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A NEW TAPESTRY : THE DEVELOPMENT OF TAPESTRY AS FIBRE ART IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND ITS POSITION IN IRELAND TODAY

by
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The contemporary use of the textile medium has evolved from a long and complex history. The latter half of this century in particular, has seen immense changes within the field, beginning just after the Second World War. What is today known as the fibre art movement, emerged at this time, as a result of artists combining traditional craft techniques with the need for something new. This saw the transition of textiles from being perceived as purely functional and decorative, into a vehicle for self expression. During these early stages, tapestry was featured greatly as a foundation on which fresh approaches were built. As a medium which, for centuries, had fulfilled certain limited expectations, it prominently displayed the transformations taking place. In the successive decades, textiles developed in more diverse directions, urging the need for outlets to exhibit this work and rousing issues for debate. These were mainly centred around finding a suitable category in which to place the work. As with all crafts, there were many mixed opinions as to whether it was craft or art.

To some extent, this tension still exists, despite the fact that there is a wider use and acceptance of craft-related techniques in all areas of the art world. Today however, the emphasis tends to be much more on which materials suit the aims of the artist. This in itself, creates an open-minded and limitless palette from which to choose. The area of textiles,

which is increasingly popular at the moment, is being utilised by many who specialise in other media and who are choosing fibre as a means of expressing certain ideas. Whilst, to a certain degree, this was the case during the growth of fibre art over the past decades, the present emphasis is not so much on exploiting the medium, but rather drawing from previous experimentation. This has provided a wealth of inspiration for many artists today.

In this thesis, I propose to explore in greater depth, the emergence of what is now known as fibre art. In doing this, I shall concentrate mainly on the tapestry medium, which underwent a complete metamorphosis, regarding technique, materials and subject matter. To illustrate this, I shall briefly outline the history of tapestry, as a background to the development of twentieth century work and its impact on critic and practitioner alike.

In Chapter One, I concentrate mainly on the changes which were beginning to take place in the textile world during the 1950s. This includes a closer examination of the nature of the medium, its rejection of traditions and influential factors responsible for its development. In my study, I focus on Eastern Europe where these changes were particularly strong. Key figures, for example, Magdalena Abakanowicz, were emerging to lead the way for experimentation with fibre, pushing it in an entirely different direction. Institutions were

established to provide exhibition facilities for these artists, notably the Biennale Internationale de la Tapisseries in Lausanne, Switzerland. This has been a vital ingredient in the promotion of fibre art to date. Naturally, public response to the work, gave rise to many questions as to how exactly it should be labelled. Much difficulty surrounded the approaches to such pieces, which combined traditional craft techniques with what were regarded at the time, as fine art concepts. Residues of this exist today in all areas of the craft field, but with a certain weariness amongst many. Contemporary artists who use fibre as a specialist medium, or who dabble when its usage suits their purpose, are no longer chiefly concerned about which category they slot into. However, like the pioneers of the fibre art movement, their priorities still lie in identifying the best medium for expressing their ideas. The present and increasingly diverse role of textiles has broadened, often becoming a strong element in areas such as mixed media and installations.

In Chapter Two, I analyse the tapestry work of one such pioneer, Magdalena Abakanowicz. Focusing mainly on a series of pieces known as the Abakans, I examine how these intrusive and sombre forms transcended all perceptions of tapestry. Creating a woven environment, Abakanowicz's use of fibre sent shock waves through the critic world and became a profound influence for new artists. These artists were given the encouragement they needed for exploring the possibilities of fibre,

which soared during the 1960s and 1970s and seemed to stem from the barriers crossed by Abakanowicz. I feel strongly that there is considerable bravery and excitement in being an innovator and surpassing an area of tradition. Today, breakthroughs appear less dramatic, chiefly because of all that is on offer to us.

However, to reflect back to the post-war era, the effect of works such as the Abakans must have been quite unsettling. In my research of Abakanowicz's contribution to tapestry, I wrote to the artist with a questionnaire, based upon this and her opinions of fibre art today. As she no longer works through the medium, she declined to comment in her reply, suggesting I refer to her views of the time. Her honesty is admirable and justifies the idea that no art or craft should be limited to a single medium. Nevertheless, her offering to textiles remains as strong and as revolutionary as ever, with relevance to many different disciplines.

As a country deeply rooted in traditional craft, Ireland possesses a natural heritage to build upon. I am extremely interested in the position of fibre art here today, which in many aspects, has been delayed somewhat compared to its European neighbours. Chapter Three traces the general development of Irish craft over the past fifty years, in search of reasons why this is so. Textiles in particular are largely associated with Ireland, although tapestry does not have a long historical background

in the country. At the moment however, there are many artists working through the medium. In my research, I have focused my attention on two artists, whose approaches I feel are innovative and in compliance with the underlying aims of the international fibre art movement. Theresa McKenna and Milyana Fusciardi work with the three-dimensional form, which they carry through to their textiles. Like Abakanowicz, they have used techniques other than the flat Gobelin, as well as unconventional materials. In my study of their work, I interviewed the artists and used a similar questionnaire to that sent to Abakanowicz. It was also possible for me to see their pieces firsthand, which was important to my discussions on resources and the actual construction of the work.

It is my opinion that the future of fibre art in Ireland is optimistic. A wider interest in the scope of textiles is constantly growing, through channels such as educational institutions and exhibitions. This was greatly prompted in 1950, with the establishment by Lillias Mitchell of the Spinning, Dyeing and Weaving Department at the National College Of Art And Design, Dublin. For the first time on the textiles course, weaving was introduced, in response to the "urgent need for good teaching in this subject" (Mitchell, L, 1986 pp.21). Despite the emphasis being on traditional hand-weaving, tapestry was also part of the curriculum, with experimental work being positively encouraged.

Overall, vocabulary, tools and skills are basic common denominators between old and new tapestry, while the aims and results have changed. Although the Gobelin format is still widely used, it has become far removed from solely imitating painting, as it had done during the Renaissance and earlier. To clarify the distinction, it is therefore necessary to reflect upon the origins of tapestry and its uses throughout the ages.

Without doubt, the medium has always demanded a skillful application of technique and material, since its beginnings in Peru, Greece and Egypt. These early pieces often illustrated scenes of everyday life, pageantry, important events and triumphant battles. In more primitive times, tapestries took their place in the burial tombs of kings and later progressed to public places, such as churches and stately homes. This was the case during the Renaissance.

Important changes were starting to take place in all aspects of art and design and textiles were no exception. The introduction of perspective brought with it, new dimensions and possibilities. Artists such as Raphael and Giotto eventually had cartoons of their paintings woven through tapestry. An example of this, is The Acts Of The Apostles (Fig. 0.1), which was woven in the sixteenth century, to a design by Raphael for the lower walls of the Sistine Chapel. (Phillips, B., 1994 pp. 58-59). However, though these pieces were effective, they sometimes look awkward. This was probably as a

result of an incomplete grasp of perspective, on the part of the weavers, which became evident in the translation to tapestry. During the eighteenth century, the tapestry tradition suffered a decline in France, where many of the leading workshops, such as Beauvais and Aubusson were situated. This was partly due to the upheaval caused by the French Revolution; subsequently, designs were of a "dull and prosaic nature" (Rhodes, M., 1973 pp.29)

In Britain during the latter half of the nineteenth century, the spread of the Industrial Revolution contributed to increased mechanisation and a suppression of craftsmanship. Mass-produced goods neglected to recognise the time and skill required in the making of individual pieces. The 'joy of the maker' declined considerably, as the demand for rapidly made pieces grew. William Morris, who rejected all aspects of industrialisation, fought to restore the status of handmade objects. He strongly believed that cheap, factory produced goods exploited employees, depriving them of work satisfaction. This was compatible with Karl Marx's theory of alienation, which understood this increasing gulf between worker and product, worker and society. Morris' own tapestries were a breath of fresh air compared to what his contemporaries were doing. With fluidity and a need to create something new, it is probably safe to say, that this was the beginning of a changing tapestry.

Additionally, Morris' ideas on the social role of craft became influential and were later echoed in those of Walter Gropius. In 1919, Gropius began his reorganisation of the Weimar School Of Art in Germany and the Bauhaus was born. This became a significant event in the future of craft and its recognition as a credible art medium. Gropius believed that a combination of skills and technique, coupled with the approach of fine art, would lead to a stronger outcome. This he predicts in saying; "Architects, painters and sculptors, we must all turn to crafts. Then there will be no 'professional art'", (Constantine,M., 1973 pp.17).

At this time, tapestries were still being perceived as something to be mounted on a wall. These were mainly pictorial, probably due to the instruction of painter Paul Klee. However, this soon altered as new materials were beginning to creep into the weaving workshops and subject matter took on a more abstract form. This was especially so in the work of people such as Gunta Stolzl, who relied heavily on intuition in her designs, which is particularly evident in her slit tapestry of 1926, (Fig. 0.2). A fresh way of teaching encouraged original ideas and an emphasis on the construction and detail of pieces. Despite this however, a bigger revolution in tapestry was yet to come, which is further examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

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This chapter examines the nature and impact of fibre art, from its emergence in the 1950s, through its development in the 1960s and 1970s.

After the Second World War, there were many changes in Europe and America. It was a period of discovery in many respects, as people struggled to break free from the pressures of recent years. Similarly, in the art world, a new aggression was present and many tried to outgrow exhausted methods in the arts and crafts. A re-thinking of roles resulted in exciting advances such as Abstract Expressionism in painting. These advances were also apparent in the area of traditional craft, which witnessed the transition of objects, from being purely functional into being something more daring. This was particularly true in ceramics, as the early stages of the 'Funk Movement' began to surface in America. Described as a "protest coming out of a feeling of being betrayed by traditional forms and ideas in society" (Clark, G., 1987 pp.118), the movement sought to use the ceramic medium in a more expressive way. This saw a challenging of the belief, that such materials were chiefly used to fulfil a utilitarian and decorative purpose.

Textiles was also greatly affected by this shift in ideas. Predominantly seen as a woman's craft, it was now beginning to take on new dimensions, branching into the male world of fine art. Perhaps this stems from the fact that during the war, women had no choice but to take over 'male'

duties. This gave them an opportunity to rise above the roles with which they were generally associated. It would seem more than coincidental therefore, the progression of textiles from a timid homemaking craft into something more sculptural and bold.

Another reason for this, was the limited availability of conventional resources such as wools, linens and silks. These were in short supply after the war, which meant alternative and more obtainable fibres, for example, sisal, jute and cordage, were used. The very nature of such materials demanded that, in order to be effective, the pieces should be of a larger scale than usual. Their stiff and coarse qualities brought unusual texture to the fabric and acted as a starting point for artists to communicate their ideas. These fibres were a far cry from the finely blended wools of Medieval tapestries and indeed, were being made to fulfil very different aims.

Technique too was changing and developing. The traditional Gobelin, which is the flat-woven style seen in Raphael's The Acts Of The Apostles (Fig. 0.1), was built upon and sometimes completely abandoned. New methods were being introduced such as braiding, knotting, slit-making and wrapping, altering the face of tapestry from flat to relief. The actual making of a piece began to involve a lot of physical labour and interaction with materials. The impression given, is that artists worked more from impulse, than to a carefully designed and drawn cartoon.

They moved completely away from pictorial representation and instead, emphasised form. Attention therefore, was mainly drawn to the overall construction of a piece.

The whole notion of textiles as decoration was also a factor being greatly questioned. Whereas tapestries had normally been observed as wall-coverings, these fibre pieces were actually creating their own environments, changing the spaces they were in. No longer was a tapestry with intricate weaving and filigree seen simply to be hanging in stately homes and churches. In fact, it was quite unsuitable to install a fibre piece in such a venue. Additionally, artists wanted their work to be seen by the public and to create responses. Therefore, galleries and commissions were more appropriate for their needs and for the respect of the pieces.

The 1950s proved to be open and receptive to these breakthroughs. Experimentation in art and craft which had begun late in the previous decade, was now in full flower and was to remain so for quite some time. Definitions continued to change in all areas of society and culture, as part of the post-war era. However, the fact that craft was seldomly recognised in the same way as, for example, fine art painting, added to the impact of its eventual revolution. There had always been a dividing line between both fields, as curator of the Museum Of Fine Art in Boston, Trevor Fairbrother reflects:

> ..the old prejudice is that fine art comes with content, while craft is more about usage and craft practice...you don't expect an Art Nouveau chair to provide the same message as an Edvard Munch painting of the same year, although both say a lot about their respective social contexts.
>
> (Marincola, P., 1995 pp.38)

As craft was never regarded to hold any profound concepts or insights, it was attributed a lower status, even though its making required expert skills and intensive labour.

In Eastern Europe, almost destroyed by the war, artists were combining elements from both craft and fine art, in attempts to break barriers. By forming new ideals and goals, it seems they were trying to create something positive from the hardship they endured. Poland, in particular, continued to suffer as a result of Communist rule. This entailed a severe lack of civil rights, freedom of speech, adequate housing and work for the people. The Polish Ministry for Art and Culture, were at the same time however, funding and establishing programs to revive handicrafts. These included the weaving tradition which was inherent in the country. Encouragement and scope were given to emerging artists to expand on what was already there. Two such people were Magdalena Abakanowicz, who is later discussed in greater depth (Figs. 1.3 & 2.2- 2.8) and Jagoda Buic (Fig. 1.1). Both created new possibilities with their work, using unconventional means to bring their ideas to full potential.

Awarded the silver medal at Milan's 1957 Triennale, Buic's work embodied all aspects of a new tapestry. Like Abakanowicz, she produced pieces which were extremely heavy and chunky and of enormous scale. Her preferred materials were sisal and handspun wools, which she dyed in dark colours of grey and black. These give her work a particularly dominant appearance, as in the case of Composition In Space from 1960 (Fig. 2.3).

With three main sections, this piece combines areas of weaving and wrapping. The vertical and diagonal lines are likened to those found in Medieval architecture and heraldic imagery, which perhaps is influenced by Buic's years as a costume designer with the Dubrovnic Theatre Festival. During this time, she found herself exposed to many historic venues in which the theatre performed. Rugged exteriors, courtyards and beautiful surroundings created a rustic atmosphere which, to a certain extent, is captured in her work. (Constantine, M., 1973 pp.127-128).

Despite this however, there also appear to be sinister undertones present. The tall, almost proud structures are reminiscent of dark knights, warriors and chain-mail armour which create an overall looming quality. Woven in strips which are joined randomly, the centre section of the three is moulded to a circular shape with the support of a metal ring. Excess fabric drapes softly onto the ground, with some warp ends left unwoven. This adds a gentle element to the rigidity of the pieces

on either side. Successfully, Buic seeks to alter space with her tapestry. She is interested in the fibre medium for the warmth it can bring to a place and for its ability to absorb sound; factors which later influenced the popular choice of textiles for public places. Much of the inspiration for her work arose from planned thought processes and memories, which then evolved through preparatory drawings. Although often rough and quite minimal, these provided Buic with the basic details from which she proceeded to work intuitively on her pieces.

At this time, outlets were becoming available to present such fibre works. Exhibitions were organised to display pieces to a wider audience and to give artists the opening required. One major event was the establishment of the First Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie in Lausanne, in 1962. The president and founder was French craftsperson, Jean Lurcat who had long been involved with the tapestry movement. Adamant in trying to change the expectations of tapestry, he became a vital ingredient in the development of fibre art. Together with Pierre Pauli, who directed the exhibition, Lurcat assembled an international jury to select artists from all over the world. In doing so, he ensured a broader and more diverse judgement to benefit applicants. The Biennale was a marvellous opportunity for many to gain insight into what their contemporaries were doing. This proved to be both healthy and constructive, encouraging competition and allowing views and ideas to be exchanged.

Although cartoon-woven tapestries were evidently present, it was the more avant-garde practitioners, such as Abakanowicz and Buic who gained attention. Other events of the time included the afore mentioned Milan Triennale and the 1958 Brussels World Fair. However, it was the Lausanne Biennale which was to make a lasting impression (Constantine, M., 1973 pp.44).

In the U.S.A., similar advances were occurring. The 'Woven Forms' exhibition took place in 1963 at the Museum Of Contemporary Crafts, New York. This introduced the work of artists such as Lenore Tawney, Sheila Hicks and Claire Zeisler. Post-war America's 'sentiment that every citizen has the right to express him or herself' (Colchester, C., 1991 pp.137) was in full swing. Moreover, experimenting with fibre in the 1950s led to a more varied approach throughout the 1960s. Many of these pieces were organic in form and colour, sometimes solemn but rarely dull.

Tawney, in particular, sought to distort the woven form as much as possible and, like Zeisler, who frequently worked with knotting, was concerned with freedom from the loom. A renewed interest in anthropology and its ancient crafts came to the fore in the 1960s, with folk and tribal art becoming extremely popular. A return to techniques such as felting, papermaking and macrame, combined with conceptual ideas, resulted in pieces like Zeisler's Preview in 1969 (Fig. 1.2).

Constructed of hundreds of knotted threads, using Hawaiian and North American methods, this dramatic form illustrates the variation in fibre pieces at the time. A complex mesh-like structure, bordered by thickly wrapped surplus yarn, adds a strong and powerful element to the remaining threads which spill abundantly onto the floor. This three-dimensional approach to textiles became more prominent in the late 1960s and stirred much enthusiasm. Critic Erika Billeter declared in a catalogue essay, accompanying Claire Zeisler's retrospective in 1979:

> However they were displayed, they were strange objects and opened completely novel possibilities for the art of textiles, that until then, had been known in Europe only in the form of Gobelin tapestry. The woven objects had their individual shapes and their own personal expressions and they solely realized themselves through the various techniques that were arranged in free combinations.
>
> (Billeter, E., 1979 pp.88)

In saying this, the following decade brought with it various pitfalls. Naturally, there were many who followed the trend without putting much time or effort in to their work. This meant that in a lot of cases, poorly designed and finished pieces were being produced. Despite this however, highly skilled artists with original ideas continued to make their mark and clearly represented those who possessed true vision and imagination.

Meanwhile, exotic patterns from Africa and Asia were being recreated in the fibre world. These added an enriching touch to the revival of ancient technique

and urged combinations of old and new, with diverse materials such as leather and plastic (Constantine M., 1980 pp.76).

With the flourishing of civic buildings in Europe, during the 1970s, a welcome site for fibre work was readily provided. Textiles as public art became more acceptable and increasingly favoured. Although tapestry had always had its place in architecture, the difference here showed that it no longer symbolised rank, royalty and religion. Instead, it was used to complement the space and solve acoustical problems, while its sensual qualities brought warmth to the modernist style (Colchester, C., 1991 pp.138-139). This was especially so in places such as banks and offices, which needed something of aesthetic value to break everyday monotony. Such commissions presented a challenge for many artists, with several factors to be considered during the designing of site-specific pieces. These included scale, light, position, surroundings, fire-proofing and installation. Because much of the work was quite large and complex, artists were often expected to be present during the hanging of pieces.

In the case of Magdalena Abakanowicz's commission for the North Brabant government buildings in 1971, the actual weaving was conducted in situ. The result was Bois-le-Duc (Fig. 1.3), an enormous composition in several pieces, whose construction required a team of helpers. Usually seen in museums and galleries, her work and its

upfront approach did not seem entirely suited to such a venue. Incidentally, the clients were unsure of how to relate to such a bizarre tapestry, but in time grew accustomed to it (Museum Of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1982 pp.67). Another factor which needed to be taken into account in the making of fibre pieces was their maintenance. This sometimes posed a problem for many of the larger and more bulky structures. Unlike the traditional wall hanging, they were difficult to dismantle if in need of cleaning and were prone to much dust. However, if treated with care, frequent vacuuming seemed to provide an adequate solution.

At the same time, many were still preoccupied with finding a label for the work, instead of accepting it for what it was. The need to classify everything seems almost to be a critical downfall in the world of art, pushing something new into an old category. The opinion of some critics, was that craft had lost much of its tradition, skill and function through its progression into fine art. On the other hand, some held the view that fine art consisted purely of the classical media of painting, sculpture and print to convey a deeper meaning. This raises the question that surely all art forms have a history, skill and message to communicate; a combination which fibre art fully portrays. The eventual abandonment of fibre by many, such as Abakanowicz, proves how unrealistic it has become to characterise any artist by their use of a particular medium. As a practitioner, it is sometimes quite interesting and a relief to gain the various

opinions of those outside the field, without pre-conceived ideas and to hear fresh, unmuddled responses to pieces of work.

In retrospect, this period, without doubt, has been a milestone in the history of textiles. The pioneers responsible for altering the many notions of tapestry, made headway for new and innovative ideas. While over the years, trends have come and gone, the use of fibre has remained strong. Their ability to transcend the the familiar and transform it into the unusual is what has made them extremely influential. Additionally, one of the most appealing traits of the textile medium, is its evident display of the time and labour involved in the making of a piece. This is especially true of tapestry, the Gobelin style of which is still hugely popular today. In fact, this has endured its own revolution regarding subject matter and now often deals with social, personal and political issues in a representational way.

Importantly, the emergence of fibre art in the 1950s, also began to introduce new methods of teaching into art schools. This was further achieved through the running of various courses and workshops by the artists themselves. As a result, people experienced firsthand the possibilities of textiles. Apprenticeships were given to students who were to become the fibre artists of the future and so the connection prospered. One such teacher, whose textile work embodies the vigour

and spirit of the post-war generation is Magdalena Abakanowicz.

CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER TWO

This chapter examines closely the tapestry work of Magdalena Abakanowicz, which has secured her position as one of the founding members of the fibre art movement.

Magdalena Abakanowicz is today considered to be a leading figure in contemporary art, not just in contemporary textiles. Her contribution to tapestry weaving is, without doubt revolutionary. As discussed in the previous chapter, Abakanowicz became one of the pioneers in a new approach to fibre. Although she no longer works through the medium, it is her contribution to the textile world which remains best known. Her work in the area has led the way for many artists to experiment and remains an influence for up-and-coming students in the field. As a young scholar herself, Abakanowicz tried to obtain a place in the sculpture department at the Academy Of Fine Arts in Warsaw, but was rejected. It was only later, after learning how to weave, that she brought a sculptural element to her textiles. The result was a series of fibre constructions known as the Abakans. These huge and threatening forms were tubular or circular in shape, mainly in dark or subdued colours. They seem to revolt against the limitations felt by the artist throughout her life, but particularly as a child.

Born in Poland in 1930, Abakanowicz spent her early years in the countryside. From the beginning, it seems she felt the need to prove herself. She longed to be wanted by her mother, who was disappointed her daughter had

not been a boy. As a result, Abakanowicz was paid little attention and spent most of her time shying away. Long days alone were passed walking in the woods exploring the environment in which she lived. With no friends of her own age to talk with, she relied on a vivid imagination to amuse her. Her constant companion was a small pocketknife, with which she used to carve twigs and bark into figures (Museum Of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1982 pp.18). It is evident that, even at this early stage, an interest in sculptural form was developing.

An observant child, Abakanowicz remembers the changing of seasons and the cycles of nature in great detail. She hoarded natural resources such as grasses, stones and wood. The shape and tactile qualities of these are reproduced in the Abakans with her choice of fibres such as sisal, jute and hessian. These represent the raw textures which she found exciting as a child. Moreover, the mystery and awe of Polish tradition surrounded the young Abakanowicz. Folklore figures were brought to life in her mind and she believed them to be as real as the environment she was so much a part of. She has recalled her surroundings thus:

> Between the ponds and the pine grove was a fallow field. Sandy, white, overgrown with clumps of dry, stiff grass. It looked strange. The tips of each clump converged, forming a kind of tent. The whole area looked as if it were covered by minute bristling cones. No one ever changed anything there. Everyone knew it should be left alone. "They" live in the grass, it was said.
>
> (Museum Of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1982 pp.20)

These 'tent' like grass stacks (Fig. 2.1) could have easily described pieces such as Brown Coat (Fig. 2.7), which shall be looked at in more depth, later in the chapter. In addition, this feeling of the unknown and sense of unease is reflected in the Abakans, with their dark colours and haunting presences.

After Abakanowicz's first attempts at weaving, she had the chance of a one-person exhibition at the Ministry Of Culture in Warsaw, in 1960. This allowed her to display both paintings and woven pieces and became a stepping stone for her to work to the standards she had set for herself. Fortunately, Maria Laskiewicz, a professional weaver at the time, saw the exhibition and took the liberty of enlisting Abakanowicz for the First Biennale de la Tapisserie in Lausanne. Ironically, Laskiewicz failed to secure a space to exhibit, while her young recommendation was accepted. This gave Abakanowicz a chance to gain just recognition for her work and for what she was achieving in the area of tapestry. The Biennale also offered her an opportunity to exhibit outside of her own country with other Polish and international artists. This must have been most encouraging and was indeed a time when her work was evolving dramatically, forming its own individual style.

In truth, it is safe to say that Abakanowicz took from tapestry weaving, the fundamental rules and further exploited them. Similarly, she dismantled conventional weaving apparatus, reassembling it to suit her own

requirements. Consequently, she was questioning the very basis of weaving, using it instead as a 'jumping off' point for her self-expression. Her belief that these woven forms exist in their own right, led Abakanowicz to work only with small sketches as a guide. In this way, her pieces were not merely reproductions of something else, but to a degree, were woven instinctively which allowed them to take their own shape.

In looking more closely at the Abakans (Figs. 2.1 - 2.8), this method of working is clearly apparent. Indeed, it would seem unrealistic to examine them with the view that they have been woven specifically to suit a cartoon. Perhaps this does not apply so much to the early Dorata (Fig. 2.2) of 1964, but most certainly to the three-dimensional forms of the late 1960s and 1970s. She comments:

> I make use of the technique of weaving adapting it to my own ideas. My art has always been a protest against what I have met with in weaving. I started to use rope, horsehair, metal and fur because I need these materials to give my vision expression and I did not care that they were not part of the tradition in this field. Moreover, tapestry with its decorative function never interested me. I simply became extremely concerned with all that could be done through weaving.
>
> (Museum Of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1982 pp.48)

In Dorata (Fig. 2.2), Abakanowicz's concern with the notion of relief is quite obvious. The subject is treated in an abstract way, emphasising the contrasting elements. This is achieved through both colour and texture. The use of light and dark tones on the sides of the piece

create dramatic areas, which then fuse in the centre with a more blended and muted effect. Creamy whites, browns and blacks suggest a link with the natural world. The darker shapes are also suggestive of shadows cast onto the earth by trees and stones. In researching responses to Abakanowicz's tapestry work, I presented people who have no link to the textile world with pictures of the Abakans. The overall opinion was that, in a strange almost prehistoric way, there is a feeling that these pieces are more ancient than their time. They seem to have survived from an era long ago.

The flatter sections on the surface of Dorata, are in marked contrast with tufting and looping techniques. Similarly, thick yarns such as rope and cord are 'whipped' (a process by which elements are attached to the surface using a weft yarn, which passes behind the warp at intervals to secure its place) during weaving. The distinction between these tightly plied threads and the more relaxed quality of unspun hair, sets up a tension in the piece.

Abakanowicz's deep-rooted connection with nature recurs time and again in her textile work. This appears not only to be a passion, but a necessity for her to create pieces which are counterparts to the environment. The impression given, is that she believes strongly that the Abakans belong in the world as much as people, plants and animals. She portrays this in Composition With Hands (Fig. 2.3) from 1966. This also enables the viewer to relate more closely with a piece.

In Abakan 27, 1967 (Fig. 2.4), Abakanowicz became more expressive with her relief. The lush folds of fabric and densely piled threads are strikingly female in appearance. Woven in warm, fleshy oranges against a dark background, they strive to deal with the woman's sexuality. In this work however, there exists a hint of tension between the softness of the threads and the stiff wrapped elements which protude from the surface. These features are continued, yet become separate to each other in Abakanowicz's three-dimensional work, for example Abakan Round and Yellow Abakan (Fig. 2.5), from 1967-1968. The latter, woven in a huge oval form, measures approximately three by three metres. Undoubtedly, it is the more approachable of the two pieces, in softly spun yarn with a calm and serene atmosphere. Suspended on a metal tube, the Abakan is forced to hang with its sides draped loosely, folds gently extending from the surface in a somewhat visceral manner. In comparison, Abakan Round threatens the spectator.

Woven as a rectangle, it was then shaped into a circular form using a metal ring, which was sewn along the top heading. Large slits were incorporated into the weaving, which are likened to huge gaping mouths. On either side of these, the protrusions writhe from a thick hairy surface. This monstrous piece could almost be alive, resembling something animal, but of an unfamiliar form. Additionally, there is something undeniably male about the work and the unease it causes appears deliberate. Perhaps this is a reaction to the young Abakanowicz's encounters with men.

These seem to have been mostly intimidating, beginning with the fear of her father.

An authoritative man, he was intolerant of "children's noise" (Museum Of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1982 pp.19) and so she spent her time cowering away and viewing him from a distance. Similarly, the soldiers on the streets of Poland during the war, terrified the child and proved to have made a lasting impression on the adult artist. This dominance is paricularly strong in the largest of all the Abakans, known as Garments (Fig. 2.6) from 1967-1968.

Resembling huge, headless giants, these pieces tower far above the average human height and stand like a solemn community. Constructed of three woven parts, they are then assembled, one over the other to suggest an array of figures clothed in jackets and trousers. Their overall presence is powerful and imposing. In fact, what Abakanowicz has done, is created an environment in which the woven form has become an object of confrontation. This in itself was highly innovative at the time. Fibres such as sisal and horsehair were still present in her work, to add to the bulkiness of the frames and to enhance their weight.

Brown Coat,1968 (Fig. 2.7), also challenges the viewer. However, with its cocoon-type shape, it appears more protective than disturbing. The form in general bears an uncanny resemblance to the tent-like grass structures

(Fig. 2.1), in which Abakanowicz believed imaginary folk lived. The colour used is also more subtle and warm when seen together with Garments (Fig. 2.6) and implies a shelter from their hovering poise; a place to run and hide. All of Abakanowicz's work to date deals with aspects of the human condition and its fundamental needs. These pieces, most notably the Abakans, are organic, provide shelter, create warmth, are sexual, are frightening, command attention and seem to possess a certain wisdom.

Understandably, these fibre pieces had a strong impact on both fine art and craft critics alike. Weaving had never been so aggressive and energetic and the experts had problems trying to define what they saw. Apologies were made to fine art for including work with elements of traditional craft and vice versa. The main reasons as reviewed in Chapter One, were the application of craft techniques no longer sought to serve a function. Instead, they became a means to a more conceptual end. The Abakans embraced this idea.

In 1967, one critic, Kirsten Dehlholm from Denmark, referred to Abakanowicz's Biennale as a "woven carpet" which she would "take off the loom and then start to work on it like a piece of sculpture". She also commented that in viewing the piece, "you need both time and distance to digest a carpet of this kind". (Dehlholm, K., 1967 pp.161-162). It could be argued that the distance which exists between these pieces and a conventional tapestry, is equal to that between a tapestry and a commercially

"woven carpet". In saying this however, it would seem that Dehlholm was perhaps struggling to define the sheer scale and nature of the Abakans and their uneasy atmosphere and so, at the time was seeking to tie them into a class of recognised tradition.

Despite such criticism, responses to Abakanowicz's work were nonetheless, positive and generally encouraging. The time was ripe for new ideas and change and it was immediately recognised by her contemporaries and curators, that what Abakanowicz was achieving with fibre satisfied these needs. For her, the Biennale was the perfect channel to do so and in fact, she remained an exhibitor there until 1979.

Amazed at how monumental and abstract woven textiles could be, people at the same time recognised their softness and intimacy. Just as in nature, each area differed from the next. Incidentally, the artist herself failed to be so enthusiastic and felt that in many ways, the emergence of the Abakans was untimely. She labelled them a failure in relation to critical appreciation, but realised she had initiated a trend. She opened doors for the field of tapestry, alongside artists such as Buic and Zeisler and by them, was inspired to find work similar to her own.

In textiles today, as in recent decades, Magdalena Abakanowicz has become an influence and constant reference for artists of all kinds. While fibre art to a certain

extent, suffered a decline in the late 1970s and 1980s, it seems at present to be undergoing fresh approaches. Renewed interest in the environment and the uses of natural materials are just now, issues of great importance. In a world of machines and man-made objects, emphasis is being put on salvaging and resources which are close-to-hand. This is one of the reasons why Abakanowicz's use of fibre still appears contemporary, even if the Abakans themselves do not.

Although now working with stone, bronze and wood, the artist continues to register her dismay at the abuses of the environment and mankind. Through this work, she rejects technology and artificial means, concentrating instead on human emotions. After her woven forms, Abakanowicz further pursued her exploration of the fibre medium, moulding, darning and treating it with resinous substances to hold particular shapes, for example Backs (Fig. 2.8) from 1974. Her reluctance to talk now about this period of her work, clarifies her belief that it no longer fulfils her aims. Nevertheless, its power and impact is still remarkably strong and assures its role in the world of modern textiles.

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER THREE

This chapter traces briefly, the position of craft in Ireland over the past fifty years, as a background to discussing fibre art here today. In doing this, the work of two artists who use fibre, Theresa McKenna and Milyana Fusciardi, is examined.

The tradition of weaving in Ireland is and always has been, a strong part of its culture. Since primitive times, hand-weaving has been associated with national identity, as indeed have many traditional crafts, such as ceramics and metalwork. In retrospect, the basic weaving culture in Ireland is parallel to that in places such as Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe. Yet, the boom in fibre art which took over these countries and in America, during the 1950s, seems to have been far weaker here. One argument for this could be that, not being direct casualties of the Second World War, the need to strive away from tradition was not as prevalent in Ireland. In truth however, craftsmanship had been dwindling for quite some time. Under British rule, the country had lost its identity and when the Republic was born, time and energy was concentrated on restoring its individuality. This resulted in a re-establishment of the craft industry, to represent the Irish origins. Consequently, while the rest of Europe was denying its cultural heritage, Ireland was remoulding hers.

During the 1950s, the state of Irish industry and craft

looked bleak. The declaration of the Republic, brought with it, an assessment of self-sufficient enterprise and clarified how bad the situation was. In comparison with neighbouring countries, Ireland had a lot of catching up to do, bearing in mind that in Poland, the emergence of fibre art was occuring. Over the following decade, the Irish Export Board dedicated their attentions to building a viable and prosperous tourist industry. In 1960, they became responsible for the transformation of design and its position, inviting a team of Scandinavian designers to offer their expertise.

After visiting various galleries, colleges and factories, they deducted an analytical, but nevertheless hopeful opinion thus:

> Ireland, by virtue of her lack of sophistication in matters of design, has a unique opportunity, denied by circumstances to many more developed countries, of making a great contribution, not alone to her own prosperity and culture, but to the culture of Western Europe.
>
> (Marchant, N., 1985 pp.9)

Evidently, this came to be, with the success of Irish craft today, even if somewhat delayed. This report prompted arguments on why the best designs were being exported and suggested that attempts should be made to create better design awareness on home ground. As a result, a committee was founded to improve the status and appreciation of skills and artistic ability in Ireland. This undertook the training and recruiting of native people by experienced crafts men from abroad, who in time, could pass their expertise on to future

apprentices. These ideas in 1963, laid the foundations for what became known as the Kilkenny Design Centre.

Many of these visiting instructors, brought with them modern design principles and a detailed knowledge of international craft. Despite this, their efforts continued to journey towards building upon tradition, which in some ways was quite limiting. In 1971, the Kilkenny Design centre played a major role in the establishment of the Crafts Council Of Ireland. The objective of this body, was to promote and develop the output of non-industrial handicrafts and provide information on all aspects of design. Today, it continues to cultivate awareness of creativity in the country, as well as providing an exhibition space for various artists and craftspeople.

Over the years, the field of textiles remained firmly rooted in its heritage. In fact, it had been one of the last crafts to join the Kilkenny Design Centre in 1964 snd even then was, in some cases, enduring revivals such as poplin weaving. At the same time, Lillias Mitchell was concentrating her efforts on renewing interest in hand-weaving. Travelling throughout the countryside, she gained knowledge about the craft, to eventually bring to her students at N.C.A.D. in Dublin. Tapestry, which has only existed in Ireland since its arrival with the Hugenots in the eighteenth century, was also further developed on her course. Mainly "carried out by advanced students" (Mitchell, L.,

1986 pp.22), these showed a distinct enthusiasm in the medium. Subsequently, in 1969, an attempt to expand the tapestry area was made when Lillias Mitchell wrote to the Director of the National College of Art and Design, requesting to compete in international contests. Additionally, a rapport developed with the Edinburgh College Of Art, which saw occasional visits from renowned tapestry weaver, Archie Brennan. An exchange network was set up, which enabled students to avail of the opportunity to study abroad and gain more insight into their field.

During the 1970s, a boom in textiles in general came to light and by the end of the decade, had started to make the transition into something new. This was fulfilled throughout the 1980s, with the decline of traditional industry and the popularity of individual items becoming particularly dominant (Marchant, N., 1985 pp.7-9).

While the development of fibre art in Ireland has been slow in relation to the afore mentioned countries, the confines of weaving have nevertheless, long been lifted. Today, there exists much potential and enthusiasm for broadening the possibilities of the textile medium. With the encouragement of mixed media and the introduction of a wide range of materials being taught in colleges, fibre art is becoming an ever-popular means of expression. While the majority of Irish tapestry

weavers work through the Gobelin technique however, there is little evidence of these changes. Despite this, there are a few artists using fibre unconventionally in the construction of their work. One such person is Dublin-based Theresa McKenna.

Known as one of Ireland's foremost contemporary artists, she works with a diversity of resources and techniques, including tapestry. Her work, which is mainly large scale, displays a careful manipulation of materials and is extremely dynamic in style. This, coupled with the love of construction, has allowed her to express her ideas freely and capture atmospheres which hold a deep fascination for her. A graduate, in 1977, of the Fine Art Diploma course at the National College Of Art And Design, Dublin, McKenna specialised in sculpture. During her time there as a student, she successfully used materials such as wood and stone, but felt something was missing. As a result, she partook in a series of night courses, in order to find a medium to excite her and carry her concepts through. These included areas such as glass and printed textiles, but it was during the weaving class, that McKenna found what she was looking for. In fact, she has said that in the minute she took up the materials to weave, she began to get new ideas. Having no interest whatsoever in handloom techniques, her concentration was solely on tapestry (Interview 25/11/1996).

Although only woollen yarns were available to the class,

McKenna chose those of a thicker ply, while immediately looking elsewhere for alternatives. These came in the form of jute, sisal and linen; all coarse fibres which, when woven, produced a stiffness her work required. This quality appealed hugely to McKenna, who sought resources with a life of their own and which were, to some degree, independent of her. The fact that they were difficult to manipulate was exciting and she found that their ability to retain a modelled effect, satisfied her love of relief. Like many artists discussed in the first chapter, McKenna was concerned with 'building' her pieces and believes that "construction feeds tapestry and the tapestry feeds construction" (Dee, R., 1983 pp.26). In doing this, she used suitable techniques such as layering with extra warps, knotting and in some cases, tufting. She has been careful however, not to use these for the sake of being 'arty-crafty' (Interview, 25/11/1996), but rather to solve certain problems in her work.

A strong element running through this, is the topic of connections. This has evolved from a deep rooted association with the land and its ancient ceremonial sites, from which McKenna has drawn much inspiration. She is fascinated by the notion that natural formations, such as mountain ranges, are part of a global chain, while at the same time are separate from each other (Interview 25/11/1996). Similarly, primitive burial grounds from different places around the world, share common features such as decoration. These provide the

artist with a link to the past, which she prefers to recreate through her work, in a more abstract than literal way. This is clearly evident throughout her pieces.

Tapestry In Six Parts (Fig. 3.1) from 1983, is woven in sisal and sees the existence of the medium in three-dimensions. The positioning of different sections allows the spectator to walk in and around the pieces. This arises from the feeling of being surrounded by different stones in passage graves. The two large sections in the foreground, give an impression of the entrance to one of these tombs. Strong, diagonal markings which have the appearance of being drawn, are a striking feature. They resemble deep rock crevices, or cracks which have formed, characteristic in the erosion of such sites. This, McKenna has commented, holds a particular interest for her (Interview, 25/11/1996). Fragments which have crumbled away often preserve areas of artwork which at one stage, were part of a larger decoration.

Similarly in her piece, she continues the markings onto the separate segments, which if assembled as one, would create a complete picture. The three smaller and darker pieces create the feeling of depth which, set against the background part, give the impression of peering into a tomb. As well as this, the purple-blues and grey colours work together to achieve a calming and sombre atmosphere, which is almost mystical. These forms could well be standing stones, or images of dolmens and the use of

sisal, provides aptly rough textures.

Overall, each section appears to be piled on top of, or overlapping the other, which is reminiscent of ancient building techniques. What is also notable in the construction, is the method whereby McKenna ensures both sides of the fabric are identical. This is particularly relevant to the fact that the piece is displayed in a way which shows all sides. Normally, with tapestries hung against the wall, loose weft tails are knotted at the back. However, McKenna has been careful to secure these into the fabric during the weaving process, which questions the nature of two-dimensional tapestry and what is shown to the spectator. As with work discussed in previous chapters, McKenna's pieces create or change their environment. On comparing the traditional tapestries woven at the Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh with McKennas contribution to the Scottish Tapestry Exhibition in 1979, critic Kitty Warnock said:

> At the same time, these pictures served as a reminder of how limited in scope the craft of tapestry used to be and so threw light into relief the boldness and creative invention of the other works in this stimulating exhibition.
>
> (Warnock, K., 1979 pp. 54)

Work In Five Parts (Fig. 3.2), which is a mixed media piece featuring tapestry techniques, is quite different visually to Tapestry In Six Parts. Yet, there is a strong connection in theme and in certain characteristics. Firstly, the format is that of a wall hanging, with distinct elements of relief. Using tanned sisal, these

are composed of tapestry woven panels which illustrate both the Gobelin method and Turkish knotting. With the latter being the most prominent, this forms an effective contrast to the taut calico fabric, stretched under great tension. To create a slightly raised effect, lightweight wadding has then been placed underneath. In shapes which echo those of the afore mentioned work, McKenna has drawn vigorously onto the surface with graphite. The overall tone of the piece is quite earthy, a strong reminder of overgrown fields and bogs. In addition to this, the sisal-woven areas are similar in shape to the graphite markings and indeed to those found on Tapestry In Six Parts. Densely woven loops appear to burst through gaps in the calico fabric, or in point of fact from the wall on which they hang. McKenna has succeeded in evoking the richness of the landscape without being pictorial in any way.

Simultaneously, the artist has not aimed to create pictures through much of her tapestry, but rather uses it as a vehicle for her intentions. She has said of this process:

> Between the tapestries and the constructions, I'm trying all the time to be sculptural. But in the sense of hanging things on walls to define space rather than standing them on the floor.
>
> (Carthy, C., 15/10/1983)

Over the years, McKenna has used a variety of media other than tapestry in her work. Exhibiting alongside other artists at sculpture-based shows, she admits there has never been a problem with its acceptance as fine art (Interview, 25/11/1996).

Although unaware of the work of Magdalena Abakanowicz while at college, McKenna vaguely remembers seeing one of her pieces at the ROSC '80 exhibition in Dublin. Today, she greatly admires what Abakanowicz has achieved in textiles and her abandonment of the medium when it served her purpose. Other inspirations include Eva Hesse, whose notebooks and drawings are particularly appealing to McKenna, as well as her fibre structures. Working a great deal on paper herself, the artist combines layers of tissue, fabric and wax which are then worked into with graphite and charcoal. These compositions relate closely to her studies of prehistoric sites and demonstrate another aspect of her work.

Besides exhibitions, McKenna has been involved in many commissions over the past few years. Working chiefly for herself with a strong, independent style, she had never thought these would suit her; however, her success in the area has proved her wrong. Adamant to keep her own method of working a priority, she realises site-specific pieces demand that certain criteria be met. Consequently, if a proposal is unsuitable to her style, McKenna would rather decline. Directing her work to suit her clients in the past has taught her a valuable lesson about being true to her own work. With this comes a distinct single-mindedness which is one of her strengths (Interview, 25/11/1996).

The 1994 tapestry series at the Phoenix Park Visitors Centre, Dublin (Figs. 3.3 - 3.4) is one of her major

commissions. Woven completely in sisal, this consists of flat and low-relief areas which combine to illustrate a movement of deer across all eight sections. Fragments of ancient pottery, unearthed within the park are boldly featured with strong, abstract patterning and add a historic quality to the pieces. This seems to be emphasised by the stylistic way in which the running animals are portrayed, almost resembling those of archaic cave paintings.

A tutor on the foundation course at the National College Of Art And Design, McKenna brings her knowledge to many students, introducing them to a wide range of resources. She is especially wary of keeping the course too narrow and encourages students to use whichever materials suit their needs. The varied approach to her own work is mirrored in her method of teaching and so, gives her pupils a firm basis from which to explore.

Another artist working innovatively with the fibre medium in Ireland is Milyana Fusciardi. A graduate of the National College Of Art And Design in 1992, she previously completed a foundation course in Galway. It was here that she became familiar with the merging of sculpture and weaving and her interest began. This was further developed during her years at N.C.A.D., resulting in a remarkable sequence of pieces for her degree show.
In these pieces, Fusciardi combined various techniques such as knotting, knitting and wrapping, which are studied more closely later in the chapter. In addition to tapestry weaving, these hold a particular interest for her.

She finds the compulsion to touch textiles rather than just look at them, quite exciting and greatly appreciates their tactile qualities. Natural fibres such as sisal, wools and even hair, have featured strongly in her work. Her use of rayon, with its light-absorbent properties, adds a contrast to these yarns and creates maximum effect.

The main influence in Fusciardi's work over the past few years has been the Australian Aborigines. She has studied extensively, their culture and beliefs and is deeply moved by the annihilation of their way of life (Interview, 15/10/1996). This has had a profound effect on her subject matter. Moreover, the human figure plays a significant role in her compositions and holds much inspiration for her.

The Guardian (Fig. 3.5), from 1992 is an example of this. A cave-like structure which encases a crouching figure, this combines an assortment of techniques and materials. Using hundreds of machine-knitted tubes, Fusciardi cleverly constructed a honeycomb weave, without the help of a loom. Instead, she decided to make a huge warp from the tubes, which she then stretched from ceiling to floor, manually lifting them in the correct sequence. This, she moulded with the use of rods, into the cave-like shape to house her figure. Once more, the exploitation of an old tradition has been transformed into something entirely new. With the knitted warp and weft ends left free and dangling from the edges of the cave, an organic feeling is added to the whole mood. Using the method of

coil and wrap, the crouching figure is made from rayon, which is wrapped over a core thread in a time-consuming and laborious technique. Much research and in-depth study of the human figure was important to Fusciardi, in order to obtain a realistic portrayal. This she has achieved with impressive results (Fig. 3.6).

The Dive (Fig. 3.7) is no exception. Firstly, using old wool and rags, Fusciardi composed the shape of a body, which then became the base upon which she worked. Around the outside, she wound a rayon warp and proceeded to tie Soumak knots, before painting with several coats of shellac. This helped to retain shape and add a stiffening quality to the work. Subsequently, the artist made different sections of the body separately, which were then assembled into one piece when dry. In addition, large semi-transparent layers, through which the figure passes when hanging, are comprised of human hair and shellac. Painted alternately onto a waxed mirror and dried, these create an extremely individual texture.

As degree pieces, The Dive and The Guardian display a wealth of skill and mastery of the fibre medium and show how much creativity can be expressed at student level. Like Theresa McKenna, Fusciardi is a staff member at N.C.A.D. and has been a technician in the Weave department there since 1995. It is important for people working actively within the fibre art field, to bring their experiences to younger artists and to keep the connection flowing. Hopefully, this interaction will help to improve

the position of fibre art in Ireland and its flourishing in the future.

CONCLUSION

As discussed throughout this thesis, the post-war revolution in textiles has changed one aspect of tapestry forever and is largely responsible for the variety of scope in the medium today. Evidently, its progression from a craft based on custom and precedent has in effect created new ways of working. This can be seen clearly in the work of artists such as Claire Zeisler, with Preview 1969, (Fig. 1.2), which is far removed from tapestry, but is an outcome of its change.

Today, the use of fibre within art is as popular as ever, with Poland and America still leading the way, in many respects. Their contribution to fibre art has continued to urge much awareness about the potential of textile materials, which is now being widely taught in art schools.

It is my opinion that a liberal and varied education is the fundamental ingredient to becoming multilingual in art. Foundation courses which familiarise students with all aspects of two and three-dimensional forms are vitally important. These lay the grounds for development in the successive years of college and provide numerous options from which to choose. In this way, students are not committed to using one specific vehicle for their ideas and enables them to build a knowledge of resources, which may be of benefit in later work.

While this is in effect in Ireland today, it would appear that the appreciation of fibre art outside colleges is

not so strong. A possible solution to this would be the establishment of a course, dealing particularly with the area, especially if it continued to Masters Degree level. As a result, a greater presence of fibre art at degree and trade shows would enable clients to see its emergence.

In Ireland, the emphasis still seems to be on creating work which is linked to the Irish identity. The exhaustion of Celtic symbolism and mythology has left little room for being adventurous. While textiles as public art pieces are increasingly popular, many are confined to institutions such as banks, government buildings and offices rather than domestic settings. In any case, the sheer scale and therefore, the cost of some fibre pieces is unrealistic for many homes, which in addition, tend to be attracted to safer pictorial imagery. As well as this, commissions are difficult for artists to acquire, until they have established a credible reputation. Consequently, a problem which arises here, is having to resort to creating work which 'sells', rather than that which the artist prefers to make. While textile exhibitions help to generate awareness, in Ireland they are quite rare and few textile artists are included in fine art shows. This helps to dampen the incentives of many.

While many of the leading figures of the fibre art movement, such as those discussed in Chapter One, worked solely through fibre in the 1950s, 1960s and1970s, today the outlook has evolved. Certainly, the specialist fields of art and craft for example, sculpture and weaving are

continued in a traditional way; however, the emphasis tends to be much more on broadening ideas with a variety of materials and techniques.

Reflecting on the previous chapter's account of the earlier stages of craft in Ireland, the comment by a Scandinavian visitor that its future is optimistic (Marchant, N., 1985 pp. 9) has been proved. There is an abundance of talent within the country at the moment, which is mainly being concentrated on the making of individual pieces. With expanding methods of communication between countries and special opportunities for students and artists to travel abroad, there is a constant link with what is happening internationally. This is resulting in an exchange of cultures and ideas, as well as bringing a richness to the work of many and is particularly true of tapestry as fibre art. Despite its slow beginnings in the country, however, it is accurate to say that the afore mentioned factors ensure its positive and exciting future.

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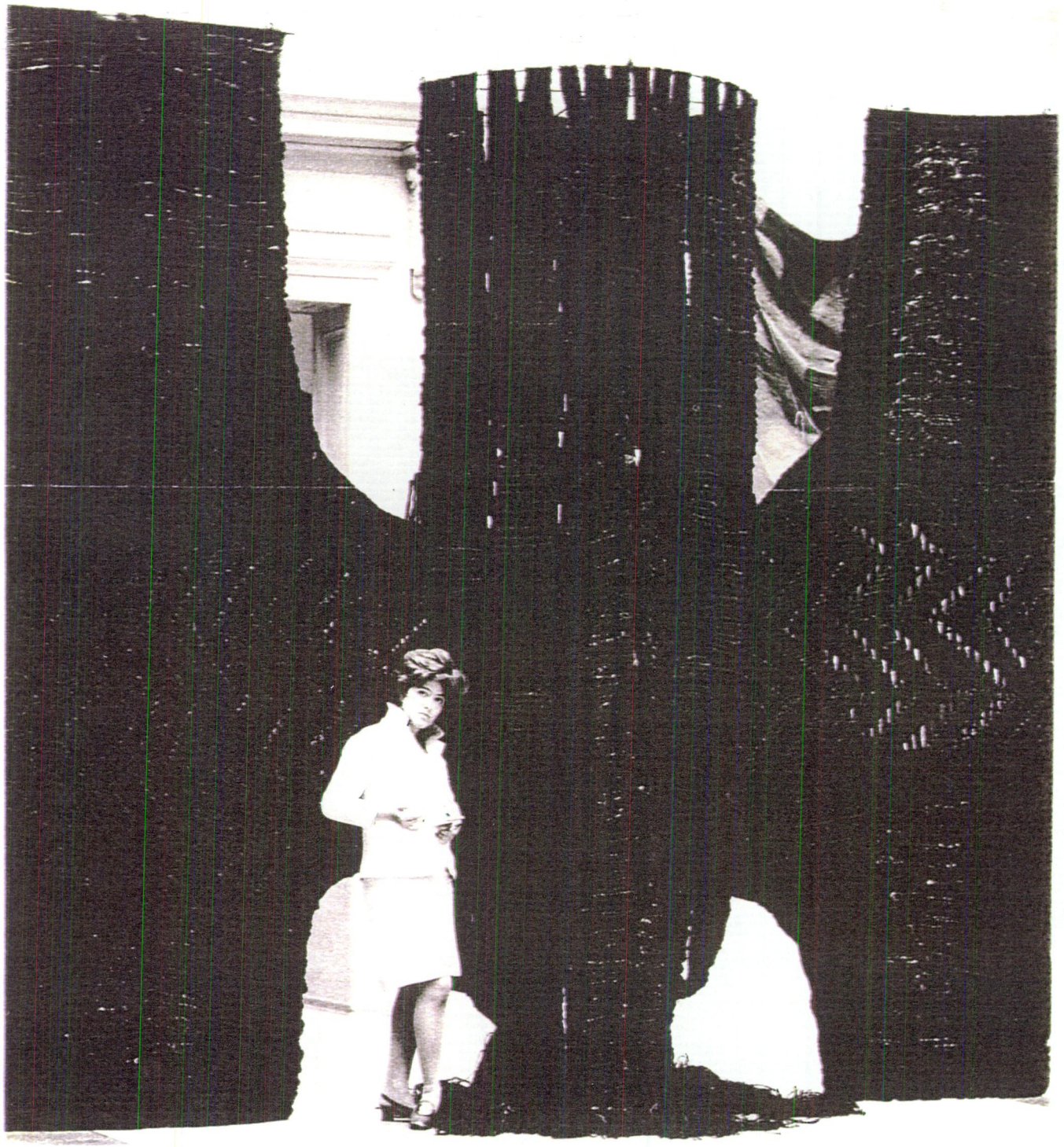

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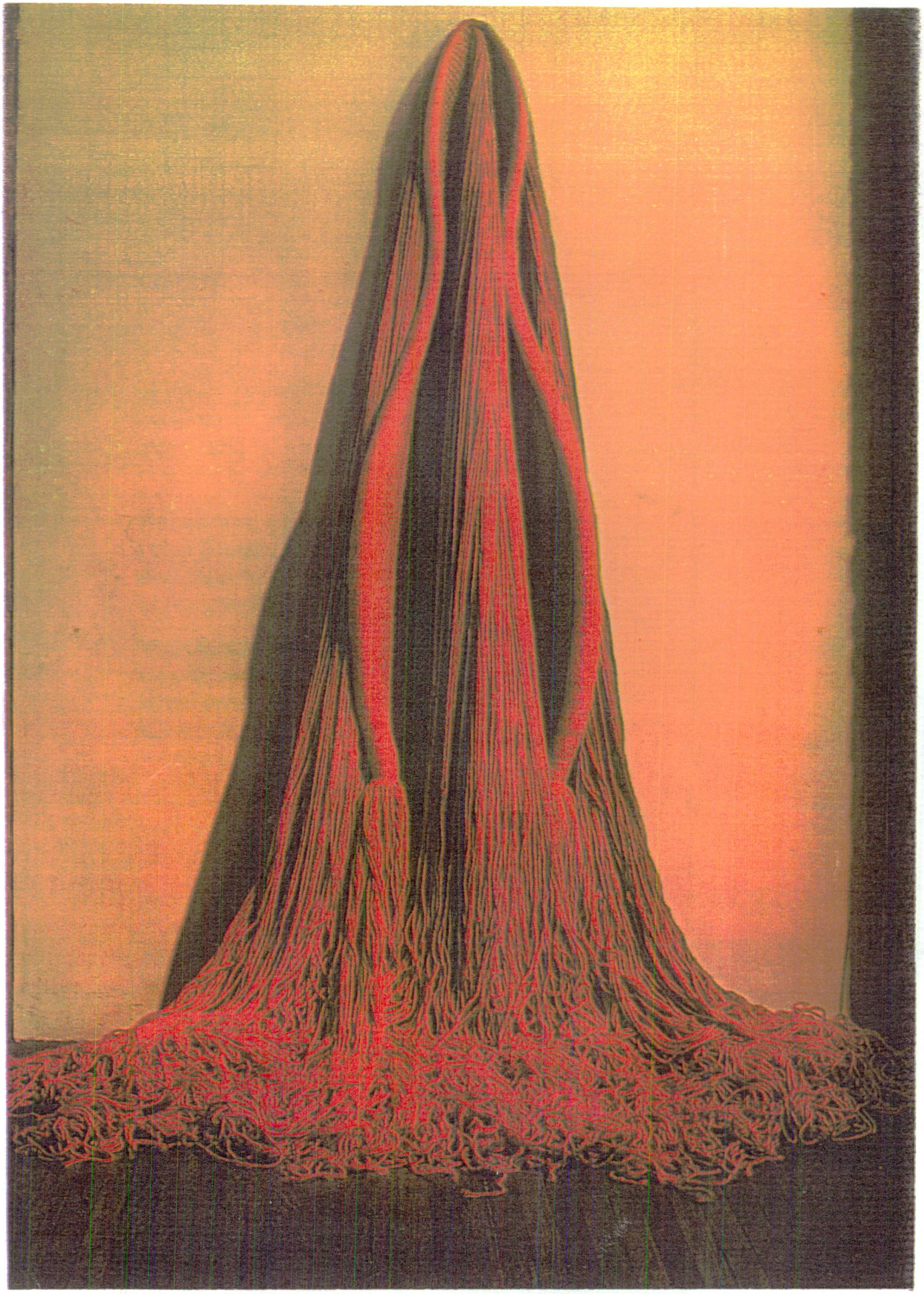

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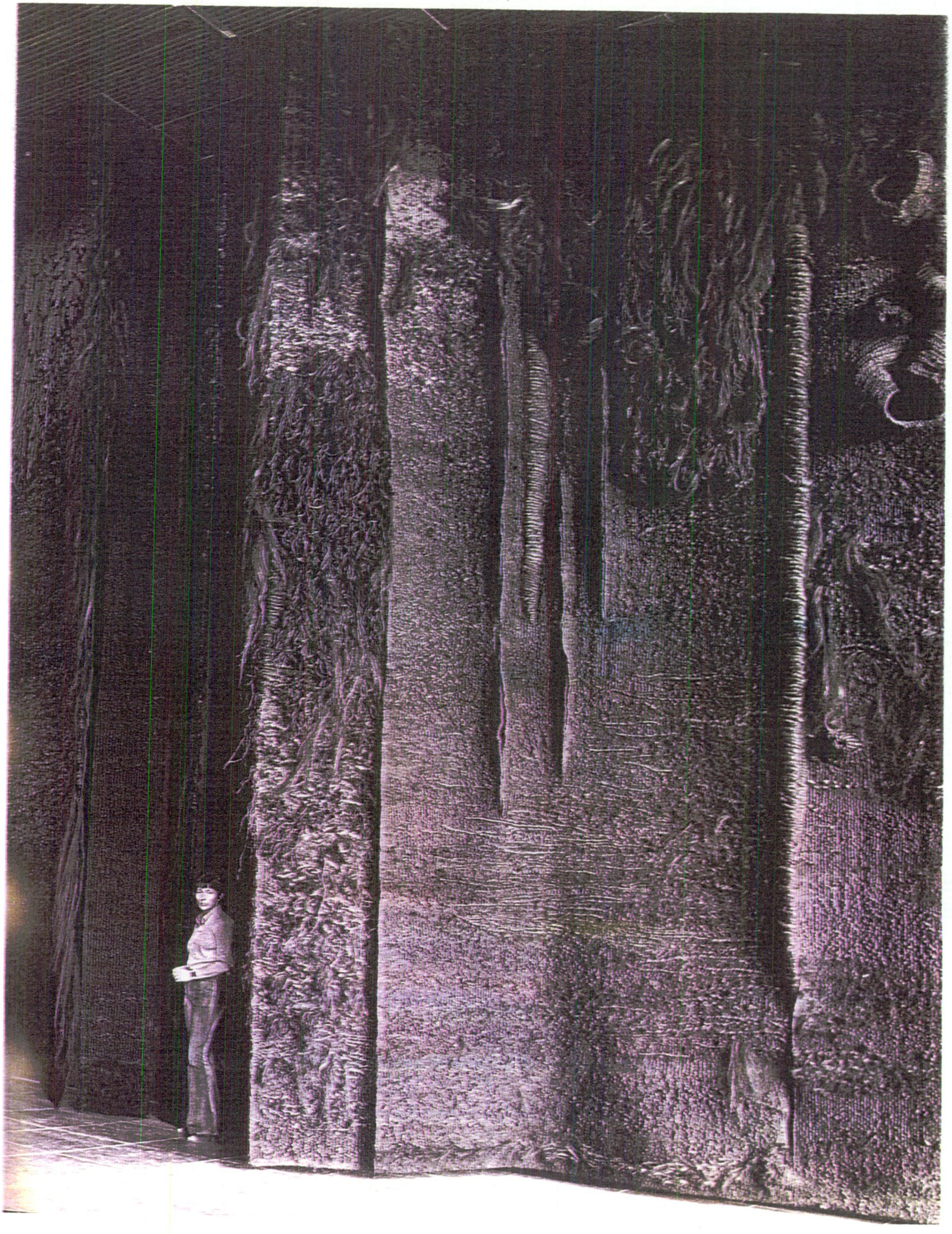

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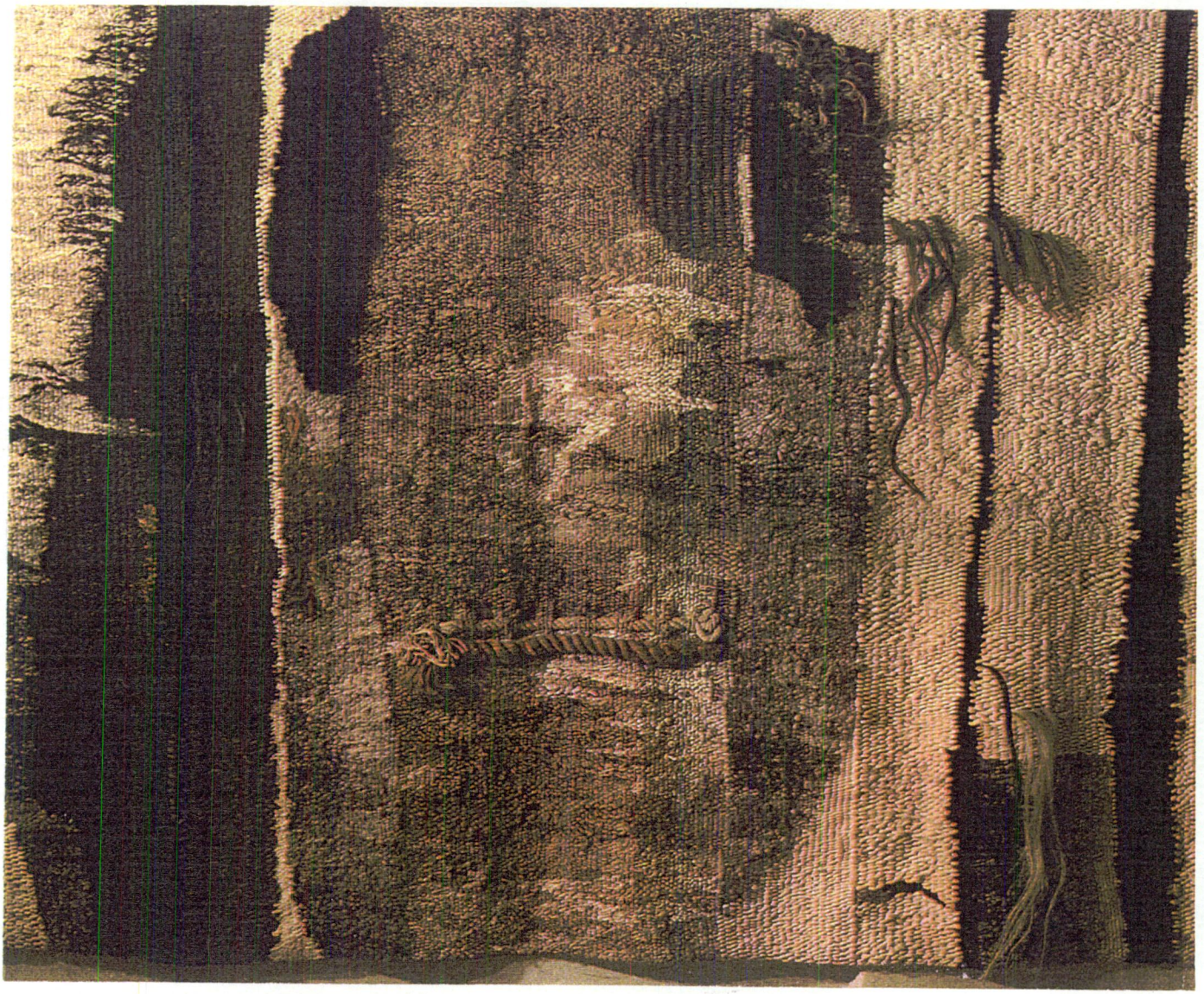

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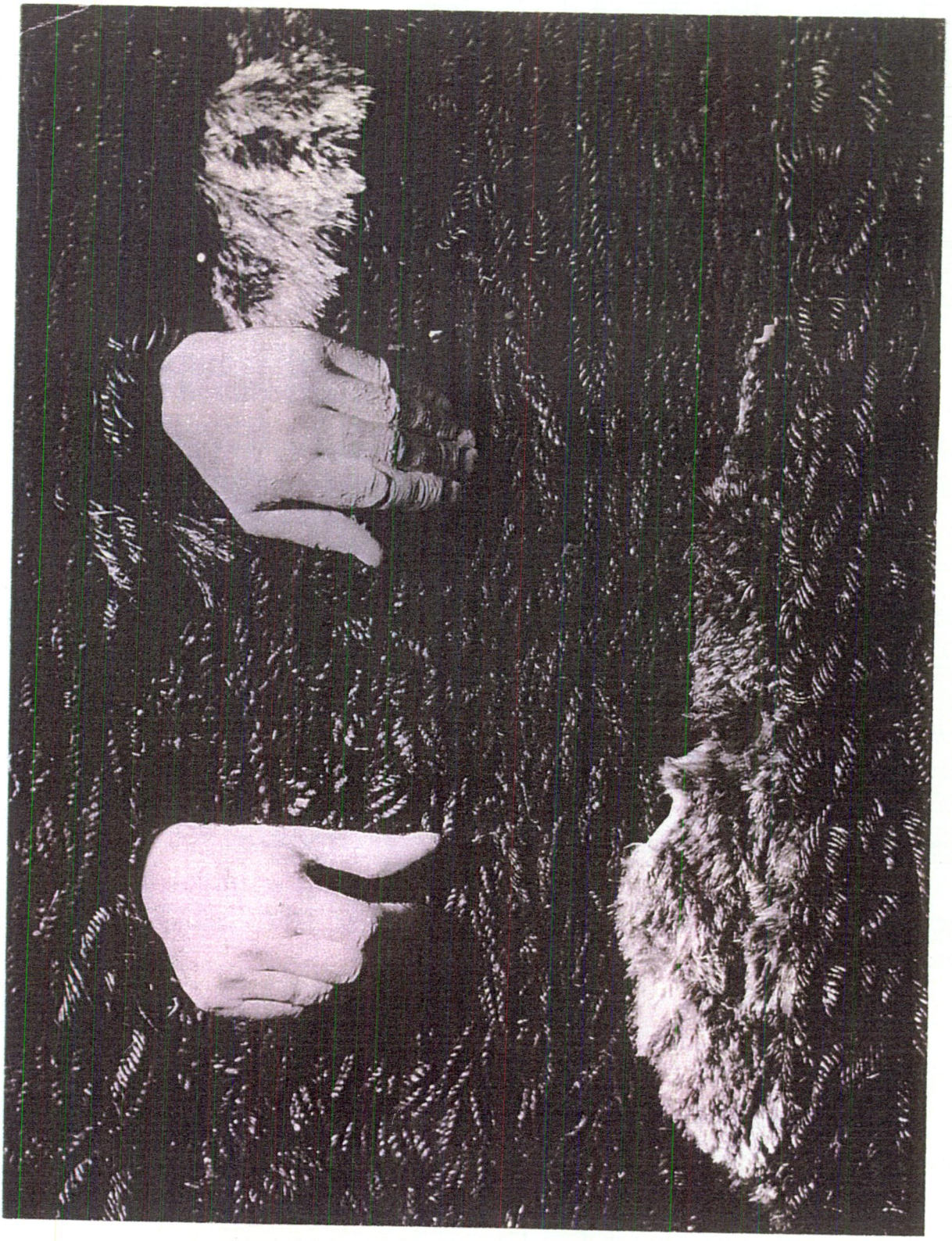

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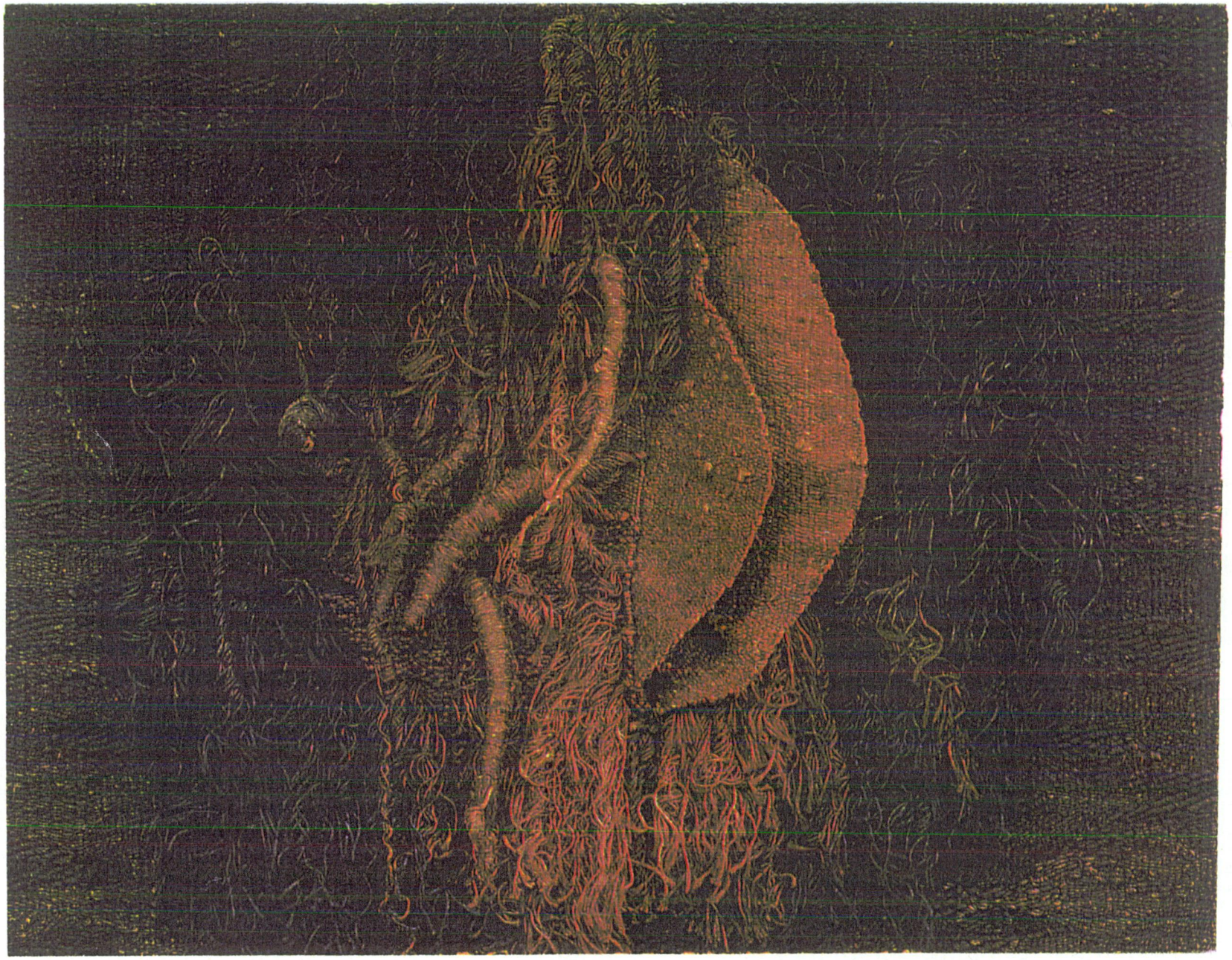

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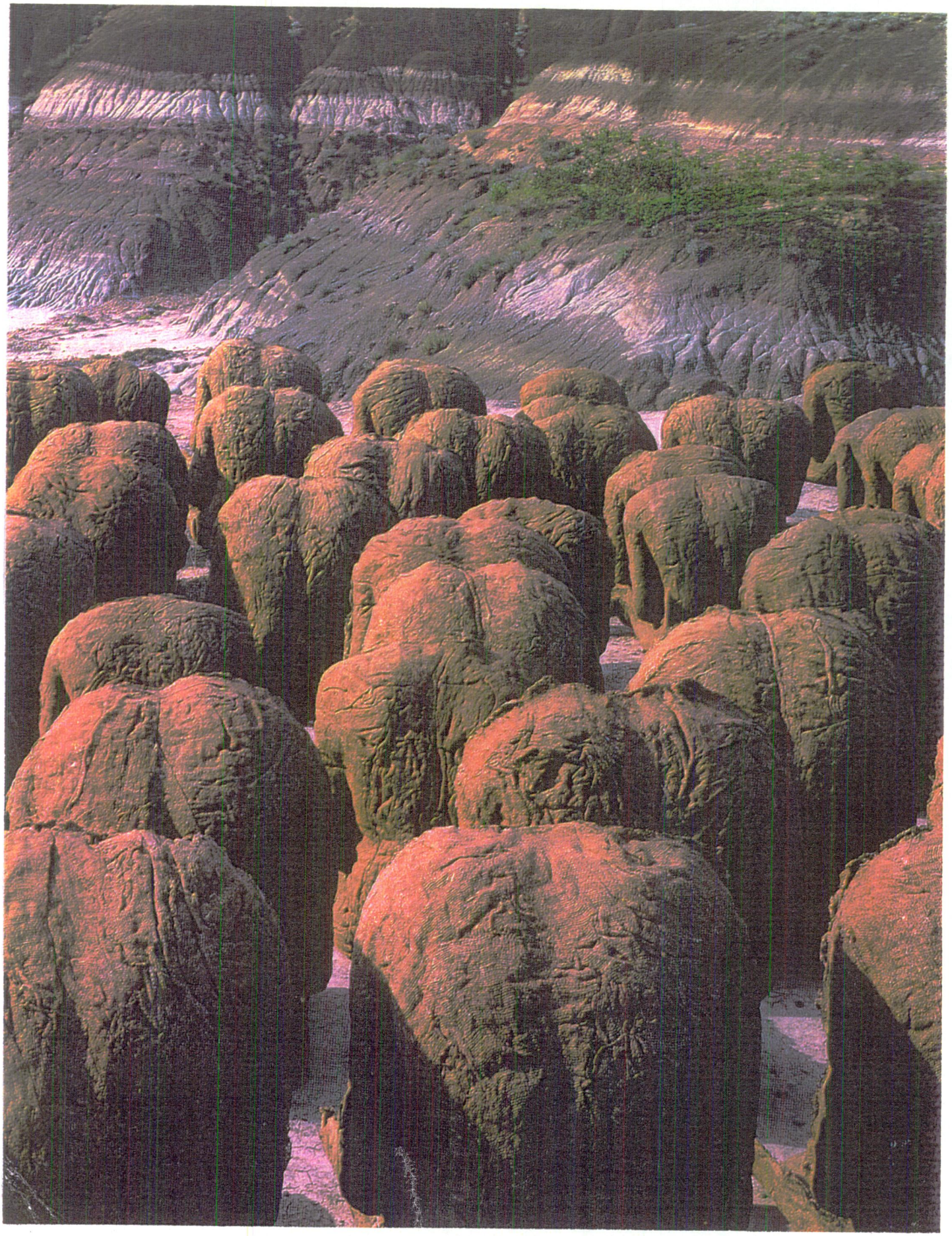

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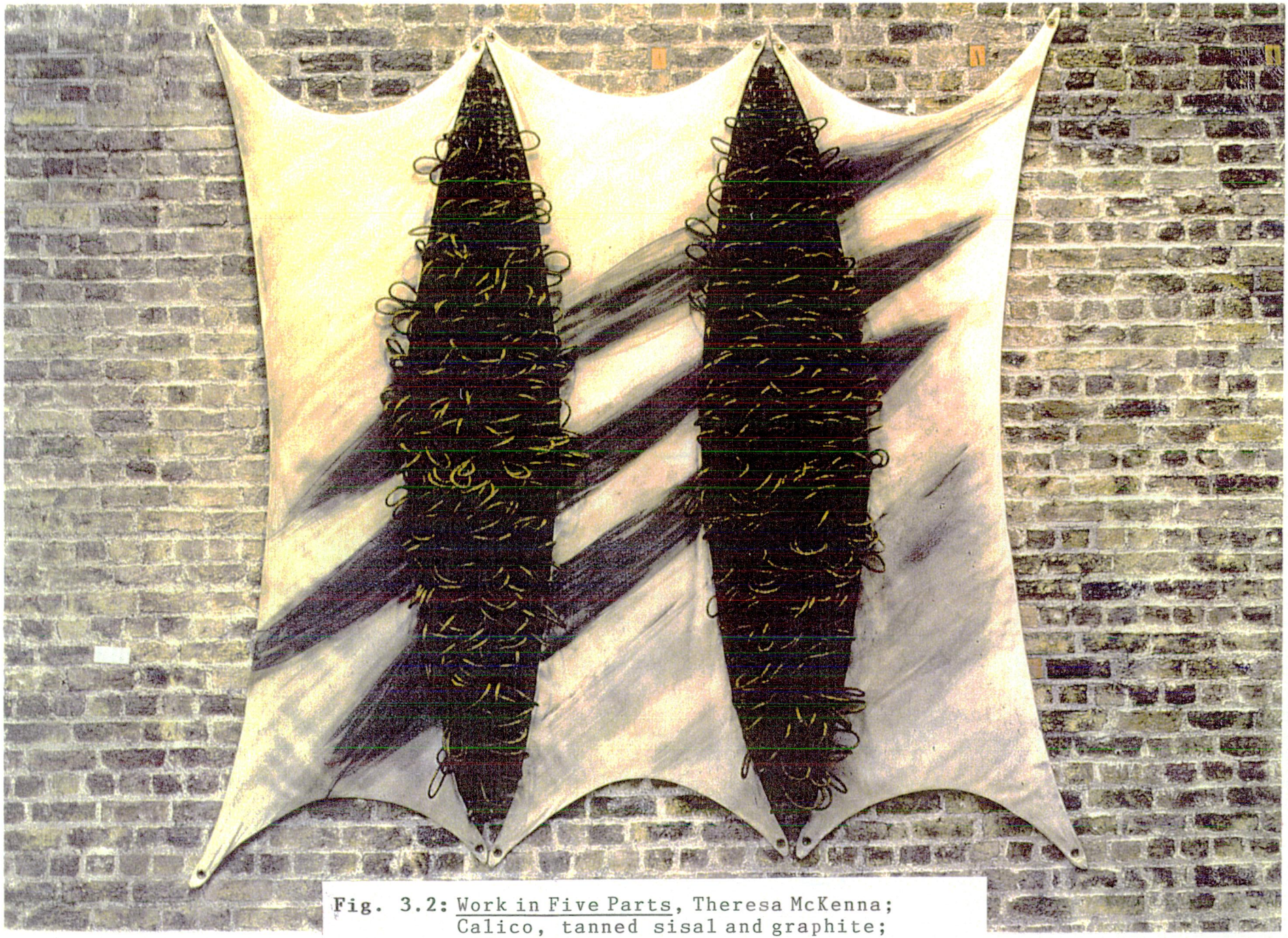

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