THERESA McKENNA AND LOUIS LE BROCQUY: TAPESTRY WORK

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B. DES. 1997

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Submitted to the Faculty of
History of Art and Design and Complimentary Studies
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Bachelor of Design in Textiles (Woven Textiles)

1997

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Frances Ruane for her direction and advice in the writing of this thesis, private, public and corporate collections who allowed visits and photographs and Theresa McKenna for her time and co-operation.

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Fig. 3.8 The Blasket Island Visitors Centre Tapestry, Theresa McKenna, 1997.

INTRODUCTION

"Tapestry is one of the oldest and most seductive forms of woven textiles" **(Philips, 1994, P. 14)**. As a weave student I'm using this thesis as an opportunity to research tapestry and, in particular, two distinct approaches to tapestry design, the artist/designer and artist/weaver. For this purpose I have chosen two Irish contemporary artists, Louis Le Brocquy and Theresa McKenna, both of whom have been involved in tapestry. Le Brocquy is a painter, who has designed tapestry pieces, most of which have been executed by the weaving group at Aubusson in France. McKenna, on the other hand, is an artist-weaver. She both designs the tapestry and executes it.

There are numerous artists throughout Europe and America whom I could have used to illustrate the two approaches to tapestry design . Many painters have had the same input as Le Brocquy has had, artists such as John Piper, Henry Moore, Raoul Dufy and Graham Sutherland, to name but a few. The group of artist/weavers is also wide and varied, for example: Ursula Plewke-Schwidt, Magdalene Aba kanowicz, Ritzi and Peter Jacobi and Sam Gilliam.

In order to achieve focused and intimate insight into the two approaches to tapestry I have decided to concentrate specifically on Le Brocquy and McKenna. There are several significant reasons for my choice of artists. Due to the fact that both Le Brocquy and McKenna are established in Ireland, their work had been documented by art critics in the national newspapers and this material was available in Dublin. I obtained further information from exhibition catalogues and artbooks. With the choice of these two Irish artists I had the added bonus of being able to locate the majority of their tapestries here in Ireland. I was able to go to the buildings where they hung - public and corporate buildings, visitors' centres, hotels

and factories. Therefore, I had the benefit of being able to see the woven pieces for myself. I was able to examine the weaving, the textures and the combination of materials and their qualities. I could see the play of light on the surfaces. It was only by going to see these pieces in their environment that I could judge and feel the impact or role of the tapestries in the area and space. It was possible to see how successfully the tapestries enhanced the site. The tapestries themselves contain all vital information required for this thesis. Also, I was extremely fortunate to be able to visit McKenna while she worked in her studio and interview her at length about her ideas, interests, influences and methods of working.

This research hopes to find out if there is any relationship between the imagery used by both Le Brocquy and McKenna due to their connection to Ireland, its landscape, mythology and history. However, before examining Le Brocquy and McKenna's work closely, it is essential to firstly put it in context.

Who / What has led the way ?

It would be impossible to mention and discuss all the important Figures in tapestry in this small section. Therefore, I have chosen to only reflect upon those key figures who have directly influenced McKenna and Le Brocquy in their tapestry work. I have selected Jean Lurcat and Archie Brennan, both of whom have had world wide influence on the techniques of tapestry and have regenerated a medium which has exciting and endless possibilities.

Jean Lurcat (1892 - 1966) was one of the prime artists responsible for actively condemning tapestries which looked like woven paintings. Le Brocquy regards Lurcat as one of the greats. Le Brocquy spoke of him with the greatest respec: "His supreme role in the revival of the art of tapestry, deliriously sick for three centuries, has earned him our profound recognition

.....but it is his historical, his symptomatic importance which primarily demands our attention today". **(White, 1986)**

A few years before the Second World War, Lurcat met with the weavers of Aubusson in France. He worked closely with these weavers. Between them, they came up with a method to release tapestry from the constraints of the previous centuries. Tapestry had previously been viewed as a substitute to paintings. Weavers had to laboriously copy a painting, every line and brush stroke. The weavers were reduced to the status of factory workers.

Lurcat was inspired by tapestries from Pre-Rennaissance times, when tapestries were regarded as more precious than paintings. To bring back the importance of this woven medium, Lurcat banned the use of perspective, and reduced the colour palette to about 45 hues.. He also insisted on using coarser yarn so that the quality of the tapestry could never be mistaken for a painting.

"Tapestry is a coarse, vigorous, organic fabric, supple certainly, but of a less yielding suppleness than silk or linen. It is heavy ..it is heavy with matter and heavy with meaning. But it is more, it is heavy with intentions. It is this which secures its magnificence to man and therefore to the building". **(Philips1994,Pls)**

Lurcat was committed to bringing the status of the weaver from that of a factory worker, to a recognised creative craftperson. These weavers worked for years with the materials. They knew best how to use the techniques of weaving to produce amazing results. Their input was crucial in order to produce a successful piece.

The original painted design was handed by Lurcat to the weaver . The painter corresponded closely with the weaver and accepted that the tapestry was going to change in this new medium.The original painting was then roughly sketched up to scale and the weaver interpreted the colour into the piece. Le Brocquy's designs for tapestries have followed this approach. His close working relationship is evident in the success of the tapestries.

One of Lurcat's other most influential achievements was his launching of the Tapestry Biennale Exhibition at Lausanne in the early 1960s. The Biennale Exhibition, which started with a required minimum of 10 square meters for an entrant, offered a showspace for new innovative techniques and weaving concepts. It was this exhibition which encouraged the freedom of expression of materials and structure. The launch of this exhibition has brought us the Fibre Art movement.

Meanwhile, Archie Brennan started weaving at the Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh, in 1948. The Dovecat Studios were fast on the heels of Lurcat's methods. While Lurcat was the forerunner in Europe, Archie Brennan, as manager of the Dovecot Studios in 1957, spearheaded the revival of tapestry in Britain. Brennan held dear the same concerns as Lurcat. Brennan has had worldwide influence on tapestry weaving during this century. He concentrated on being innovative, using new weaving techniques and incorporating new exciting yarn and unconventional fibres. He found that a close working relationship and understanding between the painter/designer and the weaver was vital to produce the best tapestry. Brennan also encouraged the staff weavers to design and create their own pieces.

Brennan's remarkable influence is being spread and expanded on, by his involvement in the Tapestry Department at Edinburgh College of Art. It is this

involvement which directly relates to this research. It was through his work and guidance at the Edinburgh Art College that McKenna came in contact with him, as one of his students.

It is interesting to note that Lurcat began as a painter and then dedicated his career to improving the connection/relationship, between the painter and weaver. Brennan did his apprenticeship as a weaver and because of this, he sought to innovate in relation to weaving techniques. Both men brought similar concerns but differing aspects to the tapestry revival.

The way in which Le Brocquy and McKenna's work reflects these two approaches will be looked at more closely. Through this thesis I want to delve into the use of imagery, the role of materials and concepts in the work of Le Brocquy and McKenna. It is also important to examine how public buildings and establishments have chosen to use their tapestries in the interior of their buildings.

CHAPTER ONE

Louis Le Brocquy's influences, use of colour and imagery.

Le Brocquy is first and foremost a painter, an Irish painter who is obsessed with the head image and its mystical and spiritual power. For Le Brocquy, "the head is an instrument to reveal a more abstract concept of being which hovers below the surface". **(Ruane, 1980, Intro)**. His fascination with the head image and history was the creative source for his 'Táin' series of tapestries. Due to the dominant role of the head image in his tapestries, it is therefore vital to explore Le Brocquy's personal identification with the head and how it came about.

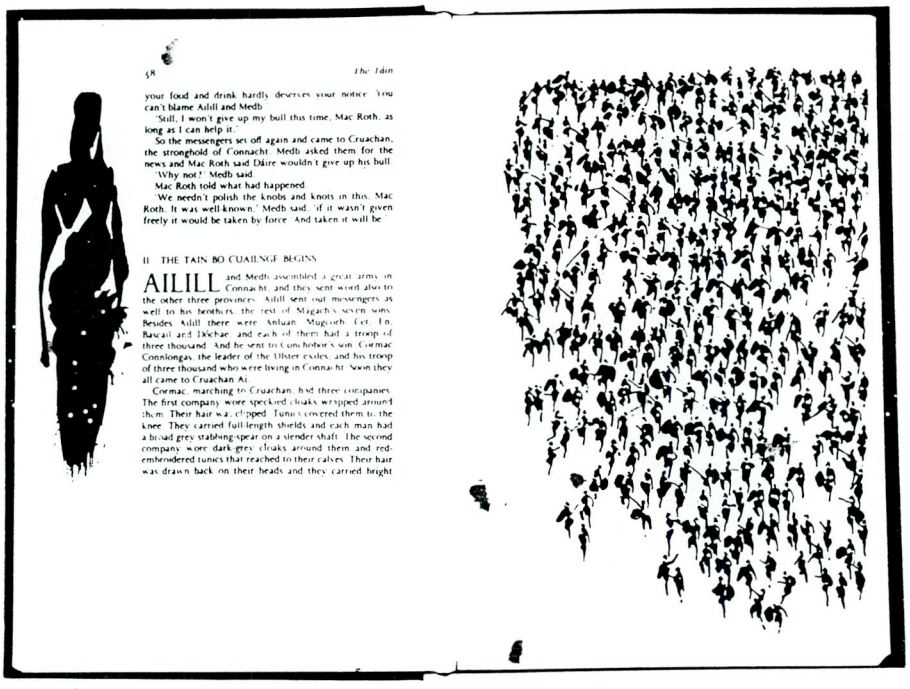
Le Brocquy has written and spoken extensively about the experience of this powerful first encounter with the ancient head cult. In 1964, during a grey period in his painting, he visited Paris. In the Museé de l'Homme a display of Polynesian heads triggered him to research and explore their history and meaning. Through this exploration, he discovered a link with the Irish celts. Both these cultures were deeply rooted in the head-cult of pre-christian times. As Le Brocquy told Anne Crookshank, a Professor of Art History at Trinity College, "Like the Celts I tend to regard the head as the magic box containing the spirit. Enter that box (the head), enter behind the billowing curtain of the face and you have the whole landscape of the spirit". **(Crookshank, 1981, P23).**

Le Brocquy gained great strength and inspiration from this deep outward and inward search after which the head became of prime importance in his work. "Le Brocquy added the double revelation of the Polynesian and the Celtic heads to his own vivid sense of the loneliness of paleolithic man, lacking any known past and therefore any conception of his future, any sense of security of tenure with a continuing race-memory. The isolation of early man and its physical expression in the head, native to his ancestral

Celts, invades all his work - painting, graphics and tapestry". **(Russell, 1981, P.45).**

The ancient Irish epic The Táin was newly translated in 1969, from the old Irish, by the poet Thomas Kinsella. The Táin was illustrated by Le Brocquy in a proliferation of superb black brush drawings, such as **Fig. 1 and Fig. 12** which the artist modestly describes as "shadows thrown by the text". **(Kinsella, 1969, P.8)** It was this intimate and intense involvement with the Táin epic which deepened Le Brocquy's personal interpretation and response to the legend for his series of tapestries based on the Táin epic.

Le Brocquy said, , "It was really a kind of game in which I tried to allow vestiges or fossilised remains of the saga to emerge" **(Tete a Téte, Sunday Press, 20/7/80)**



58 *The Táin*

your food and drink hardly deserves your notice. You can't blame Ailill and Medb.'

'Still, I won't give up my bull this time, Mac Roth, as long as I can help it.'

So the messengers set off again and came to Cruachan, the stronghold of Connacht. Medb asked them for the news and Mac Roth said Dáire wouldn't give up his bull.

'Why not?' Medb said.

Mac Roth told what had happened.

'We needn't polish the knobs and knots on this, Mac Roth. It was well known,' Medb said, 'if it wasn't given freely it would be taken by force. And taken it will be.'

II THE TÁIN BÓ CUAILNGE BEGINS

AILILL and Medb assembled a great army in Connacht and they sent word also to the other three provinces. Ailill sent out messengers as well to his brothers, the rest of Magach's seven sons. Besides Ailill there were Anluan, Mugroth, Cet, En, Rascail and Dáchar, and each of them had a troop of three thousand. And he sent to Conchobor's son, Cormac Conlongas, the leader of the Ulster exiles, and his troop of three thousand who were living in Connacht. Soon they all came to Cruachan Ai.

Cormac, marching to Cruachan, had three companies. The first company wore speckled cloaks wrapped around them. Their hair was clipped. Tunics covered them to the knee. They carried full-length shields and each man had a broad grey stabbing-spear on a slender shaft. The second company wore dark-grey cloaks around them and red-embroidered tunics that reached to their calves. Their hair was drawn back on their heads and they carried bright

A

B

C

A. Opening, pages 58-59
***The Táin*, Dolmen Editions**
Dublin, 1969.

B. black ink brush drawing
***The Táin*, Dolmen Editions**
Dublin 1969, Page 2.

C. black ink brush drawing
***The Táin,* Dolmen Editions**
Dublin 1969, Page 61.

Le Brocquy illustrations for Thomas Kinsella's Táin, 1969, (Fig 1.1)

D,E,F,
Brush drawings
The Táin, Dolmen Editions, Dublin
1969, Pages 151, 152, 153.

G,
Brush drawing
The Táin, Dolmen Editions, Dublin
1969, Page 52.

(Fig. 1.2) Le Brocquy illustrations for Thomas Kinsella's Táin, 1969.

James White a former Director of the National Gallery of Ireland believes that "Le Brocquy the painter and Le Brocquy the designer of tapestries, are two quite different men". **(White, 1975, P.1)** This is a point worth exploring further. If we look at one of Le Brocquy's paintings(**Fig. 1.3**)we can see the painterly qualities which he utilises. White is the dominant colour and all other colours are gently and sparingly applied, to suggest an image. Everything is vague with blurred and nondefined edges. The painting suggests that an image has been captured but it is too powerful and mysterious to be completely held on the canvas. If one compares the painting of **Fig. 1.3** to the tapestry of **Fig. 1.4** it is very possible to agree with White. The image of the head in the tapestry, is graphic. Bold, brave shapes are used to make the images which are strengthened by the confident use of vibrant, flat colour. The graphic imagery and colours of the tapestry give the sense of spontaneous, energetic and non-restrained application. The painting has a slower cautious more obscure and mystical quality. **Fig. 1.3** shows the style of painting for which Le Brocquy is known. Not to take away from the painting, the tapestriry takes a different approach, showing a conscious change of imagery which Le Brocquy chose to suit the weaving process. Le Brocquy believes the essential difference is rooted in the two disciplines.

In an interview with Harriet Cooke, he described his involvement with tapestry as something he had "rather stumbled into by accident". **(Cooke, Irish Times, 25/5/73)**. It began by a commission from the Edinburgh Weavers in 1948. After this he designed several tapestries and gave them to the weavers at 'Tabard Freres et Soeurs', Aubusson, France. Speaking about designing tapestries, Le Brocquy told John Russell that he "always found it a kind of recreation, involving completely different problems, it is refreshing in the sense that one is exhausted in a different way". **(Russell, 1981, P.32)** Le

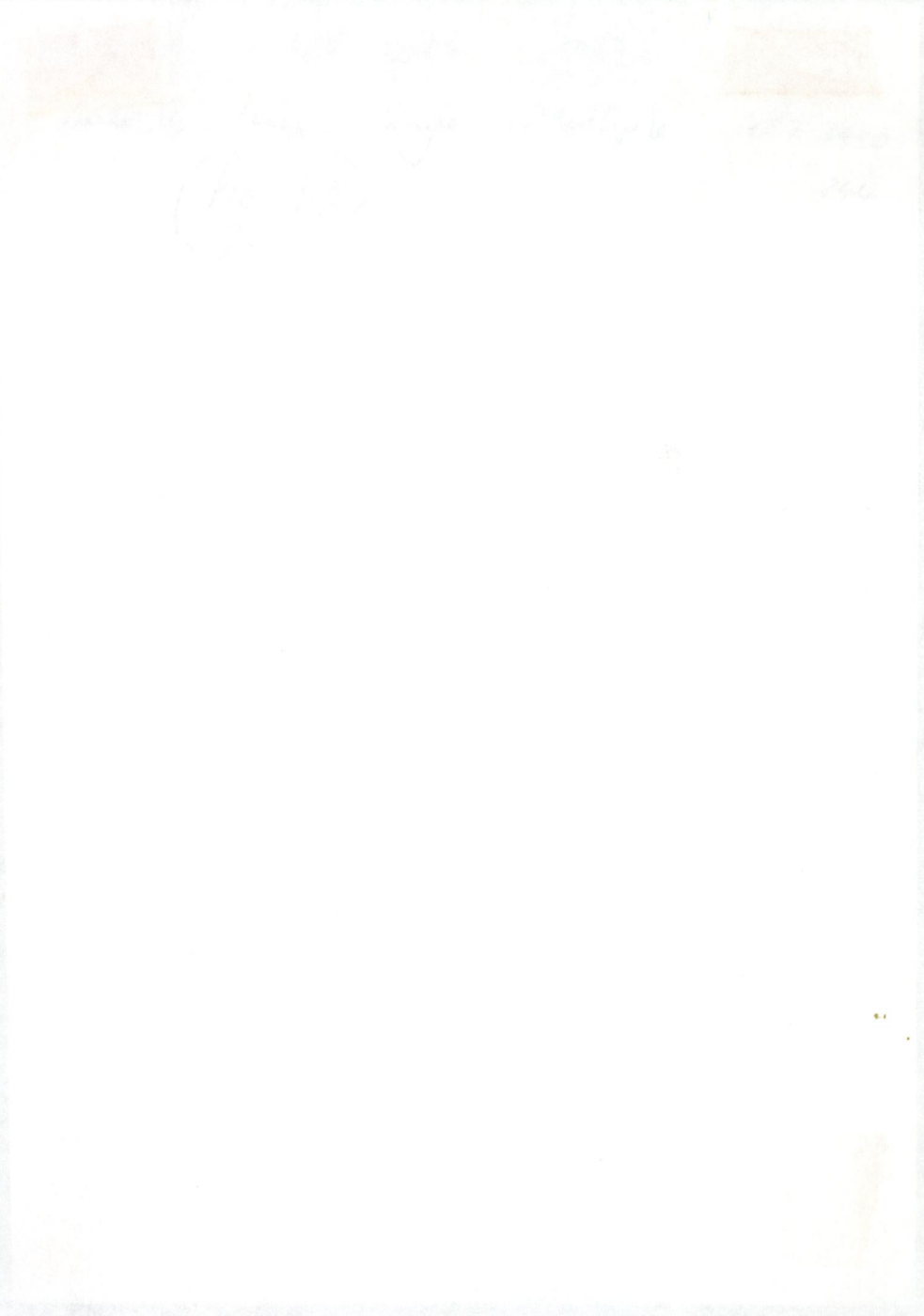
Brocquy also told Cooke that there was another aspect of designing a tapestry which is very exciting for the painter.

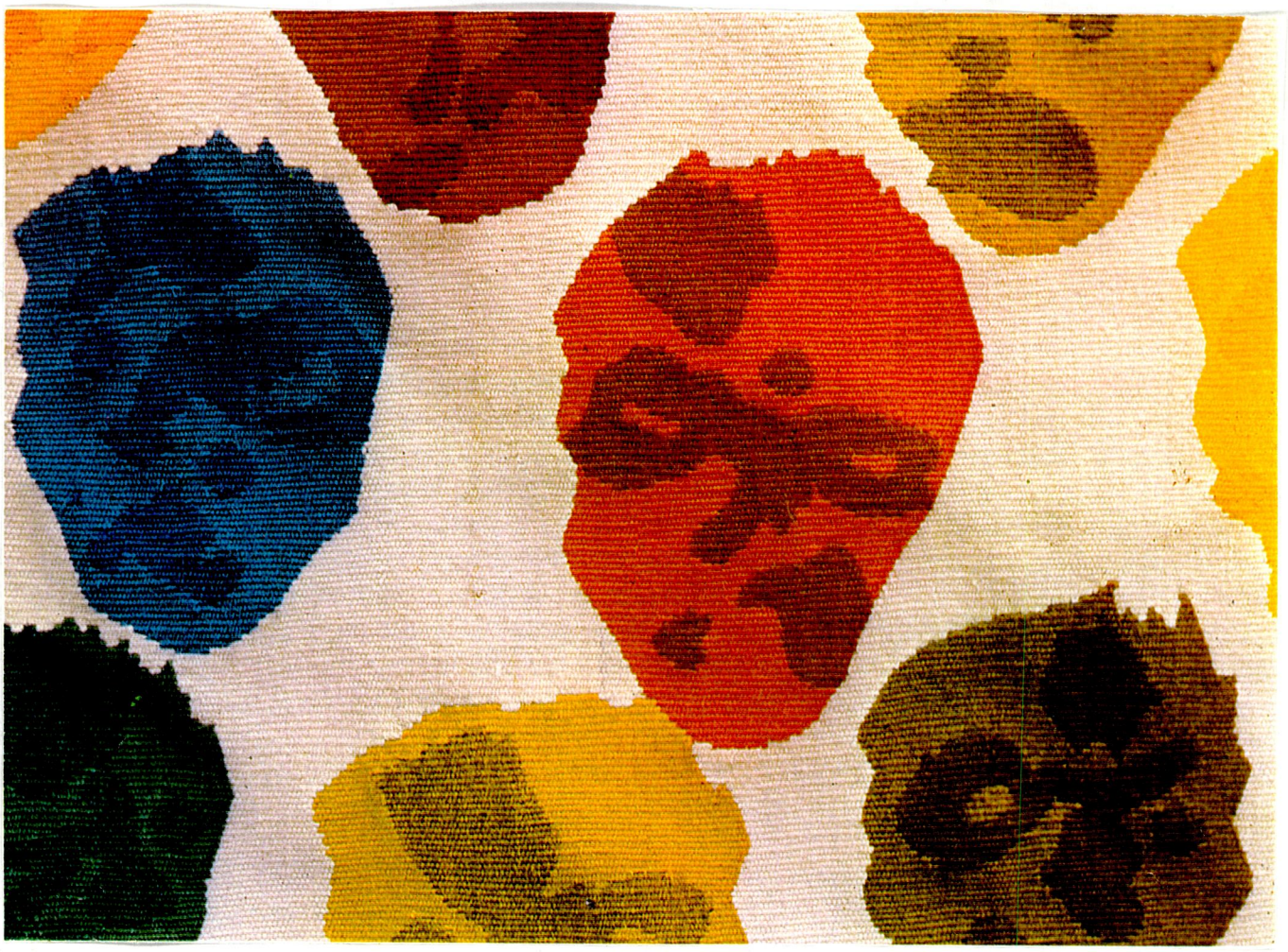
> It is the same aspect which is exciting, say, to the japanese Satsumo Potter, when he puts his jar in the oven and waits on tender hooks for it to come out. It always comes out a little different from what he had imagined and sometimes he has wonderful surprises. The method I use is a system of notation, a linear design which is numbered in the colours of a range of wools. Although one can visualise what one is doing, to a certain extent, when the tapestry is palpably there, this causes an independent birth of something, and that is so contrary to the whole involved process of painting, that it is rather refreshing.
>
> **(Cooke, Irish Times, 25/5/73).**

Anne Madden, (The Artists wife) as a close observer of the process, noted,

> The design was thus conceived like a musical score, in initially imperceptible colour indicated by signs. The realisation of the woven work added its own surprise to the original graphic conception.
>
> **(Madden, 1994, P.94).**

(Fig 1.3) Image of W.B.Yeats, Louis Le Brocquy 1975.





(Fig. 1.4) The Táin: The History of the Táin (detail) 407 X 610 cm, Louis Le Brocquy, 1970.

Le Brocquy's first 'Táin' tapestry was commissioned by the architects Scott Tallon Waller in 1970 for P.J.Carroll & Co's. cigarette factory in Dundalk, Co. Louth. While the Táin epic may not relate to cigarettes, the factory is situated close to the area where the legendary Táin took place. For this commission, Le Brocquy was initially faced with the task of designing a tapestry to cover 1 407cm X 610cm area for the foyer of the factory.

The tapestry is a mass of randomly coloured heads, which from a distance look like blobs. At first glance it is an overwhelming piece; nothing is clear and easily recognisable. The impact is similar to the feeling one gets when approaching a large crowd or group of unknown people, coming in the opposite direction. The approaching mass has a strength and unquestionable presence. When the viewer is interested or curious enough to look closely and carefully, the viewer is rewarded with an amazing array of individual faces bearing unique and powerful expressions.

A detail(**Fig. 1.4**)from the tapestry, illustrates the point. Nothing in the facial expression is definite; it is open to personal interpretation. My feeling is that within the orange head, there is a defiant, determined being or spirit which is raging to move forward. On the other hand, the section of the dark yellow head above this, to the right, gives the impression of shock and pain. The blue head seems disillusioned and gloomy. According to tapestry artist Theresa McKenna, "I've seen whole tapestries that weren't as interesting as one of these little faces .....they're absolutely wonderful." **(Marron, McKenna Interview, Nov. 96.)** These heads are oblivious of their surrounding neighbours. The heads are facing the viewer with an amazing intensity.

(Fig. 1.5) The Táin: Hosting of the Táin, Louis Le Brocquy, 1970.

Le Brocquy explained,

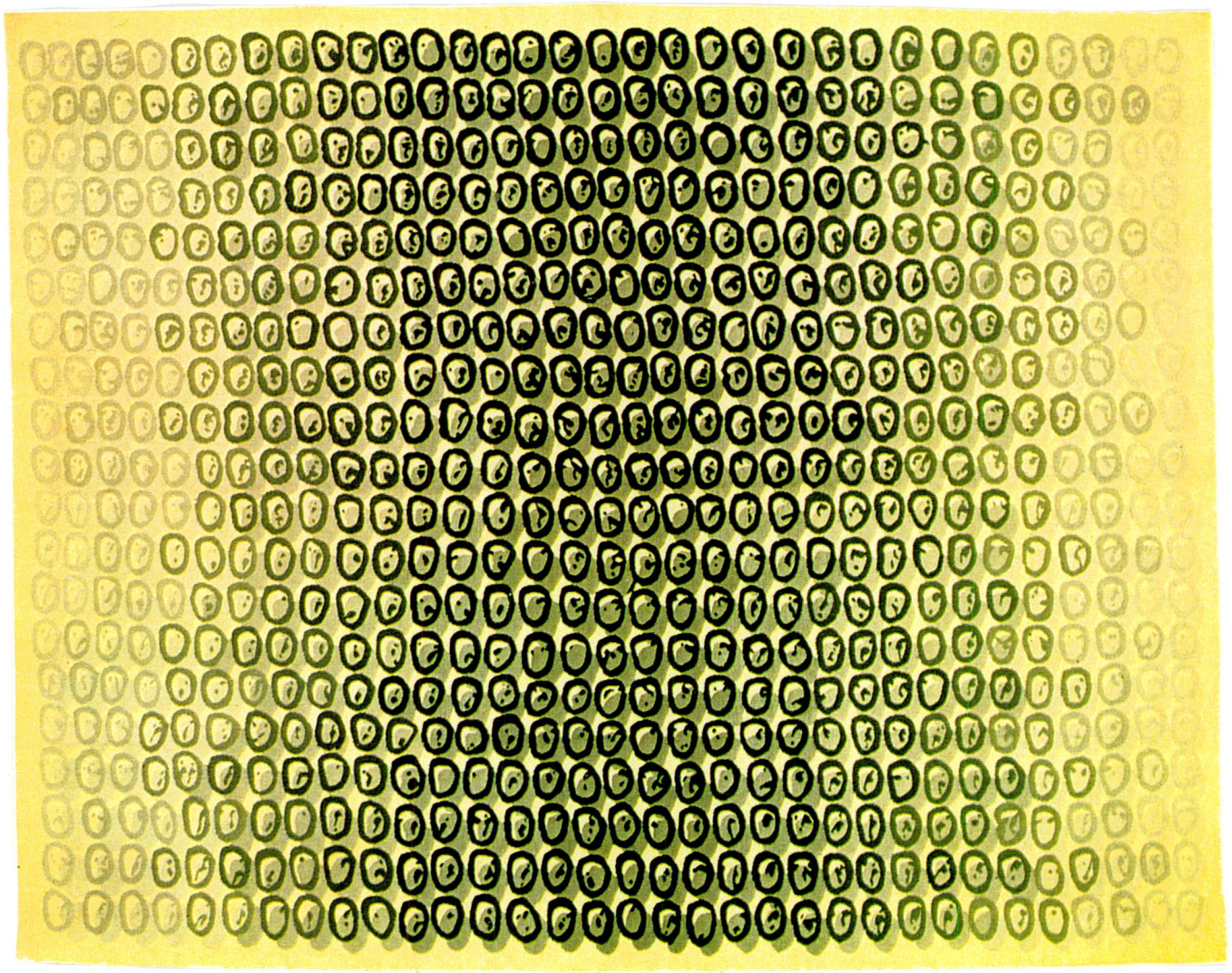
> I have tried to produce a sort of group or mass emergenvce of human presence. Features uncertain merely shadowed blobs or patches but vaguely analogous perhaps in terms of woven colour to the weathered, enduring stone bossheads of Clonfert or Entremont or of Dysert O'Dea. This poses a difficult pictorial problem, pictorially a mass of individuals conscious of each other, implies incident better left to photography, perhaps. In Clonfert each individual head is conscious only of the viewer vertically facing it. This I think is the secret to their mass regard. Each head is self-contained, a final lump of presence, no exchange or incident takes place between their multiplied features.
>
> **(Walker, 1981, P. 51).**

The random colour of the heads as in **Fig. 1.5** causes the viewers eyes to dance from one head to another and challenges one to examine the expression of each self-contained head as one goes around the tapestry.

The tapestry "The Hosting of the Táin" is based on the gathering of an army of men from the provinces of Ireland in order to wage battle against Ulster. The apparently random choice of colour, could suggest the plucking of these men from various counties to fight. There is a lack of uniformity and divisions of rank, which are customary with an army at war. This absence highlights the point that there was no organised trained army. These were normal, everyday people, who were taken to fight regardless of personal concerns. The individuality of expressions illustrates their differing feelings about the battle. Due to the lack of "imposed external form, the mass of heads is held together by an inner inherent order, like a flock of plover".

(Walker, 1981, P.51)

The next tapestry in this series is titled "Men of Connacht' (180 X 232 cm, 1973)*(***Fig.1.6***)*.This tapestry is composed of a dramatic interplay of black,



(Fig. 1.6) Táin Tapestry: Men of Connacht, Louis Le Brocquy, 1973.

180 cm. X 233 cm.

grey and white.Le Brocquy has used a black outline, to enclose the head or spirit of the being, carrying on the Celtic notion of the spirit imprisoned within the magic box of the head. The outline of the heads get darker towards the centre. To my eye it succeeds in creating an inner core. Le Brocquy has approached this tapestry, which has a flat surface, with simple graphic images but has brought depth and energy through the interplay and confident use of limited tones. The central core is acting like a magnet. It has attracted the depth of colour to the centre, and all the energy is vibrating fro this central section. The viewer's attention is brought to the centre and then gradually pulled out to the lighter sides.

According to John Russell,

> The rows of black heads casting a grey shadow behind the heads achieves an effect like the traditional 'lace stone' wall of Connemara. This tapestry recalls the legend of a king who shared the Celtic identification of the (stone boss) with the head, to the extent of attacking a stone wall under the illusion (admittedly cast by a spell) that he was dealing with upstanding warriors
> **(Walker, 1981, P.52)**

The Stone boss of **(Fig. 1.7)** illustrates a three-faced head in siliceous sandstone from Corleck, Co. Cavan (height 32cm C. 1st Century A.D). "A small hole in the base suggests that the head originally stood on a stone pillar or pedestal. There is the notion that the devine head oversaw the Kingdom and the affairs of men". **(Crookshank, 1981, P.14)** The Celts worshipped these stone bosses and thought they had super-human powers. Maybe this goes a short way in explaining how the Men of Connacht Tapestry with its use of similar heads.**(Fig. 1.6)** is Le Brocquy's response to the head cult of the celts.

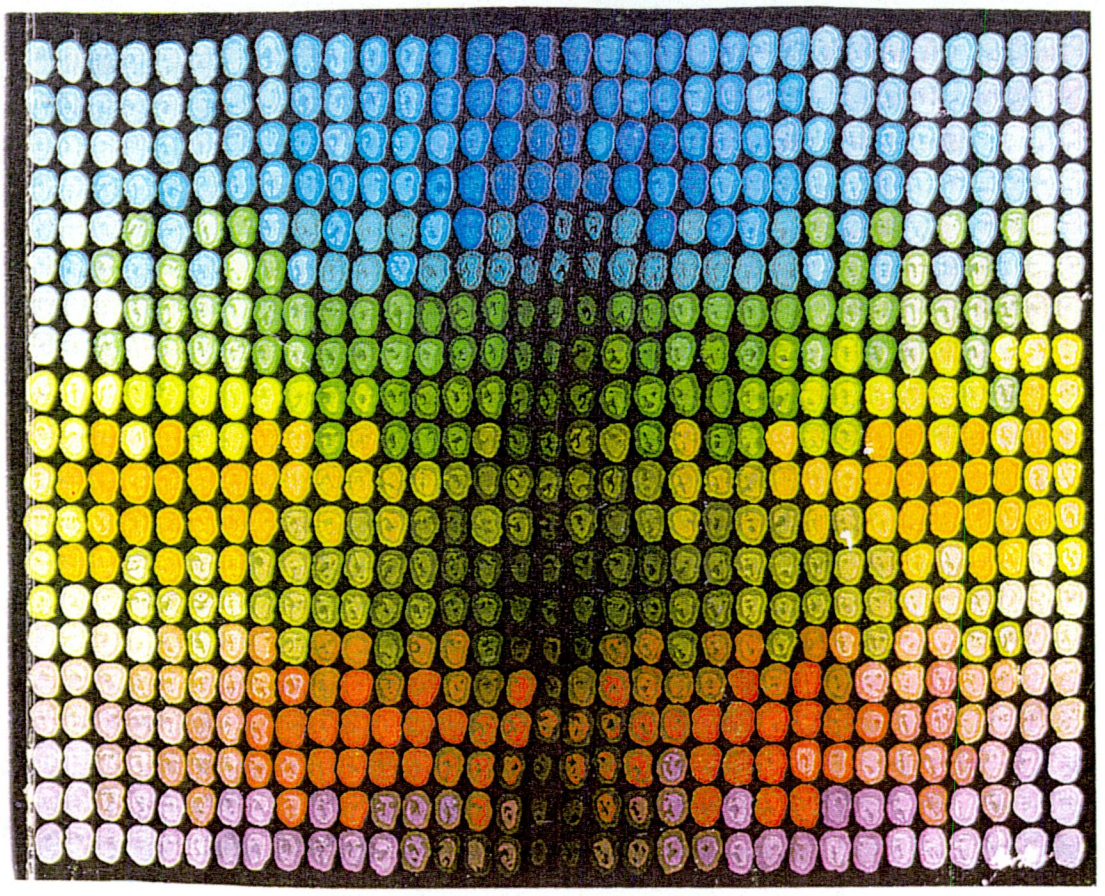
(Fig. 1.7) Stone Boss, Corleck Head, Co. Cavan, C. 1st. Century A.D.

The army of men gathered at sunset in Connemara before they set off to battle in Ulster. It's Interesting that the tapestry 'Men of Connacht' is the only one in the series which has shadows cast behind the head images. Long shadows occur between sunset and nightfall and according to the Táin epic, the men set off from Connacht at sunset, using the sun behind them as a source of power and guidance. Le Brocquy has mentioned briefly this important part of the day when day becomes night, "....day conscious / night conscious.... like Ulysses and Finnegan". **(Walker, 1981, P. 143)**. Maybe this element of the time of day is conveyed ddeliberately by Le Brocquy by the use of black, white and greys - dark and light and shadows.

The following three tapestries can be spoken about together. They are a response to Le Brocquy's feeling for the hero Cuchulainn, who is the focal figure of the Táin Epic. These three tapestries have basically the same composition and imagery but each piece has a different but nevertheless a binding power. Without knowing anything about the hero Cuchulainn, other than the fact that these tapestries are in Cuchulainn's honour, it is possible to get a sense of his character.

In 'Cuchulainn 11 1973**(Fig. 1.8)** the use of colour is spectacular. "The effect on the eye is of a sumptuous richness always absorbent and warm in the manner of wool surfaces, yet splendidly vivid in pattern". **(White, Irish Times, 1974)**. The brilliance of the colour gives the feeling of celebration, of someone magnificent. Anne Crookshank declares that when talking about Le Brocquy's work,that 'beneath the sensuous surface lies discovery". **(Crookshank, Retrospective selection, 1966)**

The vibrant red, when associated with a character, conjures images and suggests qualities such as lust and passion, mixed with courage and



(Figure 1.8) Táin Tapestry: Cuchulainn 11, Louis Le Brocquy, 1973.

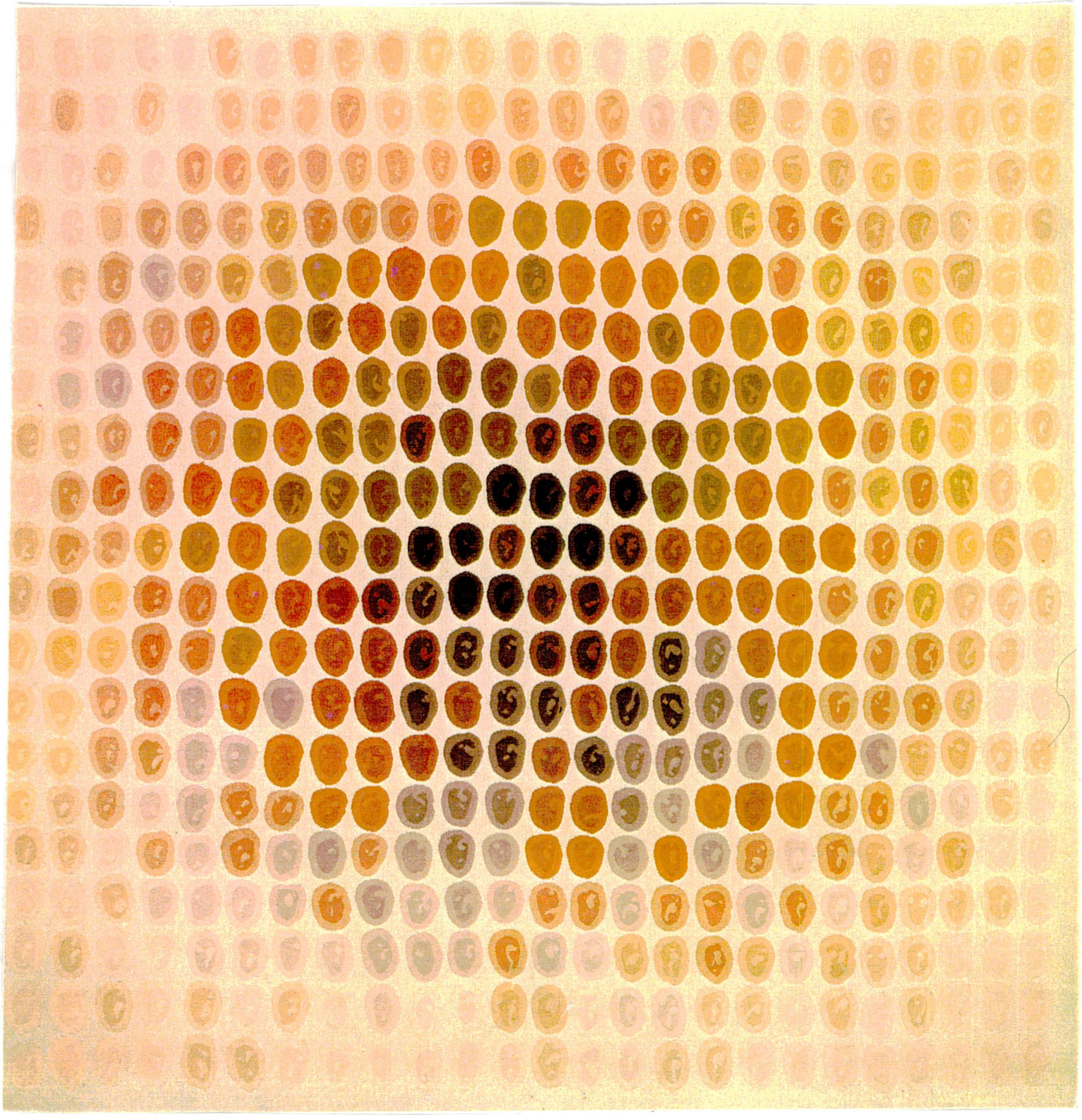
bravery. The royal blue of this piece is overpowering, yet inviting. According to Goethe, a colour psychologist, "We gladly follow a pleasant object which evades us, so we like to look at blue, not because it presses towards us but because it draws us after it" **(Goethe, 1960, P.32)**

The bright yellow has an energy and warmth similar to the effects of the sunrays. The following is a description of Cuchulainn, translated by the poet Thomas Kinsella,

> Cuchulainn outdid them all by his brilliance and nimbleness
> in the feats and the women of Ulster filled with love for him,
> seeing him so brilliant, clever and nimble of hand and
> seeing also his fair face and fine figure
> **(Kinsella, 1969, P.26).**

The dark centre of this piece and of Cuchulainn V1 **(Fig. 1.10)** acts as a focal point, where everything merges. "The heads seem to solidify at the centre, with their features dissolving at the edge. Looking from a distance a standing form gradually emerges at the dark vertical core. It is an echo, a mere shadow of a person but nevertheless retains a startling presence". **(Ruane, 1980, Intro).**

Cuchulainn 111, 1973,**(Fig. 1.9)** has a completely different colour palette. The tones are soft and gentle. The overall impression is that of a warm, feminine poetic nature. The celts were famous for their literature and poetic talents. In this tapestry Le Brocquy has chosen to associate these gentle colours with Cuchulainn. These colours would suggest that the hero felt the pain and suffering and also felt the joy of love. In this epic Cuchulainn, in order to fend the honour of Ulster, killed his own son Connla and his foster brother Ferdia. However, Cuchulainn had the opportunity to kill the Queen Medb, who was the root cause of this mass murder of the Táin epic. Even after her reckless destruction, Cuchulainn spared her life. He did, however,



(Fig. 1.9) Táin Tapestry: Cuchulainn 111, Louis Le Brocquy, 1973.

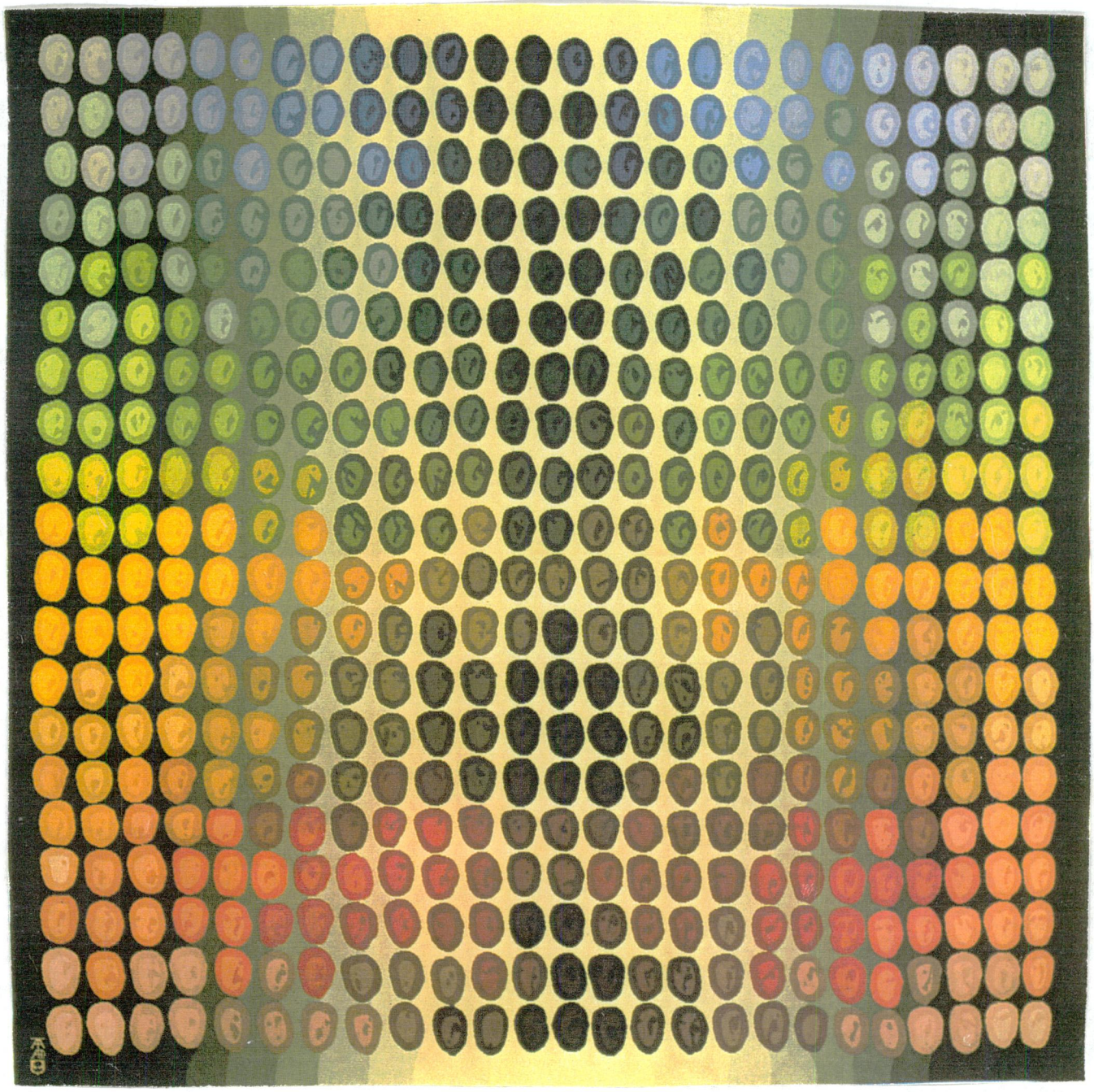
feel the grief of the deaths. "Shameful was our struggle, the uproar and grief .....I mourn." **(Kinsella, 1969, P.201)** Regardless of these feelings Cuchulainn chose to fight 'till death in order to safeguard the honour of Ulster and ensure its future. In return, Cuchulainn would achieve fame and eternity through his feats. In Kinsella's Táin, the druid Cathbad foresaw that "He who arms for the first time today will achieve fame and greatness. But his life is short". Cuchulainn replied, " That is a fair bargain, if I achieve fame I am content, though I had only one day on earth." **(Kinsella, 1969, P.85)**

Le Brocquy, in an interview with John Russell, spoke of his feelings about Cuchulainn:

> "A fabulous hero, Cuchulainn, and indeed of this archetypal Celtic warrior himself who, christ like, chose an early explosive death that we might receive the unending fallout of his substance, but paradoxically this explosive, emergent image can equally be interpreted as implosive, immergent, accretive".
> **(Walker, 1981, P.143)**

The Táin epic is recorded as having taken place in 100 BC. Both Christ and Cuchulainn are recorded as having carried out superhuman miracles throughout their lives. Both died at the young, but peak age of 33 years. They died in the belief that they were ensuring a future life for their people. Neither had an offspring to carry on their lifeforce, so they lived eternally through the stories of their feats. The Celts believed that death was a spiritual birth and Christ died in the same belief. This fascinating connection would play a part in explaining why Le Brocquy chose to honour Cuchulainn's memory with these pieces of art.

The colours in the tapestry Cuchulainn 111(**Fig. 1.9**)are so gentle and



(Fig. 1.10) Táin Tapestry, Cuchulainn V 1, Louis Le Brocquy, 1977

harmonious that they have a hypnotic power and a relaxing effect.

Cuchulainn V1, 1977**(Fig. 1.10)**is the last in the series and as such is Le Brocquy's resolution. He has merged the previously separate soft and strong colours of Cuchulainn 11 **(Fig. 1.8)**and Cuchulainn 111 **(Fig. 1.9)**.The background of Cuchulainn V1 is not plain black or white, as in the other tapestries. Rather, it has a gradual gradation from dark black to white and then to black again. It is reminiscent of a wave motion. The placing of the brightly coloured heads on the dark ground and the dark heads on the bright background creates a balance. Yet there is a movement and rhythm ever present, behind the balanced composition.

Le Brocquy recalls the multiple heads of Romanesque Clonfert, in Co. Galway:

> At once persons and stone bosses both durable and timeless, forever emerging and receeding, they signify a profound paradox, a balanced ambivalence, a succession of present moments dredged up from time, spread out before us, without beginning or end.
> **(Walker, 1981, P.143).**

Le Brocquy seems to have captured all of the above images and aspects in Cuchulainn V1 **(Fig. 1.10)**. Is this also Le Brocquy's way of creating a balanced character ? By combining the traits and colours of the two previous Cuchulainn tapestries. Le Brocquy has created his own resolved hero. I know I have no evidence to prove this last point, only a personal feeling.

Le Brocquy's series is undoubtedly a successful venture.

In these tapestries Le Brocquy has achieved a masterly conjunction of several elements: his own and the Celtic concern for the head image, the narrative content of the epic, developing the staying power of myth, and the visual and architectural demands of a large woven wall hanging.
(Walker , 1983, P.37-38)

CHAPTER TWO

Theresa McKenna's influences, use of colour and materials.

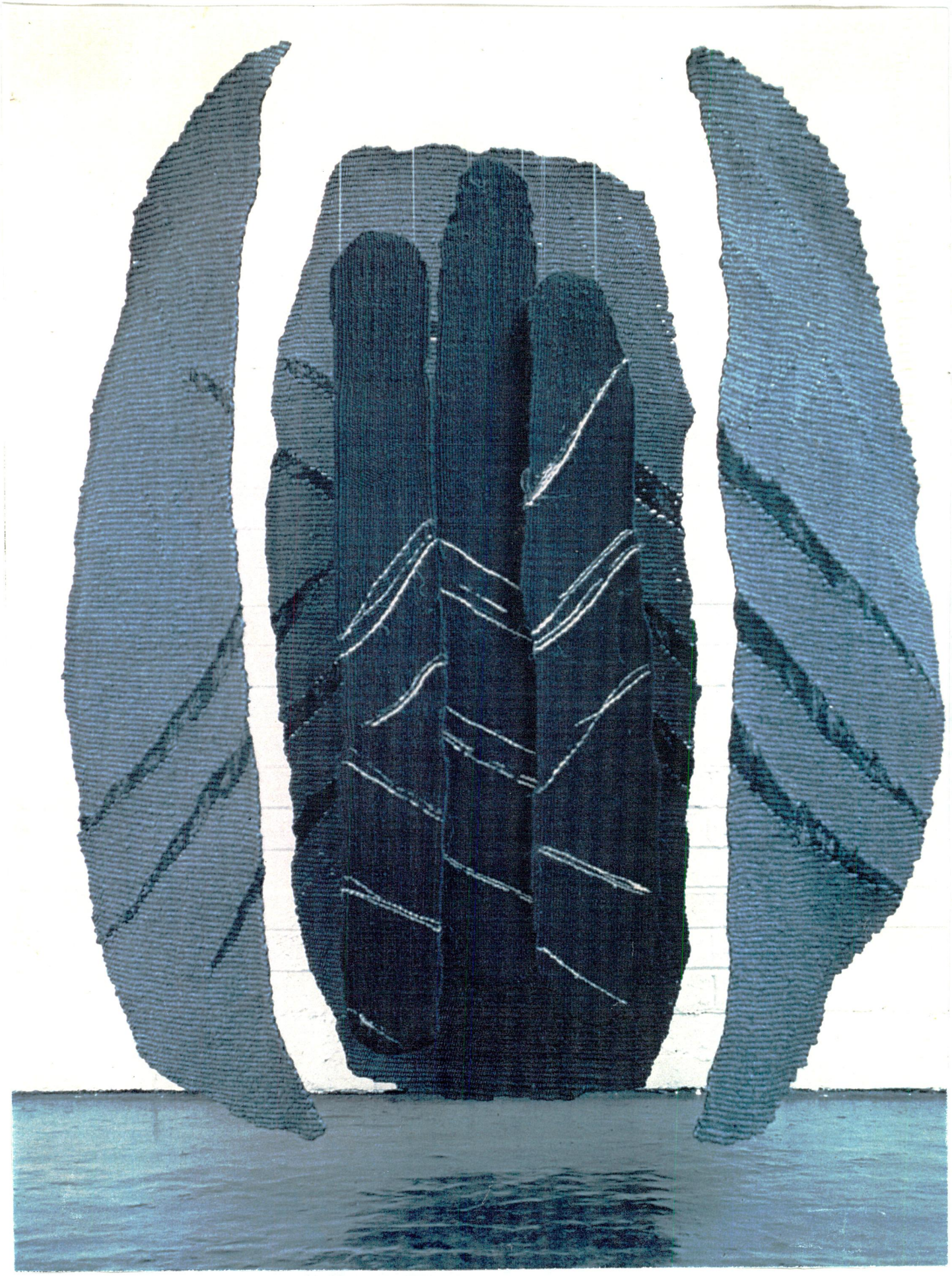
On my first meeting with tapestry artist Theresa McKenna she described her work as 'chunky and textural'. McKenna has worked directly with sisal (plant fibre), cane, linen, bamboo, camal and horse hair.

McKenna graduated from the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, where she studied sculpture. She then went to Edinburgh College of Art to do a postgraduate degree in Tapestry. Following an interview with McKenna, Roslyn Dee explained that,

> She knew form the beginning that her preference lay in the field of sculptural-type work and that, combined with a natural feeling for textiles, really shaped at an early stage the direction in which her work would go. For her, construction feeds tapestry and the tapestry feeds construction. **(Dee, 1983, P.26))**

As far as McKenna is concerned tapestry is a medium which offers a unique freedom, free from the tradition of tapestry having to be only flat and pictorial. "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 on the floor". **(Fallon 1983)**

McKenna's work cannot be easily discussed without looking at her work. Along with the materials McKenna weaves into her work, she also weaves her concerns, interests and passions into the tapestry. The first piece**(Fig. 2.1)** for discussion has been loosely called 'New Grange'. As the art critic Aidan Dunne explained, "her work is not illustrative, it is work by association and, therefore, she is cautious about citing specific subjects and concerns". **(Dunne 1983)**.



(Fig. 2.1) New Grange, Theresa McKenna, 1983

For this particular piece McKenna is trying to express feelings that she associates with walking in the countryside and visits to ancient archaeogical sites such as New Grange, Knowth and Dowth. When walking around these pre-christian passage graves and the Irish rural landscape, her fascination veers towards the linear marks in the stones and landscape, the links between lines in the far off hills and those lines under her feet: "The links from the past into the present, by the marks ancient folk made, in the passage tombs and the fact that I'm able to feel these exact marks with my own hands today". **(Marron, McKenna Interview, Nov.'96)** The main concern is connections and links. By touching the ancient marks on the stones, made by people hundreds of years ago, McKenna is somehow connecting to the creative force of history. It is illustrating the need and importance of creative expression. It may be this innate desire to creatively express which McKenna relates to, through these historic marks. It's possibly this connection to the past which is the base, that gives McKenna the confidence to keep creating. When McKenna is in the landscape she feels the strength and support of the ground beneath her. New Grange in **Fig. 2.1** is woven with the strong plant fibre-sisal. It is strong and hardweaving, similar to the stones and rocks of New Grange. The lines running across the woven tapestry pieces are a form of tribute to the survival of marks made by an ancient race in Ireland.

Before starting this piece McKenna spent time getting a feel for the passage graves, trying to understand her relationship to this mysterious environment and its powerful past. She wanted to keep her resulting piece of work simple, therefore, she refused to look at or draw inspiration from historical books where the sites were described in detail. Her prime concern was her own personal response to the marks left by these people, hundreds of years ago. She stated that she wanted to capture "That feeling/sense you get when you close your eyes and feel you're somewhere incredible, quite wonderful

and beyond you". **(Marron, McKenna Interview, Nov.'96)**

In this tapestry**(Fig. 2.1)** she has six separately suspended pieces of tapestry but all of which are interdependent for their image and strength. This piece was created so that the viewer was not just an onlooker but so that they could investigate its qualities and interrelate with it. The way which McKenna hung the work in the Project Art Centre enabled the people to walk into the centre from the back, front or sides. Once in the centre they were immersed and totally surrounded.
The relative size of the work left the person in no doubt as to the strength of those towering sections.

McKenna got the concept for the structural composition of the piece from, "the circular centre of the passage grave which is surrounded with majestic stones, bearing the historic marks of a race of people who had a life-culture and a desire to express themselves through a form of mark making". **(Marron, McKenna Interview, Nov.'96)**

In a strange and special way McKenna, through her love of history, feels a bond with these passage graves. "They give me a sense of belonging ". **(Marron, McKenna Interview, Nov.'96).** This same sense of belonging to history and having a personal link to a culture and race, also permeates Le Brocquy's work. McKenna, through this piece of work, "tries to evoke feelings of primordial and mysterious grandeur". **(Hutchinson,1987, P15)**

A second piece of work by McKenna, 'Work in five parts', 10' X 10', **(Fig. 2.2)** is about her response to the landscape, the feeling she gets from the land under her, its smell and texture, her pure love of the landscape and its natural sensations. McKenna quite openly goes into raptures when talking

(Fig. 2.2) Work in five parts, Theresa McKenna, 1990

about the freedom and strength she gains when she finds herself in the open expanse of the land. She reveals how the landscape and her relationship to it helps her put her emotions and problems into perspective. The landscape and its constant regrowth feeds her creative power and gives her the courage to be true to herself and what she wants. She's confident about who she is , firstly as a person and then as a female who is creative.

This piece of work has captured all these feelings in some form. She felt the freedom to deal with the textures found when she is hillwalking, such as dry heather, long grass or soggy bogland. She has tried to capture the real mixture of the textile qualities in the two dark brown sections. Due to the fact that the inspiration for this piece evolved from the landscape and its textures, the colour tends to mirror those of natural stone, grass and heather.

The linear patterns of the rocks cuts through the piece, a reminder of the past and its existence in the present. The shape of the two looped sections of **(Fig. 2.2)** are similar to the shape of the female genitalia. These two dark sections could possibly be McKenna's belief in herself as a female - creative, passionate, sexual, with a dynamic energy around her, which is palpable to people who come into direct contact with her. The scale of the looped sections are disturbing and provoke a connection to pubic hair. The freedom in variation of the size of the loops, the fact that they don't conform to any regular, uniform, size. As a result , they challenge the viewer to stop and absorb the strong and defiant loops. McKenna, when she talked to me about this piece, expressed that the tapestry was mainly a response to the Irish landscape. She felt that other parts of her own character were in this piece and that in some way she knew that people could see more personal things, which McKenna feels she herself has hidden from the viewer.

Three light, white oversurfaces are being broken through to reveal a

deeper layer, which is darker and demands a presence, but is in contrast to the smooth softness of the light cotton. The freedom and spontaneous of the graphite marks on the cotton surface show how at ease McKenna was with herself when creating the piece. There's no fear of breaking rules or no confinement within a regular square or rectangular framework. McKenna made this piece to free herself after making a collection of work which was suspended within bamboo cane. It had begun to irritate her, so "Work in Five Parts' was a result of wanting to be free and spontaneous again.

Aidan Dunne noted that McKenna had "utilised a typically ingenious collection of materials..... that texture is probably the most important element in her work". **(Dunne, 1987, P.24)** There's quite a strong a strong smell from the oiled sisal, which in itself captures the viewer's attention. Similar to a sweet smelling flower or plant, it contains the power to stop a passerby and focus their attention and curiosity.

In this piece McKenna is also demonstrating the freedom of the medium of tapestry. Kitty Warnock reviewed an exhibition of work by McKenna and some Scottish artists, after which she commented that "A tapestry is no longer, it seems, just a textile fabric with ornamented designs. It can be a Fine Art and not just a demonstration of skill". **(Warnock, 1979, P.16)** For McKenna, tapestry is a medium in which she can express the most personal feelings and emotions, through the treatment and manipulation of raw materials and their qualities. This piece is possible, only through McKenna's love of texture and its ability to translate feelings which words could never fully express, "richer than paint could achieve". **(Warnock, 1979, P.16)**

When talking to me about her use of texture McKenna said " I could genuinely and honestly say, that for the rest of my life, I know I could be

happy if I just allowed myself the freedom to deal with qualities, textures and surfaces. Then again, there's the other side of me, that gets in there and says, hold on I want more. I want this work to be about more important things". **(Marron, McKenna Interview, Nov.'96)**

This piece is very much about who McKenna is and what concerns her. So it was important to find out if she worked differently for commissions. McKenna finds it difficult to design for a particular site and she considers it important that the person commissioning the work understands the way she works best. This person must trust her to create a suitable piece which incorporates the characteristics and atmosphere of the site proposed but which contains an aspect from which McKenna can get personal satisfaction.

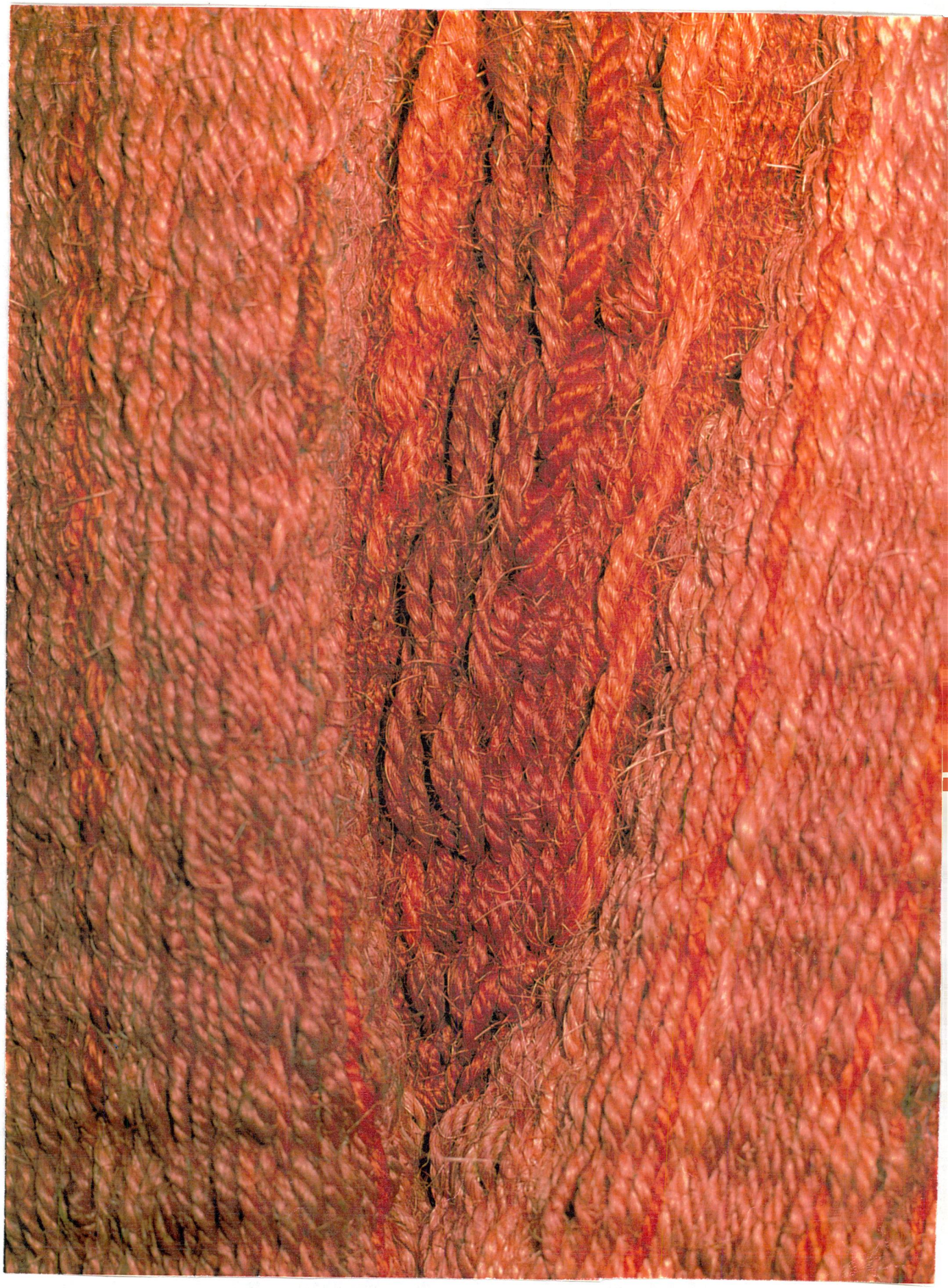
McKenna recalls with great regret and disappointment her experience of doing a commission for a person who didn't understand her methods of designing and working. The client in question was an interior designer for a Prince in the Middle East. McKenna was excited by the prospect of creating a piece of work which had beautiful imagery from the Irish landscape, a piece which included the woven surfaces which had initially attracted the Prince to McKenna's work. The relationship between the interior designer and McKenna was quite strained and difficult. Lurcat and Brennan were passionate about the close working relationship and understanding between client and weaver or the painter/weaver relationship. McKenna's dissatisfaction with this project reinforces the ideal in which Lurcat and Brennan believed passionately. In this project for the middle East the interior designer dictated what colours and images were to be used while McKenna had little or no say in the design, a detail from this tapestry can be seen in **Fig. 2.3**. McKenna feels it's hard for her to draw up a finished paper design so that a person commissioning a piece could possibly visualise what the

finished work would look like. McKenna absolutely hates drawing a design up to the point that it is finished on paper and then only needs to be transferred to the loom. She prefers to to work out the dimensions of the finished piece. When she has all her ideas and concepts worked out, she then draws up a vague design. An epidiescope is used to scale up the rough outline on to paper. Essentially, she weaves and designs as she goes along, guided by the rough outline as in **Fig.2.4**. When McKenna is weaving a flat section/piece of work, she weaves the surface at angles, so that the weaving is never a forgotten part of the image. The light throws a wonderful quality into this surface, it takes on a life of its own, such as in **Fig. 2.5.**

It is this lack of textural weaving in Le Brocquy's tapestries which disappoints McKenna. Le Brocquy's tapestries are woven by the weavers at Ambusson, France. McKenna feels that when pieces are woven by a company that it somehow divides the design from the weave. You remember that when you're looking at it because it's a regular and certain type of tapestry weaving. She feels it is woven to translate a design and that as a result the image is most relevant.

When McKenna weaves flat, she makes sure to emphasise that it is woven by hand rather than machine, that the weave itself has a direction **(Fig. 2.5)**. As a result, one's eye will follow lines and areas within the weaving. This is the quality which she feels Le Brocquy tapestries lack.

However, she thinks his work is very subtle and clean and she has a lot of respect for his imagery. McKenna feels that she has respect for painters like Le Brocquy, Mary Fitzpatrick and Pat Scott who say - yes, this is not my area and hand the work over to someone else to make "In a way they are not just designing for a place; they are also designing for a method!" **(Marron, McKenna Interview, Nov.'96)**



(Fig. 2.3) Middle East Tapestries, Theresa McKenna, 1992.

(Fig. 2.4) McKenna weaving a section for the Blasket Island Visitor Centre, gui ded by paper design

(Fig. 2.5) The Blasket Islands Visitors Centre Tapestry (detail of flat and textural weave), Theresa McKenna.

McKenna's work could never be mistaken for tapestries which were designed and handed over to a studio to be woven. For her, the weaving and the design are independent, which mirrors the belief of Archie Brennan. It was his belief that the design to an extent depends on the fibres used and on their unique qualities. McKenna has been fortunate to have been commissioned for quite large pieces, for visitors centres her in Ireland. She has a strong working relationship and understanding with a man who has commissioned her to do work for the Phoenix Park Visitors Centre and also the Blasket Islands Visitors Centre. He has given her the freedom to examine the proposed site and create work which she feels works best and allows her textural qualities to speak volumes.

The following illustration(**Fig. 2.6**)is from the centre in the Phoenix Park. When McKenna first inspected the proposed site, it was just at the building stage. The only standing wall was an exterior wall which was to become an interior wall, on which the tapestries were to be hung. McKenna was delighted at the roughness and coarseness of the wall. She felt in her gut that tapestry was what the wall needed. "It needed to be bold and gutsy with really colourful and chunky weavings". **(Marron, McKenna Interview) Nov.'96).**

McKenna's fascination with Irish history, in particular, led her to incorporate the images of the ancient chalices and artifacts which had been found in the park. The park is also for the native deer to roam free, so McKenna used these two themes and images in her work.

McKenna had to take into account the fact that the tapestries were to be

(Fig. 2. 6) Phoenix Park Visitors Centre Tapestries, Theresa McKenna, 1994.

viewed from two levels. Therefore, the tapestries had to read from ground level and and from the first floor. The deer create the movement from the first to the last piece. The textures are created by overlaying and thick knotting, all of which are done in sisal. The boldness of the colours add instant warmth to the building. The overall impression is of dramatic, confident tapestry work.

McKenna approached the Blasket Island commission, a current work in progress in much the same manner as the Phoenix Park project. Through her research and knowledge she felt it was important to highlight the Irish language and literature for which the Blaskets are known. She spent days walking the island and getting a personal response to it, a sense of its history and an image of its people. McKenna found the isolation of the island from the mainland an important aspect. She felt the boat trip between the two pieces of land was a fragile connection and it was this connection that had the greatest impact on her design ideas. She took sketches and photos of the area and the room where the pieces of work were to be hung.

McKenna showed me the the loose design, she decided to work from. At the stage when I viewed it, she had half the pieces woven. The transition from the paper to the woven areas was astounding. Her woven response was obviously instinctive and natural. It is clear to see how she couldn't have handed over the paper design and have reached the same conclusion. The colours of the tapestry, which is divided into three pieces, are deep and rich blues and turquoises. The flow and the movement is created by several things. There are deep shots of blue running across the work in wave motions. The shape of the currach is held within the three pieces but McKenna has Irish literature interwoven from left to right for comfortable reading. The piece, McKenna feels, is there for visitors to relax and enjoy. The content can be read at whatever level the viewer wishes.

CHAPTER THREE

Le Brocquy's and McKenna's Tapestries in Situ.

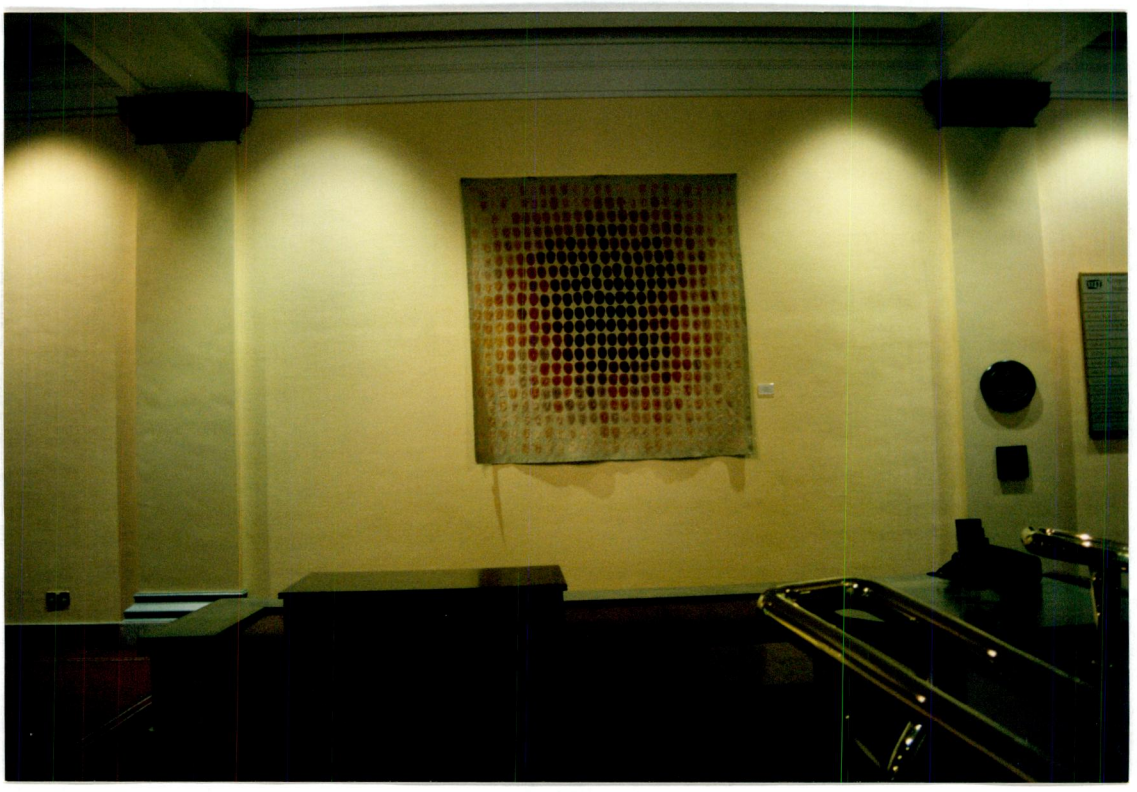
> A tapestry used as a wall hanging is typically and properly very big; wall scale. To hang effectively a small tapestry therefore one must seek a small wall-section, recessed or projected wall, a wall between windows, a chimney breast or a wall space above furniture etc. - never give a tapestry elbow room.
>
> **(Royal College of Art, 1956)**

The above statement is a reasonably accurate guide to deciding how successful a tapestry is in its chosen site. However, one just cannot accept the above statement as being a hardfast rule. Therefore this chapter aims to put this statement to the test, by looking at Le Brocquy's and McKenna's tapestries in various environments and how the tapestries are positioned. I feel the above statement may relate as effectively to paintings, as to tapestries. We may look firstly at Le Brocquy's 'Allegory, 1950, (180 X 225 cm.) which is hanging in the foyer of the Kildare Country Club.(**Fig. 3.2.**) It's a tapestry from Le Brocquy's early collection which is influenced by Picasso's drawing style and Lurcat's flat symbolism(**Fig. 3.1**)Careful consideration of its positioning is obvious. It is placed on a projecting wall above the railing and the table. The tapestry is also in a position to be viewed from varying levels, by people ascending and descending the beautiful staircase. Meanwhile, on ground level the tapestry serves as a focal point or point of conversation for guests and clients sitting in the cleverly positioned seating. The tapestry has the power to hold a guest's attention, yet it blends in comfortably with the surrounding decor and furniture. In this area nothing is fighting for attention. The atmosphere is one of sophisticated elegance. The ethos of the Kildare Country Club is one of luxury and expensive indulgence which commands supreme service and majestic surroundings. Le Brocquy could not have requested a more suitable nor elegant environment for his tapestry. The

(Fig. 3.1) Allegory, Louis Le Brocquy, 1950

Fig. 3.2) Allegory, Louis Le Brocquy, 1950,

in the foyer of the Kildare Country Club.



(Fig. 3.3) Cuchulainn 111, Louis Le Brocquy, 1973
in the foyer of the National Concert Hall.

(Fig. 3.4) Cuchulainn 111, Louis Le Brocquy, 1973
in the home of Mrs. Ann Rehill.

tapestry enhances the surroundings and vice versa.

After analysing and enjoying the successful hanging of the 'Allegory', it is clearer to see the unsuccessful positioning of Le Brocquy's 'Cuchulainn 111. It is hanging on the main wall facing viewers as they enter the foyer of the National Concert Hall(**Fig. 3.3**).The tapestry is totally lost on this wall. There is no connection or relationship between the tapestry and its surrounding. The tapestry has too much elbow room and, as a result, is similar to a wet cloth thrown onto a wall. The lighting does nothing to highlight the tapestry, it merely brightens the bottom corners of the tapestry and casts the rest of woven pieces into shadow. It is sheer disappointment in a public building of such importance.

Nevertheless, another edition of the same tapestry is successfully hanging in the home of Ann Rehill, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.(**Fig. 3.4**)As one of the shareholders of Image, a fashion and interior magazine, and many other popular magazines, her involvement with these publications may have perfected her skills of precise presentation, placement and spatial relationships. Such skill is reflected in this photo of her living room, where Le Brocquy's Cuchulainn 111 is hanging on the recessed wall beside the fireplace. The tapestry sits comfortably above the table on a wall which gives the tapestry 'no elbow room'. The light subtly highlights the sophisticated use of colour in the piece. The lighting is soft and subdued and thus does not drain the colour out of the tapestry, nor does it cast dark shadows over the piece. This tapestry, as with the 'allegory' in the Kildare Country Club, blends with the tasteful and sumptuous decor to create an elegant environment. In Le Brocquy's 'Allegory' and 'Cuchulainn 111', the weaving of the Aubusson weavers is tight, flat and precise. The yarn is refined and the colours of the tapestries are soft and subtle. All of these qualities work

together to create tapestries which hang successfully in the refined interiors of the Kildare Country Club and Mrs. Ann Rehills home. The upholstery of both interiors are refined and classical which marry with the tapestries to create a tasteful ambience.

The main difference between 'Cuchulainn 111' in the National Concert Hall and Mrs. Ann Rehill's home, is the inappropriate scale of the National Concert Hall tapestry in relation to its wall space. Whereas the tapestry in the Rehill home is the perfect scale for the room.

It is interesting to also look at how Theresa McKenna's more textural work fits into interiors.

> The clients for art fabric are business, government, and by the late 70s - collectors, including museums. Still the chief support comes from the architect and designer who considers work of art as an aspect of interior design.
> **(Constantine, 1981, P.203)**

This was obviously the case with McKenna's work for the Phoenix Park Visitors Centre **(Fig. 3.5)** McKenna was called by the architect to examine the proposed wall for her work, at the early stage of constructing the building when this was the only wall standing and the building was only beginning on the rest of the centre. Therefore, it is clear that her work was considered as an architectural entity in itself. The building was not considered complete until the tapestries were in place. We can see the resulting success of her textural tapestries on the rough stone wall of the Visitor's Centre. The cold surface of the wall is enlivened by the vibrant and bold colour of the tapestries. There is a deliberate absence of cold colours. The vast expanse of the wall is tied together by the rhythmical, swirling lines sweeping right

(Fig. 3. 5) Phoenix Park Visitors Centre Tapestries
Theresa McKenna

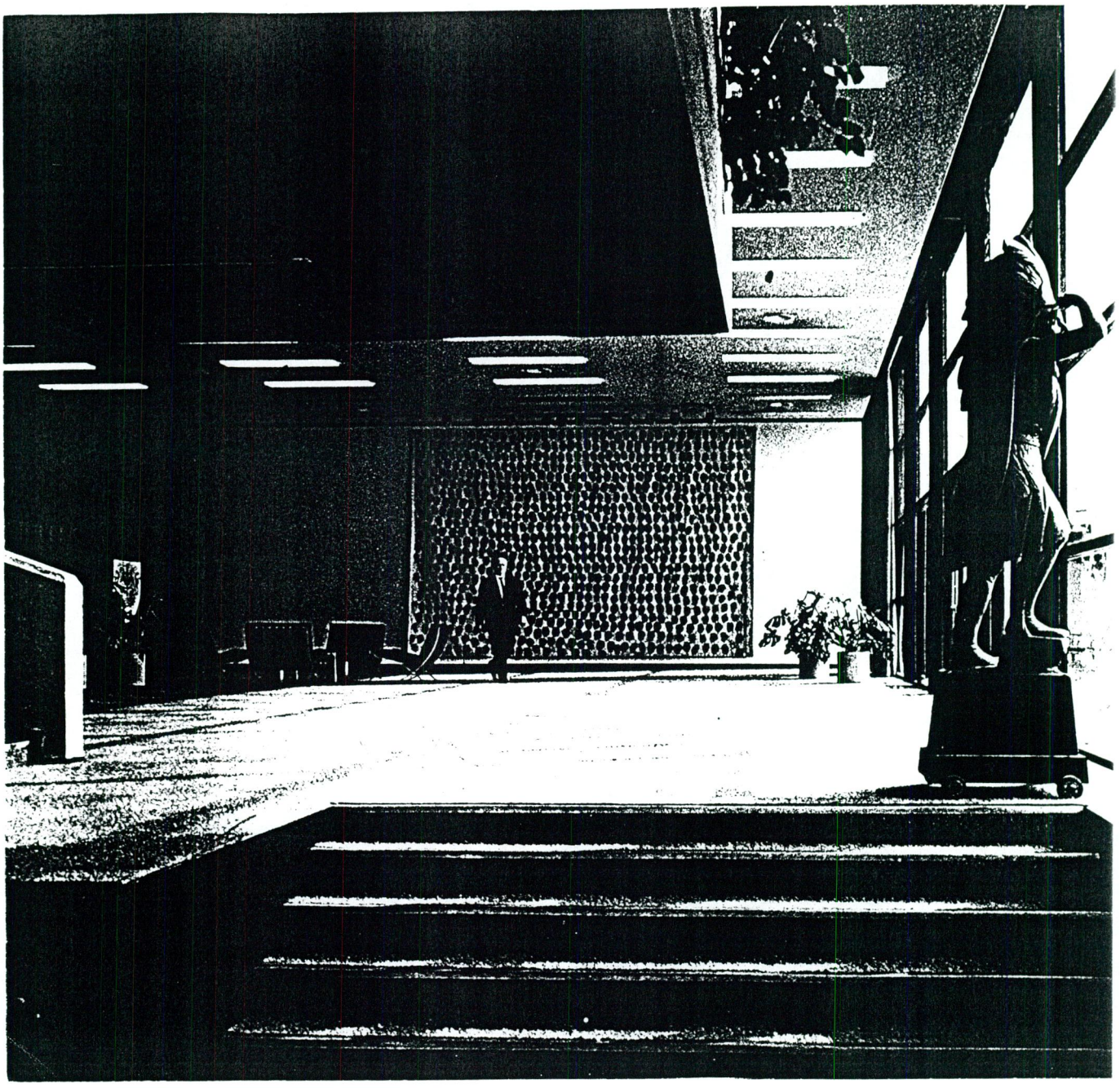
across the eight pieces of work. The simplicity of the shapes and imagery allows the overall image to divide quite easily into the eight sections, without taking away from the beauty and power of the design.

The direction of the deer running (literally) across the eight pieces, brings the viewer gently down the length of the room. The work relates well to the fact that the room has a balcony, it allows the viewer to read the work across the top, bottom or in its entirety. The roof directly above the tapestries(**Fig. 3.5**) is made of glass sections which continue down the sides of the building thus allowing maximum natural light to enhance the tapestries. These glass sections make it possible to see the park outside while looking at the tapestries, this is an important aspect due to the fact that the theme of the tapestries is essentially about the landscape of the Phoenix Park and it's treasures. The bright colour of the natural wood framing the glass windows and the wooden floor upstairs gives a certain warmth to the interior. The smoothness of the wood and the glass creates an interesting contrast to the rugged qualities of the tapestries on the rough stone wall.

The woven pieces work with the architecture to create a strong textural statement for all to enjoy. According to Mildred Constantine,

> The monumental scale in the art fabrics was no doubt influenced by the very apparent success of oversized canvases so visible from Jackson Pollock onwards in the 50s. As likely the cause was the architect's acceptance of very large works in all media.
> **(Constantine, 1981, Pg. 20)**

This statement relates closely, to Le Brocquy's 'Hosting of the Táin' in the foyer of P.J.Carroll factory in Dundalk, Co. Louth. It is a large tapestry (407 X



(Fig. 3.6) The Hosting of the Táin, Louis Le Brocquy, 1970,
in the foyer of P.J.Carroll Factory, Dundalk, Co. Louth.

610 cm) with a flat surface and initially unclear imagery. The foyer is a spacious and open area, with maximum light from the glass entrance to the right of the tapestry. The tapestry fits neatly on the wall between the floor and ceiling. The specially fitted lights above the tapestry heighten the colours and images and as a result give out a warm atmosphere in the foyer thus counteracting the harshness of this concrete, glass and steel interior. The only furniture in this area being four chairs of steel frames and leather upholstery. The immense scale of the tapestry which reaches from floor to ceiling has the power to soften this interior which is made of hard linear structures - the glass framework, the linear placement of the rectangle lights on the ceiling and the bare stone floor. The stairway at the left edge of Fig 3.6 has no carved or decorative bannister, instead there is a concrete wall surrounding the ascending stairs. Apart from the green plants the foyer is void of colour. The tapestry offers a large splash of colour and warmth. The irregular shapes of the head images with their random colour and placement, serves to counteract the regular, linear architectural structures of this foyer. The soft woven surface of the tapestry absorbs the echoes and hollowness and thus improves the acoustics of the foyer and plays a large role in creating a more intimate and friendly environment.

The positioning of this tapestry in the foyer is carefully chosen to enhance the reception area. It is a visual uplift. According to Roslyn Dee,

> The image of a company can be made or shattered by the expression one gets in its reception area. It is here that the client or customer is repressed or depressed by what he or she sees.
> **(Dee, 1983, P. 26).**

The overwhelming size of the tapestry in the P.J.Carroll factory can be seen through the glass entrance before the visitor or client even enters the

building. The client's first impression due to this tapestry is hopefully the feeling that the establishment believes in excellence and top quality and is actively supporting the arts in Ireland.

The next example shows the transformation of the interior of the Blasket Islands Visitor's Centre through McKenna's large tapestry work. **Fig. 3.7** shows how the restaurant looked beforehand. The walls are decorated by various small pieces of artwork. These pieces added interest to the bare white walls; nevertheless, the first impression is of a long cold, minimal, bare room. The cold grey stone floor dominates the room and is probably responsible for the cold atmosphere. The last thing an eating room needs is a cold feeling, where people aren't enticed to linger.

The second photo shows the dramatic difference that McKenna's work has created. The texture and tactile qualities of the tapestries reduces the dominance of the stone floor. The tapestry work creates a balance, the room has lost that bare, empty and unlived in feeling. The scale of the large tapestries succeeds in pulling the room together to make a more intimate environment. The fact that the tapestries reach from floor to ceiling reduces the hollowness of sound in this room. As with Le Brocquy tapestry in the P.J. Carroll factory, this tapestry work in **Fig 3.8** is the only textile or fabric in the room. The chairs are entirely wooden with no soft cushioning of any sort. Yet the natural bright colours of the wood framing the glass on the right and the wood of the chairs gives a warmth to the room. The rigid lines of the chairs and the columns on the right offer a strong contrast to the soft fluid lines within the tapestries. The tapestries play a key role in creating a focal point and unique environment for the Blasket Island Visitor's Centre in Co. Kerry.

The last note in this chapter is on how to maintain these tapestries,

(Fig.3.7) The facing wall is the proposed site for the Blasket Island Visitor's Centre, Co. Kerry, Theresa McKenna, 1996.

(Fig. 3.8) The Blasket Island Visitor's Centre Tapestry,
in Situ, Theresa McKenna, 1997.

and keep them clean. McKenna's layered tapestries can be effectively cleaned by gently hoovering them. The flat tapestries of Le Brocquy's can be hoovered or dried cleaned. The dyes used in all these tapestries are professional dyes, which are long-lasting with minimal fading. Also mothproofing has banished the previously mortal enemy.

CONCLUSION

There is a common thread running through the work of both Le Brocquy and McKenna work. Both have a keen interest in the Celtic past. For Le Brocquy's ~~past~~ it is an obsession with Celtic history, the spiritual belief that the head was a magic box which contained the spirit and soul of the being. Le Brocquy expressed this spiritual belief by using as his subject the powerful Irish Celtic epic of the Táin. His illustrations of the epic for Thomas Kinsella's translation of the Táin, sparked off Le Brocquy's fascination with various aspects and characters of this ancient epic. This work was the starting point for Le Brocquy's creative work in the Táin tapestry series discussed in Chapter two. Similarly, McKenna has drawn inspiration from the ancient Celtic passage graves. Its shapes, ancient marks still in our landscape and mystical feelings are the elements which fascinate her and inject deep feelings into her tapestries. For McKenna it was a sense of belonging to a race, an ancient culture who believed in making marks in stone, as a means to express themselves. In a way it was also this sense of belonging which helped Le Brocquy identify with Celtic history. He could relate to their beliefs that the soul and personality of a person were imprisoned in the head; so much so, that his paintings as well as his tapestry designs were all concerned with the head image. In a sense, he has dedicated his life to capturing the essence of a being through the head - its facial qualities and expressions. Although both artists have have gained great inspiration from ancient Irish history, McKenna was also inspired by the Irish landscape. It is the dramatic difference in their resulting pieces of work which is intriguing. It was exciting to look at the translation of their ideas and concepts based on their shared connection to their Irishness and its history.

The essential reason for the difference between the tapestry work of these two artists is where they are coming from in their approach to tapestry.

McKenna studied sculpture before doing her postgraduate degree in tapestry. Her desire to sculpt has remained throughout her work. Her semi-sculptural work with fibre, reflect an alertness to the possibilities of using familiar materials in unforeseen ways. She has the capacity to let her materials determine the expression of her sensibilities. Her exploration of the possibilities of woven processes and pliable materials give her pieces a presence and richness which have the power to overawe the viewer.

Le Brocquy, as a painter, has realised that a strong vibrant tapestry design needs to evolve from an understanding and a sympathy for the weaving process, the process of a weft passing through the warp by a skilled weaver. Le Brocquy's tapestry designs have shapes with soft edges which allow the woven wool to take on a form of its own. Le Brocquy deserves credit for his recognition that tapestry is an art form in its own right and not a substitute for painting. He has admired and learnt from Lurcat's insight into tapestry design. A tapestry should never be an imitation of a painting. I feel Le Brocquy' has grasped this concept as illustrated in Chapter One. **Fig. 1.3** shows the definite painterly style of Le Brocquy's paintings, which is dramatically different from the graphic style of his tapestry design(**Fig.1.4**).The dramatic colour of the tapestry compared to the subtle quiet colours of the painting show a conscious change of approach on the part of Le Brocquy.

Both Le Brocquy's and McKenna's tapestries have shown, in Chapter Three, that they can work well in different interior settings. Both artists tapestries have a desirable and attractive qualities which enhance varied interiors. We have seen the success of McKenna's large pieces in public buildings but a smaller piece of hers would work equally well (for example) in a modern flat in Temple Bar. Le Brocquy's pieces rested equally as well in the modern

public building of the P.J.Carroll factory as in the refined interior of Mrs. Ann Rehill's home. Both artists have a personal and enthusiastic input into tapestry, which is refreshing and free from the stifling woven paintings of the Renaissance era.

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