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SEED OF A WORLD - THE ART OF WILL MACLEAN

by

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INTRODUCTION

"Seed of a World" refers to the inner worlds created by Scottish artist Will Maclean (b.1941). The quote is from French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, "in times of great discoveries, a poetic image can be the seed of a world, the seed of a universe imagined out of a poet's reverie". (Bachelard 1969 p.1)

Directly Maclean conjures up esoteric images through the poetic use of objects which reference religion, primitivism, literature, fishing, myth and other clues that feed our imagination. Drawing from Duncan Macmillan's book on Will Maclean, *Symbols of Survival* (1992) and various exhibition catalogues, I will attempt to understand the themes of spiritualism, sacredness and the metaphysical expressed in his work. In analysing Maclean's foundation in Surrealism involves the use of poetry as an inspiration. Similarly the Surrealist interest in Primitivism should lead me into the use of fetishes, totems and the gods of Nature which reflects a certain pagan side to Maclean's work.

In Chapter One, I will trace the origins of Maclean's style and background by looking at Scottish artists working during the 1940s, '50s and '60s whose work has connected themes to that of Maclean, especially those rooted in Surrealism.

Chapter Two will explore the connection of collage, assemblage and objects, many of which carry memories and associations from a previous existence. These

constructions become a metaphor for our experience of present reality which interacts with dreams and memories.

In Chapter Three I will analyse Maclean's work which can be read almost as a poem in that his starting point is frequently a childhood memory. These memories are often encased in a shrine, tabernacle or reliquary, not in a simple religious way, but in a way that will mediate between the spectator and the subject of his work.

In Chapter Four I will attempt to understand the religious aspect of Maclean's work. I will explore the Calvinist influence underlying his work and its conflict with the more primitive beliefs present in many of his pieces. Maclean would be sympathetic to the idea of the artist as shaman and as a mediator between the spirits of nature and those of the living and the dead. Maclean is an artist who has invested much work and time in order to give his constructions their mysterious quality.

The artist Will Maclean (b.1941) comes from a culturally rich and complex background in the Highlands of Scotland. His artistic influences are seen in his symbolism and use of objects, which are suggestive of the mystic world of the Surrealists. Scottish artists have traditionally looked to Europe, in particular to the Northern Romantics and the French Colourists.(Hare.1992, p59) Maclean's surrealist influences come from a layer of artists who lived abroad in the 1940s and 1950s returning regularly to exhibit and sometimes to teach in Scotland. The literary tradition built around the Scots Renaissance was also important to Maclean's surrealist ambitions and the strong poetic associations in his imagery.

Maclean's work portrays life in the Highlands, using the hands of a maker. Well crafted assemblage has been his hallmark and it reflects both the training and the skills acquired in Grays School of Art, Aberdeen, where people like Fred Stiven, Ian Fleming, George Mackie and others were tutors. More importantly it was the making and fixing skills learned while growing up around the fishing industry at Inverness where his father was Harbour Master that carried over into his art. This practical experience combined with an artist's vision helped him to express the qualities and continuity of Highland life.

Childhood memories have been the basis for a number of Maclean's constructions where the juxtaposition of objects

conjure up imagined worlds so important to children. Through his own childhood he reflects the history of the Highlands and the life of sailors and the sea and then draws from these other wider metaphors. He presents these in his arrangement called *Memories of a Northern Childhood* (1977, Fig.1) where his chosen objects, which include playing cards, quill pens and clay pipes, seem to have personal or even autobiographical significance for the artist.

The objects are arranged against the wainscot of a Highland cottage and above them is a tabernacle, its gothic doors opening onto a dark interior. Inside is a slate relief of a ring-net fishing boat, a votive image on an altar, carved like a Pictish stone. The title and the objects together suggest a boy's perception of manhood in a fishing village.(Macmillan,1992, p 49) In this work Maclean has used religious overtones and childhood memories, both which are consistently used in his work. A similar theme runs through another work, *Archaeology of Childhood* (1989, Fig.2) which uses miniature objects from a child's tea set and presents them in a shrine-like way, similar to primitive rituals or of a glimpsed dream.

These childhood memories are what Eduardo Paolozzi called *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, the title of an 1986 exhibition that he selected for The Museum of Mankind, London. In the exhibition Paolozzi brought together the artifacts of primitive peoples with his own artworks and some modern objects. The idea is similar to the Dada and Surrealist technique of promoting startling conjunctions in which the objective was to break down the expected or conventional associations of familiar objects and to replace them with new ones. It was the theories of Freud and Jung that led artists to see that such processes might reflect

deeper subconscious connections in the mind. Similarly, Paolozzi saw non-Western society's adaptation of Western products to imaginative uses and given autonomous power as similar to that with which a totem is endowed, based purely on the strength of image. To create something truly totemic in this sense has been one of the driving ambitions of the Surrealists and Maclean's art reflects this ambition.

Paolozzi's influence on Maclean's art work can be seen in the use of collected memorabilia and cultural artifacts as things that can be incorporated directly into an artwork. Paolozzi was introduced to Marcel Duchamp and Tristan Tzara in Paris in 1947 and was a devoted convert to the use of collage and the portrayal of random association in objects for the rest of his career. He returned to Britain and immediately began making collage-sculpture from found objects, some of which were cast in metal. This approach to collage gave Paolozzi the artistic tool to interpret a perception that was his own and which was widely influential to younger artists like Maclean who also searched for a personal language after leaving college.

This method of working was useful to Paolozzi in his rejection of elitism in the Fine Art tradition of the time. Using found objects proved that visual culture is common property. These essentially democratic views have their roots in the Arts and Crafts Movements and, indeed, in 1979 Paolozzi had an exhibition in Edinburgh called *Junk - The New Arts and Crafts Movement*. In it he identified his own position explicitly with the cooperative and social traditions of the Arts and Crafts artists. This idea can also be traced back to Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) in Scotland, who influenced Paolozzi's thinking of the artist as an interpreter, not simply of history, but as a source of identity.



Fig. 1 Memories of a Northern Childhood





Fig.2 Archaeology of Childhood (1989)





Fig. 3 Navigator's Locker (1982)



Geddes had a very liberal understanding of how the arts in the broadest sense should be a part of the community. He wanted a strong sense of national identity based on a fusion of history and locality. The artist William Johnstone was later a part of this Renaissance in Scots thinking in the 1940s and his work has parallels with Maclean's exploration of the past. Johnstone's interest in time and the presence in the landscape of history and prehistory along with our continuing present experience echoes Maclean's archaeological methods of discovery, as in works like the *Bottle Beach Settlement* series.

In Britain, Johnstone was a pioneer of the Jungian idea that the artist is an intermediary between this world and the metaphysical one. In Europe, Rene Magritte and Giorgio De Chirico were Maclean's earliest influences in relation to such themes. In his piece *Navigator's Locker* (1982, Fig.3) two spheres sit on a shelf in a white painted but empty space. This luminous, structured emptiness recalls De Chirico and so do the shapes themselves. They are made up from cut and reassembled navigation instruments, whose geometric shapes suggest the kind of enigmatic, pseudo mathematical forms often seen in De Chirico's painting.

A contemporary of Paolozzi was Alan Davie (b. 1920) who also believed in the living tradition of Scottish culture espoused by William Johnstone. Davie also had links with the Scottish poets and novelists of the Scots Renaissance during the 1950s. It was after Davie had settled in London in 1949 that he came into contact with Johnstone who was teaching in the Chelsea School of Art. Johnstone by this time was distinctly Jungian in his ideas rather than Freudian as the Surrealists had been.

This Jungian view of the subconscious and the survival in all of us of the primitive, as a set of archetypes is one to which Davie has remained loyal ever since and a view which would be a major inspiration to Will Maclean.

After being introduced to the Abstract Expressionists Rothko, Motherwell and Pollock by Peggy Guggenheim in the early 1950s, Alan Davie began the natural transition from Surrealism to 'action painting', exploring and feeling his way towards a personal means of expression. The label 'action painter' describes the work of a number of artists who had the common belief that the purpose of the artist was to reestablish contact with the subconscious and with our primordial source. With the example of archaic and primitive art in mind, they sought to externalize the internal and to bring the events of the subconscious into the realm of the conscious. It was the surrealist immigrants who arrived in America during the War that sparked this style with their emphasis on the instinctual and archaic, employing the concept of universally meaningful forms buried in the subconscious and attempting to express them via the use of ancient myths, symbols and signs. (Tucker and Hall. 1992. p.12)

Davie continued throughout his career to explore and refine his symbols and signs from humanity in the broad sense with a special emphasis on the primitive from all continents. Maclean's generation was greatly influenced by Davie and in their immediate environment found the same primitive sources in the ancient Celtic tradition of the Highlands. One of Maclean's contemporaries to work in this way was John Bellany. His strong symbolism and narrative style is sometimes brutal but also shares a vision of Highland life that was fed on myth and superstition

and the possibility of shift between the actual and the spiritual.

John Bellany like Maclean grew up beside a seaport in the Highlands and similarly this greatly influenced his work. The fishing town of Port Seton was his home and the people who lived there are represented in his early work *Allegory* (1964). The iconography used here is the that of the crucifixion. On the three crosses instead of human figures there are three gigantic bodies of gutted fish or the carcasses of sacrificed whales. There is a uniqueness, both in the image and the actual surface of the paint, that describes it and which makes his work stand apart from the his contemporaries in Scottish painting. Bellany continued to develop these qualities in a series of paintings that incorporated fishermen and their activities into images that recall Millet, Courbet and Rembrandt in which he uses the Christian symbolism of fish and fishermen to suggest wider themes. (MacEwen 1994, p.50)

According to critic Duncan Macmillan, Bellany is undoubtedly the most influential figure of his generation. His work with its distinctive personality made a strong impact on the course of painting in Britain, especially on younger artists working in a figurative manner. Like Maclean, he listened to and was impressed by modern Scottish literature in the 1960s and, in particular, to Hugh MacDiarmid with his forthright manner. In the same way Will Maclean was listening to poet Sorley MacLean not as a pastime but as a part of a forum in which values were forged and the basic questions of history and identity examined and debated.

In the Summer of 1995 I first encountered the work of Will Maclean during the Éigse Carlow Arts Festival. The artist had brought together a small selection of his work which included prints, made with the utmost care and skill, each of which was accompanied by a poem written by a contemporary Scottish poet either in Gaelic or English. His main work consisted of a triptych construction, *Bottle Beach Settlement I, II, III*. These paintings/constructions were made in 1988 and were carefully laid out to be read in a particular way.

Maclean approaches his work almost like an archaeologist in the way he looks for found objects as well as searching for ways to create with them. A genuine interest in archaeology was developed early in his career while travelling in Greece and Italy, where he learned basic investigation techniques from archaeologists he had befriended. His whole method, since he began making constructions, presents an analogy with archaeology in the way both depend on buried meaning. In archaeology objects whose use may originally have been trivial or matter of fact assume a significance when seen in a context from which we can read something of a whole culture.

In the *Bottle Beach Settlement* series Maclean presents his own finds and commentary of a buried cache of nineteenth century bottles documenting time and place. He has then

developed this prosaic fact into a visual poem that celebrates the qualities that give archaeology meaning. Each element in the piece represents an aspect of the context of the find, the elements of the sea, the shore and those of time and history. It is this confrontation with time and continuity which is the imaginative dimension of all archaeology. Maclean sets this out in the shift from light to dark over the sequence of fifteen pieces that make up this work. It is the diurnal transition, the basic unit of awareness of time that rolls on, so far beyond our comprehension. This passage of time from the moment of burial to the moment of discovery has been measured by the succession of nights and days with the same indifferent regularity and the same numberless progression as the ticking of a clock. (Macmillian 1992, p.63)

In *Bottle Beach Settlement I*, (1988. Fig.4) the lightness of colour reflects the day in the passage of time. The five pieces which make up the unit are called *Salt*, *Bone*, *Ritual*, *Shell* and *Bottle Find*. They all have these small bottles which are like containers for a precious liquid, a medicine, perhaps. The first piece, *Salt*, reflects the traditional importance and value since early times of salt and more immediately represents the way in which fish are preserved and thus the livelihood of fishermen. In *Bone*, the element of bone which has been sharpened and used by fishermen in the past for shaving and cutting is also shown to signify the meaning of the life/death cycle. *Ritual*, the large central piece of this set, is both a painting on canvas and a constructed relief made from castings of rope and bottles. There is also a fisherman's traditional, small holy water casket, reflecting the hope that religion brings in the face of adversity. The themes of rebirth and death are evident in the work called *Shell*, which is an egg inside a small alcove. Beside it is a small

bottle inside a larger bottle which represents life, and is similar to a ship in a bottle. *Bottle Find*, the last in this series is a recess containing a group of small bottles similar to the way in which they were originally found on the beach and is in honour of the person who placed them there not realising the possibility that they might have another life.

The importance of material is essential to the work of Maclean in that every piece is a skilfully assembled collage, some of which are expertly carved in timber or are casts in resin or plaster of found objects that can be manipulated. The quality of his painting is most accomplished as would be expected of someone who had exhibited only paintings and drawings for a number of years before discovering his preference for constructed assemblages.

In the twentieth century, the Cubists, the Futurists and the Dadaists were among the first to use collage and saw it as a means of protest against entrenched social and academic values. The Surrealists employed collage as a surrogate for the subconscious, leading up to the 1960s where many Pop artists employed collage as a means of incorporating popular culture into their work thereby commenting on art and the society from which it spawns. It was with Cubism that modern collage took its first step. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque proposed a complete dismantling of one point perspective, in use since the Renaissance. They proposed a new type of painting, and invented a new sculpture constructed from found objects and flimsy two-dimensional works made from cardboard and paper, glued or pasted together. In painting, a new fictional image replaced the staged image of reality as was known and a new sculpture also changed dramatically when form was constructed

or assembled rather than carved from wood or stone. Composed as it is from actual fragments, collage is an ideal medium to record the temporary ephemera of everyday life. (Waldmann 1992, p.15)

Just as Picasso and Braque used the newspaper *Le Monde* and theatre tickets to capture and record the transitory, the absurd, the social and political life of the artist, similarly Will Maclean portrays that of the local and contemporary with objects such as the flotsam and jetsam which he finds and then inbeds in his work. The present and the near or distant past are in many ways continuous, and that of the local and parochial are often poignant and universal.

This is evident in Maclean's *Bottle Beach Settlement II*, (1988. Fig.5) where the colours are painted in mid tones to reflect those times of the day which are neither night nor day. The titles of these works are *Sand*, *Water*, *Measurement*, *Flint* and *Pigment*. *Sand*, has a recess with a bottle of sand lying in the middle. Again, as in all fifteen works, there are casts of three miniature bottles sticking into the canvas. He has painted this with a mixture of acrylic and sand. In the piece *Water*, there is a recess in which a bird's head is painted with resin and cloth. The large central panel *Measurement* is made from the various measuring tools used to measure nets and the depth of the sea, tools which are similar to those used for centuries. In the next work, *Flint*, Maclean is again using the theme of an ancient tool, one which has been used for thousands of years. The last work in this series is *Pigment* in which he has put a tool for grinding oxides into another small box-like recess. The reference here is to himself and his tools as an artist.

When Maclean began using objects in his work in the early 1970s, constructions and object-based work was well established internationally. The surrealist influence on Maclean is freely acknowledged and the use of the box in his work is one such manifestation of this influence. In recent years Maclean's work has varied from totem-like sculptures to almost flat constructions, but it was his box constructions that earned him acclaim. To define the box is simple enough, a case or receptacle for containing anything. Within the artists' world this definition is expanded and transformed; boxes can act as repositories for assemblages, chance events, performances, ideologies, dreams and nightmares. The box can be a stage set instead of a convenient method of packaging, a kind of reliquary, a boundary between inside and outside, public and private, an extended frame, a secret, a cabinet of curiosities. Maclean's boxes tell a story of Highland life and history. Even though there is much tragedy, his art is neither nostalgic nor self pitying; rather it draws its strength from the qualities and continuity of Highland culture.

Joseph Cornell was an earlier artist who worked in a similar way to Maclean by relying on the unexpected juxtaposition of objects to imbue his collages and box constructions with a new symbolic imagery. Maclean was unaware of Cornell when starting out with his box constructions, but later on he saw a show in The Whitechapel Gallery and it merely confirmed his belief in the narrative as a valid end and, in constructions, found objects and collage a means to that end. It also offered a contrast to the constructions of Fred Stiven, and Paul Neagu, two important influences from Britain.

Linked with the Surrealists for many years, Cornell neither

subscribed to their ideology nor participated in their activities. He did, however, acknowledge their influence, with constructions of homage to Max Ernst and Marcel Duchamp. A great part of the appeal that Cornell and, more importantly, Duchamp holds today is in the fact that they declassified the status of the object, and in doing so allowed the freedom enjoyed by a range of artists like Maclean, Beuys, Rauschenberg, Warhol and the Fluxus group. The object remains a typical surrealist creation because of the way it imposed the object on modern art and brought it into competition with sculpture which was then forced to redefine itself on the basis of the object. Some of the different genres of objects used by the Surrealists were the box, the ready-made, the found object, the interpreted natural object, the phantom object, the dreamt object, the poem object, the mobile and mute objects.(Alexandrian 1969,p.140) There are others not included and it is mainly due to the Surrealists that such a range of possibilities exists. Primarily the Dada object remained limited by being horrible and provoking the idea of destruction, whereas the Surrealist object set out to be sumptuous while using the simplest means to exalt the nuances of analogical thought. It is within this great tradition that Maclean has continued to develop.

In *Bottle Beach Settlement III* (1988.Fig.6) the colours are much darker in each of the five collages, which are secured to a black background. This reflects night-time in the cycle of the day and therefore the record of time passing through this site. the pieces are named *Bronze*, *Skin*, *Warfare*, *Clay* and *Charcoal*. With *Bronze*, the reference lies with its common usage on boats. Its shape, a ring or wrist band, brings to mind an object from an archaeological dig, reflecting Maclean's interest in the subject and his interest in hidden or buried meanings.

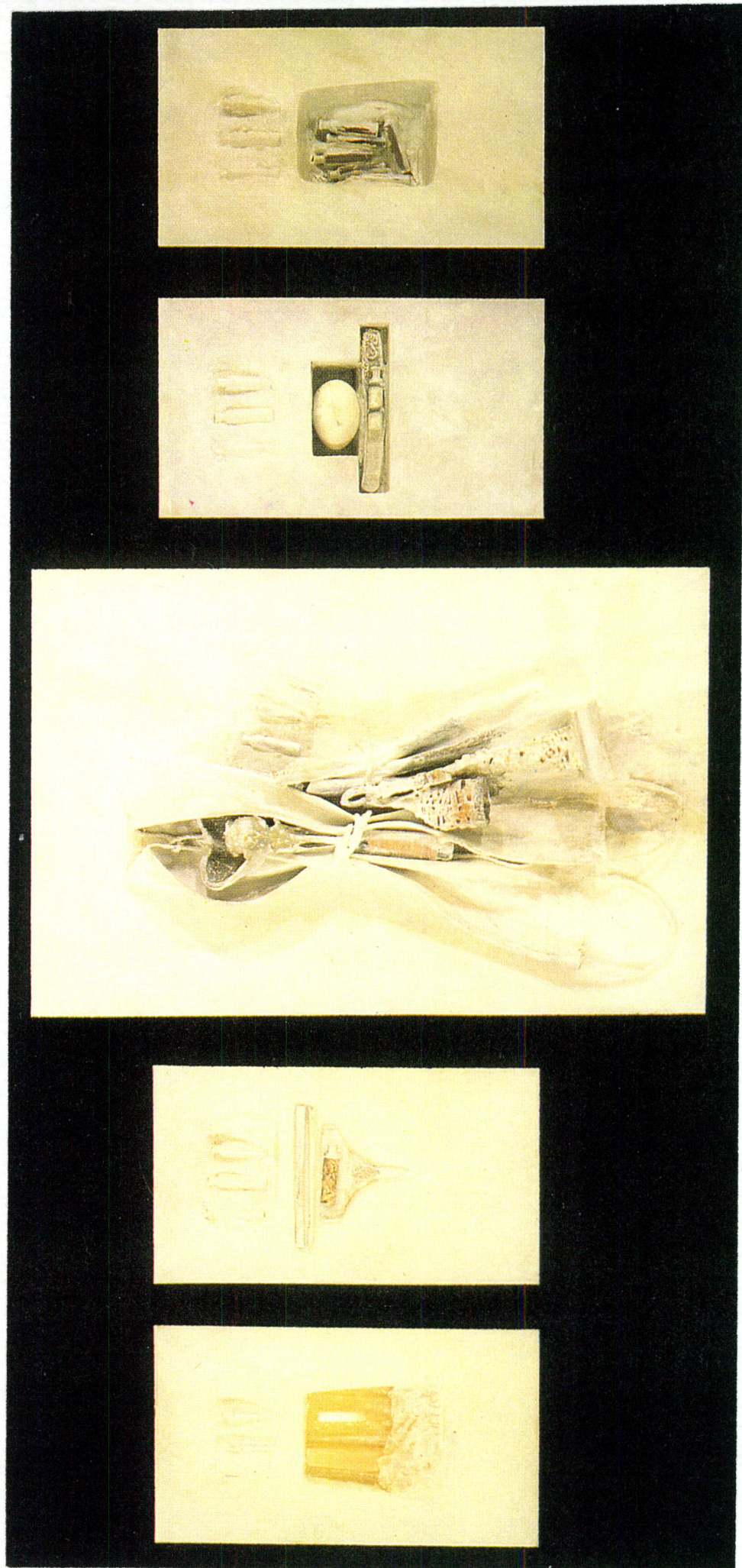


Fig.4 Bottle Beach Settlement I (1988)

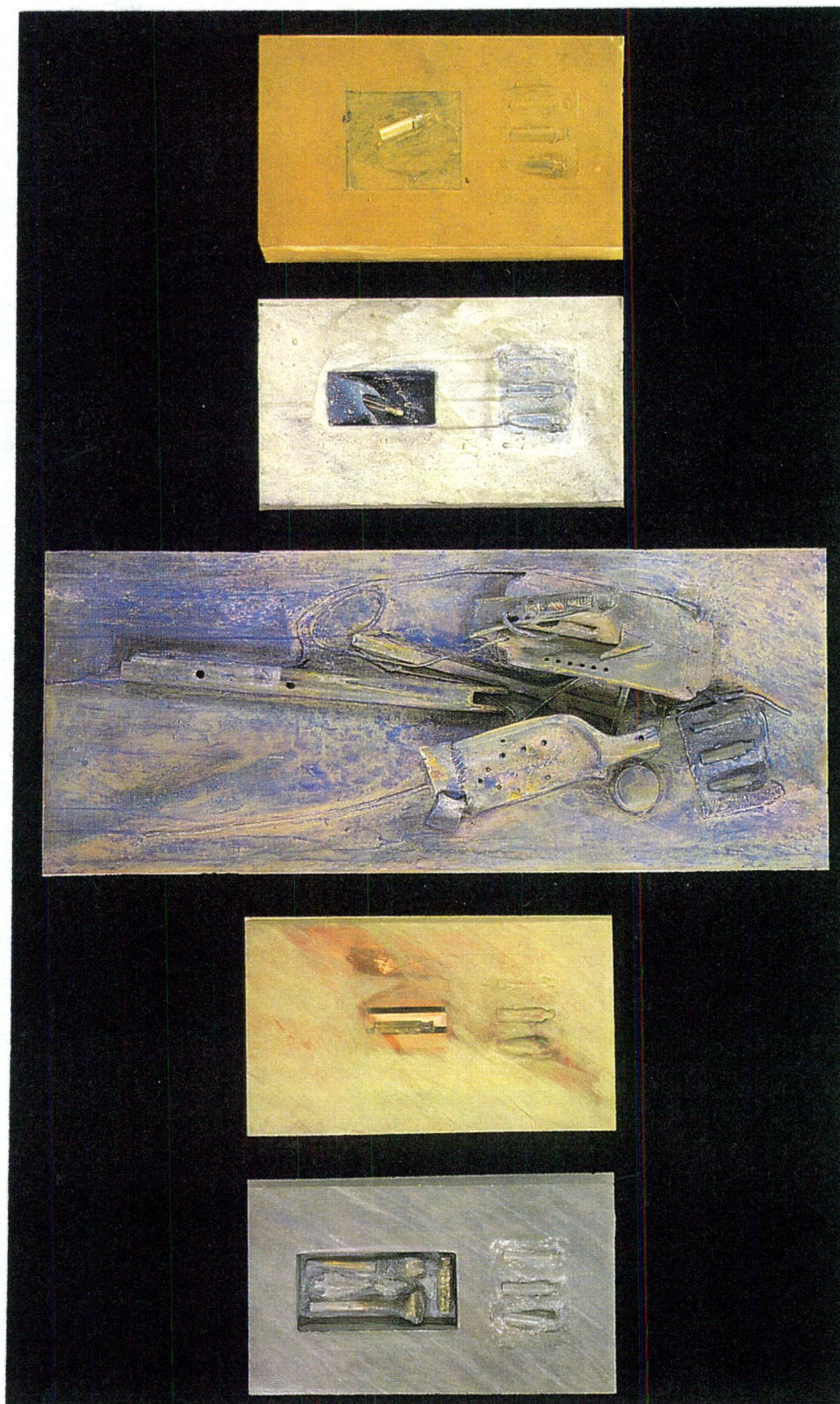
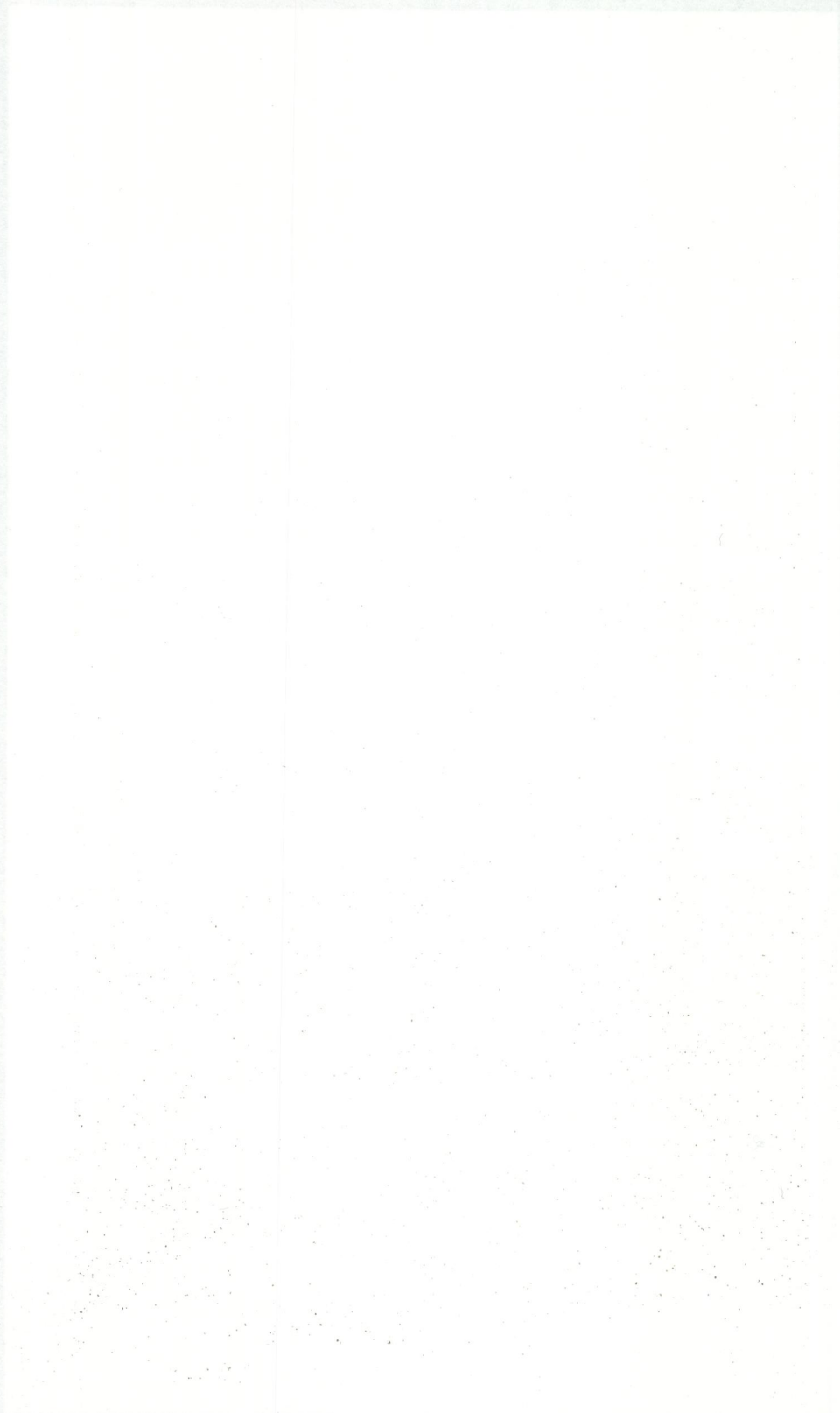


Fig. 5 Bottle Beach Settlement II (1988)



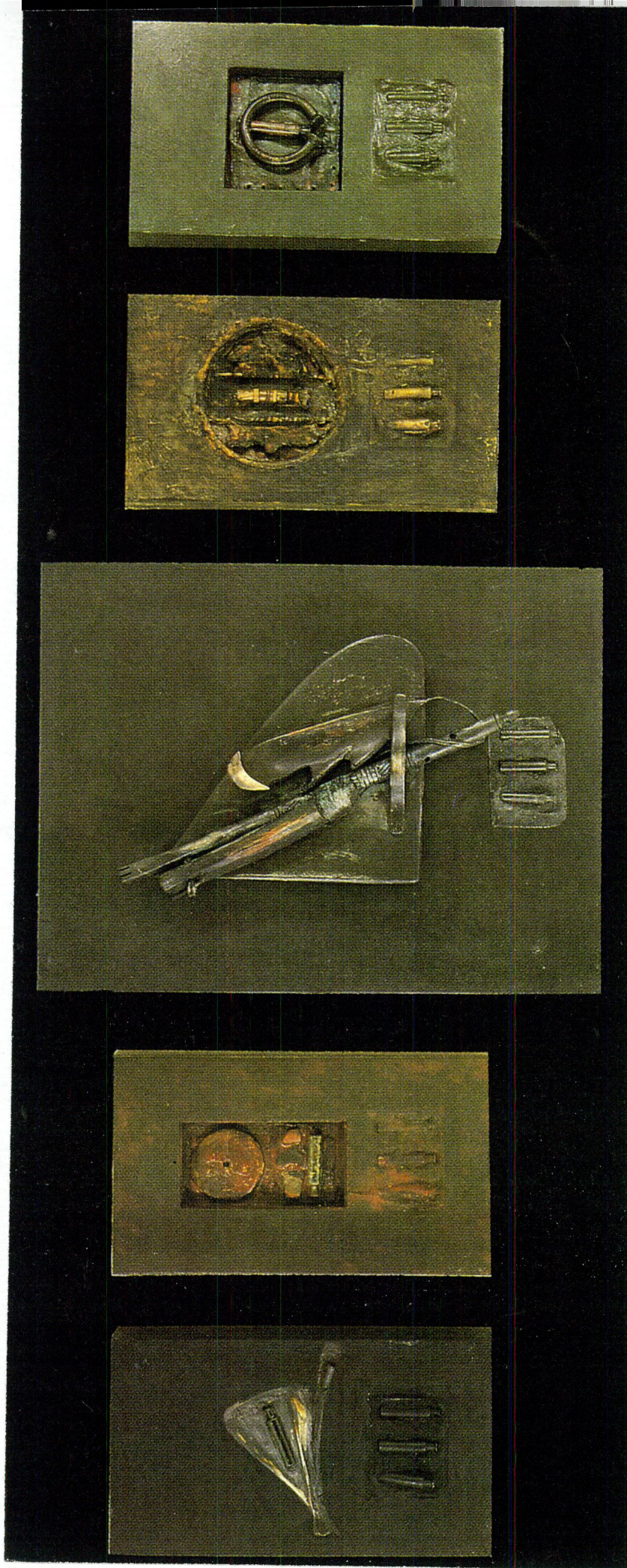


Fig. 6 Bottle Beach Settlement III (1988)



0015 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025 2026 2027 2028 2029 2030 2031 2032 2033 2034 2035 2036 2037 2038 2039 2040 2041 2042 2043 2044 2045 2046 2047 2048 2049 2050 2051 2052 2053 2054 2055 2056 2057 2058 2059 2060 2061 2062 2063 2064 2065 2066 2067 2068 2069 2070 2071 2072 2073 2074 2075 2076 2077 2078 2079 2080 2081 2082 2083 2084 2085 2086 2087 2088 2089 2090 2091 2092 2093 2094 2095 2096 2097 2098 2099 2100 2101 2102 2103 2104 2105 2106 2107 2108 2109 2110 2111 2112 2113 2114 2115 2116 2117 2118 2119 2120 2121 2122 2123 2124 2125 2126 2127 2128 2129 2130 2131 2132 2133 2134 2135 2136 2137 2138 2139 2140 2141 2142 2143 2144 2145 2146 2147 2148 2149 2150 2151 2152 2153 2154 2155 2156 2157 2158 2159 2160 2161 2162 2163 2164 2165 2166 2167 2168 2169 2170 2171 2172 2173 2174 2175 2176 2177 2178 2179 2180 2181 2182 2183 2184 2185 2186 2187 2188 2189 2190 2191 2192 2193 2194 2195 2196 2197 2198 2199 2200 2201 2202 2203 2204 2205 2206 2207 2208 2209 2210 2211 2212 2213 2214 2215 2216 2217 2218 2219 2220 2221 2222 2223 2224 2225 2226 2227 2228 2229 2230 2231 2232 2233 2234 2235 2236 2237 2238 2239 2240 2241 2242 2243 2244 2245 2246 2247 2248 2249 2250 2251 2252 2253 2254 2255 2256 2257 2258 2259 2260 2261 2262 2263 2264 2265 2266 2267 2268 2269 2270 2271 2272 2273 2274 2275 2276 2277 2278 2279 2280 2281 2282 2283 2284 2285 2286 2287 2288 2289 2290 2291 2292 2293 2294 2295 2296 2297 2298 2299 2300 2301 2302 2303 2304 2305 2306 2307 2308 2309 2310 2311 2312 2313 2314 2315 2316 2317 2318 2319 2320 2321 2322 2323 2324 2325 2326 2327 2328 2329 2330 2331 2332 2333 2334 2335 2336 2337 2338 2339 2340 2341 2342 2343 2344 2345 2346 2347 2348 2349 2350 2351 2352 2353 2354 2355 2356 2357 2358 2359 2360 2361 2362 2363 2364 2365 2366 2367 2368 2369 2370 2371 2372 2373 2374 2375 2376 2377 2378 2379 2380 2381 2382 2383 2384 2385 2386 2387 2388 2389 2390 2391 2392 2393 2394 2395 2396 2397 2398 2399 2400 2401 2402 2403 2404 2405 2406 2407 2408 2409 2410 2411 2412 2413 2414 2415 2416 2417 2418 2419 2420 2421 2422 2423 2424 2425 2426 2427 2428 2429 2430 2431 2432 2433 2434 2435 2436 2437 2438 2439 2440 2441 2442 2443 2444 2445 2446 2447 2448 2449 2450 2451 2452 2453 2454 2455 2456 2457 2458 2459 2460 2461 2462 2463 2464 2465 2466 2467 2468 2469 2470 2471 2472 2473 2474 2475 2476 2477 2478 2479 2480 2481 2482 2483 2484 2485 2486 2487 2488 2489 2490 2491 2492 2493 2494 2495 2496 2497 2498 2499 2500 2501 2502 2503 2504 2505 2506 2507 2508 2509 2510 2511 2512 2513 2514 2515 2516 2517 2518 2519 2520 2521 2522 2523 2524 2525 2526 2527 2528 2529 2530 2531 2532 2533 2534 2535 2536 2537 2538 2539 2540 2541 2542 2543 2544 2545 2546 2547 2548 2549 2550 2551 2552 2553 2554 2555 2556 2557 2558 2559 2560 2561 2562 2563 2564 2565 2566 2567 2568 2569 2570 2571 2572 2573 2574 2575 2576 2577 2578 2579 2580 2581 2582 2583 2584 2585 2586 2587 2588 2589 2590 2591 2592 2593 2594 2595 2596 2597 2598 2599 2600 2601 2602 2603 2604 2605 2606 2607 2608 2609 2610 2611 2612 2613 2614 2615 2616 2617 2618 2619 2620 2621 2622 2623 2624 2625 2626 2627 2628 2629 2630 2631 2632 2633 2634 2635 2636 2637 2638 2639 2640 2641 2642 2643 2644 2645 2646 2647 2648 2649 2650 2651 2652 2653 2654 2655 2656 2657 2658 2659 2660 2661 2662 2663 2664 2665 2666 2667 2668 2669 2670 2671 2672 2673 2674 2675 2676 2677 2678 2679 2680 2681 2682 2683 2684 2685 2686 2687 2688 2689 2690 2691 2692 2693 2694 2695 2696 2697 2698 2699 2700 2701 2702 2703 2704 2705 2706 2707 2708 2709 2710 2711 2712 2713 2714 2715 2716 2717 2718 2719 2720 2721 2722 2723 2724 2725 2726 2727 2728 2729 2730 2731 2732 2733 2734 2735 2736 2737 2738 2739 2740 2741 2742 2743 2744 2745 2746 2747 2748 2749 2750 2751 2752 2753 2754 2755 2756 2757 2758 2759 2760 2761 2762 2763 2764 2765 2766 2767 2768 2769 2770 2771 2772 2773 2774 2775 2776 2777 2778 2779 2780 2781 2782 2783 2784 2785 2786 2787 2788 2789 2790 2791 2792 2793 2794 2795 2796 2797 2798 2799 2800 2801 2802 2803 2804 2805 2806 2807 2808 2809 2810 2811 2812 2813 2814 2815 2816 2817 2818



Maclean's constructions often work in this way and frequently contain references to genuine archaeological objects alongside invented material combining fact and fiction to make a construction, reinventing from his imagination a construction that might have existed. The second of this series, *Skin*, is a reference to fish, oilskins and the tar cloth which covers the rib-like structure of boats, which is why there is a bone fragment embedded in a resin cloth and rubber combination. The middle and largest piece, *Warfare*, is a reflection of the flotsam and jetsam to be found along the coast of North West Scotland, some of which are pieces of warfare, either from old warships that sunk during and after both World Wars or present day military hardware from Naval firing practices. This middle piece shares an overall theme with the large central pieces from *Bottle Beach Settlement I* and *II* which are *Measurement* and *Ritual*. They are man's constants throughout his existence.

The second last piece in the third triptych is *Clay* which is in a clay tablet form to indicate a vessel and its life giving qualities. It is of red painted pigment, an indicator of the process of making this substance from the element of fire. The last piece is *Charcoal* which contains a thin bone and a school compass to show the process on which Maclean places great belief.

Maclean's great ability in research and attention to detail was recognised by an award from the University of Dundee in 1994 when he was appointed a Personal Professorship for his achievements in the college while exhibiting and as a leader of research studies. His methodology that is now prevalent was honed to a more precise nature during a commission he received in 1973 in which he researched and recorded the Ring Net technique of fishing which is peculiar to the Highlands. This

method of fishing had evolved a hundred years previously following the Clearances and the forcible move into fishing of Highland farming people, a move that is recorded in Neil Gunn's saga *The Silver Darlings* and which both Maclean's father's family in Coigach and his mother's family in Skye had experienced first hand. This comprehensive study of a culture through its tools and its artifacts was almost a paradigm of archaeology, which is after all the interpretation of a society through its objects and its material record. Maclean recorded some four hundred drawings and because this type of fishing disappeared shortly after the project it became an important historical document.

What distinguishes Maclean's art in the *Ring Net* (1973-74. Fig.7) is his thoroughness together with his historical sense and his insistence on information rather than on personal interpretation. These are qualities that underlie the distinction of his later work. This work is often constructed around complex and precise information about fishing, whaling or Highland history and myth. Therefore the *Ring Net* involves a continuity, more than being just a subject matter.

Working closely on the *Ring Net* project was the poet Angus Martin from Campbeltown whose poem *Dancers* dedicated to Maclean, concerns the decline and end of ring-net fishing. (Macmillan 1992, p.29)

And I wished that I could dance
in a yellow oilskin suit,
dance on the dancing water
to the slap of an old thigh boot.

They were the champions of some greater
dance
performed in a night of islands.

Maclean took from this poem the title for his set of ten prints to Gaelic poetry called *A Night of Islands* (1991 Peacock Printmakers, Aberdeen) This collection of prints accompanied the *Bottle Beach Settlement* at the Éigse, Carlow Arts Festival in 1995. One print called *Dancers* was exhibited alongside Angus Martin's poem of the same name and it recalls Maclean's earlier collage *Skye Fisherman: In Memoriam* (1989), which honoured his uncle William Reid who was a ring-net fisherman. The imprint of a ring-net forms the border pattern to represent this.

While Maclean consistently touches on themes of

universal significance, the dominant subject of his work remains the history, culture and lived experience of Highland communities. To this end he has immersed himself in the mythology, oral history and poetry of the Gaels and his work functions both as a memorial to the tragic history of the Highlands and as a celebration of the continuing vigour of Gaelic culture.(Crawford 1991. p.1)

In the collection *A Night of Islands*, ten coloured etchings inspired by Gaelic poems and prose, some of the poems are traditional, some are modern and contemporary. Most, though not all, were originally written in Gaelic. The format of the etchings mirrors the look of his constructed boxes. He created a border recession and image with the overall effect of looking through a window and often the borders will reflect the content of the image. Two examples of this are *Strathnavar* and *Adam's Clan*. In *Strathnavar* (1991.Fig.8) in the border there is the suggestion of smoke and in the centre is an image made up from the horns of sheep piled up in a creel. Above this are raised two smoking roof timbers from a destroyed cottage. This commemorates one of the most notorious of all the Clearances undertaken on behalf of the Duke of Sunderland. In *Adam's Clan* (1991.Fig.9) Maclean takes the text from the poem *Clann Adhaimh/Adam's Clan* by George Campbell Hay. It is about emigration and the last verse captures this image. (Macmillan 1992. p.107)

There she goes with a curve on her sails, putting
each sheet to the test, an ancient ship with bustle
and cheer and suffering aboard her; a horizon full
of secrets unrevealed under her bowsprit head, and
the foam of her wake closing and losing itself in the
great sea astern.

Maclean prints this image with a view through the rigging of a sailing ship in the border and central image. The central

image in each of the etchings offers Maclean's response to the content of the poem. However, there is no sense in which the artist is illustrating the poems. These are images created to reveal the mood and cadence of each work. In consequence they are often dark, tragic, brooding and frightening, but also mysterious, surreal and beautiful.

The box construction *Bard MacIntyre's Box* (1984, Fig.10) was an earlier inspiration for the etching called *The Author of this is...* and it accompanies a poem edited and translated by William J Watson.

The inspiration for the constructed work came from a poem called *The Ship of Women*, from an anthology of Gaelic verse compiled by the Dean of Lismore during the sixteenth century. The author uses a ghost ship and its crew to create a scene of moral and physical chaos. Maclean's construction is of a group of found objects which become the bizarre crew of the same ghost ship of temptation, alternatively to be called the ship of fools. He presents these grotesque women-like figures in a black mass, one displaying an oversized vagina, formed from two seals teeth and is similar to the Sheila-na-Gig figures in Ireland. Down in the dark water below the boat swim threatening fish, a metaphor to represent the darker motives of the subconscious. This imagery is a reminder that neither Highland culture nor Maclean's metaphoric use of it is any more morally simple or different than human culture anywhere, and that a tension always exists in reflecting an idealised past innocence and present corruption. (Macmillan 1992,p 74)

The construction *Wheelhouse Triptych* (1981, Fig.11) is also about poetry and ships. The ship is implied by a wheelhouse

seen from both sides and the front. This ship carries metaphors like a poem or a work of art, moving through the imagination or, as in Sorley MacLean's poem *The Ship*, the ship is Gaelic culture itself.

Will you defy the barbarous sea,
challenging the misfortune of ocean,
will you sail again peacefully with the tide,
will you swim like a love-making tune?

Dust and ashes the great man
forgotten in Moidart,
his language exposed, his hand lost,
the art and courage of his steering.

The other ship is an ocean rock,
her men drowned, holes in her sides:
when a darkening came she lost her way
and the non-Gaels took her for a loan.

In this poem Sorley MacLean *"cannot bear to think of a time when there was no one left with Gaelic enough to hear to the full the great song poetry of our people, the Fair Golden One....."* and the *"Black One"* of that poem *"was more or less professional Gaelic poetry, that was not necessarily great song."*

Will Maclean is also passionate about his Gaelic language and literature because his father was a native speaker and also the area in which he lives would have a rich tradition of myths and legends. In Will Maclean's construction there is a fairy ship from these same stories, one that can sail beyond the world of men and the man seal or *silkie*, which is visible in the wheelhouse and emphasises the spiritual continuity that exists in the Highlands between Man and Nature.



Fig. 8 Strathnavar (19910)





Fig. 9 Adam's Clan (1991)



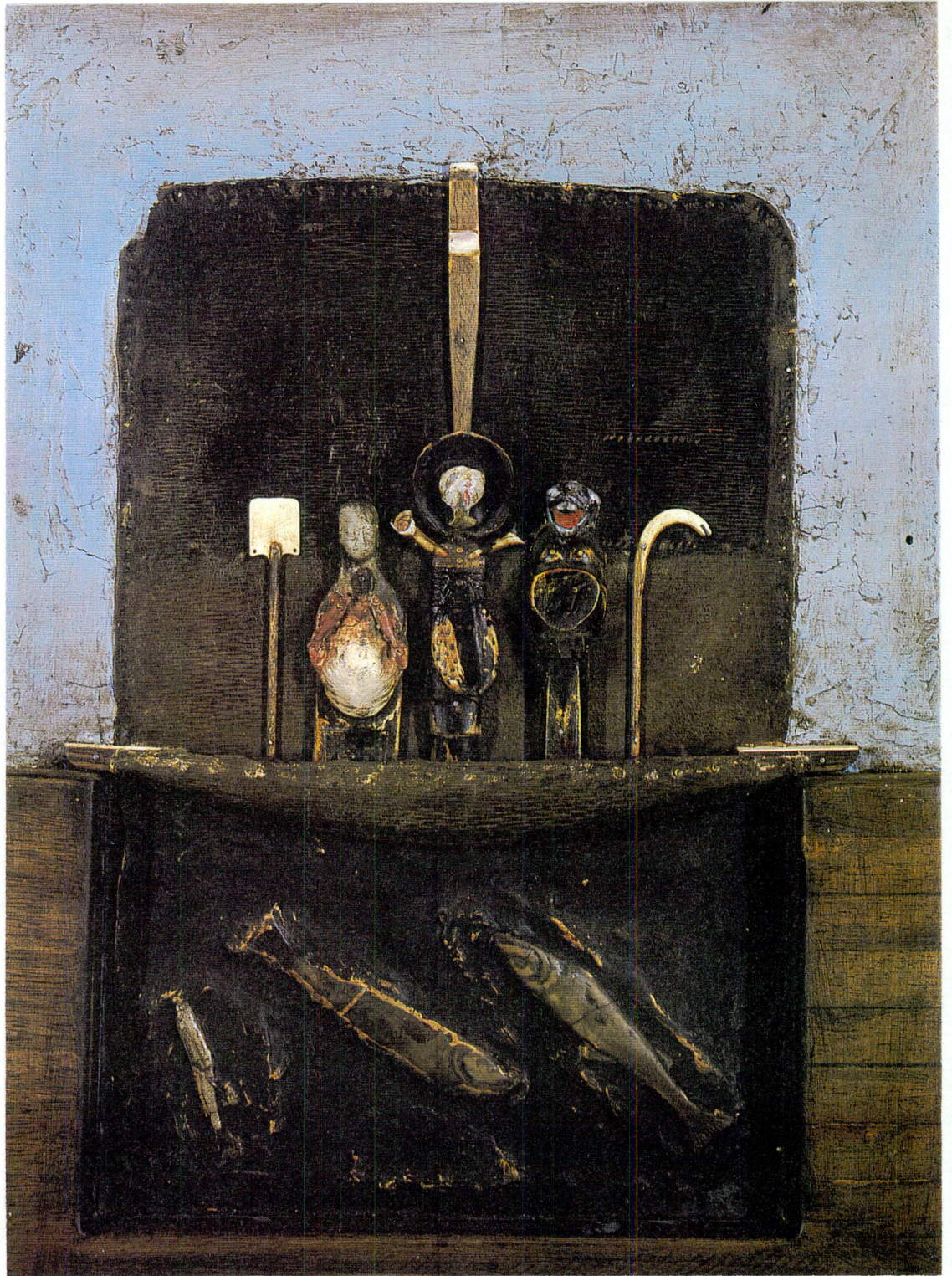


Fig. 10 Bard MacIntyre's Box (1984)





Fig. 11 Wheelhouse Triptych (1981)



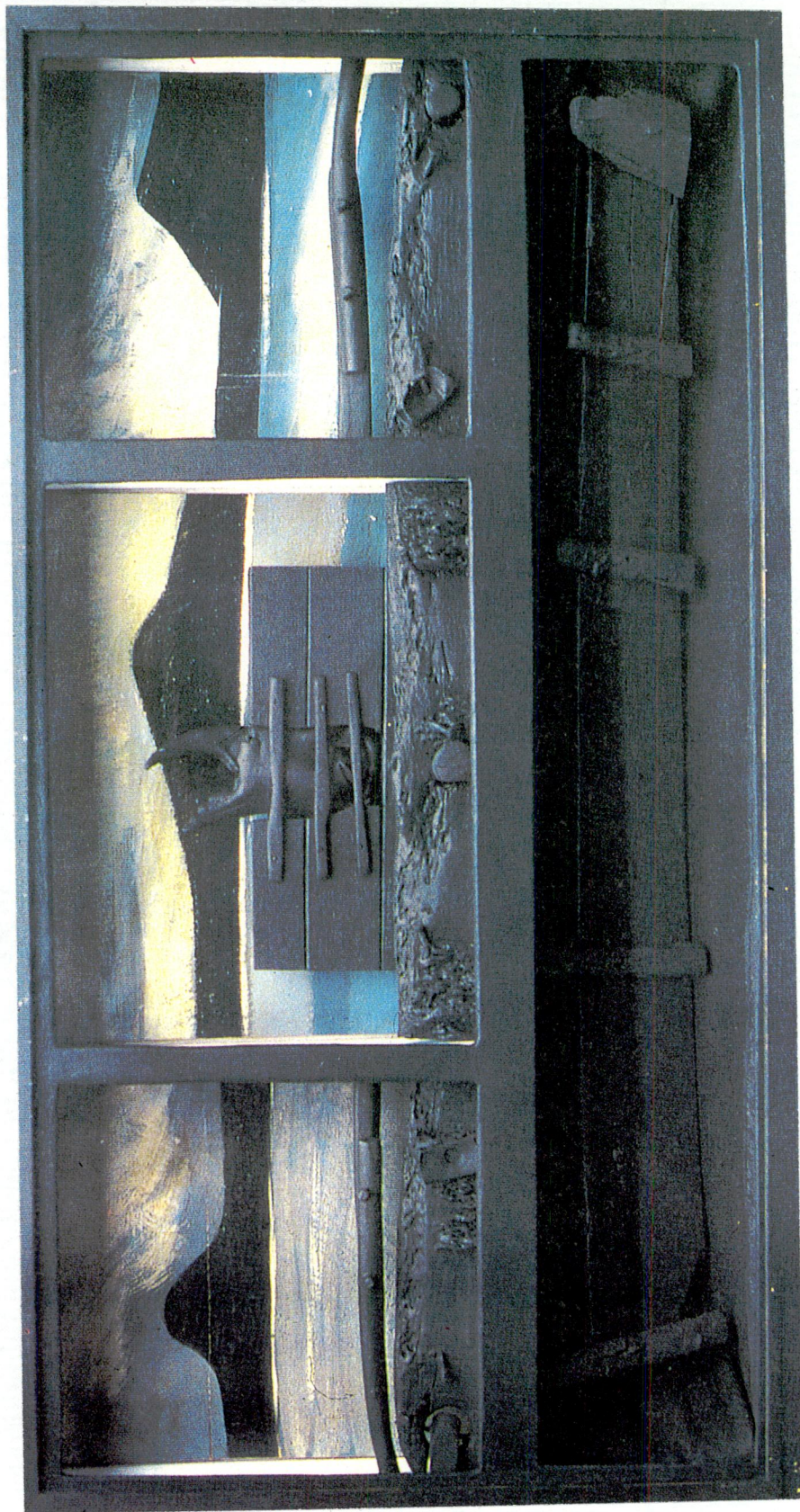


Fig. 12 Sabbath of the Dead (1978)



Will Maclean is a visual link to the Scots Renaissance in the way he uses Sorley MacLean's ideas of identity in the fusion of history and locality. The need to draw on the subconscious memory revealed in literature is an idea promoted in the Surrealist manifesto. It was this thinking that helped revive the ancient Celtic tradition in Scotland and to be an inspiration for its modern art and literature. Patrick Geddes, while passionate in bringing about a Scots Renaissance, actually argued for a modern culture so well integrated with a sense of national identity that it could draw on the deeper springs of consciousness while dealing on equal terms with the culture of a wider world.

It was Sorley MacLean and people like Hugh MacDiarmid, a brilliant poet, essayist and believer in Scots nationalism, who pushed the evolving Scots Renaissance into line with the living tradition of Gaelic culture. This background, still central to Scottish culture in the late twentieth century, was a key factor in the emergence of Joan Eardley, Eduardo Paolozzi, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Alan Davie, a group of outstanding artists of the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1960s John Bellany was directly inspired by MacDiarmid and Will Maclean by Sorley MacLean. For them art and literature had a social function and were essential tools of imaginative understanding. To quote artist Sandy Moffat from a John Bellany catalogue of 1986 about the climate of the 1960s, "MacDiarmid and the poets directly inspired by him, their idea, their horizons were far in advance of anything in Scottish painting. Something had happened in poetry which hadn't in painting; poetry seemed to matter while painting merely aimed at the Bourgeois living room with pretty still lifes and landscapes."

Themes of emigration and the loss of land, history, skills and language have a strong resonance in Scottish culture, but would also carry a strong universal significance. The Clearances and the human suffering involved is the subject of Sorley MacLean's epic poem *Hallaig*, which is about loss and is a poignant lament for the vanished people of an empty place.

I will wait for the birchwood
until it comes up from the cairn
until the whole ridge from Beinn na Lice
will be under its shade,

If it does not, I will go down to Hallaig,
to the Sabbath of the dead,
where the people are frequenting,
every single generation gone.

They are still in Hallaig,
MacLeans and MacLeods,
all who were there in the time of Mac Gill Chaluim
the dead have been seen alive.

The men lying on the green
at the end of every house that was,
the girls a wood of birches,
straight their backs, bent their heads.

In *Hallaig*, as in a lot of the most ancient Gaelic poetry, trees are very much in evidence. But these trees which earlier Gaels had treated simply as objects of affection are here symbolic of the townships and former communities whose members Sorley MacLean has transformed into a wood.

Will Maclean has drawn directly on the poem *Hallaig* and its imagery in a construction *Sabbath of the Dead* (1978. Fig.12). Its main features are the dark sombre colours, only relieved by the stark light in three separate views of the hills of Raasay seen across the water. In the foreground of each of the landscapes is a dark section of beach, reminiscent of the raised beach

mentioned in the poem. Against the central section, held in a wooden cage, a black painted crab claw stretches to heaven, like the hand of a drowning man, suggesting a powerful presence in the landscape, expressing both anguish and anger.

Will Maclean and Sorley MacLean share a deep passion for the Scotland of the nineteenth century, before much of the Gaelic culture was destroyed and though its words survive, the language carries a different resonance now than before. Sorley MacLean laments the great song poems of the last century and finds little in modern Scottish poetry that cheers him. (O'Driscoll 1981.p500) But in Will Maclean's work he sees the tradition of the Scots Renaissance in the way in which his art relates to history and to the traditions of Scotland and to the objectives of Modernism. He sees an art that is not a remote, abstract and self contained entity, but an art that is a way of reflecting on life's concerns, both immediate and wider.

A constant theme in Maclean's work is that of religion though not always in a specific way. It is more often present by implication through analogy suggested between the objects he makes and the objects made in the service of religion. He sees a continuity from the earliest times of a peoples spiritual need for some kind of mediation between themselves and the natural world.

For Maclean there is confrontation and conflict in trying to achieve this. His boyhood was filled with a strong religious presence and a strong reaction is evident in much of his work. As an artist he has looked to The Surrealists and to the broader picture of a collective consciousness as interpreted through dreams and primitive influences. The source of Maclean's conflict lies in his background and the dourness of his early religious influences as can be seen in his work in his alluding to death using the symbolism of skulls, reliquaries and memorials. Tragedy is pervasive throughout his work. His representation of The Clearances and the overall sense of loss to many Highland areas of culture, land, language and people reflects the coldness of the Highland religions. What illuminates Maclean's work with life is the underlying suggestion that a pagan or primitive is at work in the themes he chooses.

Keith Thomas in his book *Religion and the Decline of Magic* writes about the fervent actions of the various Protestant

sects in Britain in trying to stamp out the myths and magic associated with pagan rites and rituals. The Catholic Church had interacted with these pagan influences and so the Popery was believed to be in league with witches and the devil. Astrology, interpretation of dreams, charms, predication, holy wells, superstitions, wizards and fairies were all a part of everyday life for most people during the Middle Ages. The Catholic Mass was attacked and stripped bare of its mystique and magic in an effort to discredit the relics, the miracles and most Catholic rites were regarded as thinly concealed mutations of earlier pagan ceremonies. The early reformers set out to stop such traditional calendar customs as the Plough Monday procession, banned since 1548 and the saints days associated with special trades and occupations which were banned in 1547. Throughout the years the Puritans and extreme Protestants tried to ban every piece of superstition and also pagan customs with magical association. This was impossible because such practices were so deeply ingrained in peoples' psyche and also because of the associated healing powers and favours granted by God. Indeed, most Protestants also relied on certain people in their community who had "powers"

Maclean's religious background comes to the fore in a number of works. In *Portrait of Angus Mackenzie* (1982. Fig.13) the central element is a page from a Gaelic bible, coated with transparent resin and then waxed so that it looks like a fly in amber, suspended in time. This central image is edged with bone. Angus Mackenzie was a sternly religious man, but he taught his nephew Will Maclean to fish and to make model boats. In the work these appear together with the whet stones that he used to sharpen his tools.



Fig. 13 Portrait of Angus Mackenzie (1982)



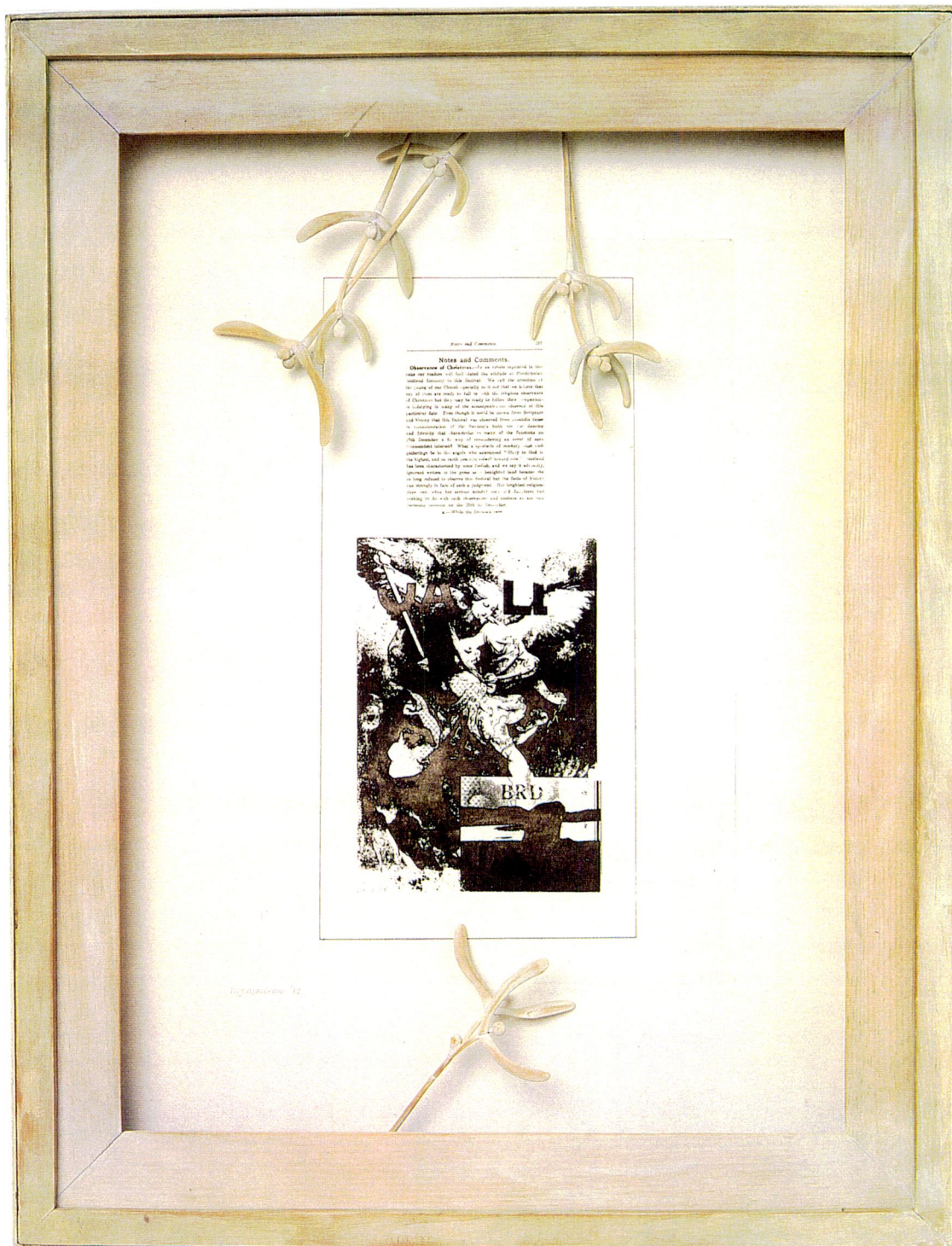


Fig. 14 Observation of Christmas (1982)



Fig. 15 Minister Preaching at Achiltibuie (1964)



Fig. 16 Sea Lectern (1989)

In the Iron Age, whet stones with their power over metal were symbols of kingship reflecting the stature of such an individual in a child's eye

A reaction to the Scottish Free Kirk, the religion of the Highlands is seen in the work *Observation of Christmas* (1982. Fig. 14). In its centrepiece is a text warning against the celebration of the feast and summoned by the Kirk's fulminations, an avenging angel is descending on Skye to chastise those foolhardy enough to find pleasure in it. A piece of carved mistletoe surrounds the text and this is a linking of the modern Christmas to its pre-Christian origins.

Minister Preaching in the Kirk at Achiltibuie (1964. Fig. 15) captures perfectly the sparseness of the cold and leaking church and by extension the fact that there is little comfort in such a religion. Organised religion failed the Highlanders as their ministers betrayed them and perhaps their religion reflected this reality. Recognition of man's ineffectuality in controlling his fate and of God's arbitrariness in dispensing it is a measure of the realism of the Calvinist belief. It is not a creed of false comfort. It matches the harsh reality of a northern existence, just as the brutality of the Clearances is matched by the harshness of the Highland environment.

In *Memories of a Northern Childhood* the arrangement of objects from his childhood inside a tabernacle with gothic doors opening onto a dark interior again reveals the powerful impression that religion made on Maclean's childhood psyche. The work *Sea Lectern* (1989. Fig. 16) has also strong religious overtones reflecting the unforgiving God of Calvinist

predestination, personifying the unforgiving God of the sea. To most Calvinist thinkers the mystery of predestination was not for men to inquire into. In the 1600s this was a very important topic and in deference to this warning every attempt to identify the elect had been frowned upon as an insidious heresy. Maclean has cast images of a god, angels and a boat on the sea inside an icon-like framework to suggest that fate is beyond mere mortals. (Thomas.1971 p.439)

In Maclean's work he uses many objects and frameworks that have religious connotations. His first true assemblage or construction was a casually made requiem for his father, *Requiem Construction* (1974. Fig.17). The work consists of a group of objects framed by a church window. Its gothic shape seems to suggest a requiem, but, it also recalls the childhood experience of the kirk. Within the window are his father's pilot's cap badge, some abacus beads and a twig with painted oak apples on it. The abacus beads are a relic of primary school but also represent the calculations in navigation. The oak apples are a natural form and have heroic, even druidic associations. (Macmillan 1992.p.36) Appropriately it was a man called John Knox who spotted this construction in Maclean's studio in 1975 and encouraged him to exhibit it where it well received and this form of display has remained his main source since.

Historically reliquaries are containers for the relics of saints. Their contents were objects hallowed by association which could act as mediators between the spectator and the saint. Maclean's objects are taken from their natural environment and placed in a box or theatre of ideas that change into something sacred. Sometimes the works are actually called reliquaries as in *Fladday Reliquary* (1978). Other times he will use some

associated religious word in the title such as, ex voto, offertory, tabernacle, shrine or icon as in *Icon for a Fisherman* (1978) and moving out of the Christian tradition altogether his later works are frequently called totems.

Often Maclean's shrines and memorials are for generalized themes such as the Clearances or for a way of life, but other themes have a closer significance, as the piece for his father or that for his uncle *Skye Fisherman: In Memoriam* (1989.Fig.18) where a yellow life jacket having rubber gloves and other paraphernalia of the fisherman are combined in a painted relief. Critic Duncan Macmillan points to his "yellow oilskin as being like a suit of armour and carrying as his regalia the tools of his trade, he is the Fisher King himself, the King who died." (Macmillan 1992. p.66) In this construction was used the name *Antares* from a found fishing box. One year later the boat sank with the loss of life and thus the memorial predated the tragedy in an extraordinary coincidence.

Another personal shrine exists in the work *Abigail's Apron* (1980. Fig.19). It was during the 1995 Éigse, Carlow Arts Festival that Will Maclean received word of his aunt Abigail Mackenzie's death. Although it is now a memorial to her, originally it was a celebration of a way of life in Coigach where she had lived as had her brother, John Maclean, the artist's father. The central element is a kitchen apron carved in pine, and is typical of Highland women of her generation. In the apron pocket is a group of mysterious objects, half recognisable as kitchen utensils. One of them looks like a wooden spoon but it has a strange lump on it. One of the local men, Johnny Allie Mackenzie had such a lump on his head from a benign growth. This detail serves as a reference to the community in which she

belonged, but also points to the way children remember individuals and peculiarities out of proportion to normal life. The strength of her personality and memory is implicit in the bold simplicity with which the wood is carved and the careful beauty of the finish. By presenting the whole assemblage behind a glass door Maclean suggests that we are dealing with a memory and looking into someone's mind or imagination. On the apron is pinned what seems to be a large brooch. It is a herring with a bird's skull contained within it which together suggest both the tragic recent history of the Highlands and the extension of memory back into remote pre-history.

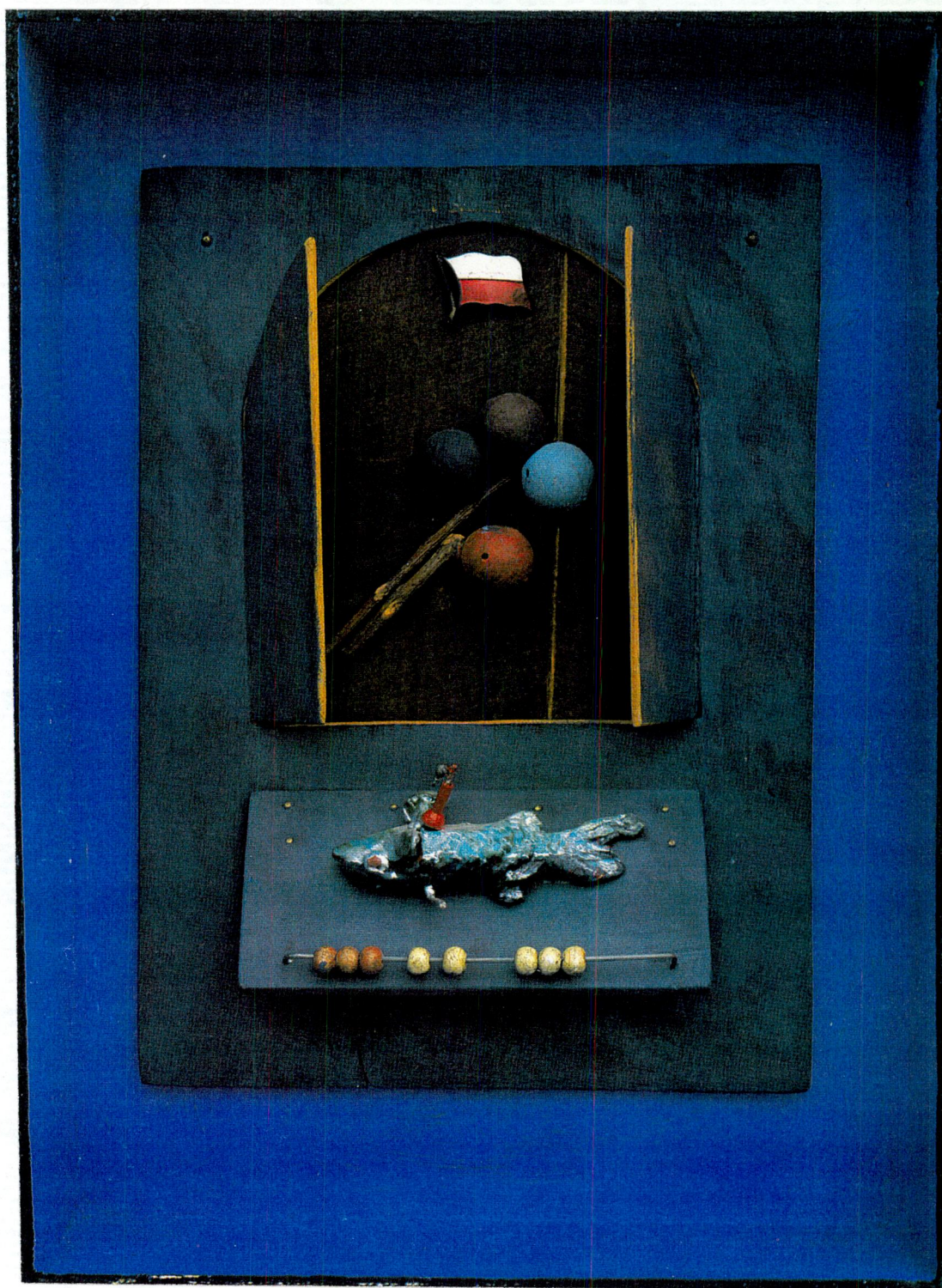


Fig. 17 Requiem Construction (1974)

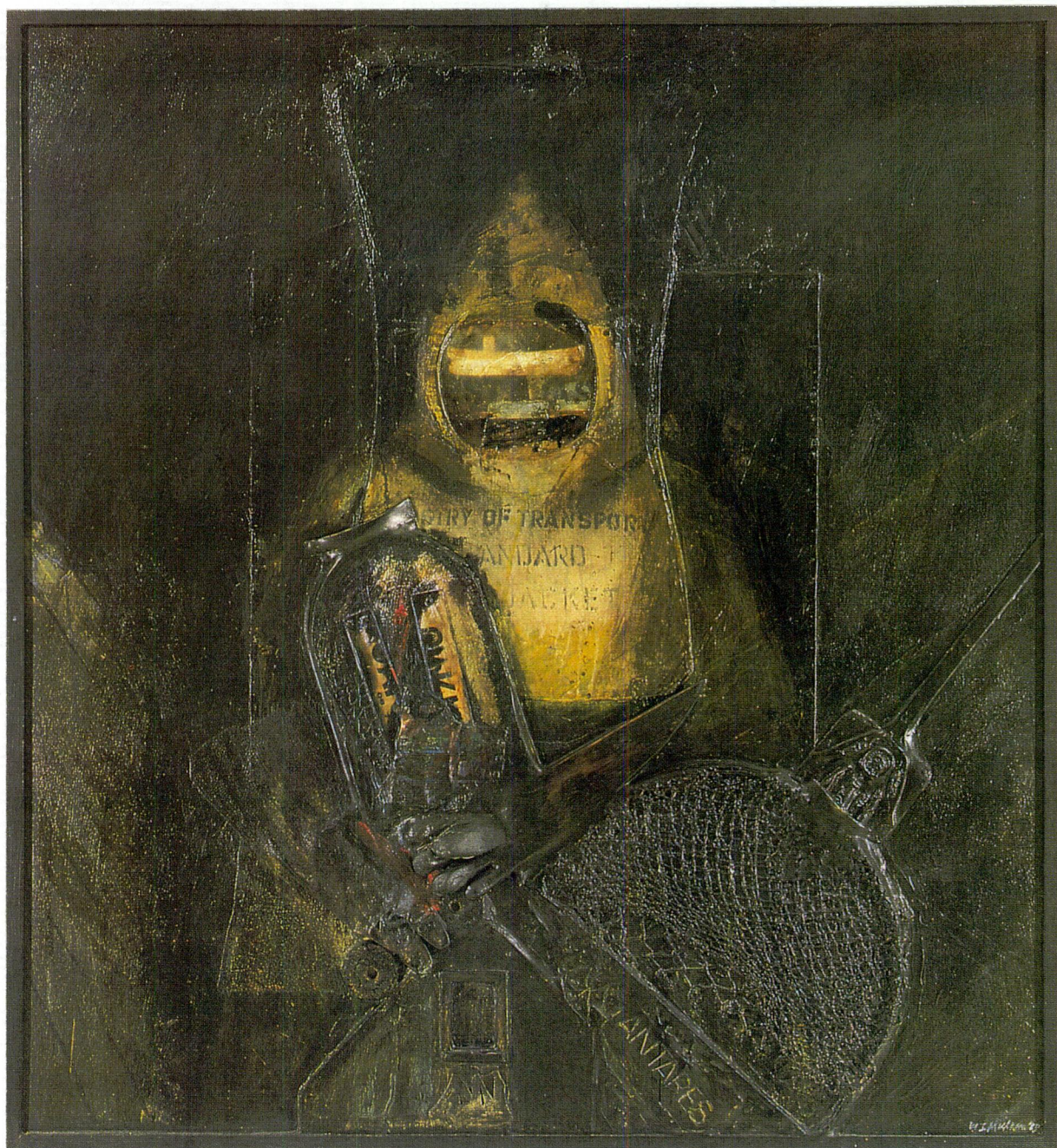


Fig. 18 Skye Fisherman: In Memoriam (1989)



Fig. 19 Abaigail's Apron (1980)



Fig. 20 Black Priest's Box (1982)

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The use of bird's skulls by Maclean is frequent in his work and has specific references to death in the Highlands. Indeed a recently unearthed collection of eagle skeletons show where a Bronze Age cult existed in the Orkney Islands, adding a primitive resonance to Maclean's work. (Macmillan 1992. p.40) To primitive man death was the most puzzling and mysterious event and it is not surprising that the earliest traces of religious belief and practice have been clustered around the burial of the dead and centered on what was to become a highly developed cult.(Parrinder 1971.p.26) Skulls estimated to be 500,000 years old have been found near Peking, China that were used in a ceremonial way. Skulls there after were found in Europe that were used as vessels to inherit the spirit of the dead but always there was an association with magic.(Parrinder 1971.p.23) The Celts were fascinated with head hunting and many statues show a Celtic warrior holding a decapitated victim. The Celts believed in the transmigration of the soul and in rebirth. Iron Age graves contained equipment for the afterlife and indeed, important leaders were buried with complete chariots. (Green 1992.p.27)

This association of primitive magic and faith can be seen in Maclean's assemblage *Black Priest's Box* (1982. Fig.20) which is a kind of imaginary tool kit for a travelling Bronze Age priest. It contains all the equipment that such a priest might need to set up an alignment of standing stones, a cord measuring a megalithic yard is contained in a bone tube, cords for setting straight lines and even model standing stones.

The bird skull is used in a number of Maclean's works in the 1970's to represent death, but in a drawing from 1982 *Two Sights of the Sea* (Fig.21) we see a slightly different use of the bird skull. In the drawing there is a view through a window in

the corner of a room to the outside world and to the sea. An old man can be seen sitting outside the window against the open view, but he has been given a bird's head like a primitive ceremonial mask. As a bird, he is a creature of nature and can move freely in the world beyond. In the Celtic tradition birds possessed supernatural powers and divine entities frequently metamorphosed between human and bird forms. (Green 1992.p.42) Joan Miró used birds as images of spiritual or imaginative freedom and John Bellany also uses birds in a similar way to Maclean as metamorphic figures. Animal and bird masks are used by primitive people not as a pretence or disguise but to claim identity with the creature represented. Max Ernst was the Surrealist to use birds and bird imagery throughout his career as a personal totem and saw himself possessing shamanistic power. It is stated that Ernst considered himself hatched from the egg of an eagle and, we must consider the mythological relations that exist between the eagle and the shaman. The eagle it will be remembered is held to be the father of the first shaman and plays a considerable role in the shaman's initiation.(Rubin 1989.p.567)

Surrealism is again linked with Maclean's mysticism in the work *Window Visitation, North Uist* (1980.Fig.22) which has a strong similarity to a Roland Penrose painting *Winged Promise:Portrait of Valentine* (1937). Butterflies cover the mouth and eyes in both works. In Maclean's construction the figure inside the window is an old man close to death and according to Highland superstition, the butterflies are a premonition of death and of the soul leaving the body.

Similar connections between man and nature are to be seen in the sculptural totems Maclean has created. *Rudder*

Requiem (1985.Fig.23) links man to the spirit of fish. It shows an image of a man with his head full of fish, an indication of his dedication and of his skill as a fisherman. It is also a requiem for fishing in its most ancient form and is in the shape of a rudder carved from the end of a church pew, decorated with carving like that on a Polynesian oar. This image is similar to a mask in a primitive society and when faced with adversity as in a battle or hunt masks can help overcome fear with the help of new spirits and a changed identity. It is the need to control both the visible and the invisible powers which circumscribe human existence and to give an identity to these elusive forces (Dagan 1992.p.36)

Even in a technological age, fishing preserves a link with our remotest past. As in Angus Martin's poem, fishermen are dancers, dancing between the tide and eternity and perceived in this temporal dimension, fishing links us to our earliest ancestors, to the hunter gatherers and the state of nature. No more than a generation ago people made many of their own tools from wood and bone in ways and forms that were reminiscent of the artifacts of our neolithic ancestors. In the image *Fisherman listening for Herring* (1989. Fig.24) Maclean records the practice of ring net fishermen listening for the sound of the fish, identifying the herring by the quality of the sound they make when leaping from the water. It is an image that suggest a communion with the natural world as intimate as that of the Australian Aborigine and other primitives.

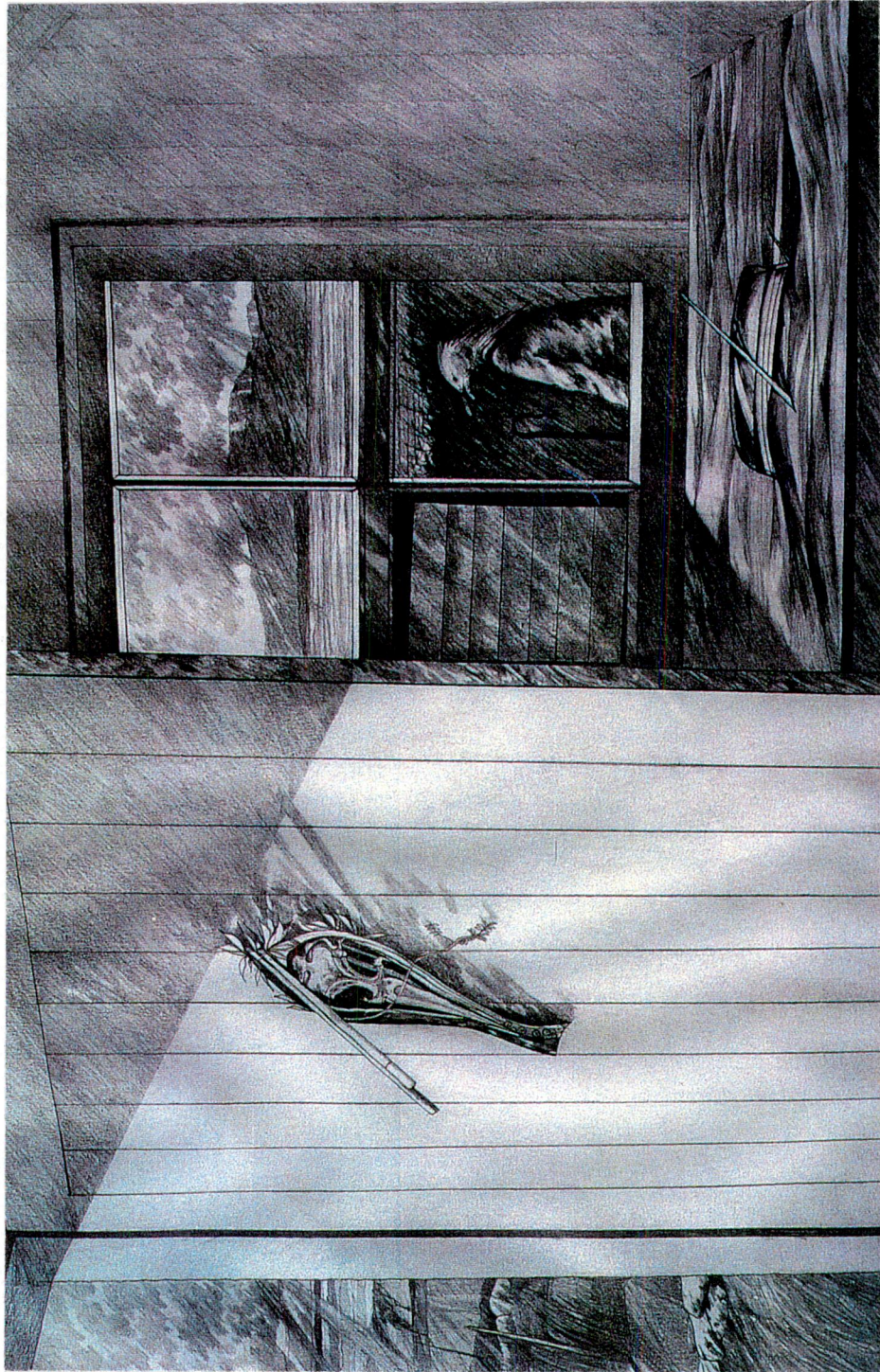


Fig. 21 Two Sights of the Sea (1982)

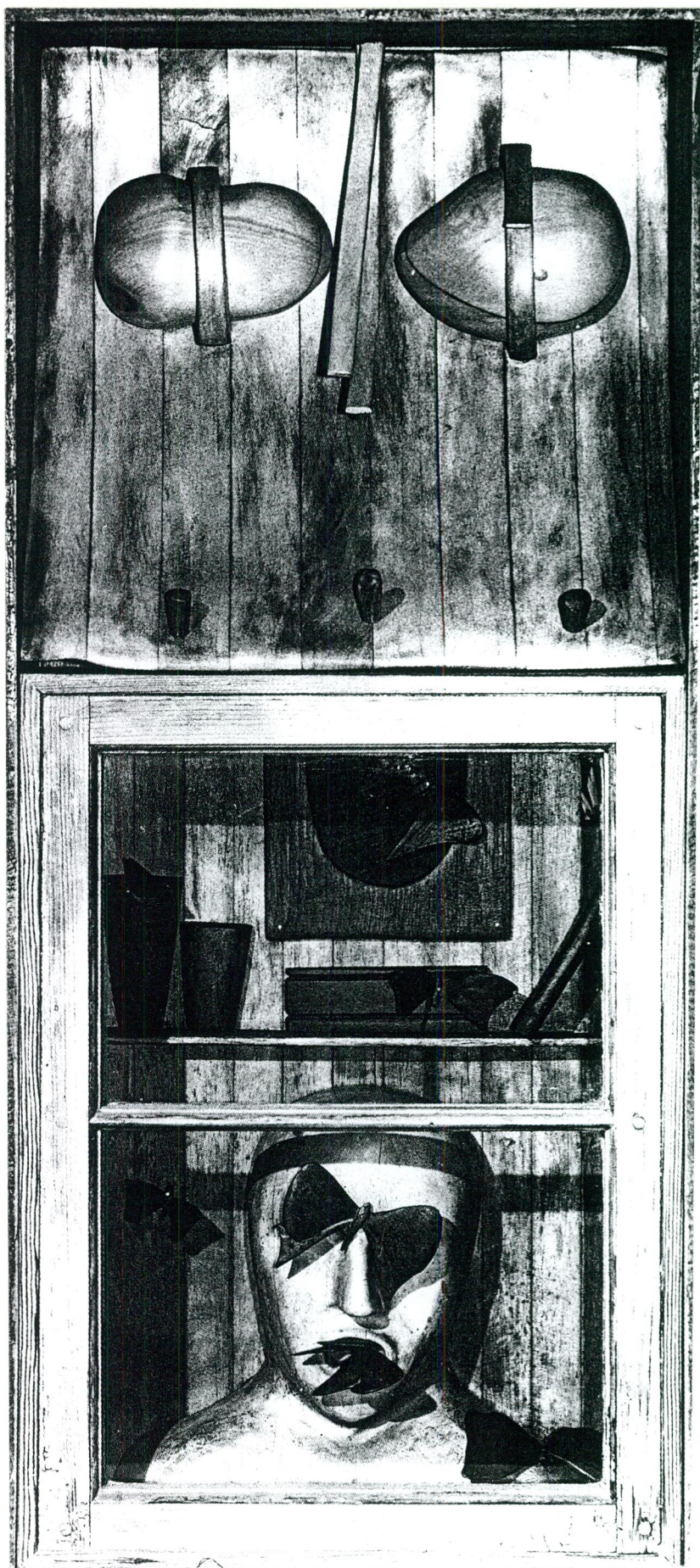


Fig. 22 Window Visitation North Uist (1980)



Fig. 23 Rudder Requiem (1985)



Fig. 24 Fisherman Listening for Herring (1989)

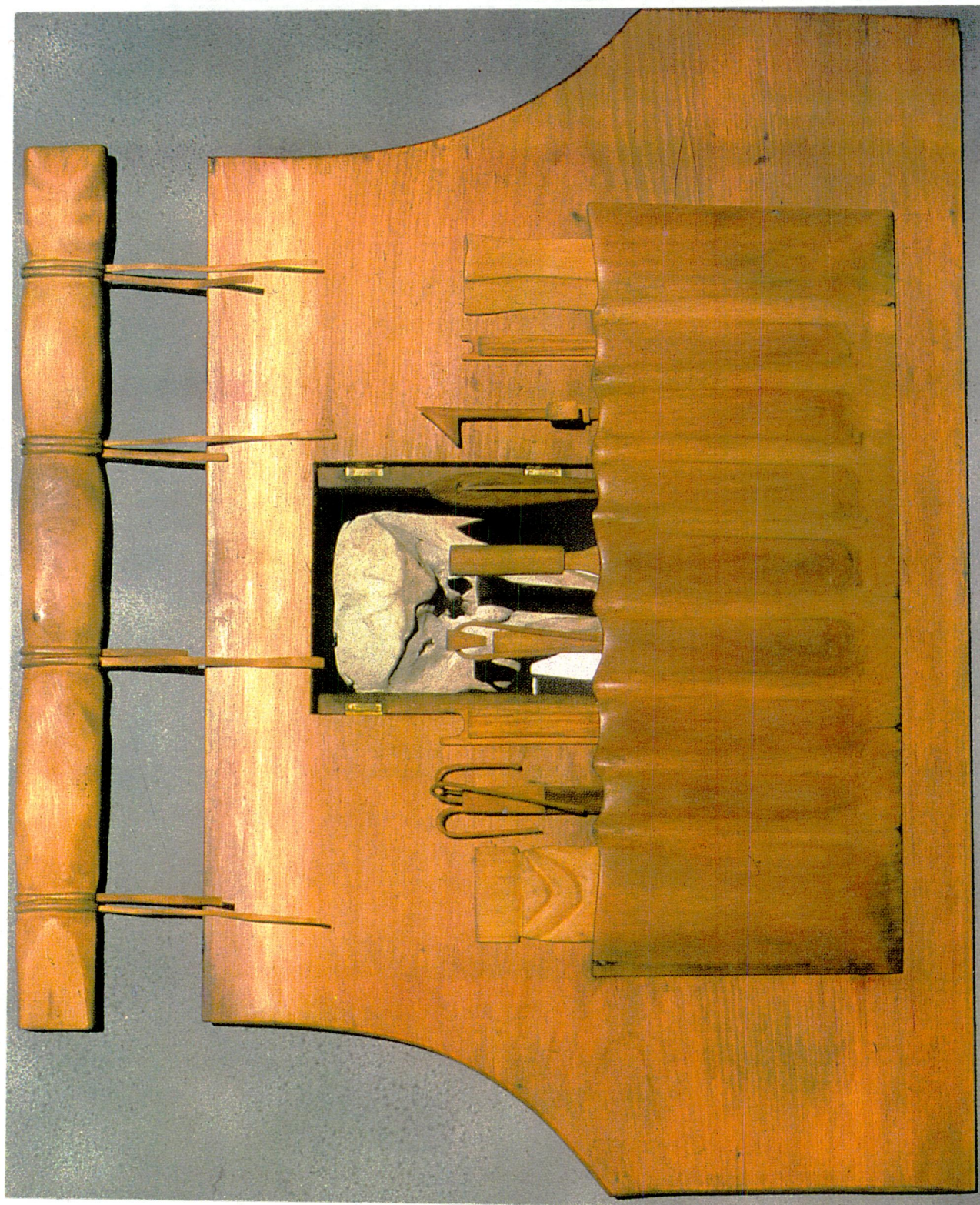


Fig. 25 Symbols of Survival (1976)

The greatest influence on Surrealist theories came from the writings on Primitivism by four scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; they were Sir James Frazer, Lucien Levy-Bruhl, Sigmund Freud and Henri Bergson, each of whom were carrying on the work started by Charles Darwin. Frazer, whose ideas on magic and religion were severely criticised, produced one of the greatest contributions to the study of the primitive mind and this was his investigation of the function the dream. He demonstrated primitive man's implicit belief that his dreams were an integral and essential part of his everyday life. He also showed that primitive people believed in themselves as existing in a universe in which every object and force in nature was motivated by a soul or spirit equal to their own, unlike western man who tends to view himself superior to nature and therefore separates himself physically and psychologically. (Rubin 1984.p.542)

In his investigation of primitive perception and cognition, Levy-Bruhl emphasised the importance of totemism, the system whereby a certain social unit identifies itself with some natural element, plant or animal and recognises it as its leading spirit and guardian.(Rubin 1984 p.542). He also emphasised the different conditions and mental processes of civilized and primitive people.

Henri Bergson's theories are very much intertwined with the works of Will Maclean. Just as primitive man sees his world as a spatial and temporal amalgam of spirit and matter, so Bergson viewed the essential character of the upward movement of life and evolution as one in which time and space interpenetrate in a great surging mass of eternal change, that is the very rhythm of life itself. (Rubin 1984 p.544)

The individual who had the most profound influence on the development of Surrealism's ideological links with Primitivism was Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, published in 1905, was important because it explained the coupling of the process of free association with the interpretation of dream symbols. Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, published in 1913, attempted to bridge the gap between social anthropology, folklore and psychology in order to deduce the original meaning of totemism from the recognisable vestiges of it remaining in childhood in western culture. (Rubin 1984 p.543)

Maclean's assemblages are like tools that open the imagination and contained within the works he often uses symbolic tools to assist in this discovery. His tools can draw analogy with the implements left in primitive graves to assist the dead on their journey to the next life. Like a shaman, Maclean proposes that his art mediates between the material and the spiritual. In the work *Symbols of Survival* (1976. Fig.25) tools are again central to its symbolic value. Inspired by a U.S. Navy survival Kit that was given to the artist as a boy by his uncle. Made of carved and polished pine, it represents a canvas apron containing fishing gear, bait, harpoons, needles and thread and other tools of survival at sea. Set in the middle of the construction is a porpoise skull inside a window. This could be a window to the imagination and the skull, being a reminder to the stark simplicity of the sailor's alternative to survival, which is death.

Maclean's life's work is about survival, in the sense of being able to understand our role in life and not accepting the

world at face value. In Maclean's work there is an intellectual element in his search for purpose and value and an emotional element in the dependence upon the power which creates and guarantees those values.

CONCLUSION

Will Maclean's vision from which he makes his constructions involves the sight from childhood memory and poetic vision, or what Bachelard calls *reverie*. The foundation for this perspective carries a conflict of beliefs, those of his community's formal Calvinistic services and the mythic, pagan world of nature and the Gaelic Highlands. In a lot of Maclean's work he sees the world through the eyes of a child. In religion and mythology the themes of the child and rebirth are used and are held up to us as being the ideal state. Bachelard writes about the importance of this clarity..."The child God is the Son of the World and in the face of this child who represents a continuous birth the world is young. From our simple point of view as a dreamer all these sanctified childhoods are proof of the activity of an archetype which lives in the depth of the human soul....In every dreamer there lives a child, a child whom reverie magnifies and stabilizes, reverie tears it away from history, sets it outside time, makes it foreign to time. One more reverie and this permanent magnified child is a God". (Bachelard.1960 p.133)

To emulate the vision of children has for long been one of the objectives of modern art and especially for the Surrealists who used poetry as a means of juxtaposing images. Maclean tries to recapture something of the imaginative power of the remembered images of his childhood. This imaginative contemplation of childhood experience is often infused with a profound sense of loss; loss of innocence, loss of security, loss of loved ones. Part of Maclean's childhood loss involves the

powerful impact that religion had on his early experience and this manifests itself in many of his works by the symbolism which he uses and in how he composes his work.

Symbols which come from a very deep level of our awareness and have been with us for many thousands of years help us to value objects and acts by pointing to the deep reality that they contain. Most symbols are religious images and they point to the transcendent. When we are alert to symbols we are attentive to the meaning of life. Jung observed that most of his patients were people who had lost their faith and who as a result had not the Church to help make sense of life's symbols. (Rees.1992 p.18)

Maclean's objects are similar to ritual artefacts found on an archaeological dig. Sometimes they are found objects and other objects are invented in an attempt to combine fact and fiction, reinvented from his imagination of something that may or may not have existed. For example, his use of bird skulls, bones and relics of his Highland heritage could classify him as a neo-primitive in some of his works. This ability to create sacred objects is mentioned by Wade in *The Eloquent Object...*"The raw communicative power of sacred objects which exude a historical, pan cultural, atemporal presence, propelled by evocative archetypes, wood, fetishes, temples, life, death, birth and age. They are man's racial memories of his first collective representations of reality".(Manhart 1984 p.262)

As with beauty, sacredness is in the eye of the beholder and by perceiving an object to be sacred we make it so. The more ambiguous and archetypal the object is the greater will be the viewer's propensity to perceive it as sacred, the greater will

be the consensus among many viewers of its sacred nature and the more power, or otherness, will accrue to it. (Manhart 1984 p.264)

The attraction of Maclean's work lies in its esoteric nature and in his use of evocative images with religious and/or historical significance. Its strength is in the local knowledge of the Calvinist church, the Gaelic community of the Highlands, the tragedy of The Clearances and the primitive traditions of fishing. All his subjects are treated in a sacred way using objects that are not intrinsically sacred but have that sacredness projected onto them using the power of the viewer's imagination. Maclean creates images with the language of a poet. The new born image; a simple image; thus becomes quite simply an absolute origin; an origin of consciousness.

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