

NC 0021127 3



**National College of Art & Design**

Textile Print

**Irish Fashion and Cultural Identity**

By Sarah Lafferty

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies  
in Candidacy for the Degree of Textile Print 1997



# **Irish Fashion and Cultural Identity**

**By Sarah Lafferty**

## **Contents**

### **Introduction**

### **List of illustrations**

#### **1. Irish Fashion: Form , Fabric and Craft.**

- The History of Native Irish Dress and its significance to cultural identity.
- Influence of native and traditional Irish dress in modern Fashion.
- Fashion as craft

#### **2. Irish Fashion: A true reflection of Irish Society?**

- 1950 - to the present. The emergence of modern Irish fashion and traditional Irish style.
- Patriotism - the desire to look Irish.
- The emergence of a new style - urban Ireland.

### **Conclusion**

### **Bibliography**



## List of illustrations

1. Drawing of Irish Soldiers 1540-7.
2. Drawing by Albrecht Durer, 1521
3. Portrait of Lady Lavery, by John Lavery, 1928.
4. Embroidered dress by the Dun Emer Guild, 1928
5. Outfit by Ann Demeulemeester, Elle UK 1993.
6. Linen and crochet outfit by Mary Gregory, 1994.
7. Knitted outfit by Lainey Keogh, 1994.
8. Knitted Aran outfit by Jean Paul Gaultier, 1985.
9. Linen shirts by Smyth and Gibson.
10. Linen dress and hand painted silk scarf by John Rocha, 1993
11. Evening dress by Ib Jorgensen, hand painted by Patricia Jorgensen mid 1970's.
12. Embroidered trouser suit by Ib Jorgensen, 1970.
13. Day outfit by Peter O'Brien, autumn/winter 1993/94.
14. Suit by Irene Gilbert, 1954.
15. Man's outfit by Terence Doyle 1994.
16. Portrait of Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis 1970.
17. Outfit from John Rocha's Autumn/Winter collection 1995.
18. Sinead O'Connor modelling for John Rocha, 1994.
19. 1996 Jen Kelly's costumes for 'Riverdance'.
20. Outfit by Gertrude Sampson, 1995.
21. Advertisement for the 'Design Centre' Image Magazine, 1996.
22. "Un Volupte Sauvage" photographs taken in Connemara, October 1996.





23. "Un Volupte Sauvage" French Vogue, 1996
24. "Un Volupte Sauvage" French Vogue, 1996.
25. "Un Volupte Sauvage" French Vogue, 1996
26. "Un Volupte Sauvage" French Vogue, 1996
27. Outfit by Gertrude Sampson, 1995
28. "The Dubliners" W Magazine, August 1996.
29. "The Dubliners" W Magazine, August , 1996.
30. "The Dubliners" W Magazine, August, 1996
31. "The Dubliners" W Magazine, August 1996.





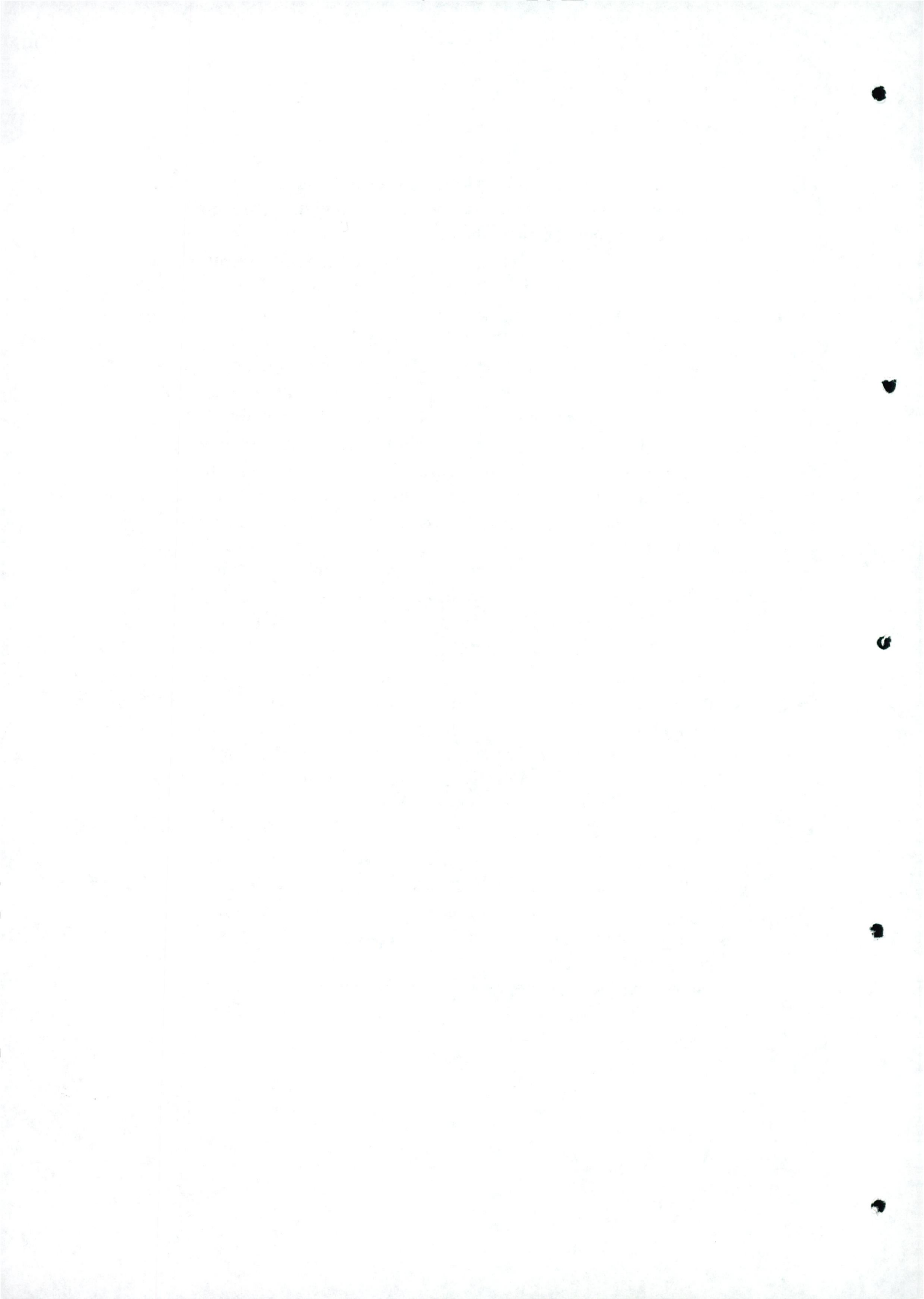
## Introduction

I would consider this thesis as a kind of search for essence that defines modern Irish fashion. I found this task difficult and disillusioning at times. Information and especially theory on modern Irish fashion is limited. A lot of the theory came from theory on fashion in general and theory on Irish culture and from personal observations. One particularly useful source of information was the exhibition "Fabric and Form, Irish fashion since 1950" in the Ulster Museum in Belfast and its accompanying book by Elizabeth McCrum. When I set out to write this thesis my knowledge of fashion was limited, as a textile print designer fashion was not always the main focus of my study. Therefore I found some of the technical aspects of the fashion industry challenging. I believe that 1997 is a good time to investigate Irish fashion and cultural identity as Irish fashion, and Irish cultural in general, appears to be at a turning point, which has been described as a 'Renaissance' in Irish culture. Enthusiasm, confidence and optimism appear to be high in Irish society, linked perhaps to the buoyant economy and falling unemployment and also the international success of Irish designers such as John Rocha and Philip Treacy. Has Irish fashion the strength to succeed in the next millennium? I believe that it has.

I have always noticed a particular quality in Irish designers' work, a common thread between modern Irish designers. This style, that I have always admired, is difficult to define. As a textile designer I have always respected Irish designers' feel for fabric. In particular, the work of John Rocha has been an inspiration to me, something to aspire to as it has been to most Irish textile and fashion students.

In chapter one I will look firstly at the history of Irish dress and then at the garments themselves, at the fabrics, the designers, the design and production processes; How, where and when these established techniques and principles started, how they have been developed, and how Irish designers have managed to keep the essence of these principles without reproducing the past.

In chapter two I will look at how Irish fashion has reflected Irish society. What it says about Irish society and how Irish society sees Irish fashion.



## Chapter 1

# Irish Fashion: Form, Fabric and Craft

### **Part (i) The History of Native Irish Dress and its significance to cultural identity.**

Before the plantation of Ireland by the English, the people of Ireland were to an extent isolated from the rest of the world. They had developed and evolved as a society separate from foreign influences, it is possible to decipher this by looking at the dress of the Irish people at this time. Their clothes can also tell us information about the wealth of the country and the morals and beliefs of its people. As with their language and culture the style of dress of the Irish people was uniquely Irish in the 16th century.

The Irish '*delighted in simple colours, as red and yellow*', Flynnes Moryson, 1600, (Dunlevy, M. 1989, p.54). They wore "*woollen jackets, and very short plain breeches close to their thighs, and over these they cast their mantles or shag rugs.....fringed with an agreeable mixture of colours, in which they wrap themselves up and sleep upon the bare ground*", William Good, 1566 (Dunlevy M. 1989, p. 63). Their shirts were described by John Derricke in 1581 "*as strange, not reaching past the thigh with pleats on pleats that are as thick as pleats may lie. Whose sleeves hang trailing down almost onto the shoe*". (Dunlevy M. 1989, p.56).

The above quotations were from visiting Englishmen who were taken aback by the distinctive dress of the native Irish, which was in





complete contrast to their own. The native Irish were immediately recognisable by their style of dress. The flamboyance of the Irish dress was very much an irritation to the English who considered it to be barbarian and vulgar.

The first English settlers arrived in 1171 speaking English and wearing English styles. Native Irish culture was very strong at this time. After a short time many of these English settlers adapted to Irish culture and the Irish language and also the Irish style of dress. They became almost indistinguishable from the Irish themselves.

Incidents occurred where the English who dressed in the native Irish style of dress were mistakenly killed by their own people. For this reason, and because the English considered native Irish dress barbaric anyway, from the 13th century the English in Ireland were ordered to adhere to their own customs and fashions. In the parliament of Ireland in 1297 a law was passed which stated that "*all Englishmen in this land [must] wear, at least in that part of their head which represents itself to view, the mode and tonsure of Englishmen*". (Dunlevy M., 1989, p.28).

By the 12th Century Ireland was divided into two separate, contrasting cultures: the new English aristocracy, which was a capitalist, urban oriented society, and the self sufficient, agriculturally based society of the Gael. The contrast between the two societies was distinguishable by the two different forms of dress. Never in the history of Ireland has the statement of dress been so important or so political than at this time.





One of the most distinctive features of Irish dress was the 'Brat'. The 'Brat' was a large, heavy, enveloping, four cornered mantle. It was made of heavy wool that was curled and napped around the collar to make it waterproof. Its form and colour varied according to the class of the owner. The Irish chieftains wore 'Brats' that were often embellished with gold. They were often very colourful, and the numbers of colours a person wore denoted a persons' rank in society.

A drawing done by Albrecht Durer in 1521 of 'Irish soldiers' and 'poor people' (fig 2) and another drawing of Irish Kerns going to battle from an unidentified artist in about 1540-7 (fig 1) gives a clear picture of the style of native Irish dress at this time.

The 'poor people' in Durers drawing have a distinctively Irish hair style which was known as a 'clib'. The long fringe at the front could cover most of a persons face. It could therefore be used as a form of disguise and for this reason it was outlawed by the English,

As well as wearing the famous Irish 'Brat', the men shown in the illustrations also wear other garments that could be described as distinctively Irish. Just as in Britain the sumptuary laws sought to regulate fashion. In Ireland the Irish were often criticised for the volume of fabric they used in each garment. In the 16th Century a law was brought in that tried to reduce the yardage used in skirts from 25-35 yards to 12-16 yards. these pleated "leinte" were usually made of linen and were very long but were pouched out over belts so that they



sat at knee length. The length was suitable for the Irish lifestyle of farming and hunting. Another distinctive part of the Irish dress was their *“hanging sleeves which covered the tops of the arms and were tied at the wrists with thongs or tapes”*.

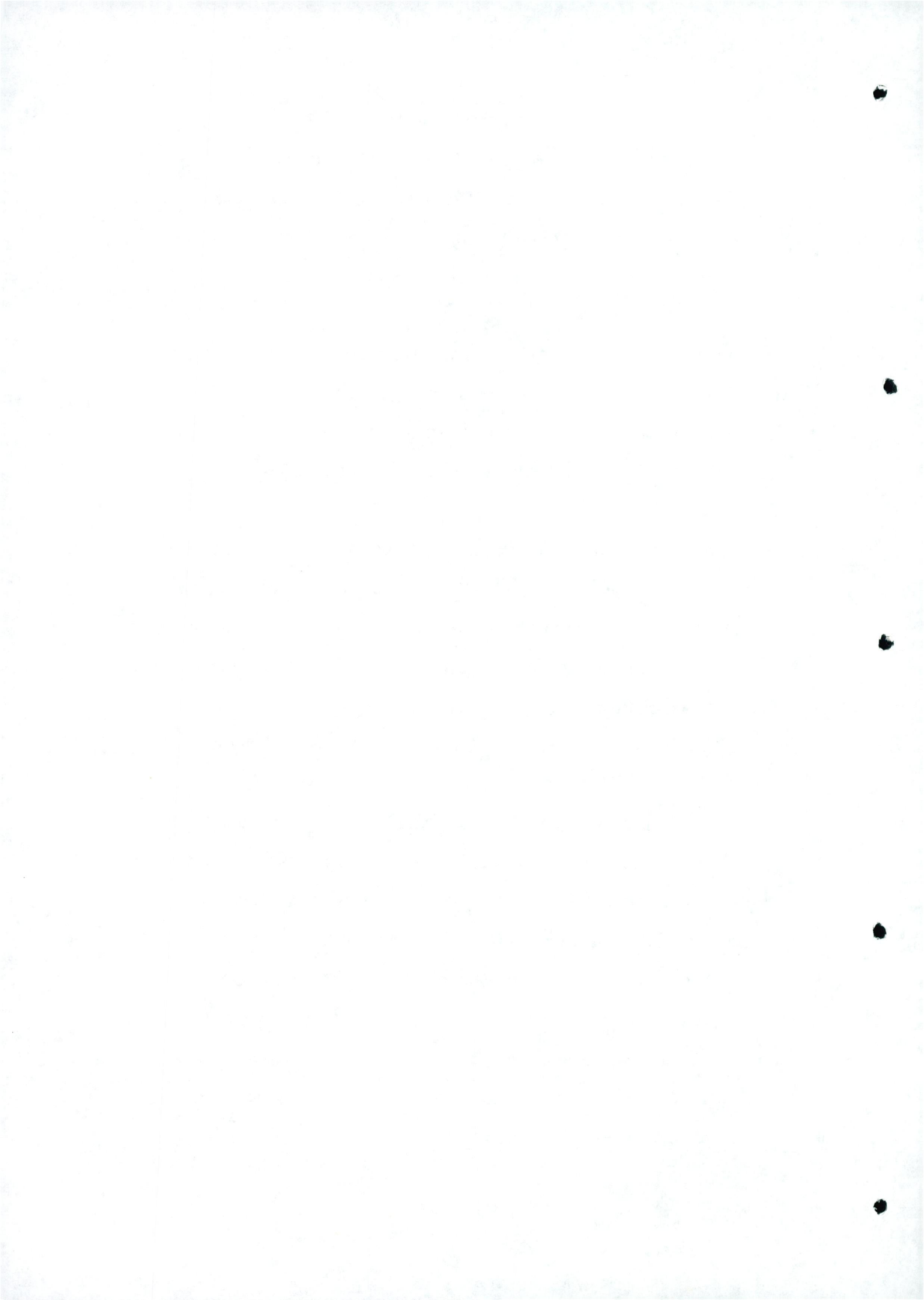
(Dunlevy M.,1989, p54)

The majority of Irish people seem to have gone barefoot at the time. The figures in (figs. and 2) are wearing unusually short highly decorated leather jackets that had v-shaped necklines and are tied at the centre front with leather thongs. The leather of the jackets was gilded and embroidered.

Another distinctive part of the Irish dress was the saffron dye they coloured their clothes with which was made from the dried stigmas of the autumn crocus. It was believed to contain magical powers that protected the wearer from the infection and disease associated with unwashed cloth. This dye was banned by Henry V111 in the 16th century. He saw its use as an act of defiance against British rule.

It was taken that those who accepted English rule in Ireland at the time displayed this by dressing in English styles. The English were known to offer English clothing as a gift to Irish chieftains. If the chieftains accepted the gift it signalled their acceptance of British rule. It was, hoped then that the Chieftain’s people would follow his example. Native Irish dress was eventually completely outlawed by Henry V111 in the decree *“no man or man child [should] wear no mantle in the street, but cloth or gowns shaped after the English fashion”*.

(O’Kelly, H. 1992 p.77)





In 1537 women were prohibited from wearing Kirtles and gowns embroidered or garnished with silk, decorated with couched embroidery or with applied jewels after the Irish fashion. Alison Lurie's theory, in *The Language of Clothes*, 1981, that "*changes in fundamental modes of dress indicate changes in the social roles and self-concepts of members of that society*" (Lurie, A. 1981, p.60) is relevant to the situation in Ireland between 12th century and 17th century.

The Irish wore their native dress as an act of defiance against British rule. It was a political statement. The privilege of being able to dress as you please is like the privilege of free speech. This was extremely significant not only in the history of Irish dress, but also, I believe, in the profound effect it had on modern Irish fashion.

Slowly the Irish started to conform, and by the 17th Century when the English conquest was completed the native dress of Ireland had completely disappeared, and the last of the Irish chieftains fled to the continent after the Battle of Kinsale in 1601.

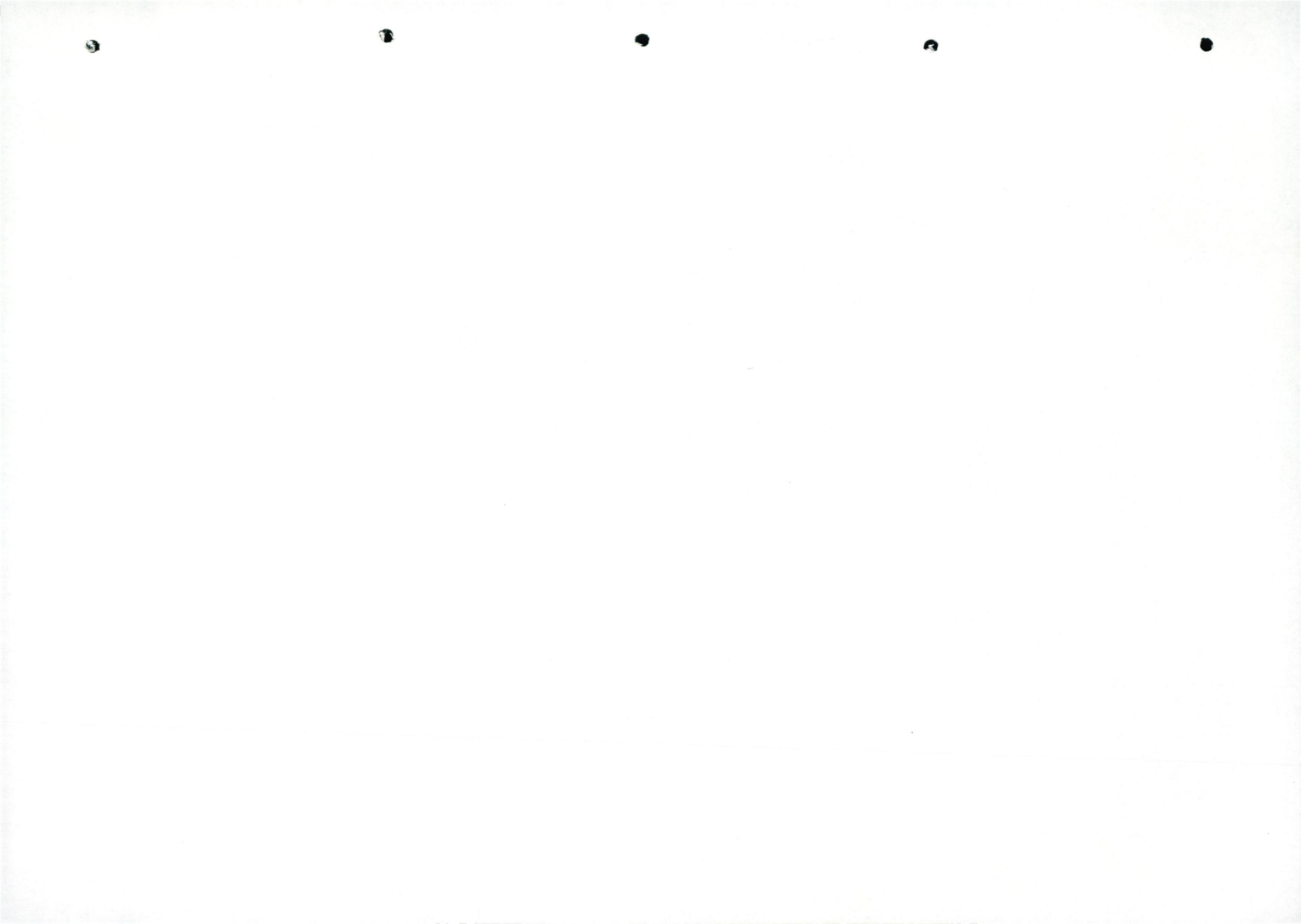
One of the only parts of the country to be untouched by the English plantation was the Aran Islands, which managed to keep both its language and native dress until the second half of this century.







Fig no. 1 - A drawing by an unidentified artist of 'Irish kern' wearing glib hairstyles, mantles and linen 'lente' with hanging sleeves.







Albrecht Durer's interpretation of native Irish dress in his drawing of 'Irish soldiers' and poor people', 1521.





## **Irish Fashion: Form, Fabric and craft**

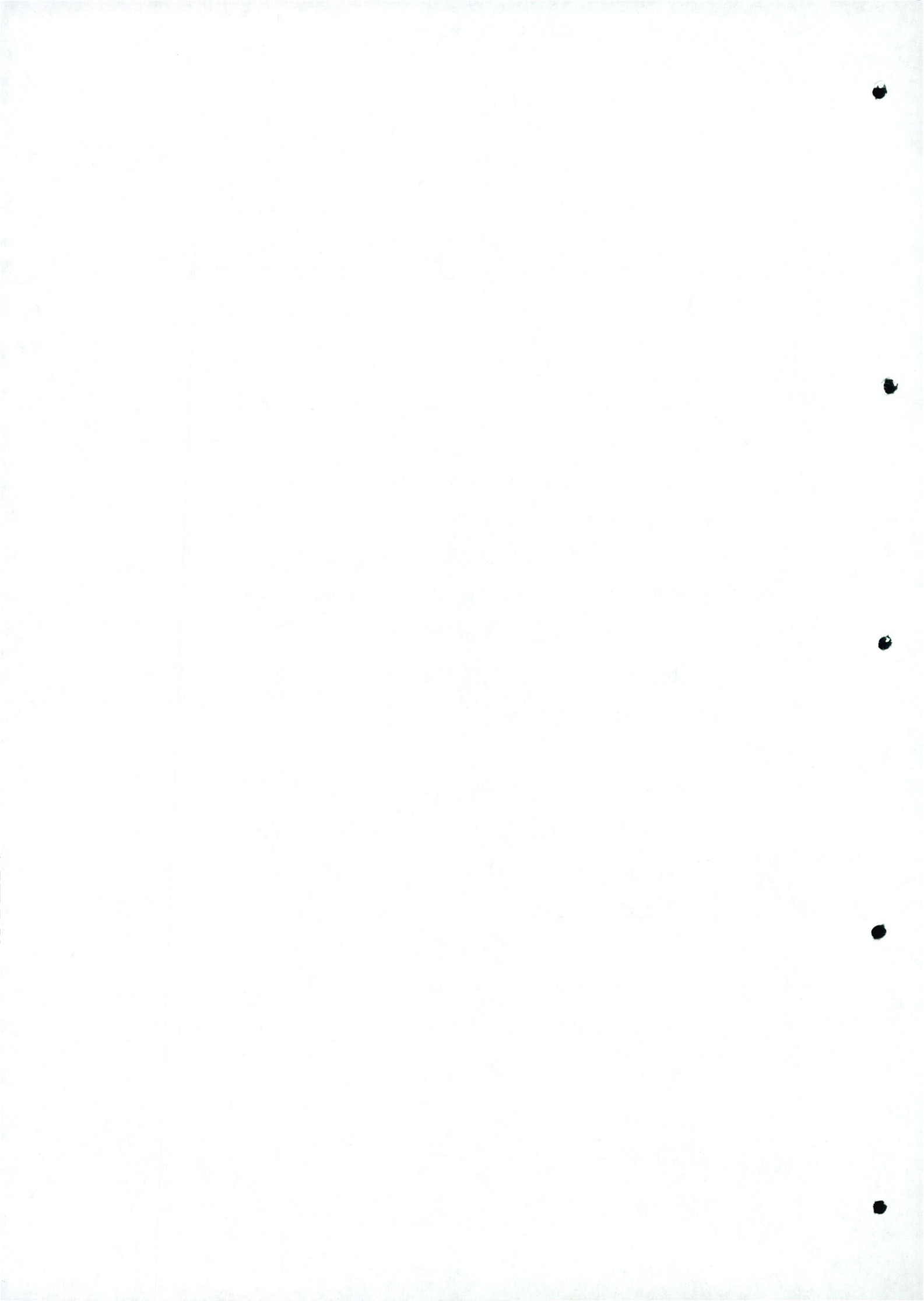
### **Part (ii) Influence of native and traditional Irish dress in Modern Fashion**

*“the dilemma of how to become modern and return to the sources, how to respect an old dormant civilisation and take part in a universal civilisation that has confused and distorted interpretations of Irish cultural history”*

(O’Laighlin, E. 1991. p21)

The evolution of dress in Irish history is fragmented and complex, certain features of Irish dress from different eras have been taken out and celebrated as traditional Irish dress, while others of equal relevance have been forgotten in history.

Irish dress can roughly be distinguished between native Irish dress and traditional Irish dress. Native Irish dress was the creation of a self sufficient society before the plantation by the English in the 12th century. It could be called the original dress of the Irish people. It evolved independently from the fashions of mainland Europe.. It is a genuine reflection of the culture that produced it. The relative originality and genuineness of Native Irish dress makes it particularly appealing as a source of inspiration.



The emergence of traditional Irish style did not evolve directly from native Irish dress. Native Irish dress was outlawed by English rule, and was almost completely extinct by the 17th century. Traditional Irish style as we recognise it today is actually a product of the 1950s. Irish designers concentrated on Irish fabrics, linen, poplin and tweed and on Irish crafts, embroidery, crochet and lace as inspiration for their work. Of the fabrics, only wool and linen had been used by the native Irish, and of the embellishments, only embroidery was used in native Irish dress, the rest were a product of the Famine, when lace and crochet were used as a means of relieving poverty in rural areas. Aran knitwear was developed on the Aran islands at the turn of the century, and was updated by the designers of the 1950s. The designs created in the 1950s were fresh and modern for their time, and with the continued demand the production of these garments continued well after their demise in high fashion. No longer a contemporary idea, by the 1960s this style of knitwear had fallen under the category of “traditional Irish”.

Modern Irish fashion has taken inspiration from both native and traditional Irish styles.

When studying Irish fashion and cultural identity it is revealing to look at how Irish fashion is perceived by those outside as well as inside, this country.





*“The purity of the lifestyle, the natural splendour of a country where everything is unspoilt and there is an untouched naturalness...*

*big wonderful sweaters and natural materials like Donegal tweed. Its a classic timelessness untouched by trends”.*

(Donna Karan quoted in The Irish Times, 12/11/96).

The foreign perception of Irish fashion is often, as Godfrey Deeny who works for Conde Nast publishing in Paris has put it, *“A beautiful vision of Ireland but a limiting one”*. Allegra Dorn, editor for Italian Vogue has a similar perception of Irish style *“people wrapped up in warm, cuddly, thick woollen jumpers... for me, Irish style consist of a “freshness, a straight forwardness. It lies in laughing green eyes and pale complexions. It is a beauty from within that is not self conscious”*

This vision of Ireland is not only limiting it is inaccurate. These designers have spoken about Ireland as if it were a fairy tale, their interpretations of Irish culture are clouded over by legends and myths. Ireland, for them, is purely imaginary. It s a mysterious and mystical land that has no bearing on reality. When it comes to Ireland, designers don't want reality. Many foreign fashion designers seem to be in a kind of state of denial when it comes to the truth about modern Irish culture. Eleanor Lambert, New York Fashion journalist believes that Ireland-

*“remains uniquely different in its take on life and every art form. My timeless image of Irish fashion is the magic mix of folklore Celtic charm and aristocratic style I first saw in the clothes of Sybil Connolly”*

Eleanor Lambert quoted in The Irish Times 12/11/96





Lacroix tapped into this romantic vision of Ireland in Christian Dior's Autumn/Winter, 1995 a collection called "Un Ballade d'Irlandaise". The show consisted of layers of vibrant tweeds with a collection of cloaks and hats. The show was awash with lyrical references to unspoilt countryside and the simple Irish rural life. This is an image that the French designers have had a particular fondness for. They have consistently used Irish fabric and knit wear in "*le style Irlandais*". In 1985 Jean Paul Gaultier created a complete outfit inspired by Aran sweaters, and in January of last year Yves Saint Laurent used a shamrock against a red background in his new year message to his customers in W magazine.

An article by Michael Soloman on the "*social-political symbolism of dress*" in the book "The Psychology of Fashion" 1985 discusses the attractiveness of rural dress in modern society,

*"Interest in rural dress by the urban fashionable is based on a persistent, romantic notion that country people somehow have the corner on happiness, which stems from their close relationship with the earth, which according to the romantic view, provides them with an unfettered, uncomplicated and enviable existence."*

(Soloman, M, 1985, p.190)

The ideas of Donna Karan and Eleanor Lambert would certainly comply with this theory and would explain the success of traditional Irish style.



Irish fashion designers have been taking full advantage of the marketing potential behind selling Irish fashion as rural, since the 1950s with such success that it is an image of Irish fashion that is difficult to break.

Since Sybil Connolly's "Irish Washer woman" 1952 outfit Irish designers have been relying heavily not only on their country's fabric traditions, but also on the literary and artistic traditions of their country. Most Irish designers have used some kind of Celtic theme in their collections to help sell their clothes and Irish designers are sometimes as guilty of romanticising their culture as foreign designers.

National identity appears to be an important part of Irish designers personal cultural identity. Is this cultural identity something they wish to portray on a personal level? It would probably be unfair to brush off Irish designers' interest in Irish culture as purely for marketing purposes rather than a more personal curiosity about their country's history and traditions. Perhaps they have fallen into the stereotype of an Irish fashion designer and use Ireland as inspiration for this reason. The truth is probably a combination of the two.

Even Irish designers abroad would seem unable to forget their Irish roots. Peter O'Brien designer of the house of Rochas in Paris has interpreted the traditional clothes of his homeland and transformed the Aran sweater into a sophisticated bodice. He is now experimenting with Carrickmacross lace. Irish designer Jim Coughlan has reworked the style of dress seen in the film "The Field" into a high fashion statement, rather as Vivienne Westwood did with historical English dress.





Modern designers reinventing native and traditional Irish style have been particularly successful in recent years. they have managed to create a fashion that contains “*undeniably national characteristics with an international appeal*”

(McCrum. E. 1996, p.115).

Modern Irish designers have been particularly successful in recent years in reinventing native and traditional Irish Style. The Irish characteristic of the garment has become understated. The designers appear to be relying less and less on their national identity to sell their clothes. The clothes still make a statement about Irish culture, but it is subtle and lacks the stage Irishness of much of the traditional Irish fashion. As Mc Crum puts it “*global requirements of style and finish with undeniably national characteristics*”

(McCrum. 1996, p.118).

Modern Irish designers have taken the processes used in native and traditional Irish style, but they have taken great consideration of the “*global requirements of style*” so that the end result has an international appeal.

John Rocha was one of the first designers to be recognised for keeping a careful balance between reinventing Irish traditions and keeping in touch with the international market. It is often in the workmanship that the message of cultural identity comes out. The national identity of the garment is not immediately recognisable.

Lainey Keogh has been particularly successful in reinventing traditional Irish knitwear. She has managed to keep the delicate balance between reinventing the traditional roots of her craft, and answering the



demands of international fashion. Her proportions, yarns and finishes are continually changing with the times, but she is still influenced by traditional Aran stitches and patterns.

The modern men's wear designs of Terence Doyle made a subtle and unexpected reference to Irish tradition in his 1994 collection with its inclusion of Aran stitches in the detailing of his suits.

This could be contrasted with Jean Paul Gaultier's interpretation of Aran knitwear. His use of Aran knitwear was a fashion statement. It was deliberately loud and comical. The detailing in Terence Doyle's suit was subtle so it did not make a fashion statement about the designers national identity.

Gretrude Sampson, an Irish knitwear designer has taken Irish knit wear and given it a completely modern look. She mixes hand knitting with machine technology. The garments are loud and colourful but the essence of the tradition is still there.

The couturier Jen Kelly reinvented traditional Irish dancing costume for the internationally successful "Riverdance" show in 1995. What "Riverdance" has done for Irish dancing, he has similarly done for Irish dancing costumes. The style of his costumes are influenced by traditional Irish costumes. He has acknowledged history without reproducing it.

Modern Irish designers seem to have found the careful balance that maintains the essence of tradition without over exploiting it.







Fig no. 3 - Portrait of Lady Lavery by John Lavery, 1928. The portrait was commissioned by The Note Committee for use as the watermark on Irish paper currency. The portrait became an image of Mother Ireland.









Fig no. 4 - Embroidered dress and brat made by the Dun Emer Guild, 1928. It is made with blue silk poplin, trimmed with silk chiffon and embroidered with blue and purple silk. The brat and leine became the national costume in Ireland as part of an effort to cultivate national pride in the late nineteenth century.



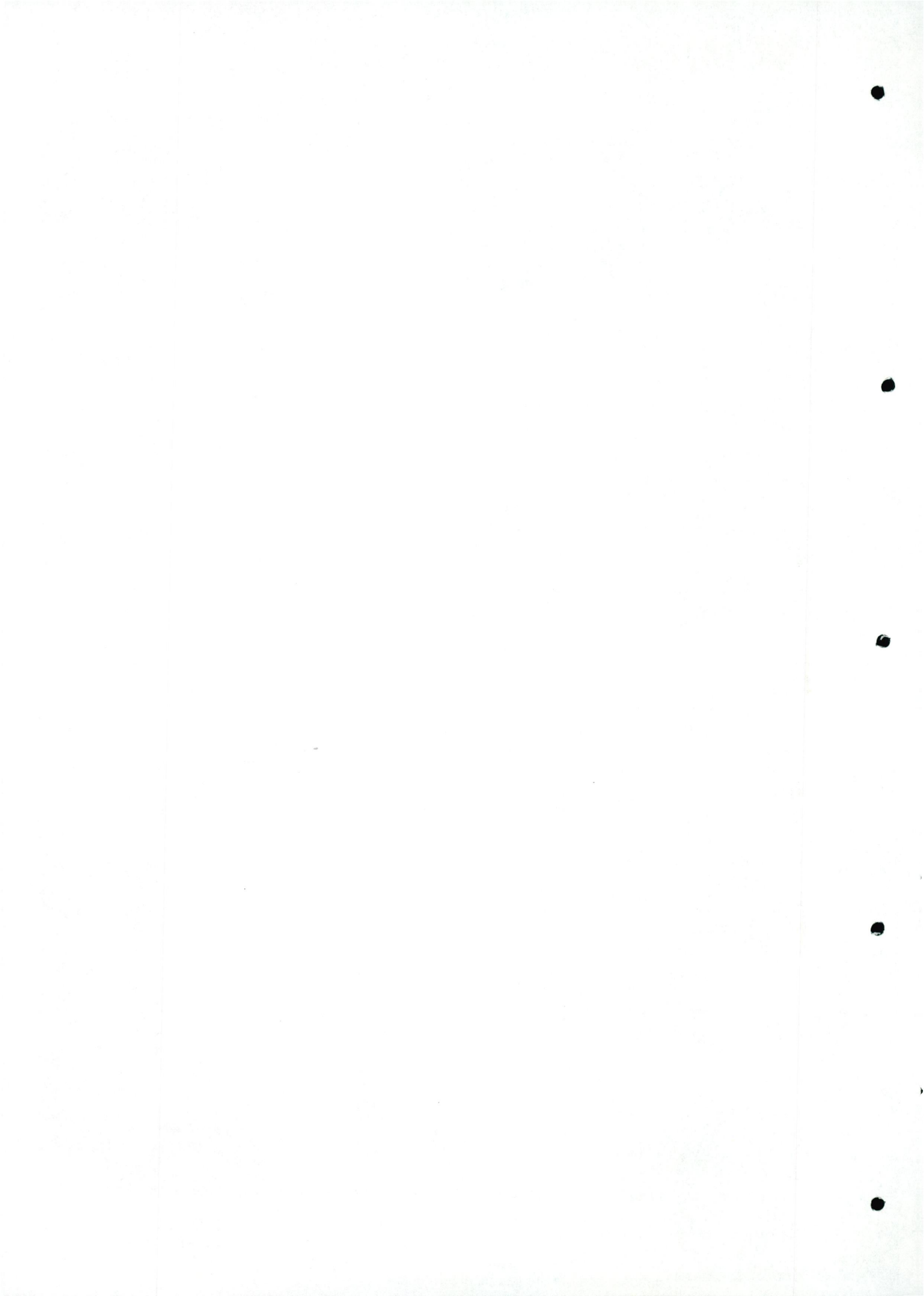




Fig no. 5 - Outfit by Ann Demeulemeester, Elle, UK, 1993 The clothes as with the surroundings are traditional Irish in inspiration.





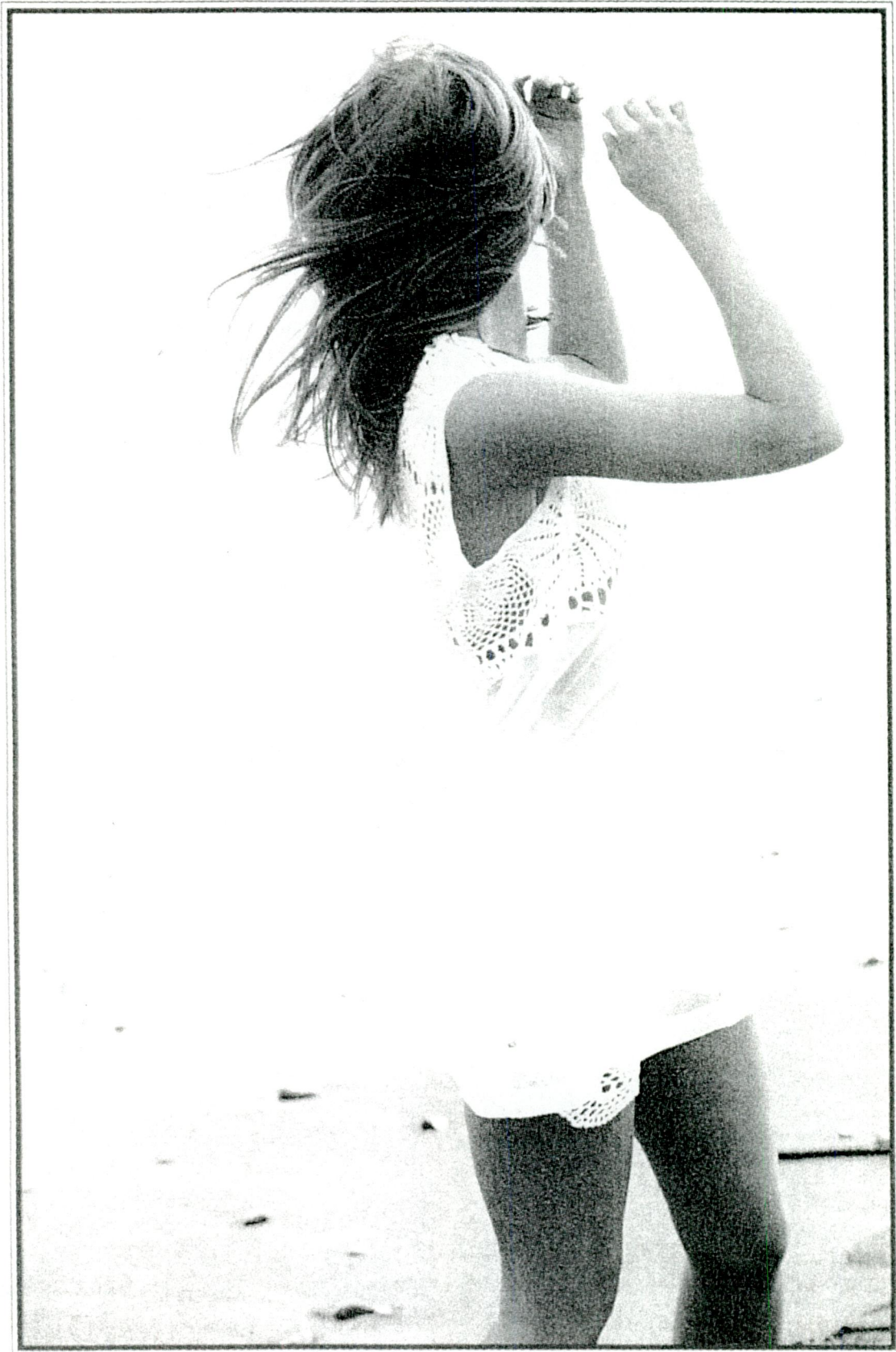


Fig no. 6 - Linen and crochet outfit by Mary Gregory, 1994. An example of the use of traditional Irish crochet in modern Irish fashion.

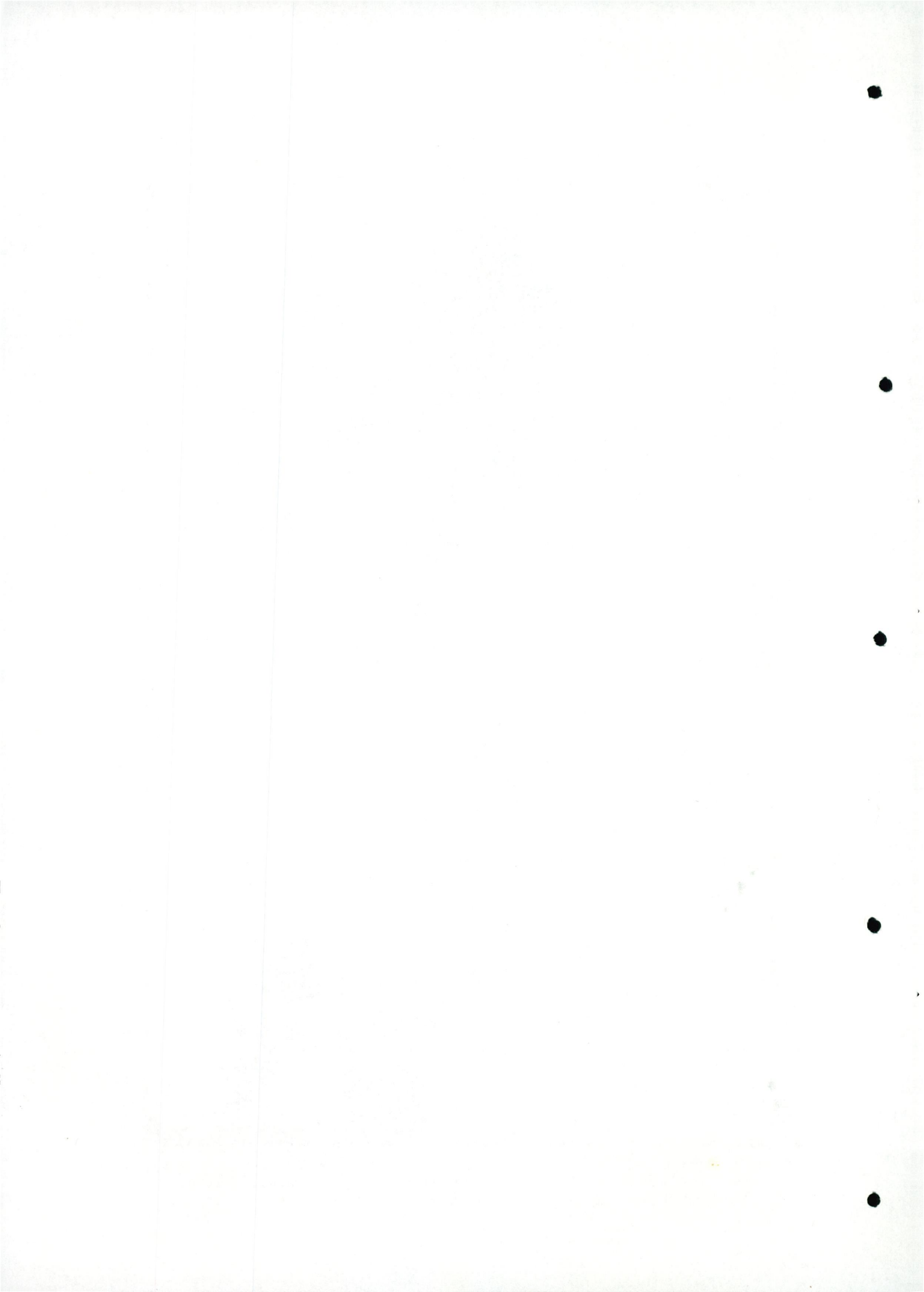




Fig no. 7 - Knitted outfit by Lainey Keogh at the New Generation Designer Show, London, 1994. Lainey Keogh knitwear is essentially contemporary, but her work constantly refers back to traditional Aran stitches.

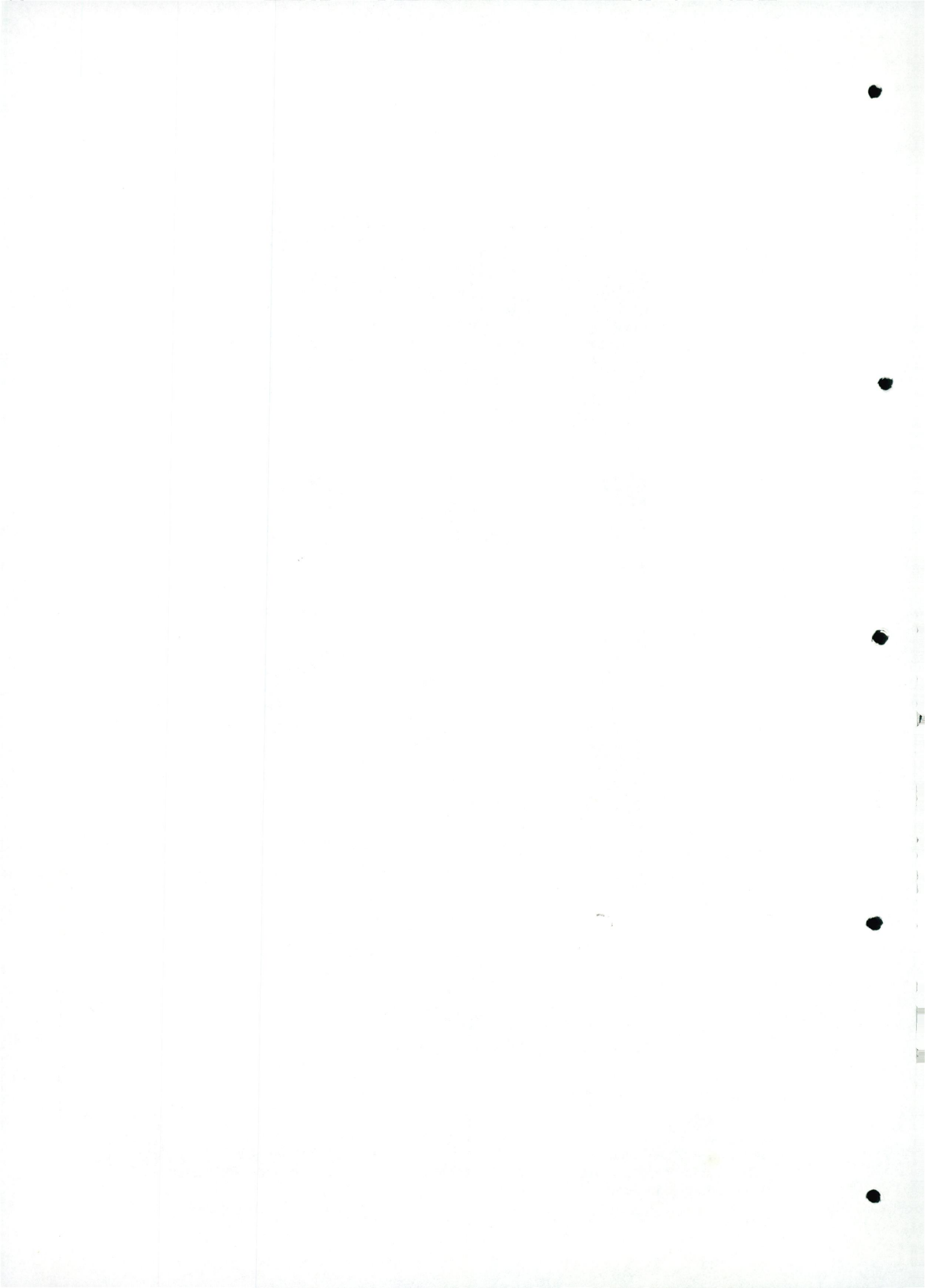






Fig no. 8 - Knitted Aran outfit by Jean Paul Gaultier, 1985, an example of effective and somewhat comical reinvention of a traditional garment.





## **Irish Fashion: Form, Fabric and Craft**

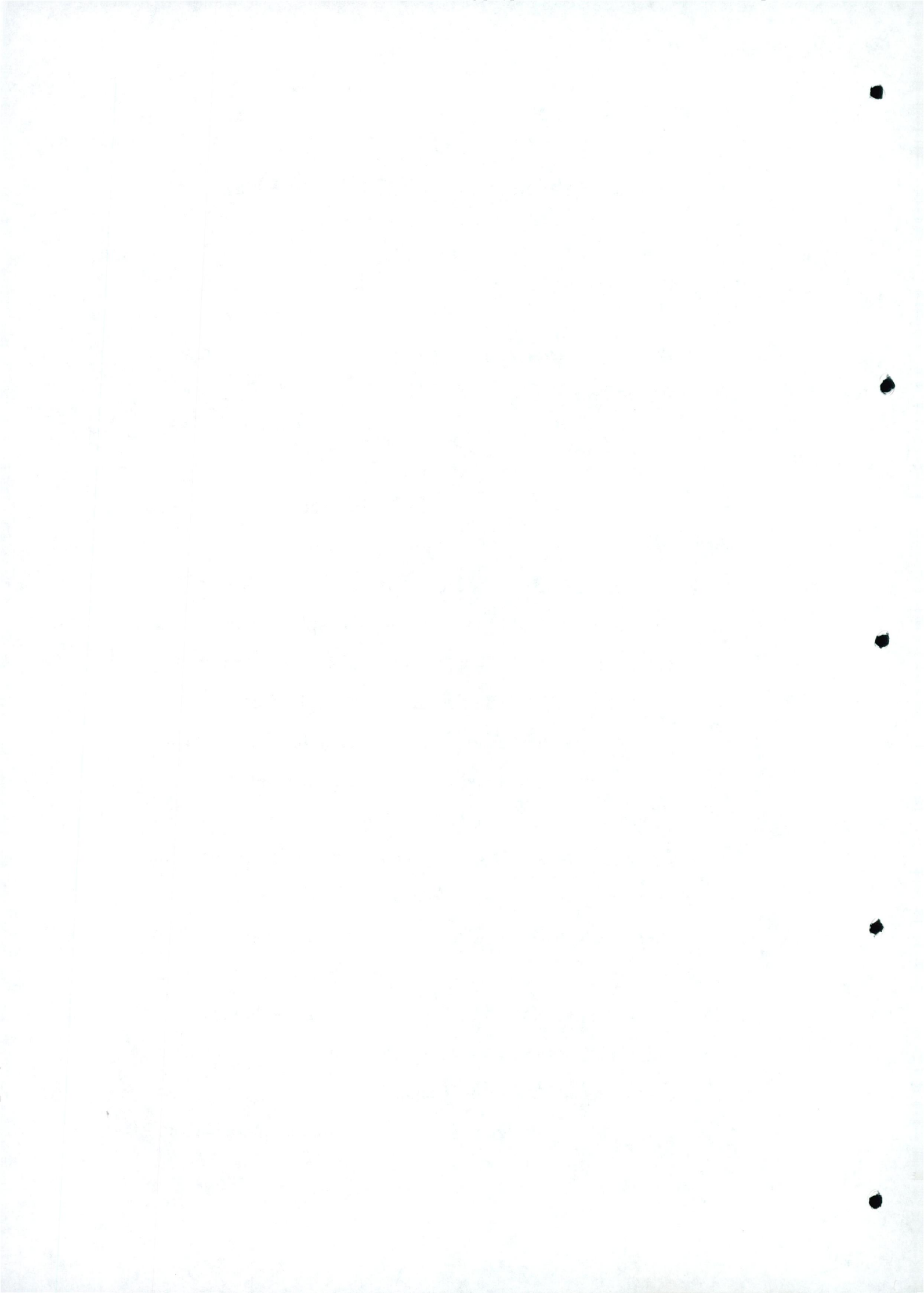
### **Part (iii) Fashion as Craft**

*“The cloth always dictated the design”* (Neill Mulcahy quoted in McCrum, E, 1996, p.22)

*“I am a man of the cloth”*

Paul Costelloe (The Interview) 1/9/96

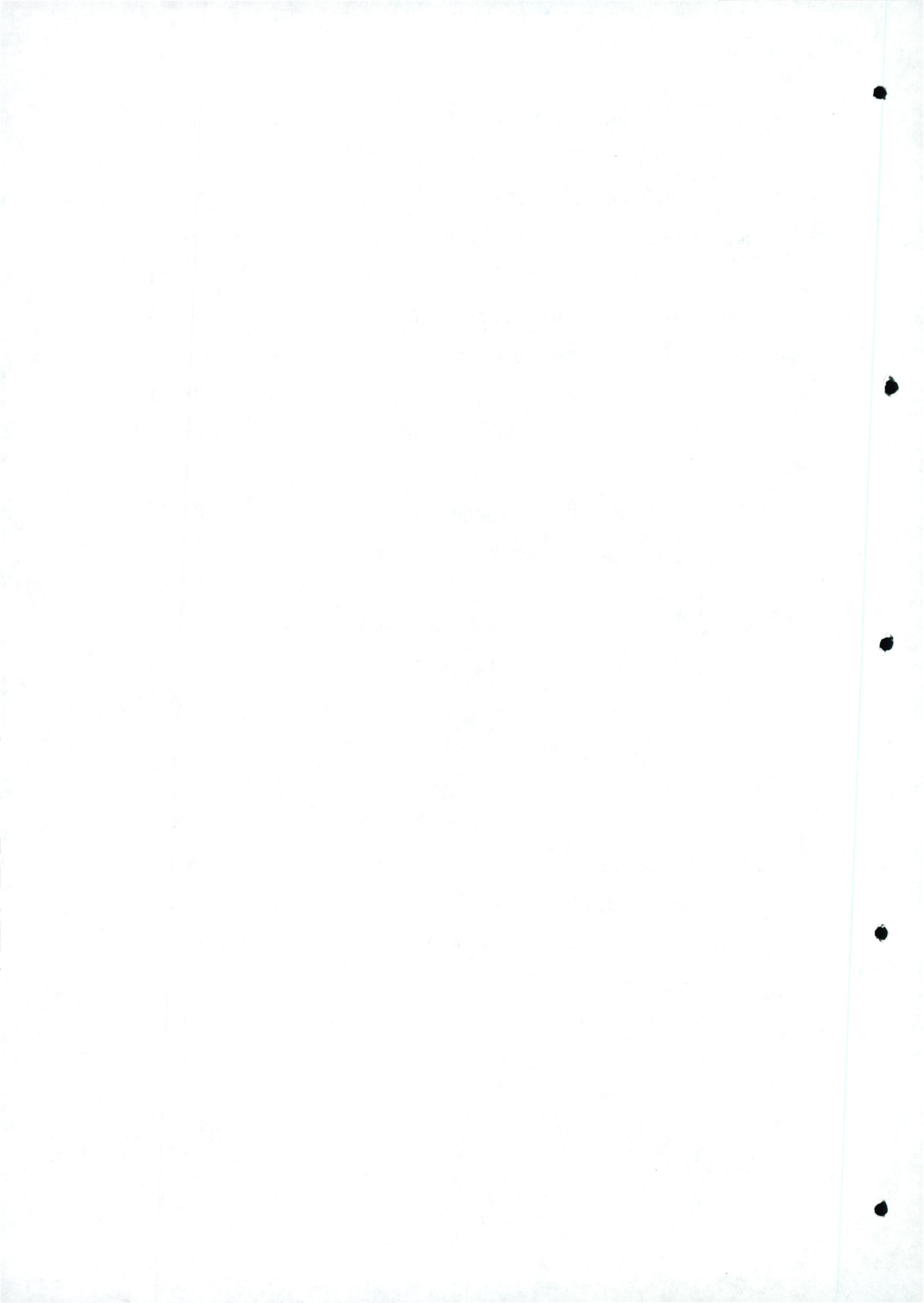
This design process whereby the cloth dictates the design seems to have become an integral part of the design philosophy of modern Irish fashion designers. One of the first Irish designers whose use of this process resulted in her international success was Sybil Connolly. Seeing the potential of Irish fabrics she made them the dominant feature of her look. She collaborated with Gerd Hay-Edie to create her distinctive unusual tweeds. Irish fashion attained a distinctive identity for the quality and importance of cloth in the garment in the 1950s, this is as relevant today as it was then. Almost all Irish designers have since followed her lead. One of the many Irish designers to use this method is John Rocha. He has always started with the cloth when designing his collection. (Merret, R. Nov. 1996) He uses fabric as the foundation on which he builds his design ideas. The purchase of the fabric is the first stage, Rocha collects fabrics from Ireland and around the world each season. The start of the design process begins with the fabrics that most



catch his attention. The fact that most Irish designers use this process shows the importance they place on fabric. It makes the fabric the most important component in the overall working of the garment. It also affects the overall style of the clothes. Texture becomes one of the most important elements of the garment. Many modern Irish designers are known for their effective and unusual use of fabric. It is a key feature of their work. By using unusual fabrics they can lift simple classic shapes to something contemporary and individual. John Rocha is known for his mixing of fabrics within an outfit. He pays such careful attention to his cloth, and is so sensitive to their handles and weights that he can confidently combine and manipulate fabrics in unusual ways, such as sheepskin and chiffon, and satin and knit.

Rocha has also developed new fabrics himself like "*crackled silk*" which he used in his 1996 collection. Almost all Irish designers have been recognised for their choice of fabrics as well as having a talent for developing form from a fabric. Paul Costelloe has explained "*cloth dictates what I can and can't do, design is secondary*" 1/9/96.

Costelloe has always worked in this way, winning the Fil D'Or three times for outstanding use of linen, as did John Rocha. Mariad Whisker won the Fil d'Argent for her use of linen in 1989. As well as linens Irish designers have an affection for Irish fabrics in general. John Rocha often talks about his love of linen, and makes a point of using it in nearly all his collections.





*"It is like an old friend, the more you wear it the better it looks"*

(John Rocha (International Textiles)

Nov. 1996)

This process of letting the material dictate the form is a principle of craft more than it would be of fashion. It is mainly silhouette that has been the most important feature of modern fashion. It is the silhouette that keeps changing from season to season. The silhouette in Irish fashion is a secondary consideration when this design process is used. Because it is a secondary consideration it is often quite soft, and changes slowly from season to season. It does not over shadow the beauty of the fabric but instead complements it.

*"it is really due to a most rigorous, but very warm and authentic tradition consisting of fine workmanship, popular arts and an informal elegance which is stronger than any fashion. It is my own exorcism"*

(Christian Lacroix, on Irish fashion, The Irish Times 12/11/96).

By producing something with your hands you put a piece of yourself into it. Like the fingerprints left on a ceramic bowl there is something of the individual left behind. In the case of the fabric or garment embroidered within its intricate working is a piece of the person who created it. This makes it special. It gives the object an energy, an individuality, a precision that mass produced objects completely lack. In a hand-crafted garment or fabric one can look beyond the work as mere surface decoration to something quite personal.

Oscar Wilde talked of a craft that:



*“comes not only from the hands, but from the head and the heart too”*

(Oscar Wilde quoted in McQuillan, D. 1993, p.47)

The craftsperson is etching their personal identity into their work, as was done when the first intricately made sweaters were produced by the women of the Aran islands. It was more than just production for necessity sake. It was a personal expression, each sweater differing in its overall design, with designs and stitches being passed through generations of families, each family having their own individual pattern. This relationship between garment, textile and craft in Irish fashion was, clearly evident in a recent exhibition “Adornments” by the crafts council of Ireland where work by Irish textile artists and designers were displayed together.

The importance of hand production in modern Irish fashion is crucial in its relationship to cultural identity. The people behind the garments are as important as the garments themselves. Craft has a personal element to it that mass production lacks. Ireland has long been known as “the soul of Europe” so it seems only fitting that Irish fashion should contain within it this recognised part of our culture.

It is said of Gerd Hay-Edie who designed hand woven tweeds for many of the prominent Irish fashion designers of the 1950’s that *“your tweeds are subtle, they have the feel of hands”* (Sheila Mullally quoted in McCrum, E., 1996, p.33).

John Rocha has always been an advocate of hand crafted textiles. He passionately believes that they should be supported and encouraged. Nearly two thirds of his collection is created by hand. Most of the





tweeds he used are hand woven in Ireland. This is expensive, but Rocha believes that is worth the extra expense because the handle is so different. He also includes hand painted fabric, embroidery, Irish crochet, lace and hand finished garments. *“they are so personal. Machines cannot give the same look”*

He not only uses hand woven and knitted fabric, he also patronises Irish lace, crochet and embroidery in his collections. He even commissions Irish jewellers to accessorise his collections.

*“John Rocha’s success is a breath of hope in a deeply depressed Irish clothing industry and knitwear companies in the west of Ireland such as Hackett and Turpin in Mayo, yarn manufactures in Donegal and Northern Ireland. Irish linen weavers are reaping the benefits too”*

Mc Quillan (The Irish Times)05/09/93

One important craft used regularly in Irish fashion is that of hand painting fabric.

Clodagh O’Kennedy who sold under the label “Clodagh” in the 1960s was one of the first Irish designers to collaborate with Irish knitters, weavers, crochet makers and especially fabric painters in her collections.

Ib Jorgensen, an important Irish designer of the 1970s created several garments which contained areas that were hand painted. The hand painting and sometimes embroidery was done by his wife Patricia Jorgensen. The designs were extremely successful, and became one of the hallmarks of Jorgensen’s work. Today John Rocha among other Irish designers such as Mariad Whisker, Mary Gregory, Louise



Kennedy and Marc O'Neill use hand painted fabric as a prominent feature of their work. Their collaboration with textile artists is vital, as the graphic work is often the dominant design feature of a simply cut garment. It is important to note that these designers choose to have their fabrics hand painted when the same designs could be more easily and more cheaply produced if printed industrially.

For John Rocha “*this is not the point. Every design must be special. It must be unique*” (Rocha International Textiles Nov. '96).

His hand painting is often large scale and the dominant feature of the garment. Rocha works alongside textile artists in designing the hand painting.

Irish fashion designers not only use hand crafts and embellishments in their work, but many also view their own profession as a craft in itself. The most successful of Ireland's designers have fallen into the niche that is somewhere between ready to wear and couture fashion. There has always been an emphasis on quality rather than quantity. It is not coincidental that during the 1970s Irish fashion was in recession in a decade when there was a lack of demand for high quality, expensive clothing, Peter O'Brien who designs for the Paris House of Rochas shares this idea of concentrating on the craft of dressmaking rather than on fashion. His clothes are unsuitable for mass production and he is known for his trimming and the intricacy of his cut. In a recent interview in the Irish woman's magazine Image he stated:

*“I'm more interested in what goes on inside the garment because it is the means rather than the end”*

Fearon, Image magazine p42 -46





This emphasis on craft in Irish fashion is also very much part of John Rocha's philosophy on fashion. He believes that "*workmanship cannot be appreciated if structure is very complicated*" (Howlin M. 1994, p.24) John Rocha is one Irish designer who says that he would like to be remembered for his integrity in design. "*I have never designed anything just for the sake of selling*"

John Rocha (International Textiles) Nov. 1996

A lot of Irish designers have commented on the fact that they feel they don't fit into the stereotype image of a fashion designer. Colleagues of Peter O'Brien of the House of Rochas has commented about him that he doesn't have the "killer instinct" and that they have "*never seen him have a temper tantrum*". People have also commented on the relaxed atmosphere backstage at John Rocha's shows. Paul Costelloe also claims not to fit into the stereotypical profile of a fashion designer.

*"I want to do it my way, I don't want to lose my life for fashion. I want to enjoy the simple things in life, my children, rugby"*

Paul Costelloe (The interview) 1/9/96





Fig no. 9 - Linen shirts by Smyth and Gibson. 1996. The shirts are made, and packaged to a very high quality, and marketed as a quality Irish product.







Fig no. 10 - Linen dress and hand painted silk scarf by John Rocha, 1993. An example of hand production in modern Irish fashion.

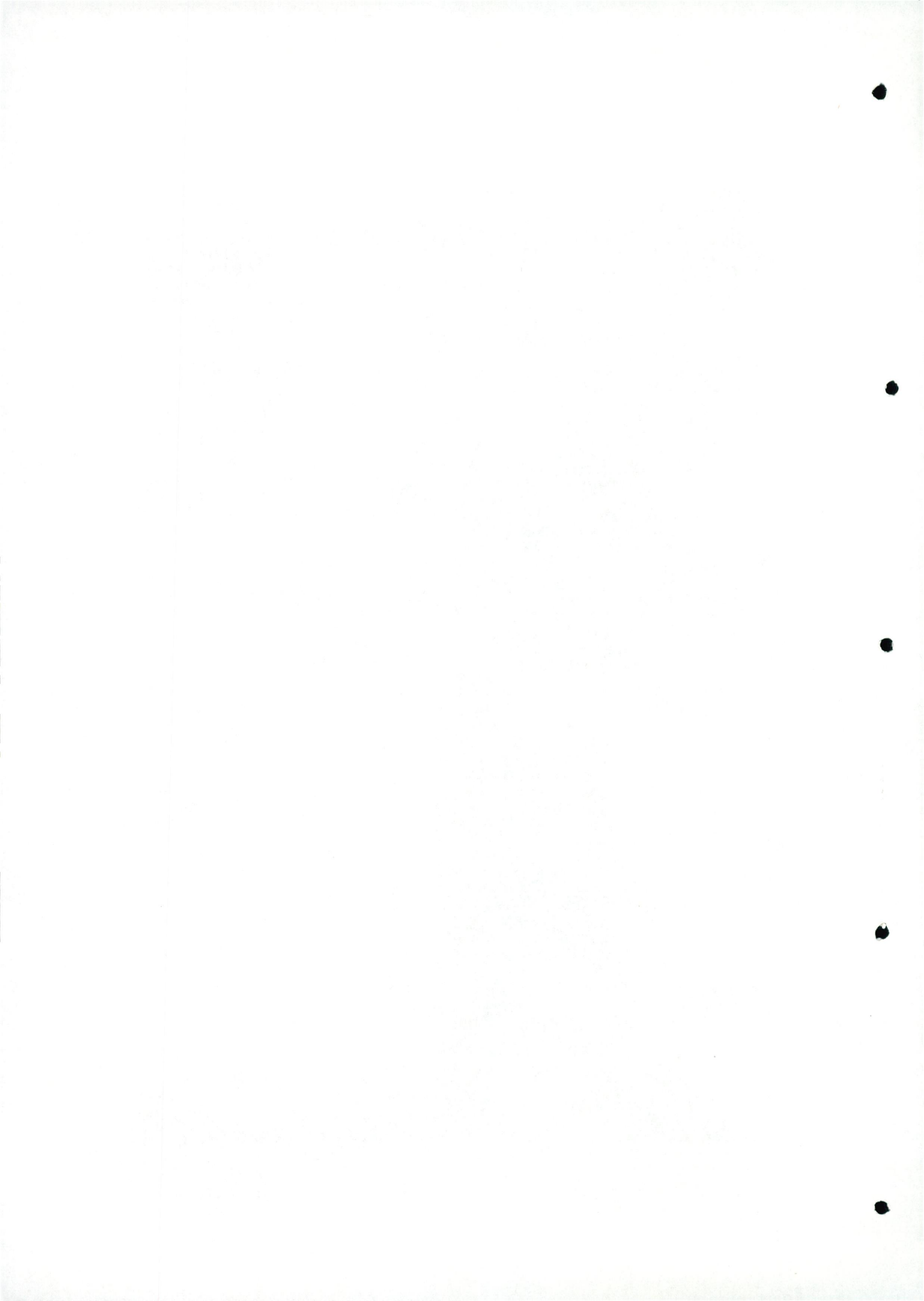






Fig no. 11 - Evening dress by Ib Jorgensen. Hand painting by Patricia Jorgensen. The house became known for its hand painted and embroidered embellishment of evening wear.

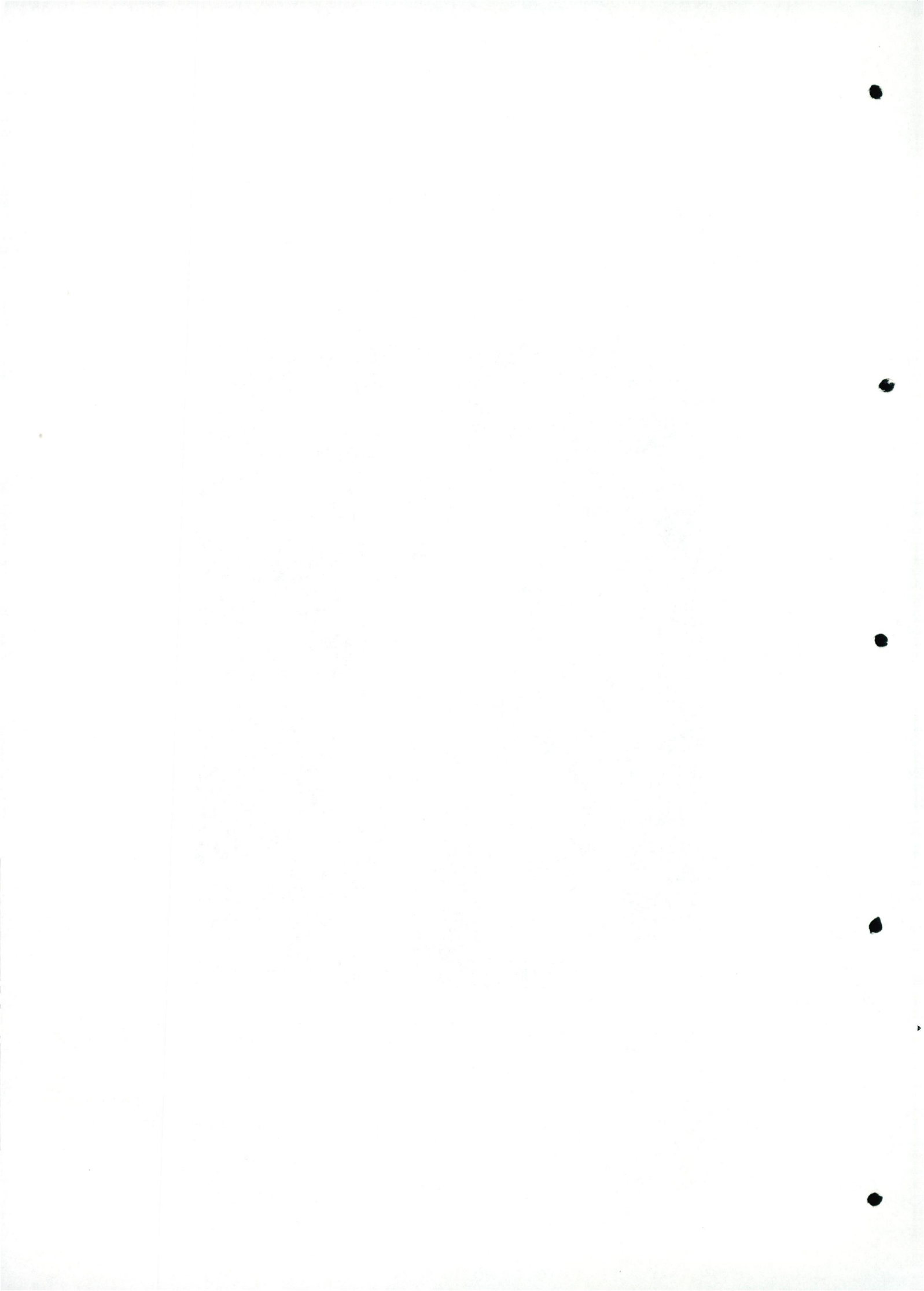






Fig no. 12 - Embroidered trouser suit by Ib Jorgensen, 1970







Fig no. 13 - Outfit by Peter O'Brien, Irish designer for 'Rochas'. Patterned wool fabric by Tim Roberts, Co. Down 1993.







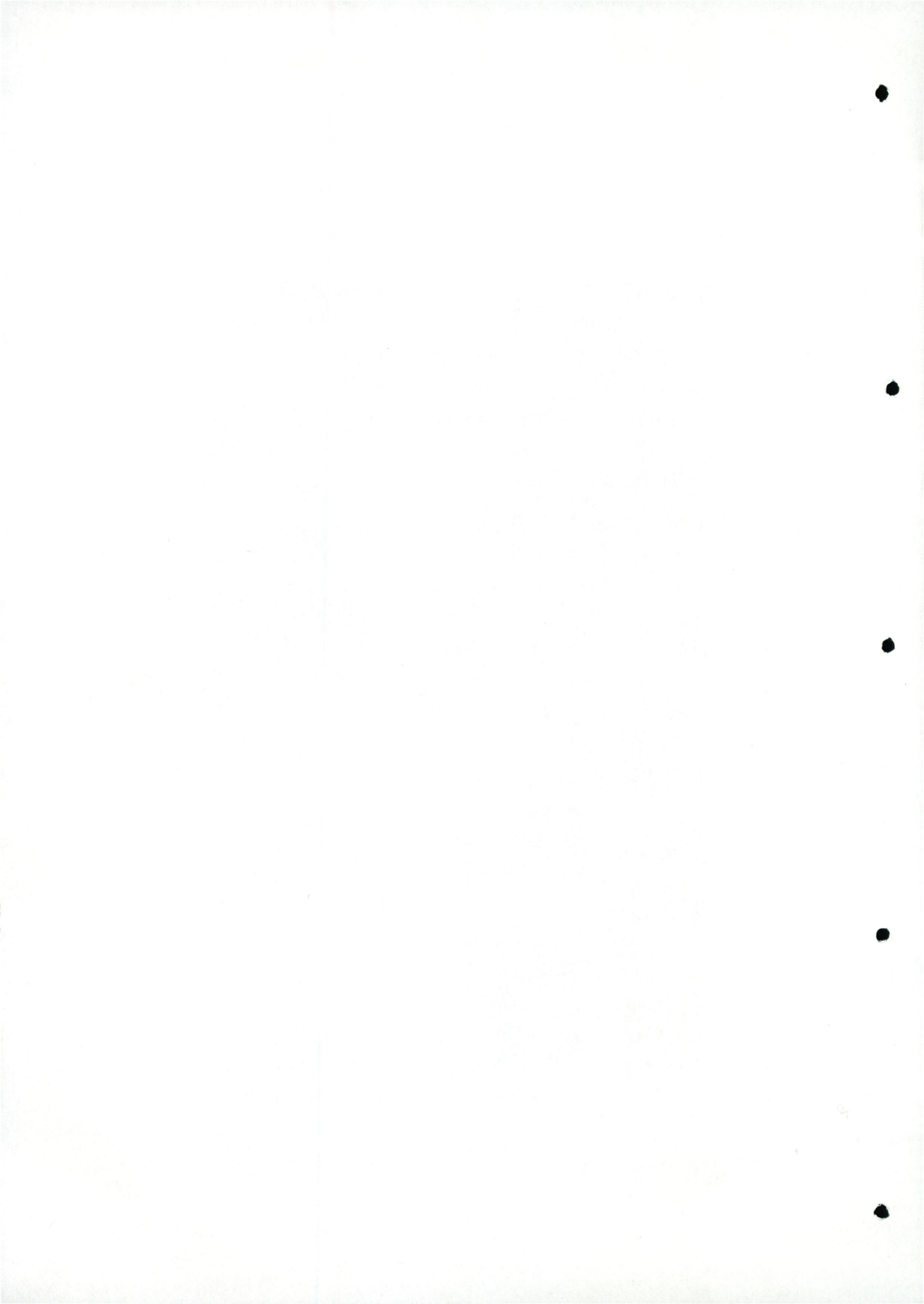
Fig no. 14 - Suit by Irene Gilbert, 1954. This outfit makes effective use of Irish wool.







Fig no. 15 - Outfit by Irish designer Terence Doyle with Aran stitch detail. An example of how modern Irish designers take inspiration from traditional Irish style.





## **Irish Fashion: A true reflection of Irish Society**

### **Part (i) 1950 - to the present. The Emergence of modern Irish fashion and traditional Irish style.**

In 1952 the Philadelphia fashion group came to Dublin to see the couture collection of a new Irish designer called Sybil Connolly. The international success of this collection, and the numerous collections which followed were not only a breakthrough for the designer herself, but more importantly Irish fashion was being given world-wide media attention for the first time in history.

In 1950 the textile industry in Ireland was in recession. However fine and damask linen was still being produced in Northern Ireland for the domestic market as well as exportation, but despite Irish linens international reputation for quality the linen industry world-wide was in decline. This was due to competition from cotton and new manmade fibres such as nylon.

Embroidery, lace and crochet are now recognised in modern Ireland as the traditional Irish embellishments of cloth, only embroidery was produced in native Irish dress but it was not until the 19th century that lace and crochet were introduced as cottage industries to help to relieve poverty. There was widespread famine in Ireland at the time and it was one of a number of schemes that were brought in to create employment



for the sick and hungry. Small industries producing embroidery, lace and crochet were established. (Mc Crum, E. 1996, p.13)

By the 1820's embroidery centres were producing white thread work on muslin under Glasgow firms which had set up in Ireland.

After the decline of these companies local women continued the manufacture of embroidery on a smaller scale on locally woven linen instead of muslin.

Lace making industries were set up in Limerick and Carrickmacross. During the 1880's lace became very fashionable and hence the demand for it rose considerably.

Both Limerick and Carrickmacross lace were exported to Europe and America and Irish lace gained world-wide admiration.

Crochet was introduced to Ireland by a group of French nuns during the Famine. It soon became an established cottage industry, and by 1900 was exported as dress trimming. It became known as "point d'Irlande" and was admired and utilised by French designers such as Paquin.

Another fabric often associated with being Irish is silk poplin. It has been woven in Ireland since the 17th century. Its manufacture has been in decline since the beginning of the 19th century but is frequently used by Irish designers to complement Irish lace or crochet.

In 1922 Ireland gained its independence from Britain and became the Irish Free State. A recession and the 'Emergency' of 1939-45 followed and it was not until the 1950s that the Irish people had an opportunity to establish its national cultural identity. There was a renewed enthusiastic interest in everything Irish, including Irish fashion.





*“There is no doubt that the lead given by Sybil Connolly of Dublin in the translation of Irish fabrics from home-spun to couture level is a beacon lighting a whole industry”*

(The Manchester Guardian, Jan. 1955 quoted in McCrum, E. 1996, p2)

One such person to celebrate and rediscover Irish culture through fashion was Dublin fashion designer Sybil Connolly. She started with fabric. Irish fabric had had an international reputation for hundreds of years for its quality and excellence in design. She used Irish fabric as a direct source of inspiration for her designs. She not only used traditional Irish fabrics, but reinvented and updates them. By working alongside weavers such as the Avoca Hand Weavers in Wicklow, a family run business dating from 1723, she was able to experiment with traditional weaves and developed them into something finer and more unusual.

There was a demand in fashion at the time for unusual fabrics, so the tweeds created by Irish designers at the time had an international appeal, which perhaps helped to create the world-wide trend in the popularity of tweeds at this time. A headline in the New York Times associated tweed with Irish dress stating *“Tweeds in peach mark Irish attire”* (O’Byrne R., The Irish Times 12/11/96).

The patronage by Irish designers of Irish fabrics not only helped the sale of the designers’ clothes, but also created a boom in the Irish textile industry with couture houses from Paris having a particular interest in Irish fabrics.

Irish linen became equally popular in the 1950s due to the patronage of it by Sybil Connolly in a fine handkerchief linen, which was made up into heavily pleated dresses, which were to become her signature style.



Irish embroidery, lace making and crochet were also given a new lease of life in the 1950s by updating and transforming it into contemporary fashion, as was done by such designers as Mary O'Donnell.

The Irish fashion designers of the 1950s not only took advantage of the international reputation of Irish fabrics but also the entire Irish culture. They promoted along with their clothes an entire lifestyle. Films like the hugely successful romantic film 'The Quiet Man' had already given Ireland an image abroad as being "*a land of poetry of purity*".(O'Bryne R.12/11/96,1996).

The Irish designers took full advantage of this romantic image of an idyllic, rural wholesome island. They realised the marketing potential behind promoting their clothes as being somehow special because of their Irishness. As well as using Irish fabrics they also used colours taken from the Irish landscape and designs in embroidery taken from the Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow. So much so that an article in the Irish Times in 1955 warned of the dangers of

*"lifting a Celtic design and planting it down piece meal on a cocktail dress"*

(quoted in Mc Crum, E, 1996, p.)

Some of the dresses carried reflections of native Irish dress in their form and shape such as Sybil Connolly's "Irish Washerwoman", but many lacked historical accuracy. The collections were also given names with some reference to Ireland such as Irene Gilbert's "Kilkenny Marble"

*"American interest in the Dublin market is increasing"*

Woman's Wear Daily 1954





This romantic vision of Ireland was particularly appealing to the American market.

Irish fashion was appealing to the American market for sentimental reasons. They somehow believed that by buying a tweed suit or an Aran sweater, they could connect with their native homeland, no matter how many generations intervened they were somehow sharing a tradition. They were thus making a statement about their Gaelic heritage as well as their own personal identity. By patronising Irish fashion they demonstrated their loyalty to Ireland as a nation.

*“Aran Knitting evolved to express a singular communal feeling for design. The patterns have a rough male Celtic beauty that needs no romanticising, created by female hands. The women drew on levels of imagination that are earthier and more primitive than pseudo religious allegories about the shapes of their patterns”*

(Rutt, A., quoted in Mc Quillan, 1989, p.35)

As discussed above, textile crafts were first introduced in Ireland in the 19th century to combat poverty in heavily populated rural areas. At this time weaving and home skills were strongly encouraged by Victorian philanthropists as a source of income for the poor and destitute in rural areas. In 1893 a government body, The Congested Districts Board set up 76 lace making, knitting and crochet schools in Ireland for this reason. John Molloy whose family has been weaving in Donegal since 1900, recalls that it was *“one of the home crafts that kept the smoke going up the chimney”*, quoted in (McQuillan, 1989, p15).



A native feeling of the Irish people for decoration which goes back centuries had found another mode of expression, and cottage industries throughout the country, especially in the west of Ireland flourished. One of the many textile crafts to evolve at this time was knitting. It became of particular importance to an island community on the Aran islands off the west coast of Ireland. In the early 1900s knitting on Aran "*transformed a fairly routine operation into a craft of singular beauty and artistic expression*". Mc Quillan, D, (The Aran Sweater) p16.

The people of Aran had for many years shown a creative talent for textile craft. An important example of this talent was the intricately woven coloured belt called a "crios"; these belts are still produced today. Textile craft was a communal activity. In the Aran islands it was a pastime that brought the young girls and women of the island together. The skill of knitting was passed down from one generation to the next along the female line. The patterns were extremely complex and intricate, and became more so as the knitters never gave up experimenting and developing new stitches and techniques, making each pattern better than the last. They took inspiration for each stitch from their rural lifestyle, creating designs that echoed the shapes of plants and nature of the landscape of the island.

The technical developments achieved in Aran knitting as this Irish tradition came to be known was further developed by modern Irish designers. Since the 1950s top Irish designers have continued to draw from the distinctive handwriting of the original Arans.





Irish knit wear today still uses the same basic principles as it did at the turn of the century. Many of Irelands knitwear designers have a rural background. Many fell into the fashion industry by chance, and originally knitted for the love of it, as a creative pastime, it was a means of personal expression.

The Inish Meain Knitwear company was started on the Aran islands by Tarlach de Blacam with six people and a couple of domestic machines in a shed producing sweaters for sale to visiting tourists to the island. It now produces some of the most sophisticated knitwear in the world, using the latest Japanese machinery and luxury yarns imported from South America.

The Irish knitwear industry has developed steadily since the 1950s with Irish designers producing some of the most innovative and unusual knitwear in the world. The designers have been true to the roots of their craft, continuing to draw inspiration from traditional Irish knitwear, continually reworking and updating traditional stitches and patterns. Irish knitwear designers have been recognised world-wide for their never ending investigation into and the creation of new yarns, yarn finishes and stitches. They approach knitwear with the same enthusiasm that the women of Aran displayed only a couple of decades ago. As a result Irish knitwear is continually being recognised by the International press for its excellence. Edele Mc Bride won Christian Lacroix's Prix de Coner in 1989 for her outstanding achievements in modern knitwear and Lainey Keogh has gained international recognition for her knitwear creations which feature regularly in international fashion publications.



Much of Ireland's fashion is created on a small scale in a craft type industry, creating unique, one off garments with a personal touch. Some of the garments and fabrics produced would be one-off creations that challenge the border between fashion and art. They are often produced completely by hand, and outside mainstream fashion, giving them a timeless quality. The creator has put their heart into not only designing the garment but also producing it. Many of these artists/fashion designers produce on commission or bring out small collections for a small niche in the market. They often take a particular traditional Irish craft and develop and update it being careful to maintain the essence of the craft which it originated from. Much of this work is interpreted as Irish for this reason. The garment would contain an Irish quality that would be difficult to pinpoint.

In 1962 a report on design in Ireland was commissioned by the Irish Government. The Irish fashion and craft industry was in economic decline. Hence Irish cultural identity through fashion and craft was threatened with extinction. The research was carried out by a group of Scandinavian researchers who reported that "early Christians motifs had lost their appeal in modern design and reproduction." The work pioneered by the designers of the 1950s in creating an Irish cultural identity through design had not progressed or had not been built upon since it first evolved ten years earlier.

As a result of this report the Kilkenny design workshops were set up in 1963. Firstly to improve the level of design among Irish people which had historically been very strong, but had lessened in recent years. Secondly, it was set up to give Ireland a design identity abroad.





By the end of the 1960s there was a reaction against the materialism of the decade. There was also a world-wide interest in the conservation of the planet and its resources which signalled a trend in fashion away from synthetic fabrics to natural ones and to quality hand made garments instead of mass produced. This was an opportunity for Irish designers to make their mark again in international fashion.

It was around this time the early 1970s that John Rocha visited Ireland for the first time. It was here he met Mary Moylan who was very involved with the revival of the Irish craft industry at that time. She taught Rocha about Irish crochet, lace and embroidery, which he used in his celtically inspired degree show. The Irish trade board saw his potential for helping the revival of Irish craft industries and invited him to Ireland.



## **Irish Fashion: A true reflection of Irish society**

### **Part (ii) Patriotism: The desire to look Irish**

National costume evolved in Ireland in the late nineteenth century. The concept of using dress as a symbol of cultural identity had been used in Ireland since native Irish dress was outlawed by the English in the twelfth century. In 1784 the Irish volunteers wore a cap they called the 'Cap of Liberty'. A hat was chosen again to declare nationality by Daniel O'Connell in the 1830s.

From the time of re-enfranchisement in the 1840s the social, economic and political strength of the Irish Catholics grew and with this aspirations for a new Ireland grew also.

Nationalism strived to create a new national identity, it promoted the Irish language, names, music, literature and sport and also 'Irish dress'. In the case of 'Irish dress' historical accuracy does not seem to have been important. As O'Kelly puts it in 'Chic Thrills' "the costumes represented an ancient, pure and glorious Ireland. It summarised the vision of the country's past and the aspirations for its future (O'Kelly, 1942, p.82).

The function of national dress is similar to the function of a uniform. In the language of clothes a uniform makes a clear collective statement. By wearing national dress they made a political statement about their allegiance to the national cause. The Gaelic League in 1893 choose the Brat and leine as a suitable national costume. The costume was decorated with Irish embroidery. A kilt was selected as suitable





costume for men. It was coloured green and saffron, a dye banned by Henry viii for its Irish symbolism. The kilt was worn with a brat.

J.S.L. Lyons explains the Gaelic League's interest in revivalism of Irish studies as a 'means of attaching themselves to their native country and at the same time of holding at arm's length the English connection which the more perceptive of them sensed to be both dangerous and unreliable' (Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939.1992 p.28 quoted in Chic Thrills).

The Gaelic League encouraged the patriotism of Irish fabric in dress, in an effort to regenerate the Irish textile industry as part of a policy to "burn everything English except their coal." Accessories with Irish references were popular. Members of the Gaelic League dressed in a manner acceptable to English society, but put across their message about Irish identity in their replicas of Tar brooches and shamrock tie pins.

*"[The] adoption of a fashion in dress is a matter of collective action than is observable and explainable within the context of a social unit"*

(Lind, M. 1985, p.189).

If one were to consider Irish fashion in relation to this quotation from "The Psychology of Fashion" the relationship between patriotism, or cultural identity, and the characteristics of Irish fashion is clearly evident. Modern Irish fashion is with few exceptions directly or indirectly referential to its country of origin. Sometimes the message of cultural identity is unmistakable and sometimes more subtle. If fashion is about fantasies and desires then Irish fashion can be used to fulfil a desire to look Irish.



There are a number of reasons why Ireland's national identity has been so important to its clothing industry. As discussed in Chapter 1 part of Irish fashion's appeal is the country's idyllic, unspoilt, rural lifestyle. Emigration is also an important factor. This is particularly relevant with respect to the American market.

Interest in Irish fashion from the American market has primarily been for patriotic and sentimental reasons. This interest was particularly strong in the 1950s. Since then, Irish fashion designers have taken advantage of this fondness. In a recent Hollywood film "The Brothers McMullen", a film about an Irish American family released in 1995, the characters wore Aran sweaters and tweed caps. These garments were to symbolise the social-political attitudes of the wearer.

First lady Jackie Kennedy Onassis made a similar statement when she chose to wear a pleated Linen dress by Sybil Connolly for her portrait by Aaron Shikler in 1970 (fig 3). By wearing the dress she was acknowledging her husbands family roots.

The Irish president Mary Robinson made a similar statement about her cultural identity when she chose to wear a jacket by the Irish designer Louise Kennedy for her inauguration in 1990. She has since worn only Irish designers clothes for all state occasions. By doing this she is promoting Irish fashion at home and abroad and expresses her personal pride in her cultural identity.





This expression of social-political attitudes is not always so unambiguous. Irish designers have shown their pride in their heritage by their patronage of Irish fabrics and embellishments, and their use of Irish symbolism and themes.

One of the most interesting and relevant factors here is the desire by Irish people themselves to look Irish. Never has this been so strong than at present. In November 1996, the Canadian fashion programme "Fashion File" came to Ireland to do a report on Irish fashion. They discussed what they described as a "Renaissance in Irish culture." In November 1993 Elle magazine described Dublin as "the hottest place on Earth". The city seems to have maintained this reputation.

Numerous Hollywood stars have bought homes in Ireland. This new pride in everything Irish also includes Irish fashion. The Brown Thomas "showcase" attracted several of the top super models in the world for its production. Bands like Boyzone have used their national identity to promote their image, and because image is built around appearance they often dress in a recognisable Irish style.

In two of his recent fashion shows John Rocha used Irish celebrities to model his clothes. In 1994 Sinéad O'Connor modelled for Rocha's Spring/Summer collection. In 1995 Bob Geldof modelled for his Autumn/Winter collection. Both these artists themselves are patrons of John Rocha's clothes and Irish fashion in general. John Rocha was making a statement about cultural identity and his loyalty to it. The artists themselves were also making in a similar comment about their own cultural identity. By choosing Sinéad O'Connor and Bob Geldoff



to model his clothes in his show, Rocha would have been aware of the media attention and publicity such politically active celebrities would attract.







Fig no. 16 - Portrait of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis by Aaron Shikler, 1970. She is wearing a pleated linen dress by Sybil Connolly. By choosing to wear Irish fashion she is symbolically acknowledging her husband's Irish family roots.







Fig no. 17 - Outfit from John Rocha's Autumn/Winter collection 1995. Modelled by Bob Geldoff, a politically and socially active figure in Irish society.

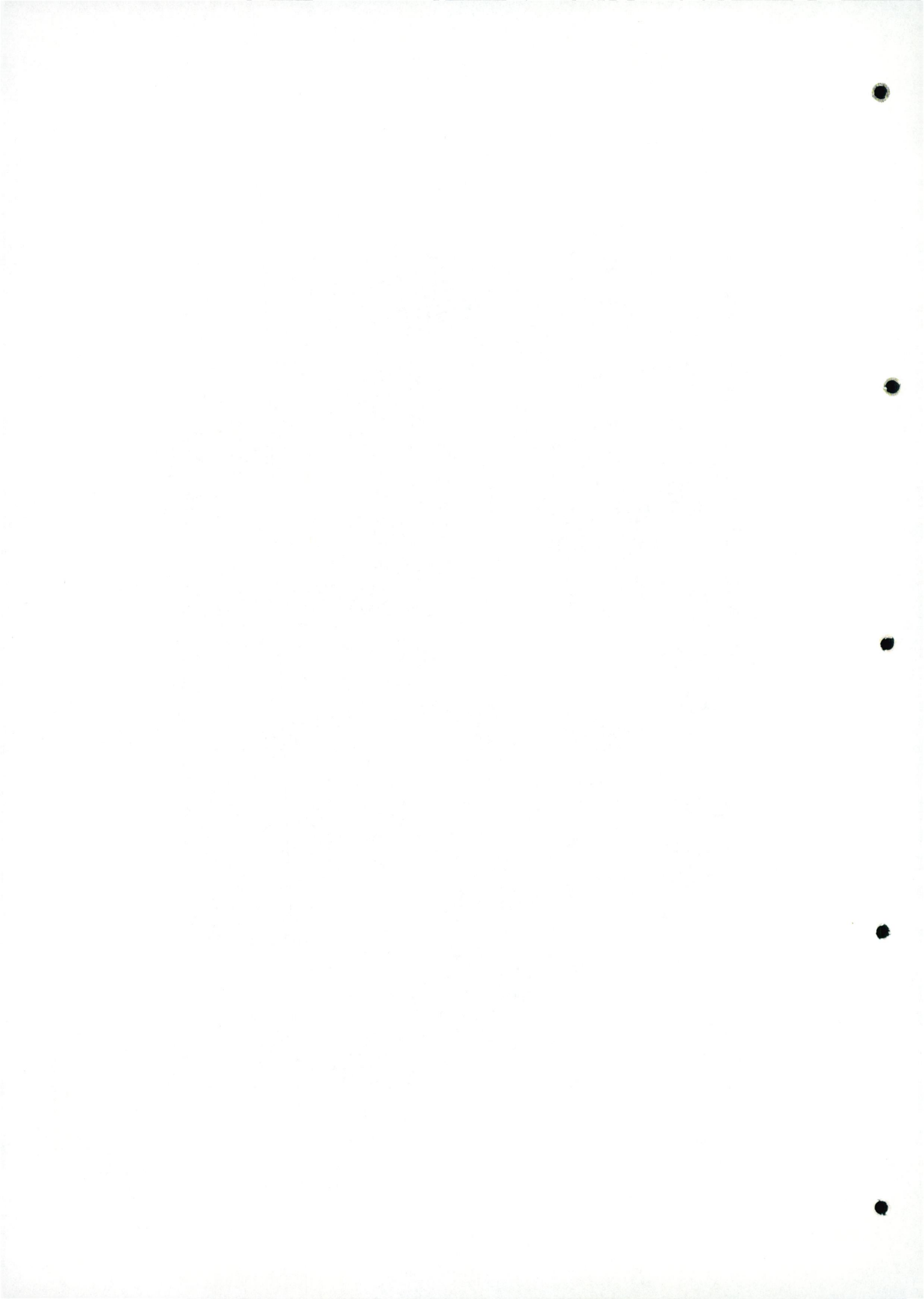






Fig no. 18 - Sinéad O'Connor modelling for John Rocha, 1994. An artist who is patriotic, but has voiced strong opinions on Irish culture.



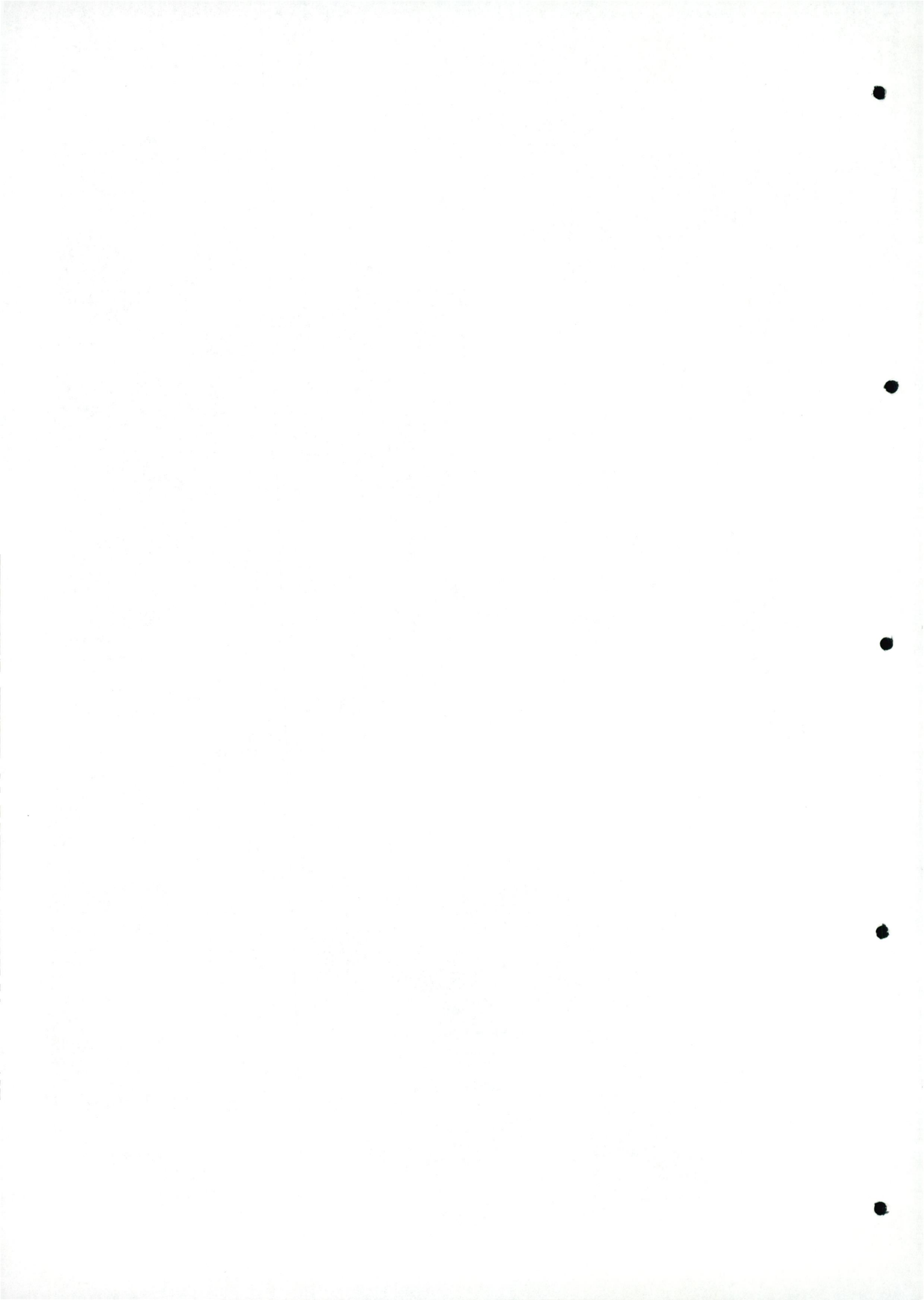




Fig no. 19 - Costumes for 'Riverdance' designed by Jen Kelly, who updated Irish dancing costumes in the same way 'Riverdance' updated Irish dancing.





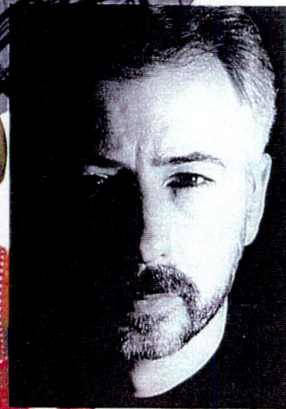
# MODE

## L'accent sur Rochas

Depuis quelques années, la maison Rochas propose une mode à l'image de ses célèbres parfums : fraîche, séduisante, gracieuse. PAR SONIA RACHLINE



“**L**a femme française ? Elle est intelligente, sexy, pas trop pudique, pleine de caractère et... elle a toujours de belles jambes !” Ainsi parle l'Irlandais Peter O'Brien qui, depuis 1990, préside à la destinée de la mode féminine chez Rochas. « Je pense qu'il y a de la place pour toutes les créations. Mais il me semble qu'une chef d'entreprise préfère la discrétion à l'avant-garde, les matières éternelles plutôt que le vinyle. » Et d'ajouter : « C'est terrible, plus je vieillis, plus je ressemble à ma mère ! Mais je suis de plus en plus convaincu qu'on ne peut pas oublier l'histoire de la mode, le modernisme, sans cette mémoire, c'est débile. » Modeste, prêt à s'excuser toujours de n'être que ce qu'il est — un homme de 45 ans qui aime toucher la mousse-veline et ne sait même pas conduire ! —, Peter O'Brien n'en a pas moins une idée précise de ce qu'il entend proposer chez Rochas : de beaux vêtements qui conviennent aux femmes jolies. Une simplicité, faussement simple, 55 morceaux pour une veste, mais ça ne se voit pas. Et des finitions impeccables, boutons passés à la main, doublures tout aussi soignées que l'endroit. Le tout dans des tissus souples, crepe, lin, faille de soie, maille viscose, taffetas. Et dans des tons aux détonances souvent indéfinissables.



« Mes vêtements ne sont ni arbres de Noël, ni branches. Une élégance entre les deux. Je ne veux pas que l'on puisse dire : « Voilà la femme Rochas, habillée Rochas. Je ne veux pas faire du spectacle. »

Ce n'est pas la vocation de Rochas, et ce n'est pas sa nature. J'apprécie la simplicité presque monacale. C'est mon côté bonne sœur irlandaise, peut-être ! Pour cet été, donc, un choix de petites robes ravissantes et épurées : « Je n'aime pas déguiser la silhouette. La robe, c'est facile : d'un seul geste, on est parfaite. »

Vous savez, avec le temps, je me dis que rien ne vaut les bonnes manières. Être impeccable, c'est une formidable politesse. C'est un peu cela que Rochas propose... ■



La féminité déclinée, chez Rochas, par Peter O'Brien : un soir rafraîchissant et de nombreuses robes faciles à porter. Et facilement élégantes.



Fig no. 20 - French Vogue April 1996, article on Irishman Peter O'Brien, designer for Rochas. Irish references and fabrics continue to feature in the designers work.



## **Irish Fashion: A true reflection of Irish Society?**

### **Part (iii) - The emergence of a new style - urban Ireland**

In most countries fashion is a completely urban phenomenon. Irish fashion has always been exceptional in that most of its inspiration is from a rural landscape and lifestyle. This rural inspired fashion was a product of the 1950s. It reflected a society which was at the time predominantly rural. Traditional Irish style was a product of the historical period it was created in. Since the 1950s Ireland has undergone profound economic and cultural changes. Migration from rural to urban means that one third of the population now live in the greater Dublin area. Therefore traditional Irish style is no longer a true reflection of modern Irish culture. One of the most important functions of fashion is to reflect the spirit of the times. If trends in fashion indicate trends in cultural activity then is modern Irish fashion a true reflection of Irish culture?

The Catholic church has played a vital role in the shaping of Irish culture. As part of the constitution of the state our laws are influenced by those of the Catholic church. The church exerts considerable influence on the thinking of the nation. Most of the schools at primary and secondary level are run by religious orders. The Catholic church has always been anti-materialism and has a puritanical attitude to sex and morality. This has naturally affected the country's attitude to fashion. Alone, the notion of spending money on fashion would be





considered self indulgent by the Catholic church, and anything slightly daring or provocative would have been considered vulgar and indecent. With these kind of beliefs drummed into an entire nation it made the establishment of a serious fashion industry impossible .

The influence of the Catholic church in Irish society has diminished greatly in recent years. Proof of this can be seen in the results of recent divorce and abortion referendums. With so many Irish people turning away from the Catholic church, the beliefs and morals within Irish culture are changing. Change comes slowly however and beliefs of the Catholic church has left its mark on Irish fashion.

At a recent John Rocha show one of the models commented on what a relief it was to model for a designer who doesn't use sex to sell his clothes. John Rocha has said that he has always aimed to "*portray women as they wish to be seen*" (McCrum, 1996, p. 59). This can be said of most of Ireland's fashion designers. Many of the clothes are feminine and womanly, but few could be described as sexy.

Every year numerous fashion magazines come to Ireland to do feature photo shoots. The location is usually somewhere in the West of Ireland. The photographers stick to a tried and tested formula of green fields and thatched cottages with the odd elderly farmer, herd of cattle and perhaps a horse as extras. French Vogue published a ten page spread called "Un Volupte Sauvage" in October 1996 which conformed to this perception of Irish fashion (figs 22-26). The mood of this collection of photographs was poetic and mythical. There was a strong focus on the eyes of the models, as they stared dreamily into the camera, transfixed by the natural beauty surrounding them. The garments worn by the



models are by international designers such as Agnes B and Astorino. They have a natural look about them. Natural fabrics such as wool and cotton and knit and woven tweeds in natural colours reflect the surrounding landscape.

This image of Irish fashion is very different to a collection of fashion photographs taken by Perry Ogden for W Magazine for its August 1996 edition, which were a reaction against this kind of fashion image created by French Vogue on October 1996. Ogden was born in England and has spent a lot of time in Ireland. His understanding of the country's contemporary style of dress is clearly evident in his collection of photographs. The photographs break all the rules of the international perception of Irish fashion. So much so that there were written complaints to W Magazine about its portrayal of Ireland. The series of photographs was entitled "The Dubliners". They were taken in Ringsend, a working class area of inner city, Dublin. An unusual mixture of professional models and locals were used. They are all dressed in the current seasons clothing from the international collections. However, the clothes do not look as if they are from Hermes or Christian Lacroix and these designers would probably not approve of the off hand manner in which the clothes are worn. Never the less the clothes are worn with a certain attitude, a street style. Odgen has captured the spirit of urban Irish style in a extraordinarily accurate way. There is a quality about these photographs that could not be anything but Irish. It is in the way the models stand, relaxed but slightly defensive, and tough. This also comes across in the eye contact.





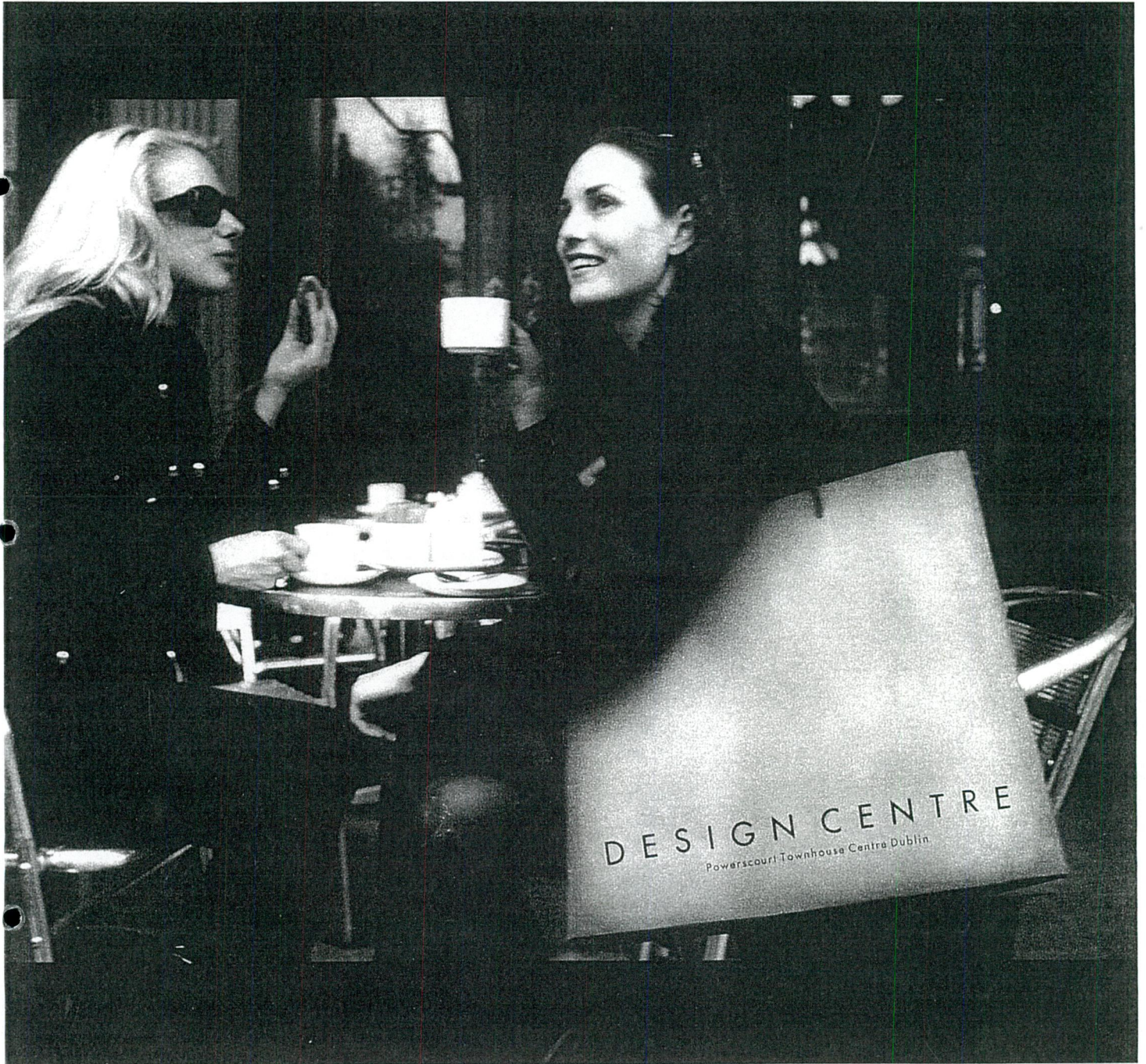


Fig no. 21 - Advertisement for the 'Design Centre' Image Magazine No. 1996.  
The centre provides units for established designers and young designers in the Innovative Designer Forum section.





## UNE VOLUPTÉ SAUVAGE

La maille des champs à l'allure indomptée, voilà une parfaite alternative aux tenues près du corps, citadines et soignées. Une manière aussi de mettre le corps en vacances, libéré de toutes contraintes, loin du style longiligne qui fait l'élégance en ville, grâce à des pulls masculins enfin à nos mesures. Direction plein ouest, donc, pour une balade irlandaise hors des sentiers battus, au cœur d'un Connemara aux allures de lune et de bout du monde, balayé par le vent, la pluie et l'océan. Photos Mikael Jansson.

Fig no. 22 - "Un Volupte Sauvage" . French Vogue Oct. 1996. An example of an international perception of Irish Style. Photographs taken in Connemara.







Fig no. 23 - "Un Volupte Sauvage" French Vogue Oct. 1996







STELLA TENNANT PORTE  
UN AMPLE CARDIGAN  
COL CHÂLE EN DOUBLE  
MOHAIR BLANC  
CASSE TRICOTÉ MAIN.  
**BALENCIAGA LE DIX,**  
SUR UN PULL COL ROULÉ  
EN LAINE BEIGE CHINÉE.  
**BLUES CLUB,** PANTALON  
EN FLANELLE À CARREAUX  
BEIGE, MARRON ET  
ROSE. **ASTORINO,** POUR  
ERIC, PULL EN LAINE CHI-  
NÉE CHOCOLAT VANILLE.  
**AGNÈS B,** ET PANTALON  
SLACK EN MOLESKINE  
NOIRE. **A.B.C. COIFFURES**  
**JANE FUNDGREN** ET  
**MISE EN BEAUTÉ NATA**  
**RINA HANSSON,** CHEZ  
WILSON/WENZEL N.Y.  
RÉALISATION DÉLPHINE  
TRÉANTON ASSISTÉE  
DE PRISCILLA PATRON.

Fig no. 24 - "Un Volupte Sauvage" French Vogue Oct. 1996







DU MOHAIR NOIR, CH-CONTRE, POUR UN MANTEAU A  
COL CHALE, **HERVE LEGER**, ET UN COL ROULE  
CHINE GRIS CLAIR, **A.P.C.**, PANTALON TAILLE BASSE  
EN FLANELLE DE LAINE STRETCH GRISE, **JOSEPH**  
MOGASSINS PATRICK COX, CHAUSSETTES DD  
POUR LUI, PULL EN CACHEMIRE ECRU, **MALO**, SUR  
UN SOUS-PULL EN COTON SEA-ISLAND ECRU,  
**JOHN SMEDLEY**, JEANS 50E EN VELOURS COTELE  
MILLERHAIES BEIGE, **LEVI'S**, CHAUSSURES  
**JOSEPH FENESTRIER**, PAGE DE DROITE, CARDIGAN  
ZIPPE EN CACHEMIRE, LAINE ET SOIE, SUR UN  
PULL COL V EN CACHEMIRE, **SAVERIO PALATELLA**  
JUPE EN FEUTRINE DE LAINE, FENDUE D'UN  
CÔTE, **JIL SANDER**, BOTTINES EN VEAU VELOURS,  
**MICHEL PERRY**, COLLANTS WOLFORD



Fig no. 25 - "Un Volupte Sauvage" French Vogue Oct. 1996



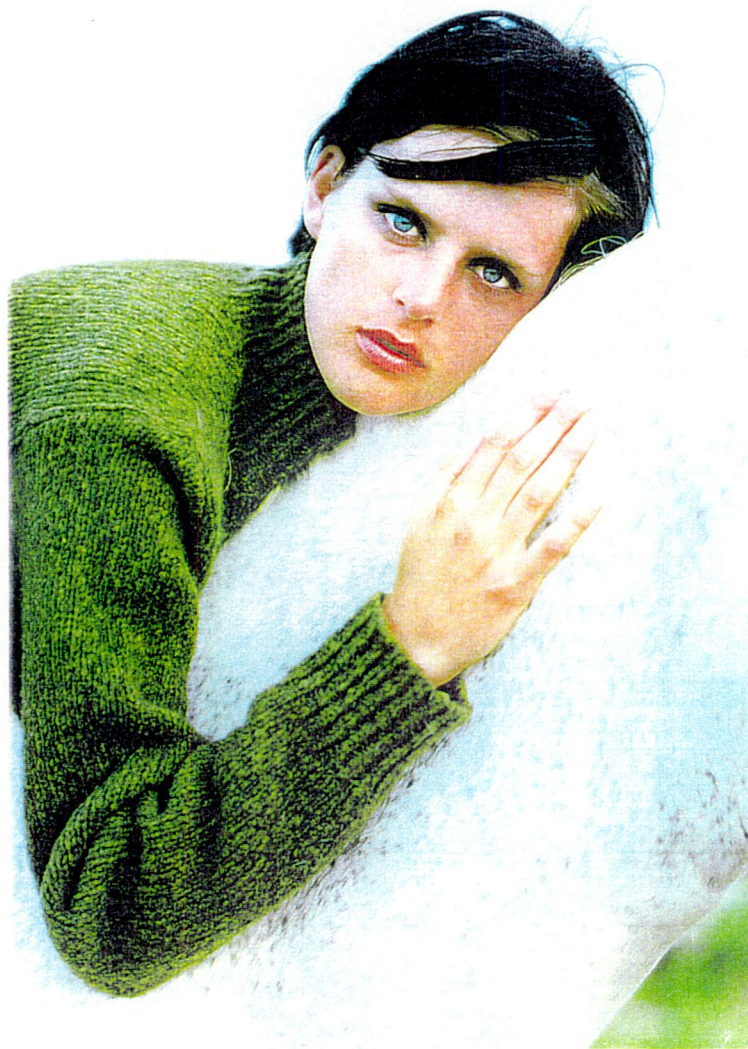


Fig no. 26 - "Un Volupte Sauvage" French Vogue Oct. 1996







Fig no. 27 - Outfit by Gertrude Sampson, 1995. A highly contemporary design which still contains the influence of traditional Irish knitwear.





# The Dubliners

The back streets of Dublin are the perfect environment for fall's gritty style.



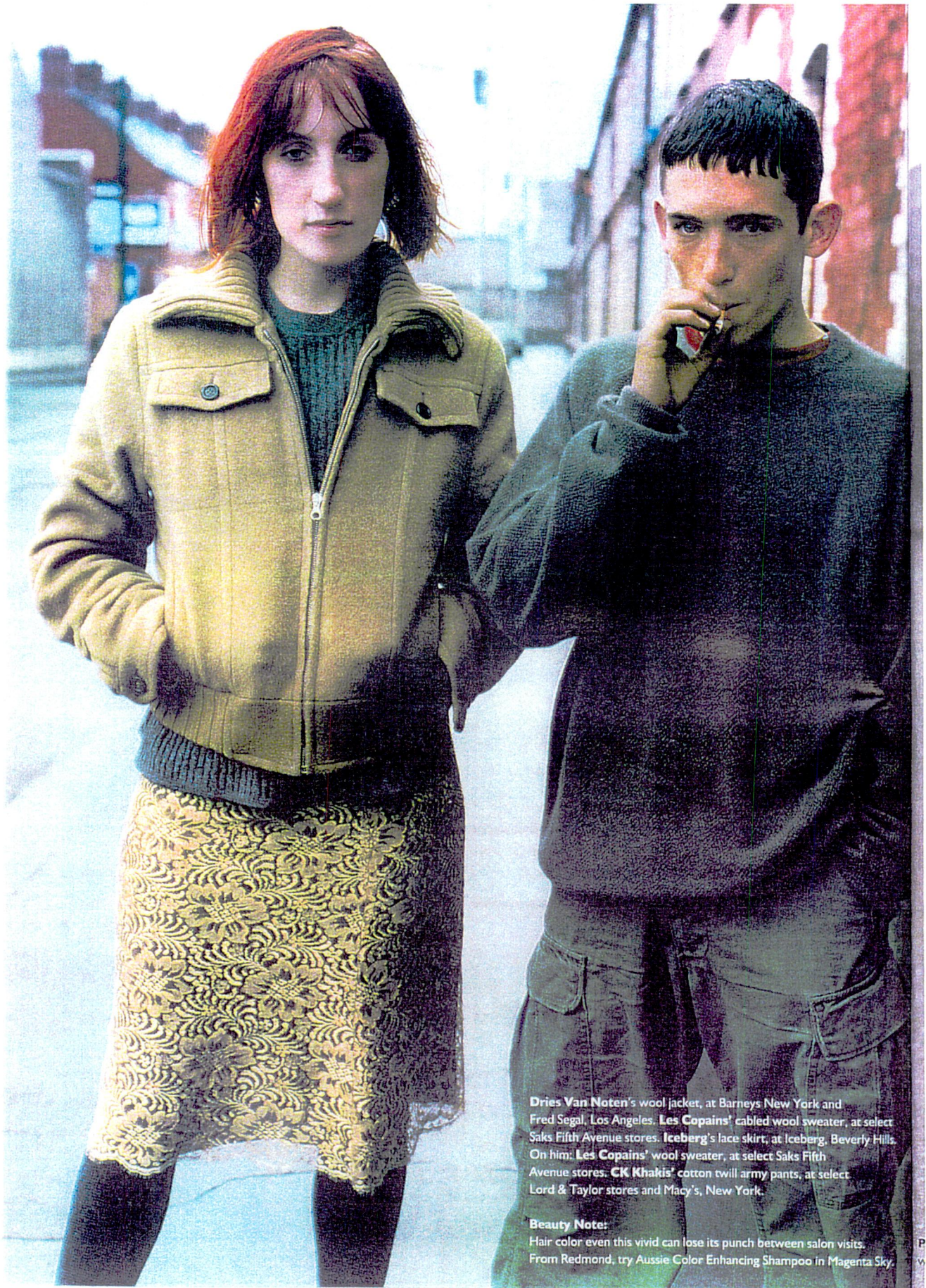
Daryl K's face-trimmed  
tulle shell, at Daryl K;  
Marc Jacobs Look's  
skirt, at Bloomingdale  
Ultimo, Chicago, and  
boutique, New York  
September; Carhartt  
sweatshirt jacket. W  
Petro Zillia. Shoes from

PHOTOGRAPHED BY PERRY OGDEN

Fig no. 28 - "The Dubliners" W Magazine, August 1996. Photographs by Perry Ogden, who shows an understanding of contemporary Irish style.







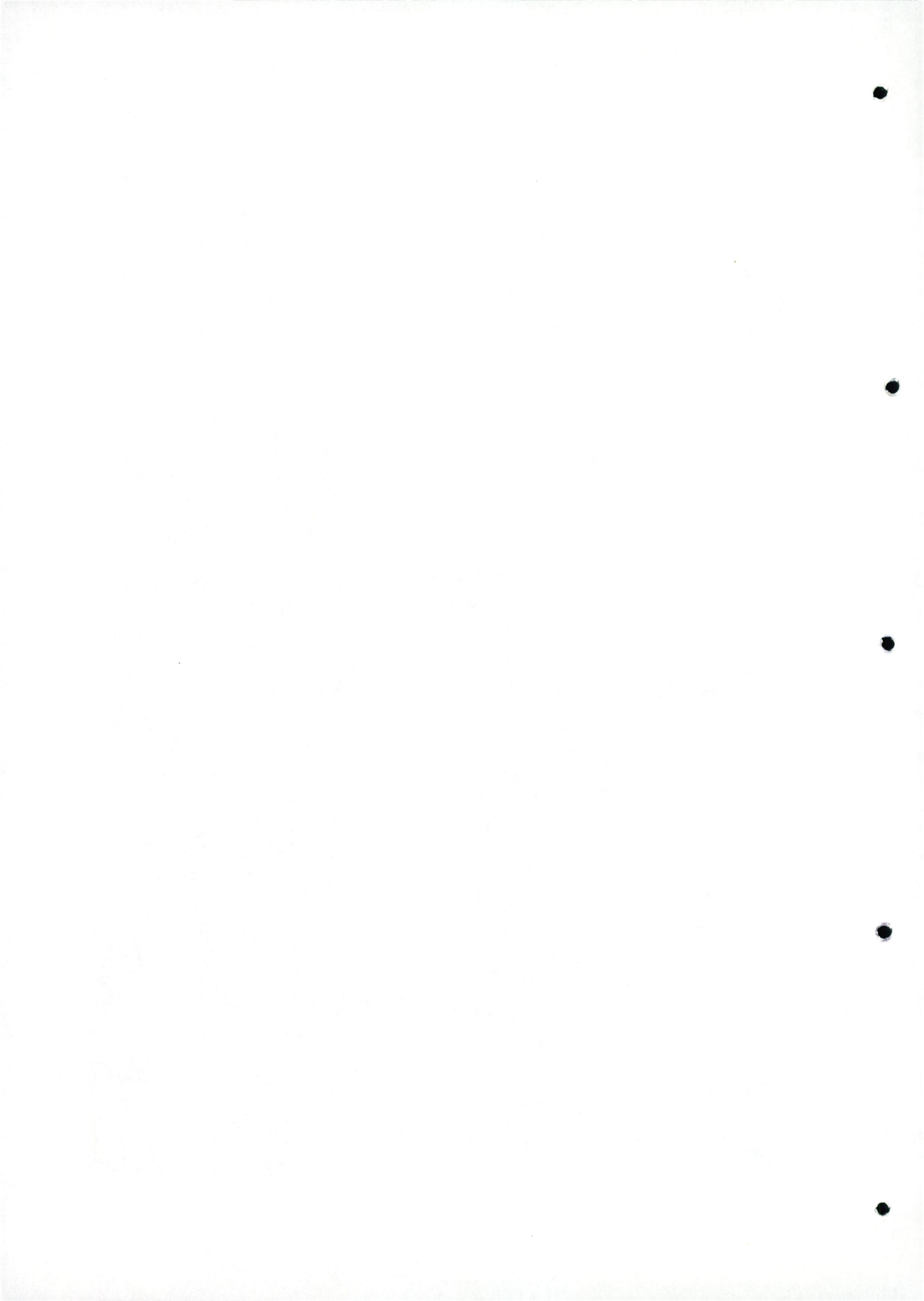
Dries Van Noten's wool jacket, at Barneys New York and Fred Segal, Los Angeles. Les Copains' cabled wool sweater, at select Saks Fifth Avenue stores. Iceberg's lace skirt, at Iceberg, Beverly Hills. On him: Les Copains' wool sweater, at select Saks Fifth Avenue stores. CK Khakis' cotton twill army pants, at select Lord & Taylor stores and Macy's, New York.

**Beauty Note:**

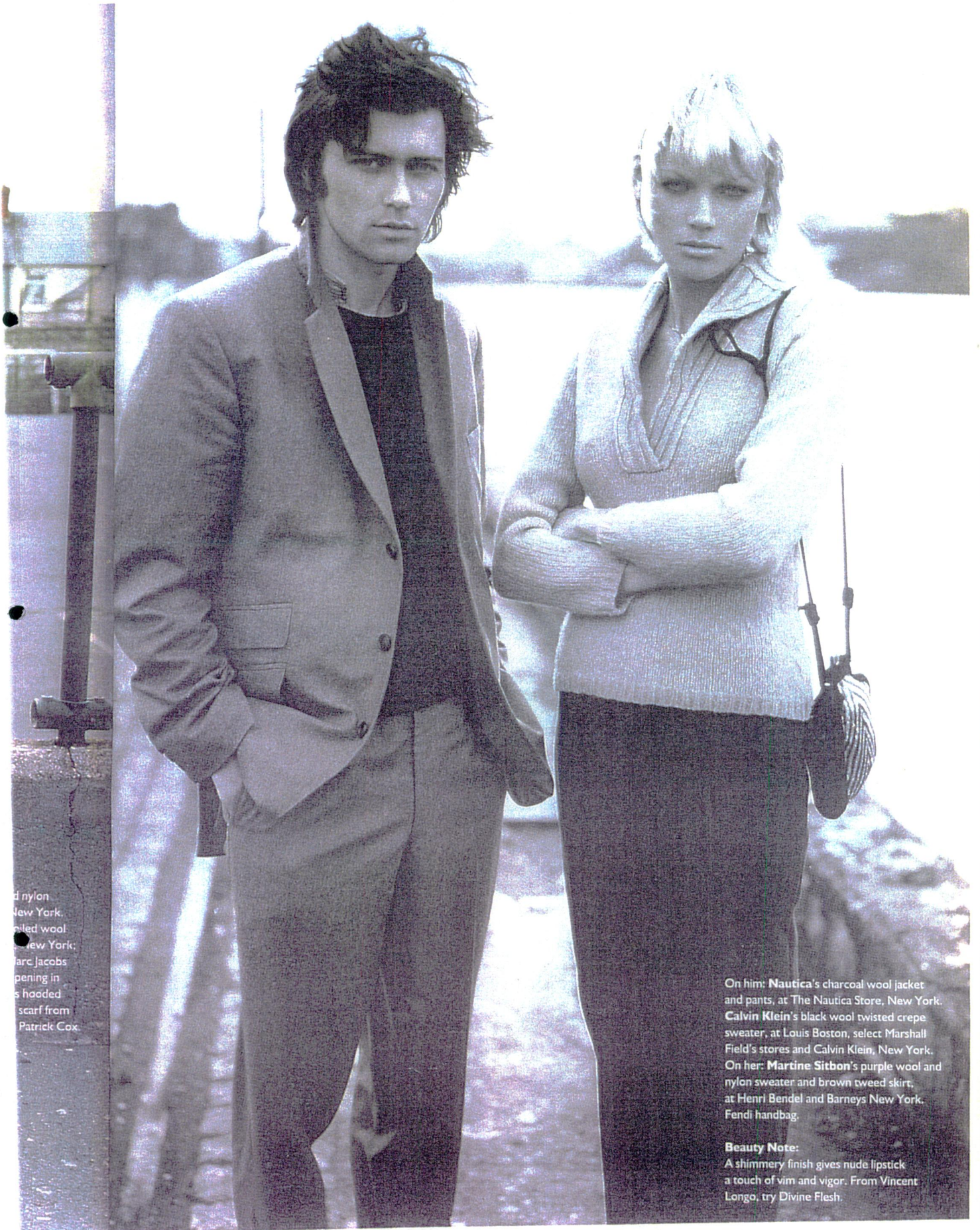
Hair color even this vivid can lose its punch between salon visits. From Redmond, try Aussie Color Enhancing Shampoo in Magenta Sky.

Fig no. 29 - "The Dubliners" W Magazine, August 1996









d nylon  
New York.  
plied wool  
New York;  
Marc Jacobs  
opening in  
s hooded  
scarf from  
Patrick Cox

On him: Nautica's charcoal wool jacket and pants, at The Nautica Store, New York. Calvin Klein's black wool twisted crepe sweater, at Louis Boston, select Marshall Field's stores and Calvin Klein, New York. On her: Martine Sitbon's purple wool and nylon sweater and brown tweed skirt, at Henri Bendel and Barneys New York. Fendi handbag.

**Beauty Note:**  
A shimmery finish gives nude lipstick a touch of vim and vigor. From Vincent Longo, try Divine Flesh.

Fig no. 30 - "The Dubliners" W Magazine, August 1996.









Helmut Lang's black wool coat, khaki merino knit shirt and khaki cotton corduroy pants, at Charivari, New York and Maxfield, Los Angeles

In this feature: Hair by James Brown for John Frieda, New York; makeup by Lucia Peroni for Trish McEvoy; models: Shirley Mallmann/Women and Tanga/Metropolitan Paris. Styled by Michel Botbol.

Fig no. 31 - "The Dubliners" W Magazine, August 1996.







## **Conclusion**

The recent success of Irish designers cannot be undervalued. Irish fashion has proved itself to be more than just a passing trend. It has stood up to the challenge of the business world and new technology and proved itself an equal in the international market.

Modern Irish fashion has responded to changes in trends, and when traditional Irish styles appeal diminished designers offered an alternative.

Both John Rocha and Paul Costelloe are launching glass ware under their own labels. This is part of a world-wide trend to offer an entire lifestyle under one label. Fashion empires such as Donna Karan and Calvin Klein have been particularly successful at marketing everything from cosmetics, interior furnishings to scented candles. Donna Karan even has planned to open an hotel under the DKNY label. Paul Costelloe believes the Irish lifestyle is particularly suitable for this type of marketing.

A world-wide trend in fashion towards an emphasis on fabric, on texture, fabric manipulation and innovative fabrics has lent itself well to the design process and philosophies of modern Irish designers who have been letting the fabric dictate the form for years, and have always had a softened, textured quality to their clothes. However if and when fashion reacts against this trend, this will be the true test to the survival of modern Irish fashion.

Whether Irish fashion will continue to express cultural identity is difficult to predict, Ireland is no longer isolated. The world has become



a global village. The media projects images from around the world, including fashion images. However, I think these influences can only be beneficial to Irish fashion. Ireland has often been accused of being too provincial. This may have been true even five years ago, but Dublin in particular has become increasingly cosmopolitan. This change has been reflected in Irish fashion. McCrum talked about maintaining “the global requirements of style with undeniably national characteristics. Perhaps this is the challenge for modern Irish designers.





## **Bibliography**

### **Books**

- Ash, Juliet. Chic Thrills, London, Pandora Press, 1992.
- Breward, Christopher, The Culture of Fashion, New York, Manchester University Press, 1994.
- Carter, R.W.G. Ireland, Contemporary Perspectives as a land and its People, London, Routledge, 1989
- Dunlevy, Mairead. Dress in Ireland London, BT Batsford Ltd., 1989.
- Hollander, Anne. Seeing through Clothes USA, Viking Penguin Ltd., 1978
- Kennedy, Brian, Ireland Art into History, Ireland, Trinity House, , 1994
- Lurie, Alison. The Language of Clothes, New York, Random House, , 1981.
- Mc Crum, Elizabeth. Fabric and Form, Irish Fashion since 1950. UK, Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1996.
- Mc Quillan, Deidre. The Aran Sweater, London, The Appletree Press Ltd., 1993.
- Perna, Rita. Fashion Forecasting, USA, Fairchild Publications. 1987.
- Polhemus, Ted. Street Style London, Thames & Hudson Inc., 1994.
- Soloman, Michael R. The Psychology of Fashion, New York, Health and Company, 1985.

### **Documentaries**

- "The Interview" Interview with Paul Costello BBC 1. September 1st, 1996.
- "Profile of John Rocha" RTE 1, 1994.

### **NCAD Degree Theses**

- Byrne, Siobhan. The Development of the Irish through two major fashion figures. T1077 NCAD, 1993.
- Gillan, Mary Avril. What is the future for art and culture in Ireland T398 NCAD 1986.
- Heany, Fiona. Working Dress: did Irish woman power dress in the 1980's. T1604. 1996.
- Howlin, Louise. John Rocha a cultural Compendium T1472 NCAD 1995.
- Marr, Janice. The Grafton Academy of Dress Designing. P. Clotworthy, a pioneer in Irish fashion T1621 NCAD 1996.
- O'Laghlin, The Internal Battle for an Irish Identity, NCAD, 1991, T822.

### **Magazine and Newspaper Articles**

- Fearon, Francesci. "The Haute Favourite" Image. No. 1996 page 42-46.
- Ganem, Mark. Irish Times W. Magazine Dec. 1996 page 220-232.
- Harris, Constance. "Beyond the Mainstream", Sunday Independent October 27th 1996





- Harris, Constance. "The Sweet smell of success", Sunday Independent, Oct. 1996 page 20.
- Jansson, Mikael. Une Volupte Sauvage. French Vogue, Oct. 1996. page 118-128.
- O'Byrne, Robert, "An anti Style of our own", The Irish Times Nov. 12th 1996, page 13.
- Merrett, Robert, "A feel for fabrics" Textile Design Review [XLV], International Textiles, Nov. '96.
- O'Byrne, Robert, "Four from the North", The Irish Times Nov. 13th 1996 page 9.
- O'Byrne, Robert, "Land of Poetry and Purity" The Irish Times, Nov. 12th 1996 page 17.
- O'Byrne, Robert. "Is there such a thing as Irish Style?", The Irish Times, Nov. 11th 1996 page 11.
- O'Laighin, Eoin. The Eternal Battle for an Irish Identity. T822 NCAD 1991.
- Ogden, Penny. "The Dubliners" W. Magazine, August 1996, page 44-55.
- Phelan, Philip. Preceltic Irish design a discussion & evaluation of design in Ireland from 9000 BC to 2000 BC. T856 NCAD 1991.
- Rachline, Sonia. "L'accent sue Rochas" , French Vogue April 1996 page 58.

