive. The only negative reaction I could find in print was a letter from Elizabeth Murphy to the editor of the Irish Times, dated the 25th of February 1994. (Fig.28,p.45b)

According to Ms. Murphy the event was "*clearly seen by the gallery as having ritualistic significance*". She felt that "*in a country with an overwhelming Christian legacy, one has the right to question this 'exhibition.'*" She goes on to say "*Contemporary Christians have a case to challenge the current social mode of relativism as their faith is based on absolutes.....If the Douglas Hyde recognises that life can be spiritual*" she wonders "*if they would permit an artist to invite a group of Christians to hold a prayer vigil in the gallery? It's probably not trendy or ethnic enough!*" This last statement demonstrates Ms.Murphy's lack of understanding concerning the significance of the Kalachakra Mandala's context in the theme of exhibitions shown at the Douglas Hyde Gallery around that time. She also seems to be unaware of the importance of the Douglas Hyde Gallery's role in hosting foreign exhibitions.

Ms. Murphy claims that "*in this country the Church is only demonstrating its vibrancy in small unrecognised pockets.*" She mustn't be conscious of the international success and recognition of artists such as Maïne Jellicott, or Harry Clarke who produced many works for ecclesiastical purposes. Nor does she acknowledge the huge role the Church has played in the patronising of Irish art.





Her remark about Buddhism being an "easy option type of faith", demonstrates how little she knows about the religion or the self disciplinary practices which many Buddhists monks undertake. Her final question which asks *"Surely it is time for the Church to watch and pray for true life in all its abundance and joy"*, sums up Ms. Murphy's misunderstanding of the Buddhist faith, as one of its main ethics, like Christianity, actually is to watch and pray for true life in all its abundance and joy.

In the following weeks edition of the Irish Times newspaper were two letters in reaction to Ms. Murphy's letter from other Christians who showed totally different views on the same subject. Margaret Riordan writes in her letter to the editor of the Irish Times on the Third of March 1994,

*I am a Christian, yet I felt so privileged to see the monks making the mandala, that I visited the Douglas Hyde Gallery on four different occasions. I found it a thought-provoking exhibition, and profoundly interesting to witness a very different approach to prayer.*

Ms.Riordan also shares the Buddhist attitude that many of the world's ills are due to people ignoring their spirituality and looking to materialism for fulfilment.

Because Ms.Murphy's letter stemmed from an uninformed prejudiced reaction, it cannot be counted as a valid objection to the Kalachakra Sand Mandala, or a justifiable reason to prohibit the exhibition of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala in the Douglas Hyde Gallery.

The practice of Buddhism seems to have attracted the attention of many who have become disillusioned with the



## KALACHAKRA MANDALA

. Sir, — My subject matter is the current work at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, "The Kalachakra Sand Mandala".

Part of the energy of art is ability to use colours, symbols, concepts with freedom. The artist, Shirazeh Houshidry, could have chosen, prior to the exhibition, to make a mandala as a textural but symbolic art piece and leave it on public display. However, the choice was to have five Tibetan monks to make the mandala whilst at prayer. This changes it to not only performance art, but it is clearly seen by the gallery as having ritualistic significance. Staff have verbally billed the event as "special", "sacred", "holy", etc.

I feel that in a country with an overwhelming Christian legacy, one has the right to question this "exhibition". Contemporary Christians have a case to challenge the current social mode of relativism as their faith is based on absolutes (whilst also showing love for mankind). If the Douglas Hyde recognises that life can be spiritual, I wonder if they would permit an artist to invite a group of Christians to hold a prayer vigil in the gallery? It's probably not trendy or ethnic enough!

The progression of art is often through controversy, so I know there will be those who applaud exhibits like the "kalachakra" if it provokes fundamental objections like mine. However, my greatest sadness is not really that art has given opportunity for appeal to be made to "deities", other than the Christian God (who declares Himself to be the

one true God), but that, generally, in this country the Church is only demonstrating its vibrancy, message of truth, and creative richness in small unrecognised pockets. After the exhibition the mandala sand is to be cast into the Liffey to help spiritually cleanse it. It is good to acknowledge that this city and island are not in a state of well-being.

However, I call on those who believe that this is not the solution to challenge this shipping in of people from a country distant in belief to our history, with a worldview which few here fully grasp, which provides an easy-option type of faith; an option where we watch, rather than participate, are relativist to the point of confusion, rather than renewed and commissioned by Christ. Surely it is time for the Church to watch and pray for true life in all its abundance and joy? — Yours, etc,

ELIZABETH MURPHY,  
Cabra,  
Dublin 7.

Fig.28, page 45b. LETTER FROM MS.MURPHY TO EDITOR OF THE IRISH TIMES.



conventional religion in this country. Similarly in Shirazeh Houshiary's work an attractive alternative to our own tradition of spirituality is offered for those who spend time in seeking out, and are receptive to its meaning. Both Houshiary's exhibition and the Kalachakra Sand Mandala serve as vehicles for carrying these alternative messages.

The introduction of something different to what people are used to and feel safe with, can be a threatening and scary prospect for some. Perhaps this explains one of the reasons why the mandala exhibition was met by criticism and condemnation from some 'Born again Christians' and people like Elizabeth Murphy. This critical reaction reflected a conventional section of Irish society which is afraid of change, or reluctant to make any attempt to understand something before passing judgement.

Whilst the information contained within this thesis may make it seem self evident that the Douglas Hyde Gallery was justified in hosting the Kalachakra Sand Mandala Exhibition, it was necessary to argue out these points because of the controversial reaction which the exhibition provoked in Ireland, not only from members of the 'art world', but also from certain members of the public. After exploring all the areas and reasons for controversy concerning the hosting of the Kalachakra Sand Mandala, we can conclude that none of these objections constitute enough grounds to prohibit its exhibition in the Douglas Hyde Gallery. So we can safely say the Douglas Hyde Gallery was completely justified in hosting the Kalachakra Sand Mandala Exhibition. The quality of its execution and the strength of its visual presence outweighed the controversial religious and political factors. Because the mandala exhibition went so well, John Hutchinson has planned a similar cultural show later in this year. The exhibition is based around Mexican death rituals,





**Fig.29, page 48b.** PROCESSION DOWN TO THE LIFFEY. Photograph by Ciaran Kirwan.



**Fig.30, page 48b.**POURING THE SAND INTO THE LIFFEY. Photograph by Ciaran Kirwan.



and is called "The Day of The Dead", this is scheduled for 17th of October to the 2nd of December, which includes Halloween 1995.

The Kalachakra Sand Mandala was undoubtedly an unusual exhibition for the Douglas Hyde Gallery, and probably more unusual was the overwhelmingly positive public reaction it attracted. John Hutchinson made an interesting observation in relation to this,

*Curiously, normally in terms of our exhibitions we find non 'art world' people coming to us and saying, 'look this isn't art this is junk, this is just bad news.' This time the negative comments came from not the people at large but the 'art world'.*

(O'REILLY. Documentary film. '94)

The mandala represented an art form that the 'everyday person' of the street 'could relate to because they could see and understand the skill, time and effort that went into it. The twifold beauty of the Kalachakra is that it combines both this conventional idea of art, and the concepts of contemporary and conceptual art.

The exhibition did however arouse an angered reaction amongst some people who called themselves 'Born Again Christian', as was revealed when the monks made their procession down to the Liffey. (Fig.29,p.48b & Fig.30,p.48b) 'The Born Again Christians' displayed placards which bore statements like for example "We don't want foreign devils in our country." In most other countries where the Kalachakra Sand Mandala was exhibited it seemed to have received a positive reaction, with the one exception of Santa Monica in The U.S.A. Here an violently outraged protester jumped on top of the mandala and destroyed it. He obviously didn't understand the message of impermanence!





**Appendix One.**

Interview with John Hutchinson, the Director of the Douglas Hyde Gallery. This interview took place on Friday the 25th of December 1994.

The interview questions were as follows;

(1).What were your reasons for choosing the mandala as an exhibition subject for the Douglas Hyde?

(2).Can you justify bringing such a religious display into a contemporary art gallery?

(3).Why was Buddhism given preference over any other religion?  
e.g.there has never been (to my knowledge) a solely catholic exhibition in the gallery.

(4).In the book A New Tradition there is an essay by Aidan Dunne titled *Back to the future-a context for Irish Art of the 1980's*,which states that "*The Hyde was intended as Dublin's venue for contemporary art*", do you think that a Buddhist ceremony can be termed as 'contemporary art'?

(5).Do you consider an art gallery to be a suitable setting for a ceremony which would traditionally have been held in a Buddhist temple?

(6),(a)Does the gallery have any set policy on what is exhibited, and is this decided by a panel/board or by you alone?

(b).Who are the members of the present board?





(7).The gallery guide for the mandala exhibition states that it '*echoes some the ideas which informed artists like Toshikatsu Endo, Nikolaus Lang, and Shirazeh Houshiary, all of whom have shown in the Douglas Hyde gallery over the last two years.*' Would it be an accurate assumption therefore, to say that the mandala exhibition follows a theme of work which was being exhibited in the gallery at that time?

(8).Do you have any personal interest in Buddhism?

(9).Have there been any other non commercial shows like this in the gallery? Would you consider the Douglas Hyde unique in the respect that is is probably the only southern Irish gallery who could afford to run a show like this?

(10).How much money did this show cost? What were your expenses?

(11)(a)Was the show funded by sponsorship alone, or did the gallery cover the costs?

(b)What sort of reaction did you receive from the sponsors when they were approached about the mandala exhibition?

(c)Did they have any comment to make about the completed mandala?

(12).In the essay refereed to in question four,Aidan Dunne mentions the importance of the Douglas Hydes role in hosting foreign exhibitions. Is this part of the criteria for the galleries programme of events?





(13).(a)I was informed that the number of people who visited the gallery while the show was running was the highest ever attendance of any one exhibition; is this true?

(b)Was there any protesting reaction from the public?

(14).(a)In what other countries have the monks made the mandala?

(b)Was the Douglas Hyde working in conjunction with the foreign galleries who have hosted the mandala?

(c) Are they still travelling with it now ?

(15).The Irish times has quoted you as having said that you were "*looking for something which would give expression to two things- the question of identity and that of the spirit.*" Could you please elaborate on this for me, what exactly did you mean by this statement and do you feel that the exhibition was successful in achieving these two things ?

(16).In terms of expressing identity, was one of the main aims of the event to create an awareness amongst the viewers of the the similarities between Irish and Tibetan political histories, or were you indicating a more personal level of self identity (for example self identity through spirituality)?





## Appendix Two.

Interview with Gordon Campbell, owner of the clothing company The Gap. This interview took place on Monday the 16th January 1995, in his office at the G.P.O Arcade branch of 'The Gap' shops. Romio Shrestha was also present at the interview and answered many of my questions. The interview questions were as follows;

(1).What were your reasons for sponsoring the Kalachakra Sand Mandala?

(2).Do you think the Douglas Hyde Gallery was justified in bringing such a religious display into a contemporary art gallery?

(3).Do you consider the Kalachakra Sand Mandala to be 'contemporary art' and what are your views on art in general?

(4).Do you consider an art gallery to be a suitable setting for a ceremony which would traditionally have been held in a Buddhist temple?

(5).Do you have any personal interest in Buddhism?

(6).Have you sponsored any other shows like this in the gallery? Would you consider the Douglas Hyde unique in the respect that it is probably the only southern Irish gallery who could afford to run a show like this?

(7).Do you have any comment to make about the completed mandala, and its significance to you?

(8).Were you surprised at the number of people who visited the gallery while the show was running ?





USEFULL ADRESSES

The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Trinity College, Nassau St, Dublin 2.  
Phone; 7021116. Fax; 677269.

John O'Neil, Kilmainham Well House, 56 Inchicore Rd,  
Kilmainham, Dublin 8. Phone; 537427.

The Tibetan Foundation, 10 Bloomsbury Way, Londo, WC18.  
Phone; 004471 404 2889.





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