

*Coláiste Náisiúnta Ealaíne is Deartha*  
*National College of Art and Design*  
*Faculty of Education*  
*Diploma for Art and Design Teachers*

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This dissertation is concerned with the manner in which the critical aspect of art education is currently being approached at secondary school level.

In chapter 1 the nature of the Leaving Certificate Art History and Appreciation course is examined in the light of a number of critical comments by the Chief Examiner, relating to the quality of answers submitted for examination in 1996, which displayed a lack of comprehension.

It then establishes a connection between the structure of the course, and the nature of the discipline of art history and criticism, as traditionally perceived, and proposes, in chapter 2, that inherent in this discipline are some characteristics, that may contribute to this lack of comprehension. These characteristics are fundamentally connected to the segregation of the critical from the productive aspects of art.

This is in total contrast to the position of the critical, Support Studies, in the Junior Certificate programme, which is examined in Chapter 3. An example and recommendation of how such an approach, as that of the Junior Certificate, could contribute positively to an increased understanding of the whole area, at Leaving Certificate level, is provided in chapter 4.

Journal of the American Medical Association

Volume 100, Number 1, July 1928

Original Articles

1. The Role of the Physician in the Community

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National College of Art & Design  
Faculty of Education**

**The role of support studies  
in the Senior Cycle - a proposal**

**A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of  
Education**

**in**

**Candidacy for the**

**DIPLOMA FOR ART AND DESIGN TEACHERS**

**by**

**Damien Ó Buachalla**

**1998**



## Table of Contents

	Page
List of Illustrations	ii-iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Introduction	1-2
Chapter	
I     Accumulation as opposed to comprehension.	4-12
II    The tradition of Art History and Criticism	13-26
III   The Senior Certificate, A Contextual Approach	27-39
IV    Classroom Application	40-75
School and Pupil Profile	
Scheme and Methodology	
Assessment	
Evaluation of Class	
Evaluation of Self	
V     Conclusions	76-77
Selected Bibliography	78







## **List of Illustrations**

		Page
Plate 1	Mona Lisa, Leonardo da Vinci, 1503	9
Plate 2	Sunflowers, Vincent van Gogh, 1888	10
Plate 3	Peasant Woman, Vincent van Gogh, 1995	22
Plate 4	Green Man, Bamberg Cathedral	42
Plate 5	Green Man, Dijon Cathedral	43
Plate 6	Romesque Carving, Chauvigny Cathedral	46
Plate 7	Observational drawing, Students work	48
Plate 8	Observational drawing, Students work	51
Plate 9	Drawing, Leonardo da Vinci, Support Study	52
Plate 10	Green Man design, Students work	54
Plate 11	Phil, work in progress, Chuck Close, 1969	55
Plate 12	Clay Modelling, Students work	57
Plate 13	Clay Head, NOK Tribe, 500 BC	58



Plate 14	Papier Mâché, Students work	60
Plate 15	Papier Mâché masks, Support Study	61
Plate 16	Construction of leaves, Students work	63
Plate 17	Use of String, My work, Support Study	64
Plate 18	Photograph of Gloria Swanson, Edward Steichen, 1926	65
Plate 19	Connection of forms, Students work	67
Plate 20	Linda Brückner, Support Study, 1990's	68
Plate 21	Colour Studies, Students work	70
Plate 22	Marilyn Monroe, Andy Warhol, 1967	71
Plate 23	Green Man, Students work	73
Plate 24	Carving, Native American Indian	74





## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Professor Iseult McCarthy as Head of Faculty of Education and Maria Farrell as Tutor for their contribution to this dissertation.





## Introduction

Students in this case would not have passive encounters with or make passive responses to, works of art, craft or design or their environment.<sup>(1)</sup>

The opening statement is by Kieran Meagher and is taken from his contribution to the 1990 book The Changing Curriculum. It relates specifically to the intended response that would be cultivated in pupils in the then new Junior Certificate programme in relation to the new approach to art education at that level. Fundamental to this approach is this integral integration of the critical evaluation of art history and appreciation and the productive practice of making art, also the broader interpretation of both of these areas under the title Art, Craft and Design and seen in a multicultural context.

The success of the Junior Certificate Art, Craft and Design programme has been very encouraging with a huge increase in the standard of students work and their comprehension of issues aesthetic. This however is in contrast to the quality of comprehension that was evident in the Chief Examiners report relating to the Art, History and Appreciation Leaving Certificate examination 1996.

In chapter 1 of this essay there is an analysis of the Chief Examiners<sup>9</sup> report and a proposal that the poor quality of the learning is the result of the structure of the current Art (including Craft) syllabus which segregates the critical and productive aspects of art from each other, and due to the nature of the Art, History and Appreciation course which seems to alienate the students from the subject. In Chapter 2 the traditional role of art history and criticism is examined with particular reference to observations made by Donald Preziosi, professor of art history





at the University of California, Los Angeles. Many comparisons become evident between this traditional perspective and that of the Leaving Certificate course which sheds some proverbial light on the alienation of the students.

Chapter 3 examines in detail the Junior Certificate programmes perspective on art education referred to already and compares it favourably to that of the Leaving Certificate. Chapter 4 demonstrates how such an approach as that of the Junior Certificate could be applied to the senior cycle and offers recommendations for the same.





## **Introduction Footnotes**

1. Kieran Meagher, "The Art, Craft and Design Syllabus", in The Changing Curriculum, ed. Tony Crooks (Dublin: O'Brien Educational Ltd, 1990) p.24.



## CHAPTER 1

### Accumulation as Opposed to Comprehension

The Chief Examiner's Report on the higher level History and Appreciation of Art examination 1996 made the following criticisms in relation to the general nature and quality of the candidates' answers.

- Skills of DESCRIPTION, DISCUSSION, COMPARISON and ANALYSIS are required and necessary for answering at Higher Level. Instructions like 'describe, and discuss' 'compare and contrast' and 'define' were frequently ignored with questions being answered with general and unfocussed narratives.
- Many students either neglected to read or to understand what certain questions were specifically about or else were unable to adapt knowledge that they had, to the requirements of those specific questions, producing rote answers in the general area instead. An example of this was Q3(a)(b) in Section I which specifically referred to Irish Romanesque and Gothic and which was generally answered in relation to mainstream continental Romanesque and gothic, without dealing with those characteristics that are unique to the insular Irish versions of the styles.
- The weakest element in the candidates answering was frequently the ability to discuss the VISUAL qualities and characteristics - of artworks, of individual artists' personal styles and of artistic movements and trends. The lack of understanding of what distinguishes one major historical style from another was prevalent.<sup>(1)</sup>





Often, candidates provided detailed information about individual artists but were undermined by their lack of knowledge of the larger context or of the art style or movements associated with the individual artists.

Many candidates were unable to refer to more than one or two works by an artist and in general the work that they were familiar with were the most obvious, presumably those featured in their textbooks.

'Describe and discuss Paulo Ucello's (1397-1475) use of perspective, illustrated on the accompanying sheet, and compare and contrast it with the use of perspective by later Renaissance artists.'

(An A4 full colour reproduction of Ucello's Battle of San Romano was included in the paper).

'Describe and discuss the sculpture for Donatello (1386-1466). Write in detail about one specific work by him.'

In relation to these two questions that were concerned with Renaissance, the report had this to say:

The Renaissance period provides accessible, varied and rich material for art history and appreciation. Surprisingly, for such a widely taught, mainstream popular, topic, so central to the development of European Art, treatment of it was, in general, superficial, relying over-much on description and biography. Candidates often did not appear to be clear about what visual characteristics distinguish, for example, Medieval from Renaissance, styles, or how post-Renaissance art developed.<sup>(2)</sup>

The report continues to comment upon the fact that it was evident in the answers on Donatello, that the relationship between Renaissance art and ancient classical art was not understood, similarly in the Irish section there was no evidence of an understanding of how Irish Georgian





architecture relates to antiquity. In relation to the questions on Ucello, despite specific questioning very few candidates discussed the development of perspective by Ucello and later Renaissance artists.

The report comments on the Renaissance period are particularly interesting for two reasons, firstly because of an implication in the choice of vocabulary and phraseology and secondly because inherent to the comments are some of the values and issues that are fundamental to the very nature of our western tradition of what the discipline of art history actually is or aspires to be.

In the quotation from the report the objective criticism was simply that the answers were superficial and over reliant on description and biography. This is preceded however by a reference to the 'accessible, varied and rich material for art history and appreciation' that the Renaissance provides, by asserting that it is, a 'widely taught', 'mainstream' and 'popular topic' and that it is central to the development of European art. Significantly, the report includes the term 'surprisingly' in commenting on the poor quality of the answers in light of the above facts. In doing so the Chief examiner is implying, whether intentionally or not that there are fundamental flaws both in the manner in which secondary students at the highest level are learning, and understanding art history, and implicit therefore, in the manner in which art history is being taught to them. The Chief examiner's criticisms apply to all areas and periods of art history, but the fact that the superficiality of the answers apply even to such a fundamental and widely taught period as the Renaissance seemed to epitomise the depth of the problem.

The general impression created by the report of a typical senior cycle students approach to art history is of someone with an accumulation of facts about individual artists, art pieces and art movements that are





perceived as being isolated from each other. There appears to be no real comprehension of why these facts are considered to be of significance, (not in order of relative importance).

- The artist and artwork in the context of the period and location in which work was created the influence of the particular social, philosophical and geographical climate upon the visual and cognitive nature of art.
- The dilemma of differentiating between an artist as an individual and as a member of an art movement.
- The artist's intentions, and signification i.e. What was the artist trying to do or say in relation to the portrayal of space, form, colour and light, was the intent to reproduce reality in an illusionary or symbolic manner or was the intent to create a totally new reality, for example.
- How one period of art history relates to another either as a source upon which to develop and progress in a similar direction or to react against.
- The visual appearance of art works as being in some way a conglomeration and distillation of all of the above and more, the individual, society in general, a time, a place, significative values, aesthetic values. Plus the more complex and abstract problems relating to concepts of aesthetics, beauty, truth, genius, talent, taste.

So a typical higher level student it would appear, may well know that Leonardo de Vinci is considered a Renaissance artist and that he painted





the 'Mona Lisa' (Plate 1). He may know that Van Gogh is considered a Post Impressionist and that he painted 'Sunflowers' (Plate 2). He maybe able to describe the images portrayed and he may have some incidental and anecdotal biographical information but in all probability he would have no concept of why both paintings are stylistically so different, of what the two artists were trying to do, of why both paintings are considered masterpieces, of how they relate historically to each other and perhaps most importantly, why Van Gogh's painting could never have been made 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence. To draw an analogy, it is similar to a mathematics student memorising sample problems featuring X, Y, and Z, but with no understanding of the concept involved being unable to adapt the information to a similar problem featuring A, B, and C, the information therefore being pointless. While there obviously is a limit to the extent of insight expected from students at Leaving Cert. level, even at higher level, there is no doubt that collecting meaningless facts, with no insight at all is far from educationally sound, as is apparent from the Chief Examiners report and the nature of the questions being asked on Leaving Cert. Examinations, a greater degree of understanding is obviously required.

The problem exists therefore of accumulation as opposed to comprehension, information without understanding. The question is why this should be the case? And the answer, I propose has to do with relevance. I have already made an analogy to mathematics, it is significant that these are higher level students who presumably are dealing with a number of other subjects from sciences, languages, humanities and technologies where comprehension is required. More important still is that these students are dealing with art as a practical subject. They themselves are concerned with many of the issues in creating their own art that the artists they are studying were concerned with. They have to deal with representing form, line, shape, tone, colours,





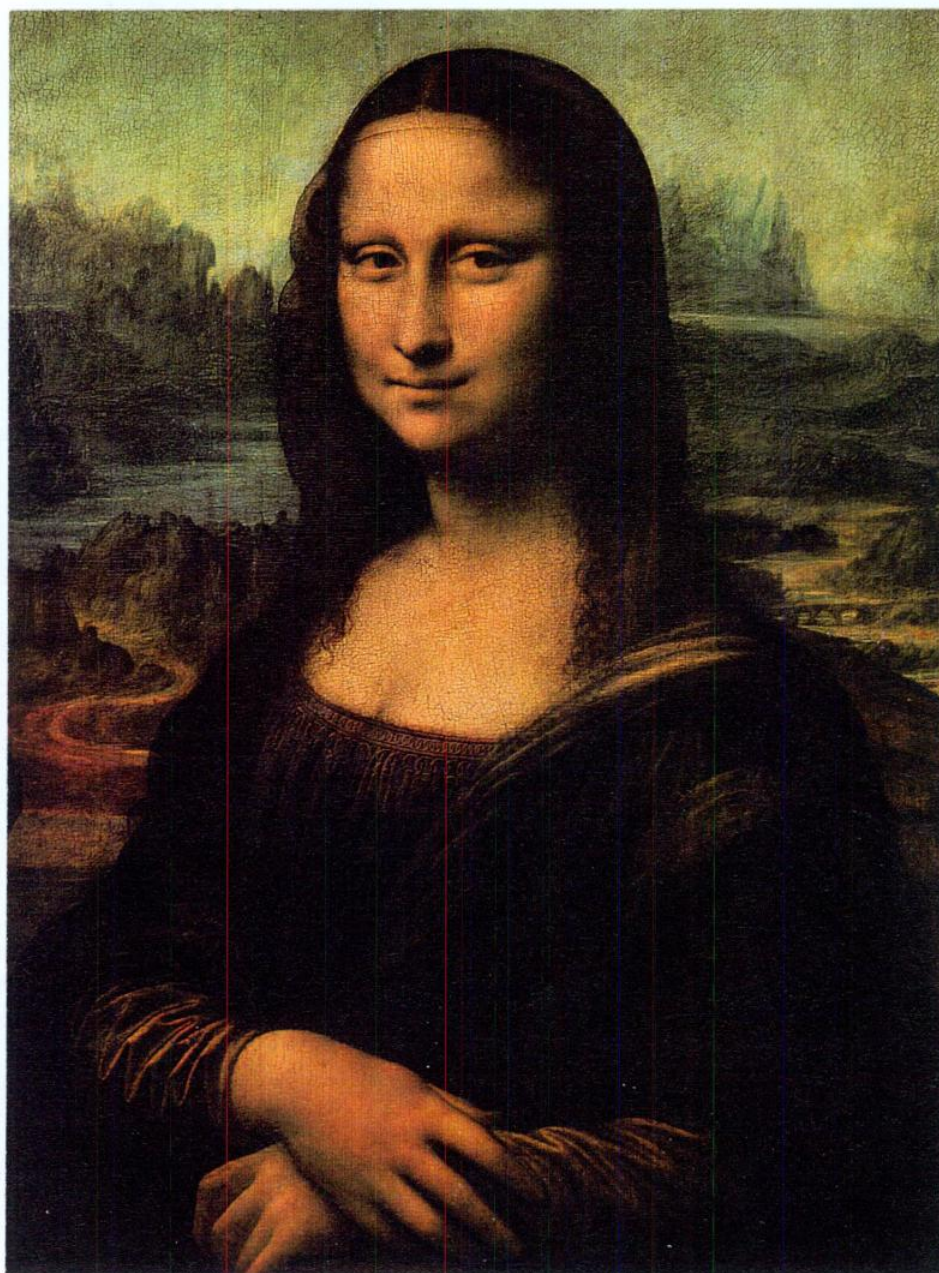


Plate 1    Mona Lisa, Leonardo da Vinci

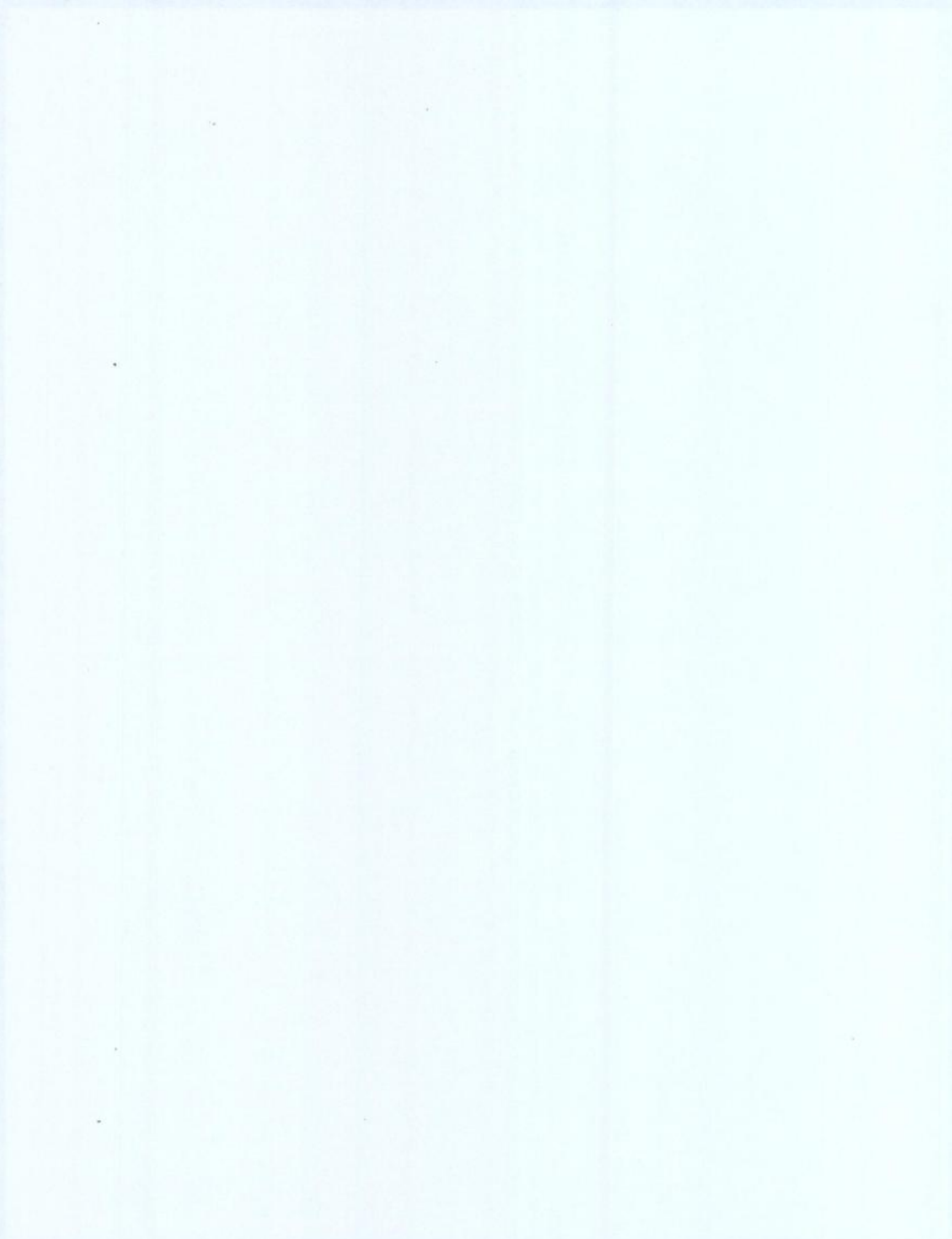






Plate 2      Sunflowers, Vincent van Gogh





2d and 3d work, design, composition, craft etc. And yet these concerns are not being dealt with sufficiently in the context of art history. It is in this respect that I propose a fundamental flaw exists at present in the approach to art history, that there is too much segregation between the practice of art and the discipline of art history and appreciation. Even within the art history curriculum, history is segregated from the general appreciation. Such segregation dictates to a large extent how the various elements are perceived - and thus how they are taught - as separate entities. The net result of this is that the student fails to connect the disciplines of appreciation and history to each other and neither to their own art work and therefore the relevance of their own work to that of related artists, an area of huge potential is effectively not developed.

However, it is not necessary to practice art in order to derive or appreciate some value from the study of its history, it surely is a worthwhile practice in itself. In order to get a more complete picture of why we consider the study of art and art history to be a positive and beneficial practice let us first examine more closely what the role of art history and the art historian is all about.





## Footnotes Chapter I

1. The Chief Examiner, Leaving Certificate Examination 1996  
Art (including Crafts) Higher Level Chief Examiner's Report  
(Dublin: An Roinn Oideachais, 1996) p.6.
2. Ibid.



## CHAPTER 2

### The Tradition of Art History and Criticism

"There is no such thing as Art. There are only artists."<sup>(1)</sup>

The above statement is the opening assertion from the introduction of E.H. Gombrich's book 'The Story of Art', one of the most popular and widely read general art history books ever written. It is a very complex statement because it is written by an art critic/historian whose work is considered to be very much within the tradition of art history and criticism and yet it encapsulates one of the most fundamental problems associated with that discipline - that of criteria. If there is no such thing as Art, with a capital A, then how is its value to be assessed or criticised? Indeed how do you decide what to assess in the first place? His second statement, that there are only artists, instead of resolving this only adds to the confusion for if there is no such thing as Art, but there is such a thing as an artist then surely there must be some common criteria that defines someone as an artist. It would not seem illogical then to suggest that what an artist produces is art, whether spelt with a capital or lower case 'a'. The book that follows these statements by Gombrich is, however, in its very structure, more enlightening about the discipline of art history and criticism. What he presents us with is a chronological progression of visual art through the work of selected artists, predominantly European, from pre-history to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The impression that is created is of a sequential development, so complete that it almost appears to be fulfilling some predestined path.

Gombrich is not writing in a vacuum of his own creation, his sequential approach to art history is an accepted one, the one in fact on which the Leaving Certificate art history and appreciation syllabus is based. It is





one in which there are generally accepted 'great artists' and in which the title and status of 'masterpiece' has been attributed to a select body of work. Such titles could not be awarded and generally accepted in the absence of criteria. There may according to Gombrich be no such thing as Art, but there certainly is something called Art History and Criticism.

Donald Preziosi in his 1989 book 'Rethinking Art History' makes the simplistic assertion that, "the business of art history is the history of art"<sup>(2)</sup> and he defines them thus:

The history of art  
the developmental progress(ion) of the visual arts:  
differential articulations over time, space, biography and  
ethnography.<sup>(3)</sup>

The writer continues by stating that:

The business of the art historian is  
to plot and chart such transformations and articulations  
against the broader social and cultural changes occurring  
diachronically in different places.<sup>(4)</sup>

He continues to say that the art historian in setting about this task must approach his subject from a trinity of perspectives, the Connoisseur, the Iconographer and that of the Social Historian.

1. The Connoisseur - delineating the minute signs of biography and temporal identity.
2. The Iconographer - delineating networks of signifiers and signifieds and their morphological and referential transformations over time and place.





3. The Social Historian - concerned with the signs of the various roles played by artwork in simultaneously generating, sustaining and reflecting broader social, cultural and historical processes.<sup>(5)</sup>

So the art historian sets about accumulating information about the individual artist and interpreting his images in the context of time and place. The emphasis upon time and place is very important because time, place, philosophy and significative values associated with that particular time and place are tangible researchable entities. They can be collected, sorted in order and assembled as part of a scheme, but there is one factor that is less tangible and which appears to be perceived as remaining constant throughout the ages and that is the very nature of what constitutes an artist.

The discipline of art history is founded upon the work of 19<sup>th</sup> century critics such as Heinrich Wölfflin, whose major work 'Renaissance and Barock' was published in 1888. It was the age of reason, the academic climate was one of the order. Freud and Darwin appeared to be discovering a logical order and progression in both the unconscious and the natural world - there appeared to be no reason why the world of art should be any different, as Preziosi states:

There is a deep sense in which, for the art historian, art has always been a historical event or phenomenon, a sign of its times, an index of historical, social, cultural, or individual growth, identity, change, or transformation.<sup>(6)</sup>

Consider and compare the following definitions. The first is a definition of historicism by Maurice Mandelbaum from his book 'History, Man and





Reason: A Study in Nineteenth Century Thought." The second is a definition of the task of the art historian by W.E. Kleinbaur.

Historicism:

the belief that an adequate understanding of the nature of any phenomenon and an adequate assessment of its value are to be gained through considering it in terms of the place which it occupied and the role which it played within a process of development.<sup>(7)</sup>

Art historians aspire to analyse and interpret the visual arts by identifying their materials and techniques, makers, time, and place of creation, and meaning or function - in short their place in the scheme of history.<sup>(8)</sup>

The common and key phrases here are "process of development" and "scheme of history". The nineteenth century art historian had an image of his discipline as being a branch of science, he desperately wanted to find a scheme of history that would unravel under scrutiny as a linear progression - and he did. Art history as we know it reads as a series of periods and movements that develop upon or react against each other. The progression in architecture from classical Greek through Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque on to Neo-classicism and beyond is just one example, the development of naturalistic representation in painting from the symbolism of the International Gothic through Giotto, Quattrocento artists such as Masaccio and Ucello and on to the apparent resolutions of the High Renaissance is another. Classicism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Modernism, the list continues and what emerges is a history Darwinian in appearance through which art evolves and is categorised into periods, movements and 'isms' and from which only the 'fittest' and greatest art has survived.

This categorisation and notion of linear, evolutionary progression is not a problematic area. There are definite connections between periods and there are common factors and traits that justify the work of several artists





being associated with a movement. The importance of this aspect of our perception of art history is reflected in the school curriculum in the prominence of questions relating to how various periods relate to each other and how individuals relate to movements that appear on Leaving Certificate Art History and Appreciation exam papers, and as is apparent from the Chief Examiners report referred to earlier, it is an area that students have failed to answer effectively. These are higher level ability students so the question is why should they have problems making such obvious connections?

One reason could be that teachers are not emphasising such connections and developments in the classroom. While this may be true to a certain degree I consider it difficult to believe that such is the case in general.

There may however be an argument to suggest that the lack of comprehension is related to a more fundamental issue, one which has already been referred to but not resolved and which is at the core of the discipline of art history. That is of course the criteria of what constitutes art and the nature of the artist, not how art may change in appearance and manifestation in relation to the contemporary social and cultural context in which it is made but what, in its very essence art is. Students may well have been made aware of the development of art history in its chronological order but if their perception of "the artist" or "art object" itself is associated with mystery, with notions of beauty, truth and harmony (terms that are used in school textbooks without qualification), of the glorified outsider concerned with issues beyond the normal, if it is foreign and irrelevant to their own experiences then the information about art that will be retained will be minimal and superficial. The question of what art is in its essence is philosophical in its nature, the complexity of which led effectively to Gombrich asserting that there is no such thing - that a single word is too limited to encompass all that is involved in art,







that art is undefinable. The question of what art is, is one that does arise in schools, and is the cause of much confusion among students whom we expect to be able to accommodate both the scientific, chronological side of art history and the largely unacknowledged philosophical side intuitively and equally.

John Bergers book 'Ways of Seeing' contains the results of a survey in which members of the public from different occupations were asked the following question:

Of the places listed below which does an art museum remind you of most?

Results:

	Manual Workers	Skilled White Collar Worker	Professional & Upper Managerial
	%	%	%
• Church	66	45	30.5
• Library	9	34	28
• Lecture Hall	-	4	4.5
• Department store or entrance hall in public	-	7	2
• Church and Library	9	2	4.5
• Church and Lecture Hall	4	2	-
• Library and Lecture Hall	-	-	2
• None of these	4	2	19.5
• No reply	8	4	9

(9)

The results show that the most common answer across the board was that art museums reminded people of church~~s~~.





The claim that there is a perception prevalent that elevates art to a realm that is almost sacred is not as outrageous as it initially appears. In fact it is not only a credible one, but one which art historians have themselves contributed to cultivating, whether intentionally or otherwise.

One of the primary tasks of the art historian is to interpret the signification of art works. Preziosi talks about the:

implicit notion that the work of art is in some way a revelation of Being or of a Truth that is already present (in the mind, in culture and in society)...the business of the discipline is addressed above all to the task of reading objects so as to discern produced meaning, to hear the voice behind what is palpable and mute.<sup>(10)</sup>

He continues to point out that inherent in this however, is a "curiously double disciplinary postulation", the assumption that: "the true meaning of an artwork can be translated (into discourse) and that the true meaning of the work of art is untranslatable."<sup>(11)</sup>

The problem of interpretation, translating the untranslatable, consider this along side Kleinbauer's definition of an art object and the ambiguity of the underlined terms of definition,

a work of art can be defined as a man-made object of aesthetic significance, with a vitality and reality of its own. Regardless of the medium of expression, a work of art is a unique, complex, irreducible, in some ways even mysterious whole.<sup>(12)</sup>

In reality his definition is no more definite than Gombrich's statement that there is no such thing as art. For many people the artists motivation and the function and value of artworks, particularly but not only conceptual and abstract work, is a mystery but in the light of the esteem and value





(not least monitorial) that is bestowed upon them by society in general there is a tendency to accept that there are reasons and value but that they simply do not understand them.

Preziosi makes some interesting observations on the relationship between the art critic and historian and the public's perception of the artist in his analysis of the 1956 Hollywood film biography of Vincent van Gogh, 'Lust for Life'. He notes that on several occasions in the film the camera cuts from a view, similar to that being looked at simultaneously by the artist to, firstly, the artist's face which appears distraught and agitated and finally to an image of Van Gogh's finished painting of the initial scene. Preziosi states that in showing us the transformation from original source through the artist to art object that the camera itself plays the role of the art critic, showing us 'the voice behind what is palpable and mute' and that in doing so it highlights two concepts.

1. A view of western art since the Renaissance in which the art object is seen as the result of a process of inspired metamorphosis by the artist of some originally perceived truth.
2. In contrasting the initial view with the appearance of the finished painting it implies the extent of genius of the artist to a lay audience while simultaneously segregating the artist from that audience and placing him in a position of isolation. The artist is portrayed in his isolation as a "distillator of the Essential from the world in which we live".<sup>(13)</sup>

As the film progresses certain ideologies are reinforced and the viewer is further alienated from the artist while at the same time comforted. Van Gogh's life and work is portrayed as an evolutionary journey from naturalism to abstraction, representative of the development of art history





in general. The difference between his interpretation and portrayal of reality and that seen by the viewers is equated with the degree of his genius - the greater the difference becomes, the greater the genius. Parallel to this equation however is the association between the degree of his genius and that of his insanity, which again developed in equal relation to each other. The film goes further than simply establishing a recognisable difference between the insanity of the artist and the normality of the viewer. It ensures the perception of the artist as genius and not simply insane and it does this in two ways.

Throughout the film Vincent's earlier, representational work is constantly referred to as is his religious and conservative upbringing. In doing this the film establishes the importance of the mastery of traditional values of objective representation and legitimises his forays into his more personal interpretations by qualifying them as a choice on his part and not due to lack of ability (plate 3). It also creates a context in which the artist is established as a saint-like figure whose singular mission is separate from that of mundane life and in whose paintings there may be a representation of some truth that is more profound than that of the ordinary, than that of the viewer. The viewer is left with an image of the artist as an outsider, a genius on a noble crusade. He is made aware of the fact that he and the artist are essentially different but he is also left secure with the knowledge that the price paid by the artist for his genius is ostracization and insanity.

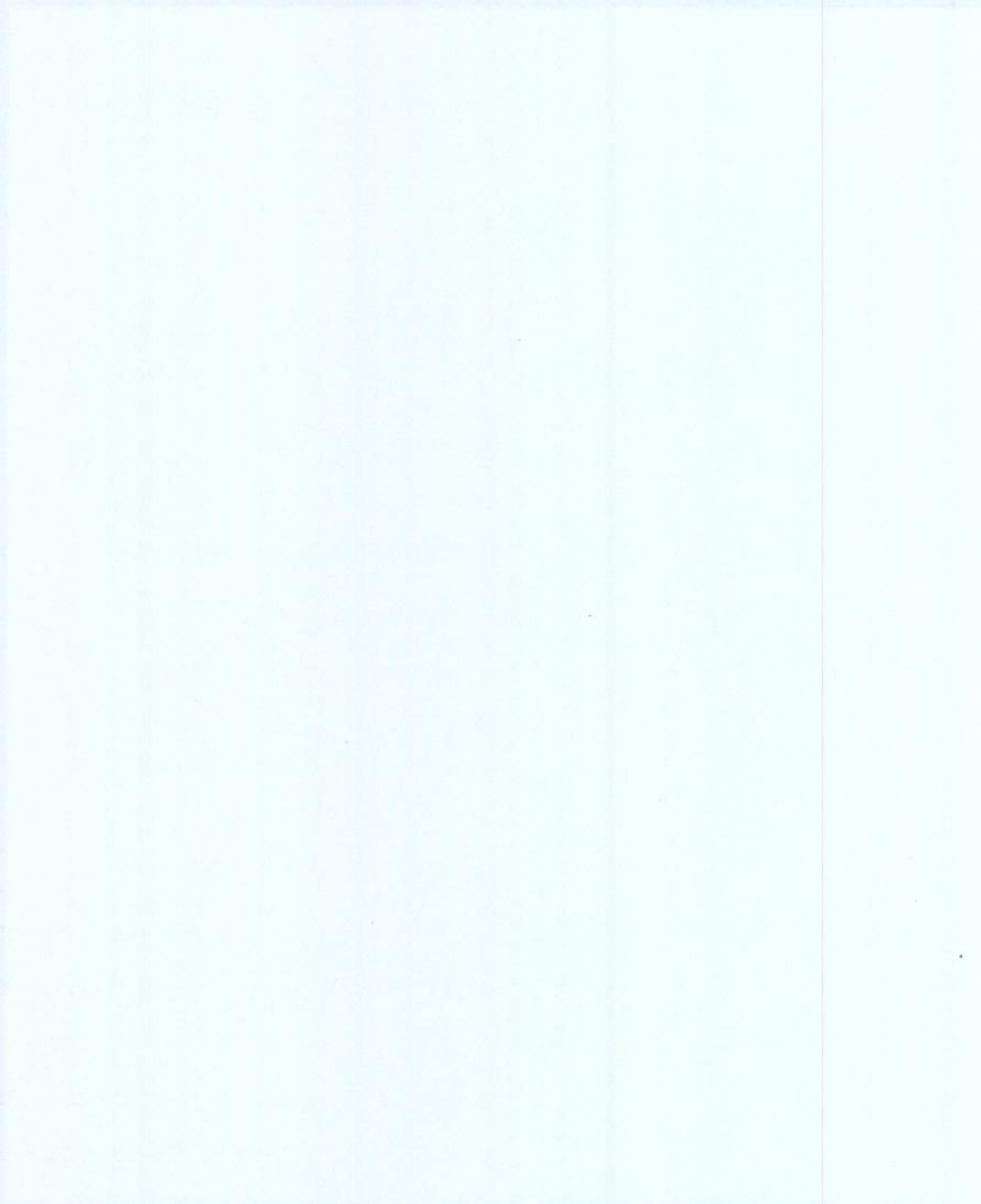






Plate 3    Peasant Woman, Vincent van Gogh, 1885





Preziosi claims that the real hero of 'Lust for Life' is not in fact the artist, not the viewer but is the discipline of art history itself as it sets itself up as the mediator between the two. He claims that the film succeeds in making two points.

1. The role of the artist as a distillator of reality and the importance of a grounding in traditional, observational representation is firmly established.
2. In the fact that Vincent's genius was recognised, not by his contemporaries, but posthumously, the discipline of art history is legitimised in its view of art history in its Darwinian mode.

in doing so (recognising Vincent's genius) makes clear that there is a true history of art, a real developmental progression, which will survive the tests of time.(14)

According to this analogy of the art historian as the camera in 'Lust for Life', the problem of the 'true meaning of an artwork' and the translation of the untranslatable is resolved by showing the viewer the originary source of inspiration alongside the metamorphosised vision (the painting), by establishing the context of time, place and biography and by equating the process which resulted in the paintings appearance being different from the source with genius, insanity and mystery, it essentially shows us the process of artistic productivity. Art history on one hand cultivates the mystification of artistic practice while on the other hand it promotes itself as the vehicle through which the mystery can be interpreted in a logical manner. Preziosi qualifies this by relating back to the notion of art history as a disciplinary science, in which case it should be governed by three premises.





“(1) that artworks say (express, reveal, articulate, project) something determinate.

(2) that such determinacy be ground ultimately in authorial or artistic intention - what the maker meant to express or convey about a view of the world or about the truth of some internal or emotive state.

(3) that the properly equipped analyst could mimetically approximate such determinate intentionality by producing a reading that, it must be assumed, similarly trained and skilled experts might agree possesses some consensual objectivity.”<sup>(15)</sup>

This third point is crucial when relating the discipline of art history criticism and appreciation to the school context. The current structure of the Leaving Certificate Art, History and Appreciation syllabus, with its emphasis on chronological progression, interpretation of signification and the European tradition is founded upon this traditional understanding of art history. The problem however is that the students appear to be expected to be able to assess and interpret art works from the same perspective as that of “similarly trained experts”, experts whose task is a complex one involving the trinity of roles, the Connoisseur, the Iconographer and the Social Historian. Furthermore they are expected to carry out these tasks with resources of varying quality. Many students rely completely upon small reproductions of work, often in black and white, one of the most widely used texts contains only black and white reproduction. Often, therefore, many of the characteristics of the art itself which the teacher may allude to, for the student, become questions of faith as opposed to perceived objectivity. In light of this and the alienating nature of the subject itself, with its mystification of the artist, art object and artistic practice, it is no wonder that comprehension among Leaving Certificate students is poor when the subject is approached in this manner.



## Footnotes Chapter 2

1. E. H. Gombrich, The Story of Art (London: Pheidon Press Ltd, 1950) p. 3.
2. Donald Preziosi, Rethinking Art History (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989) p.11.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.12.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p.14.
8. Ibid.
9. John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: B.B.C. and Penguin Books Ltd., 1972) p.24.
10. Preziosi, Rethinking Art History, p.15.
11. Ibid., p.16.
12. Ibid., p.21.





13. Ibid., p.22.

14. Ibid., p.24.

15. Ibid., p.29.





## CHAPTER 3

### **The Junior Certificate A Contextual Approach**

The previous chapter was concerned with the traditional nature of art historicism and criticism, originating in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and how it relates to the structure of the Leaving Certificate Art, History and Appreciation syllabus. The image that emerges is of a discipline, reflected in a syllabus, predominantly academic in its nature, concerned with the sequential, chronological development of Western Art and in which the artist, art objects and its meaning are endowed with a certain mystique and sacredness. This ideology is part of a hidden curriculum associated with the Leaving Certificate which emphasises academic intelligence. This, however, is apparent in the nature of the examination questions and comments of the Chief Examiner, referred to in Chapter I, as opposed to any syllabus document, as the only reference to the Art, History and Appreciation curriculum in the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools 1987/88 to 1997/98 amounts to the following short and vague paragraph:

Questions will be framed so as to test the general knowledge of historical development and visual appreciation rather than detailed or specialised knowledge of History of Art. Opportunities will be offered for the expression of the candidates own opinions of works and visual problems. Answers to questions may be illustrated by sketches where those would be appropriate.<sup>(1)</sup>

This directive is then followed by a list of approximately 20 books which the art teacher may refer to, none of which were written with the intention of being used within a school context. Despite this paragraph, in reality the questions being set on Leaving Certificate papers require quite specific and specialised knowledge and opportunities for subjectivity in Section I Irish and Section II European Art are minimal.





The effect of this, I propose, is the alienation of the student from the subject and the poor, superficial quality of the learning, as was highlighted in the Chief Examiners report. Ironically however, in searching for an alternative approach to the discipline, it is not necessary to look too far, for one already exists within the secondary school curriculum, and that is the area of Support Studies as envisaged within the Junior Certificate programme.

The Junior Certificate was introduced to secondary schools in 1989 and was first awarded, following a three-year-programme, to students in 1992, in doing so it replaced the Intermediate and Day Group Certificates. It is the result of recommendations made by the Curriculum and Examination Board established in 1984 by the then Minister for Education Gemma Hussey T.D. and continued by her successor Niamh Bhreathnach T.D.

In devising the new Junior Certificate curriculum the C.E.B. proposed a framework of eight categories each of which would contain an obligatory core curriculum as well as a series of options. These categories would involve approaching "an overall framework from two essentially complementary perspectives: first areas of experience and second, elements of learning."<sup>(2)</sup> Eight areas of experience were identified, one of which was Arts Education - Creative and Aesthetic Studies, the other seven areas included Guidance and Counselling, Language and Literature, Mathematical Studies, Physical Education, Religious Education, Science and Technology and Social, Political and Environmental studies. The second perspective, the elements of learning connected with each area of experience, the C.E.B. stated as knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes.





The seven new syllabi that were introduced with the Junior Certificate in 1989 were presented in a unified format that was very different to that of earlier syllabi. Within each one there is a clear statement of aims and objectives, a description of syllabus structure and content, a detailed set of assessment objectives (as opposed to assessment methods) and a clear definition and description of and between the levels of which the course would be offered.<sup>(3)</sup> Central to these syllabi is the intention that they be implemented, not in isolation but with constant reference to the overall aims of the Junior Certificate programme, published on the inside cover of each publication of Syllabus and Guidelines for Teachers.

In the introduction to The Changing Curriculum - Perspectives on the Junior Certificate, three types of reasons are highlighted as being given by the various authors who contributed to the book for the need for the new curriculum. Firstly, "new content and new emphasis" were said to be required because of "the changing needs of society", secondly, because of the "perceived problems in content and examination procedures of the old syllabus" and thirdly, "to give a greater professional role to the teacher in the choice of content within the framework of the syllabus."<sup>(4)</sup>

All three of these reasons could currently be proposed as arguments for re-assessing the current Leaving Certificate Art (including Crafts) syllabus and interestingly in 1984 when the review of the junior cycle curriculum was initiated, the then Minister for Education also referred to the need to "review the leaving Certificate as a measure of general education and to ensure that school courses are not unduly influenced by entry requirements for third level education."<sup>(5)</sup>

The term used above, general education, is significant as it relates to the ideology upon which the Junior Certificate is based. This ideology is concerned with the role of structured education in the development of the







individual from a multiple of perspectives, not purely academic and not purely exam based. The Junior Certificate programme contains a number of aims, in its general aim it states that,

The general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual, including aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, social and spiritual development, for personal and family life, for working life, for living in the community, and for leisure.<sup>(6)</sup>

The Junior Certificate syllabus also states three principles upon which it is based, Breadth and Balance, Quality and,

Relevance: curriculum provision should address the immediate and prospective needs of the young person, in the context of the cultural, economic and social environment.<sup>(7)</sup>

It is the acknowledgement of the aim of education as nurturing the wholeness of the person and the need for any education to be relevant to the individuals needs and experiences which is central to the importance of the Junior Certificate programme and which is in stark contrast to the Leaving Certificate programme which appears to result in the alienation of the individual from the subject and the narrow aim of examination results as motivation.

The manner in which the ideology of the Junior Certificate is interpreted in the specific context of Art, Craft and Design is discussed in depth by Kieran Meagher, Clodagh Holahan and Professor Iseult McCarthy in The Changing Curriculum, their collective response is a positive one. I am primarily concerned with the area of Support Studies within that curriculum but I will briefly refer to some of the relevant points that are made in relation to art education in general.





All three allude to the improved status of the subject within the school context. Holohan states that it had often previously not been considered a serious subject.<sup>(8)</sup> Meaghar states that 'Art' had often been considered to be a subject only suitable for either an elite group of talented students as a bonus, or for difficult or academically weak pupils as a form of therapy. He makes the point that this contributed to a "curious misunderstanding and, indeed mystification of the subject".<sup>(9)</sup>

Professor McCarthy makes the point that the improved understanding of the subject is apparent even in the change of title from Art, to Art, Craft and Design.<sup>(10)</sup> The very allocation of equal status to the three aspects contributes to and reflects the breaking of preconceived notions of elitism, irrelevance or triviality associated with the whole area among pupils and other staff members.

Consensual approval is given to the acknowledgement of art as a form of intelligence or knowing, and particularly to drawing as a way of thinking and the validity of the design process.

Much of Kieran Meagher's contribution is concerned with the recognition of the validity of the whole area of art education through the importance of understanding what he calls the "fundamental characteristics of the subject."<sup>(11)</sup> He states that:

The distinctive contribution which art education makes to the curriculum is based on the means by which it helps to develop in students an informed, inquiring and curious attitude about the world, how we perceive it and how it can be assimilated visually. Art education provides an opportunity for individuals to ask fundamental questions about their environment as visually perceived, about the nature of art, craft and design activity and about the nature and essential identity of individuals themselves.<sup>(12)</sup>





This statement by Meagher is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly it eloquently describes a general rationale for art education that is very much in keeping with the general aim of the Junior Certificate programme in its development of the whole person and learning that extends beyond the subject itself. The student becomes familiar not only with the processes and practices connected with the production and appreciation of art, craft and design but develops an inquisitive attitude based upon perception and contemplation as opposed to presumption. Secondly, the statement is significant because it simultaneously, eloquently describes a process of artistic activity involving the individuals relationship with the world around him, which is very similar to that discussed in the previous chapter concerning the question of what an artist actually does. Here however, instead of shrouding the activity in a veil of mystery, Meagher is implying that it is an activity that anyone is capable of, and from which anyone will benefit, providing they are not initially intimidated into believing the opposite.

Meagher continues to state that "artistic learning is not a single type of learning, but involves three aspects, the Productive, the Critical and the Cultural."<sup>(13)</sup> The Productive involves the ability to make/create work, the Critical involves aesthetic evaluation and assessment and the Cultural involves the ability to comprehend the first two in relation to a cultural context.

There are similarities here between the description of the Critical and Cultural aspects and the traditional roles of the art historian and critic, that of the Iconographer, Connoisseur, and the Social Historian, discussed in chapter 2, there is also one very important distinction. The art historian/critics point of perception is an external one in so much as it lacks the Productive aspect of making art. This is reflected in the Leaving Certificate programme in which there is no connection between





the practical, productive artwork made by the pupils and the content or structure of the Art, History and Appreciation, critical aspect. With the latter the student is exclusively concerned with hypothesising about the work of others. The essential difference between this approach and that of the Junior Certificate is that in the Junior Certificate the three aspects, Productive, Critical and Cultural are seen as being intrinsically linked to each other and are thus presented as such to the pupils.

Within the structure of Art, Craft and Design in the Junior Certificate the focus of attention is always centred around the pupils needs. The critical aspect of the programme, the Support Studies, that he encounters are chosen specifically to contribute positively to and complement the pupils own productive artwork. These support studies may relate to the pupils work in two general ways, thematically and activity based. A pupil whose work involves animal imagery, for example, may benefit from exposure to selected work by Henry Moore or Picasso, this is thematic, another example of this is the work of Linda Brüchner in relation to the Green Man scheme featured in chapter 4. (Plate 20) Activity based is when a support study is chosen because it relates to the practical activity that the student is involved with, an example of this from the Green Man scheme is the work of Chuck Close in relation to the enlargement, gridding process, (Plate 11), here the subject matter being enlarged is irrelevant.

The importance of this contextual approach is relevance, the benefit of the pupil connecting the act of critical evaluation of other artists work to their own can not be overestimated. The success of this approach however does depend to a large extent upon the teacher. One of the reasons given for the need for the new curriculum was the "desire to give a greater professional role to the teacher in the choice of content within the framework of the syllabus,"<sup>(14)</sup> nowhere is this more evident than in relation to Support Studies. Support Studies must not be perceived as





being incidental or ornamental or used inconsistently, irregularly or inappropriately, they must be perceived as integral and pervasive.

Meagher states that::

Students should not only produce works but that they should also cultivate a sense of value, be able to make sound judgements (as opposed to mere preferences) and exercise self-direction in and through art, craft and design. Students in this case would not have passive encounters with or make passive responses to, works of art, craft or design or their environment.<sup>(15)</sup>

In order for the pupil to cultivate this sense of value, it is imperative that the teachers accept their greater professional role both in their choice of support studies and the manner in which they present them to the class or individual. They should be presented both visually and orally in a tone that does not undermine their importance. Their relevance should be made clear. The teacher's input should not be over dictatorial, the pupils should be questioned in a deliberate manner so as to confront them with issues which require consideration. Issues should be open to discussion, while at the same time the teacher's input relating to the work should be constructive and informative, containing sound and meaningful insight. The nature of this questioning will be dealt with with specific examples in the section on Classroom Application.

While personal, local and school resources will have an effect on the Support Studies available to any particular teacher, this is countered by the sheer variety of sources from which to chose, as the Junior Certificate's definition of Support Studies, in contradiction to the Leaving Certificate, is not Eurocentric. The Junior Certificate Syllabus document states that,





History of Art, Craft and Design should be introduced in relation to the learning experience, with examples from past and present, worldwide as well as local Irish or European work, so as to acquaint the student with adult and child art, craft and design from many cultures.<sup>(16)</sup>

Neither does it emphasise chronological order as is made clear in the Guide Lines for Teachers which states that:

In critical and evaluative areas of Art, Craft and Design, chronological sequence is less productive of insight and understanding than attention to ideas and qualities that are inherent and experienced in the learning situation. Integration of support studies in this way should lead to a greater understanding, balance, and effectiveness of the learning as a whole.<sup>(17)</sup>

In Guide Lines for Teachers, the intended nature of Support Studies is clearly described. They should involve the development of critical, evaluative and appreciative skills and the “critical appraisal, history and appreciation of Art, Craft and Design should be organised to form an integral part of the learning experience”, they may become the “starting point, stimulus or main motivational force in a learning situation.”<sup>(18)</sup> They should concern,

- Specific treatment and organisation of a variety of visual elements and form in specific works.
- General concepts of form.
- Significance of symbolic meanings expressed.<sup>(19)</sup>





and it states that "all qualities are considered in relation to the cultural and historical context in which the artist craftsperson, designer lives or has lived."<sup>(20)</sup>

Finally it states that:

Through such analysis philosophic and expressive meanings in the work are re-discovered, refined and clarified. Whether this form of analysis is directed towards drawing, painting, printmaking, architecture, sculpture, or other objects created by artists, the student can recognise, understand and empathise with the artists expression, philosophy of life, inner feelings and his/her aspirations as a human being.<sup>(21)</sup>

The situation exists therefore where the discipline of art history and appreciation, including craft and design, is being approached at secondary school level in two very different ways. At Junior Certificate level it is seen to be integral to the pupils general art education, which is seen to be of great benefit in the development of the individual as a whole and as part of a community. It is presented in a manner in which it is made relevant to the pupil so that he can recognise, understand and empathise with the artist. It is presented in a context in which it is valuable and meaningful for the pupil.

In total contrast to this, at Leaving Certificate level it is presented to the pupil as a discipline that is completely segregated from the pupils own artistic endeavours. With overtones of traditional historicism, with scientific aspirations it becomes overtly academic. It focuses exclusively upon the development of art in Ireland and Europe. It mystifies the artist and the practice of art, all of which combine to alienate the pupil from the subject resulting in the pupils actual comprehension of the subject being extremely poor. My recommendation is a simple one, the Leaving Certificate Art (including Crafts) syllabus is currently under review,





I propose that in an attempt to improve the actual comprehension of the aesthetic issues that are central to art, craft and design, as well as an understanding of why its history has developed in the way that it has, that the Leaving Certificate be restructured in a manner that resembles that of the Junior Certificate. The following chapter Classroom Application illustrates one way in which such a structure could be applied in the senior cycle.





## Footnotes Chapter 3

1. An Roinn Oideachais, Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools 1987/88 to 1997/98 (Dublin: Brunswick Press Ltd., 1997) p.224.
2. Tony Crooks, The Changing Curriculum, Perspectives on the Junior Certificate (Dublin: O'Brien Educational Ltd., 1990) p.10.
3. Ibid., p.11.
4. Ibid., p.14.
5. Ibid., p.9.
6. An Roinn Oideachais, The Junior Certificate, Art, Craft & Design (Dublin: N.C.C.A., 1988) p.1.
7. Ibid., p.1.
8. Clodagh Holahan, "A Teachers Perspective" in The Changing Curriculum, ed. Crooks, p.31.
9. Kieran Meagher, "The Art, Craft and Design Syllabus" in The Changing Curriculum, ed. Crooks, p.21.
10. Iseult McCarthy, "An External Perspective" in The Changing Curriculum, ed. Crooks, p.37.
11. Meagher, "The Art, Craft and Design Syllabus", p.22.





12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p.23.
14. Crooks, The Changing Curriculum, p.14.
15. Meagher, "The Art, Craft and Design Syllabus", p.24.
16. An Roinn Oideachais, The Junior Certificate, p.6.
17. An Roinn Oideachais, The Junior Certificate, Art, Craft and Design, Guidelines for Teachers (Dublin: N.C.C.A. 1988) p.5.
18. Ibid., p.4.
19. Ibid., p.5.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.



## CHAPTER 4

### Classroom Application

#### School and Pupil Profile

The following scheme of work was carried out by a fifth year class in a south Dublin Community School established in 1975. It is significant that the schools Mission Statement closely resembles, in its aspirations, that of the Junior Certificate in its general aim of education. It acknowledges that the school exists in a "rapidly changing society, where traditional values and standards are no longer taken for granted."<sup>(1)</sup> It perceives its role within that society as to cater for the individual needs of all of the children of the community, placing equal importance on academic and other areas of achievement. The development of the pupils self esteem, confidence and psychological well-being are central, positive reinforcement in the learning environment is encouraged. The Applied Leaving Certificate as well as various P.L.C. courses are available as well as the traditional Leaving Certificate. Much of this ethos is directly related to the needs of the community. The majority of the pupils are not highly motivated academically and the daily absentee level is high and a very real problem in the school.

The particular class are in general of weak ability. When the scheme initially began, their self-esteem and notions of self-efficacy, in relation to their artistic abilities at least, were quite low. While most of the comments of the Chief Examiner referred to in chapter 1 were related to students of higher level ability, the fact that this class would generally be considered to be of ordinary ability only emphasises the benefits of the contextual approach of incorporating Support Studies into art education.





## **Scheme and Methodology**

### Aim of the Scheme:

To develop an understanding of line, texture and form through the investigation of a specific element of Gothic decoration (Green Men), resulting in mixed media Green Men.

The scheme was carried out over twenty four lessons and was divided into two parts, Part 1 lessons 1 to 9, Part 2 lessons 10 to 24. Three factors influenced the length of the scheme. Firstly, the processes involved, observational drawing, composition and design, enlargement, clay modelling, papier mache, construction and painting. Secondly, half of the lessons were single periods of 40 minutes duration, the others, 75 minutes. Thirdly, the ability of the pupils, inconsistent attendance and the insistence upon quality in the work. While the elements of line, texture and form are specifically mentioned in the aim, shape, composition and colour were also integral.

The scheme is based upon one of the Junior Certificate premises that the Support Studies may become the "starting-point, stimulus or main motivational force in a learning experience."<sup>(2)</sup> The idea of drawing as a way of thinking and the importance of a well structured design process are also central to both this scheme and the Junior Certificate ideology.

The starting point in this case was the carvings of Green Men used as decoration in Gothic Cathedrals such as Bamberg (Plate 4), Dijon (Plate 5), Norwich and many others. A typical Green Man is composed of two elements, a head/face and foliage (and sometimes fruit).





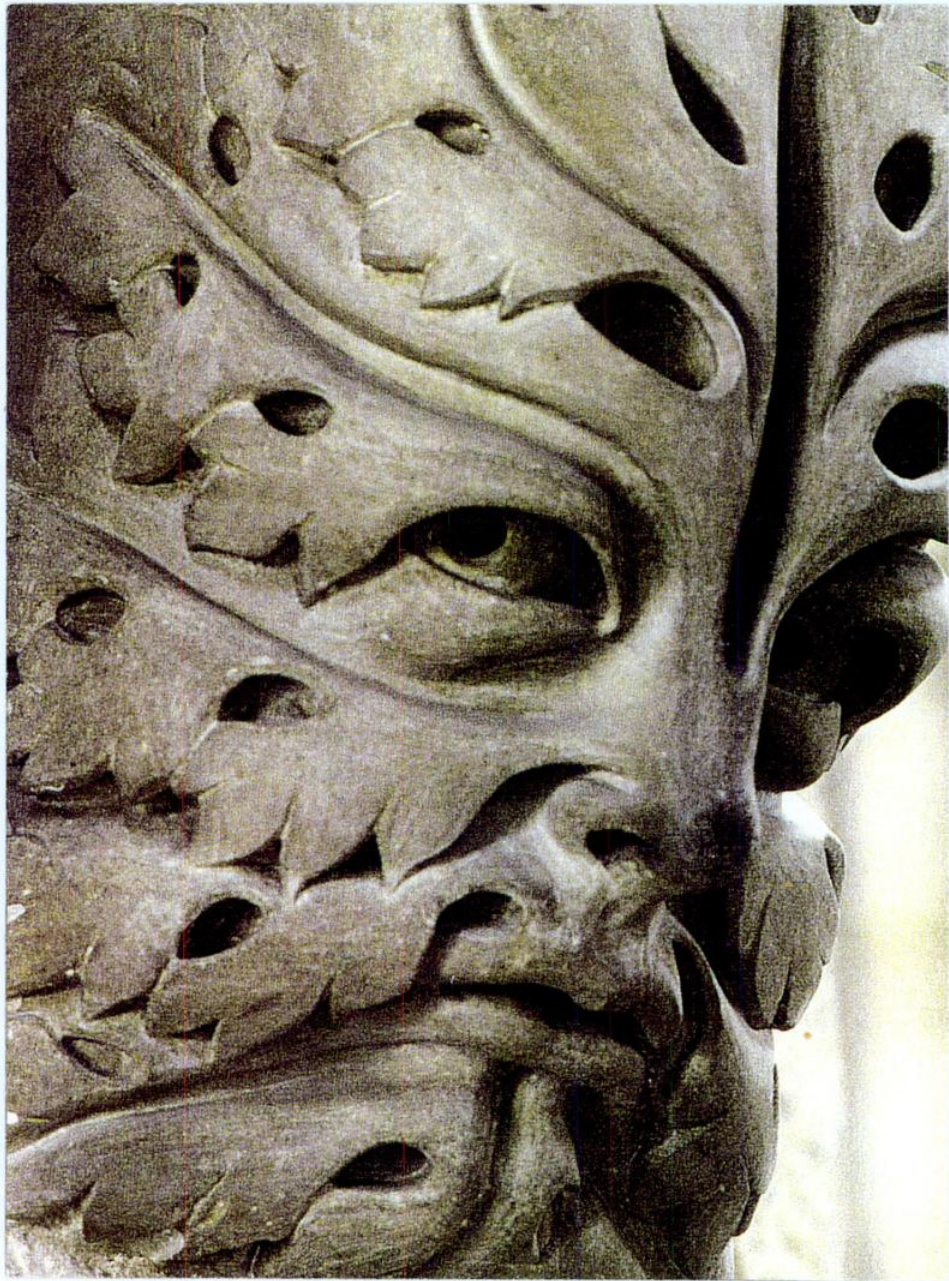


Plate 4. Green Man, Bamberg Cathedral.

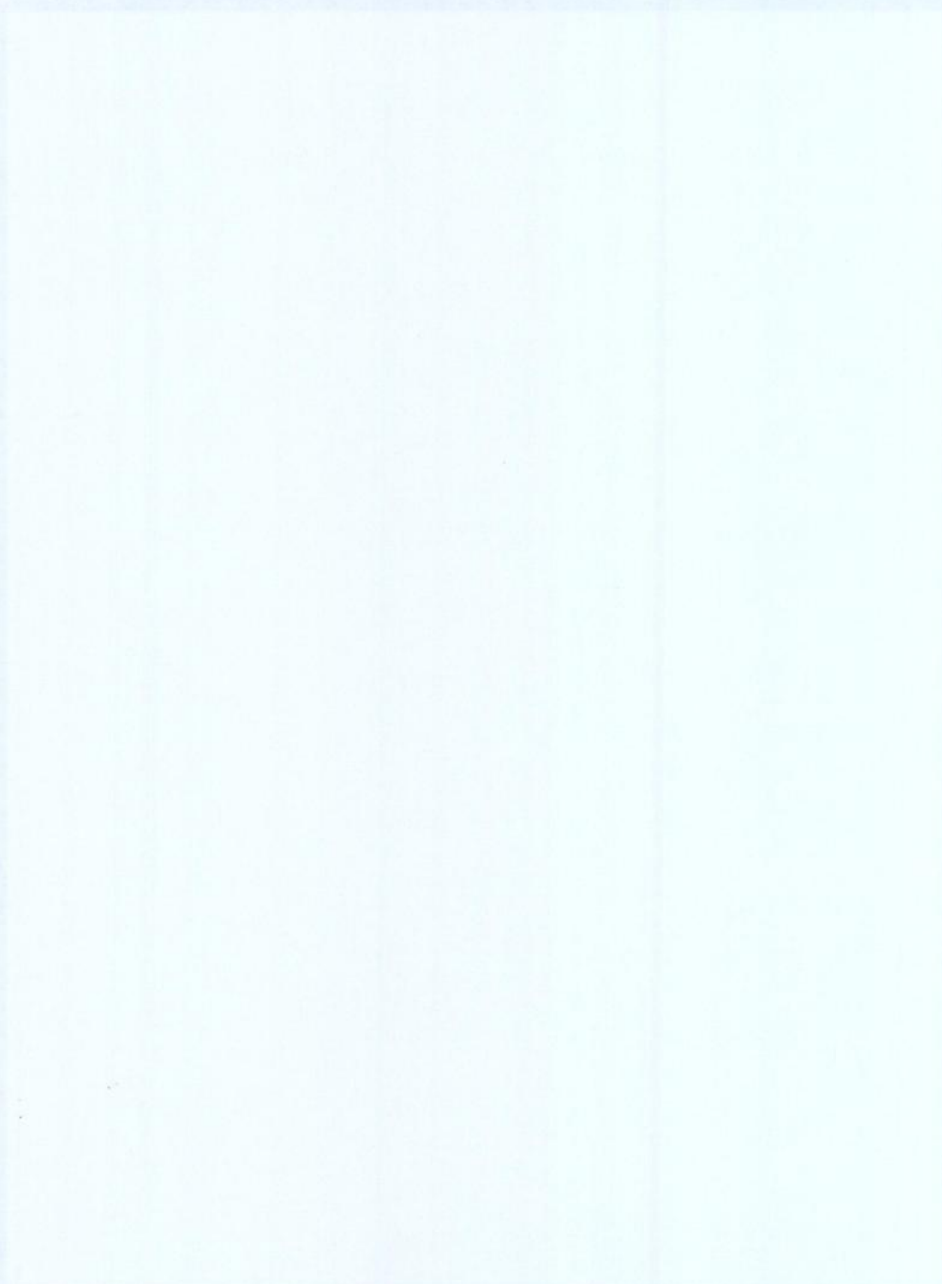






Plate 5. Green Man, Dijon Cathedral.





Characteristically these elements are arranged with the head central, surrounded by the foliage, which tends to connect in a very organic manner, often symmetrical, to the head. Frequently, leaves emerge from the mouth or blend into the planes of the head, the eyebrows or the cheekbones.

One of the most interesting features of the Green Men is the way in which they reflect a philosophy of the time in which they were made. The Green Man imagery is believed to have descended, in part at least, from the Celtic horned God Cernunnos, God of the forest, fields and hunting. In the ninth century Hrabanus Maurus identified the "leaf as a symbol of sexual sin,"<sup>(3)</sup> and grotesque Green Men appeared in Romanesque churches as warnings against the dangers of indulging in the same, Cernunnos himself provided the image of the devil that still exists today. With the more enlightened view of God, man and the world that accompanied the Gothic period, the Green Man "underwent a remarkable transformation at the hands of Gothic artists into a symbol of renewal and resurrection, as befits a god of vegetation."<sup>(4)</sup>

Three points have just been made relating to the Green Men, the nature of the imagery, the composition of the imagery and the contemporary context of the imagery. These three points were established in the first lesson of the scheme, and set the tone for the scheme in general.

The learning objective of Lesson 1 was:

to develop an understanding of the Gothic mentality and of line drawing as a research method and primary sources as a starting point in construction/relief project.

Pupils in this lesson were initially questioned about the nature of, and composition of the imagery:





- What elements/forms are common to all of the Green Men?
- How are they connected?
- Are they arranged randomly or in a deliberate manner?
- Why do you think they are arranged in such a way?
- What kind of mood do you think the image creates, calm, angry....?

Where ever possible important and relevant aesthetic observations were arrived at, through such directive questioning, by the students themselves, if it was not observed it was pointed out by the teacher.

Where specific vocabulary was required, the appropriate terminology was introduced and explained using the blackboard, element, symmetry and composition for example.

Pupils were then shown an example of Romanesque carving (Plate 6) and asked to compare it to the Green Man in relation to the way in which it was carved, the nature of the imagery and the mood which it creates. During the following discussion the pupils were informed about the time periods in which the carvings were made, their philosophical difference and about how this is reflected not only in the carvings but in the general architecture. Also discussed were what possible meaning such Green Man imagery could have in the context of today, which led into areas such as Eco-Warriors. The general progression of the scheme, for each pupil to make their own Green Man, was then outlined and the specific practical, productive task for that lesson, observational drawing of leaves from primary sources, was described, demonstrated and again related back to the Support Study. The Gothic artist, as opposed to the Romanesque, had observed in drawing and naturalistically translated into carving, actual species of plants:







Plate 6. Romanesque Carving, Chuvigny Cathedral





The same process that had given individuality to the saint had at once humanised the faces of the Green Men and ensured that the oak, hawthorn, ivy or vine leaves that issued from his mouth or made up his features were immediately identifiable.<sup>(5)</sup>

Relating to the practical task, the pupils were again questioned as to why they need to draw leaves? The function of these drawings was explained as research, to gather information from which they would be able to construct leaves at a later stage. They were then questioned as to the type of information needed and therefore what type of drawing would be most appropriate, the information being shape and structure, the quality of these drawings, in relation to their purpose, was very good (Plate 7).

In the very first lesson of the scheme therefore the pupils were confronted with significant aesthetic issues relating to choice of imagery, composition, line and shape. They were presented with historical facts and simultaneously confronted with issues of signification and how they change in the context of different periods. They were also introduced to the idea of drawing with a function and the basis of good design process. Significantly this was done in the context of a practical art class. At all times, art materials and primary sources material were on view to reinforce this, and at all times the issues in question were related to the pupils own experience and work, as reference and as a motivational force. Any factual and historical information was preceded by encouraging the pupils perception. In this way, the substance of the issues was not trivialised or alienated but made relevant to the pupil, thereby making comprehension, meaningful.







Plate 7    Observational Drawing, Student Work, Lesson 1



This first lesson is typical of the way in which Support Studies were used throughout the scheme. They can be divided into the two general groupings referred to earlier, Thematic and Activity based. Thematically related Support Studies here related to images and artworks in which human imagery, especially heads and foliage are combined, for example The River Gods (Lesson 10), Edward Steichen (Lesson 18) and Cyprien Tokoudaeba (Lesson 14). Examples of Activity based Support Studies included da Vinci - proportions of the head (Lesson 9), Henry Moore - use of thumbnail sketches (Lesson 4) and Andy Warhol, colour combinations (Lesson 22). Where possible the two overlapped as with Linda Bruchner (Lesson 20) who creates human forms in sculpture by casting leaves in bronze and Andreas von Weizsacher who casts human heads in paper. While the historical context was taken into account none of the Support Studies were chosen in relation to chronological order, neither are they all European. In contrast, they span many cultures and centuries from a ceramic head made by the NOK tribe in Nigeria in 500BC to the Pop Art of Andy Warhol in the 1960's to Bruckner working in Dublin in the 1990's. What unites all of the Support Studies is their relevance to the scheme and particular lesson, through this however the pupils encounter and cultivate a broad understanding of their interpretation of the terms Art, Craft and Design as well as acquiring specific, informative knowledge.

Due to the length of the scheme, 24 lessons, and the amount of Support Studies used, 28, a detailed account of each lesson in terms of learning objectives and methodology, in the productive, critical and the cultural aspects of each lesson is impossible here. The following however is a summary of the general progression of the scheme in stages as opposed to individual lessons. The learning objectives relate to the stages and are conglomerations of the specific learning objectives. These stages are accompanied by one sample of students work and one example of a Support Study used in each stage.





### **Lesson 1 to 3**

**TASK:** Observational drawing from primary sources of leaves and fellow pupils heads, front and profile (Plate 8).

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:**

To develop an understanding of observational drawing as a method of gathering and recording relevant information, in this case line, shape and form.

### **SUPPORT STUDIES:**

Gothic Green Men, motivation and pervasive throughout the scheme. Georgia O'Keefe, Lucian Freud and Leonardo da Vinci (Plate 9), observational drawing of heads and leaves.







Plate 8. Observational Drawing, Student Work, Lesson 3



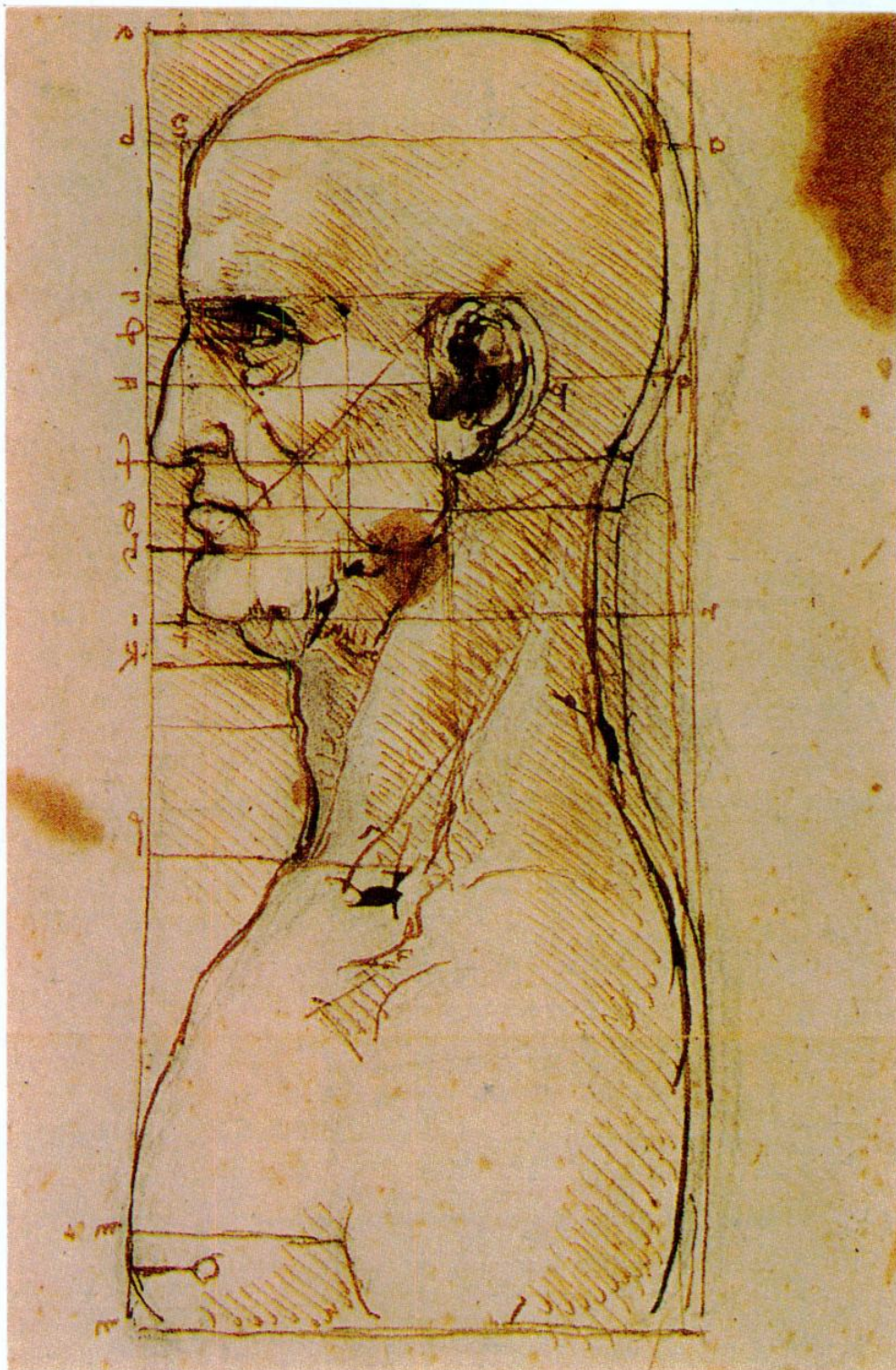


Plate 9. Observational drawing, Leonardo da Vinci,  
Lesson 3, Support Study





## **Lessons 4 and 5**

**TASK:** Thumbnail designs from observational drawings and enlargement of selected design to actual size (Plate 10).

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:**

To develop an understanding of composition, balance, arrangement and connection of forms through the combination of imagery. Completion of the initial design process through enlargement. This involved general compositional issues as well as those specific to the Green Man, symmetry, organic connection...and the design rationale behind the use of thumbnails.

### **SUPPORT STUDIES:**

Henry Moore, use of thumbnails, Picasso and da Vinci, thematic reference - leaf and head imagery. Chuck Close (Plate 11), enlargement process.





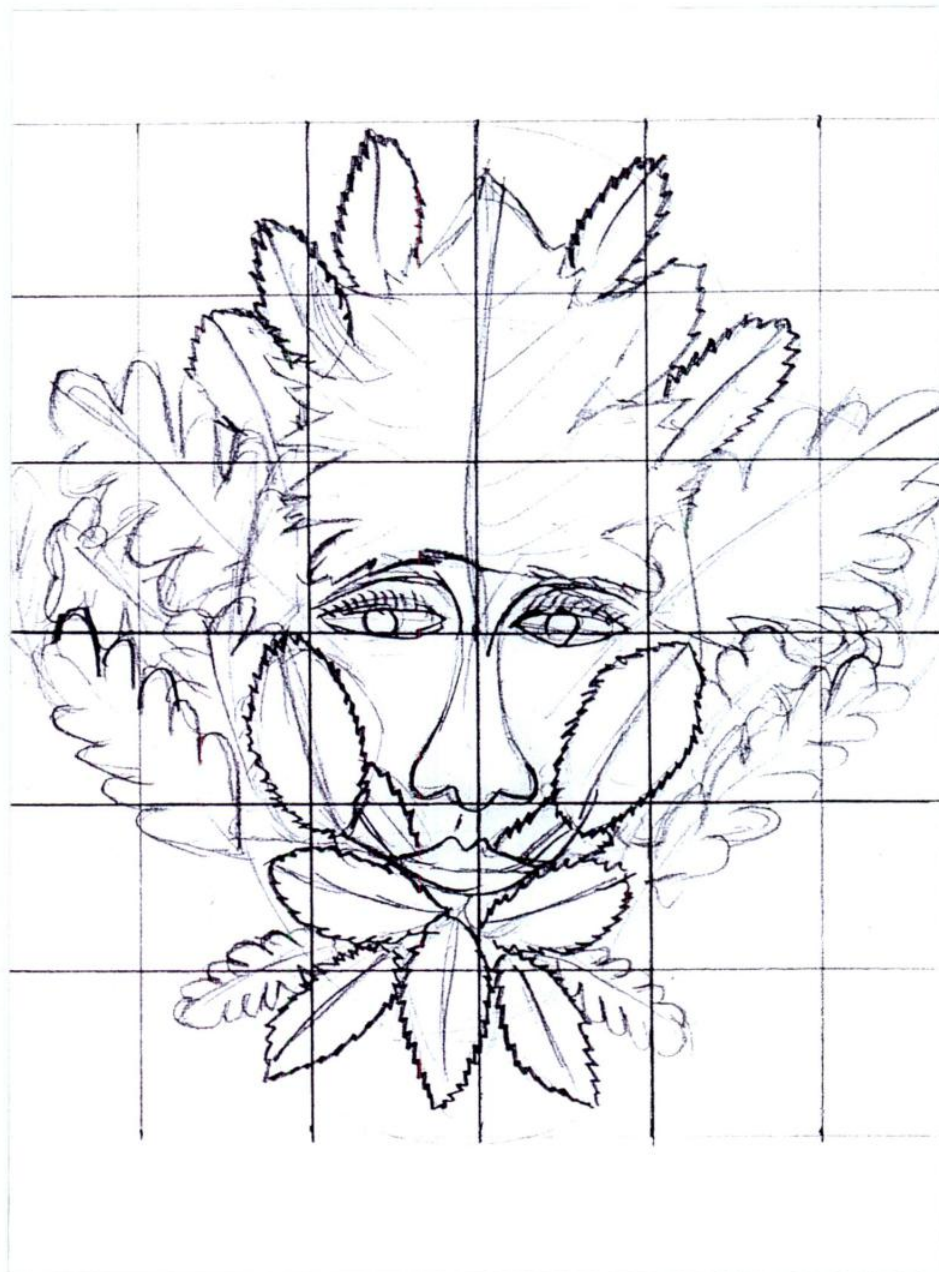


Plate 10. Green Man Design, Students Work, Lesson 5





Plate 11. Phil, Enlargement, Chuck Close, Lesson 5,  
Support Study.





## **Lessons 6 and 7**

**TASK:** Clay modelling of the heads for casting, working from source drawings. Characteristics for casting, exaggerated features, no overhangs....(Plate 12).

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:**

To develop an understanding of form, modelling in clay and translating information from 2D design to 3D.

### **SUPPORT STUDIES:**

Elizabeth Frink and NOK tribe head (Plate 13), both relate to modelling heads in clay.







Plate 12. Clay Modelling, Students Work, Lesson 7.





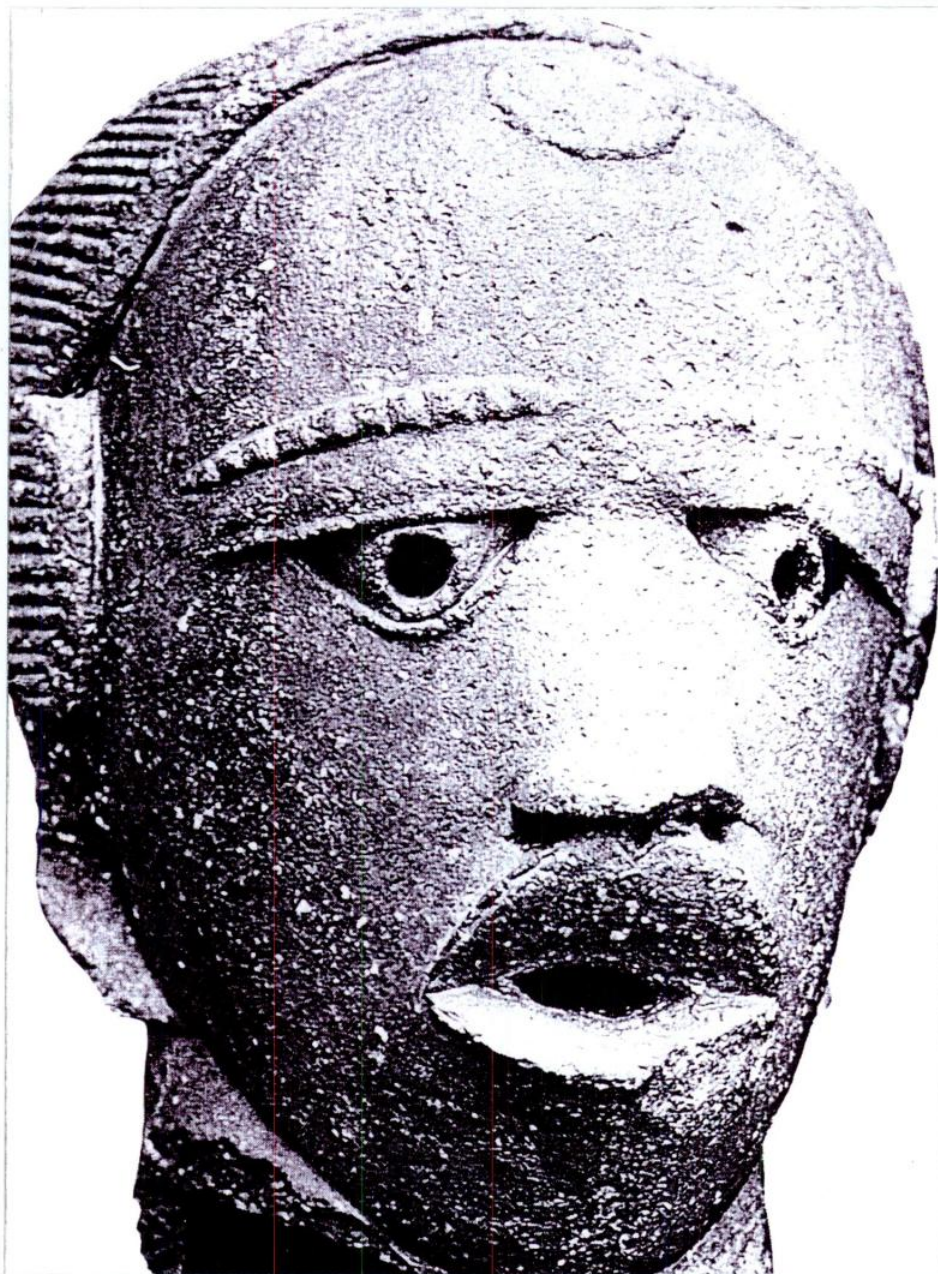


Plate 13. Clay Head, NOK Tribe, Lesson 7, Support Study





## **Lesson 8 and 9**

**TASK:** Taking papier mâché casts from the clay heads to form the head of the Green Men, (Plate 14).

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:**

To develop an understanding of texture and surface through the process of papier mache.

### **SUPPORT STUDIES:**

Samples of papier mâché applications, masks, bowls.....  
(Plate 15). Faces from Mount Rushmore, portrayal of head in 3D.





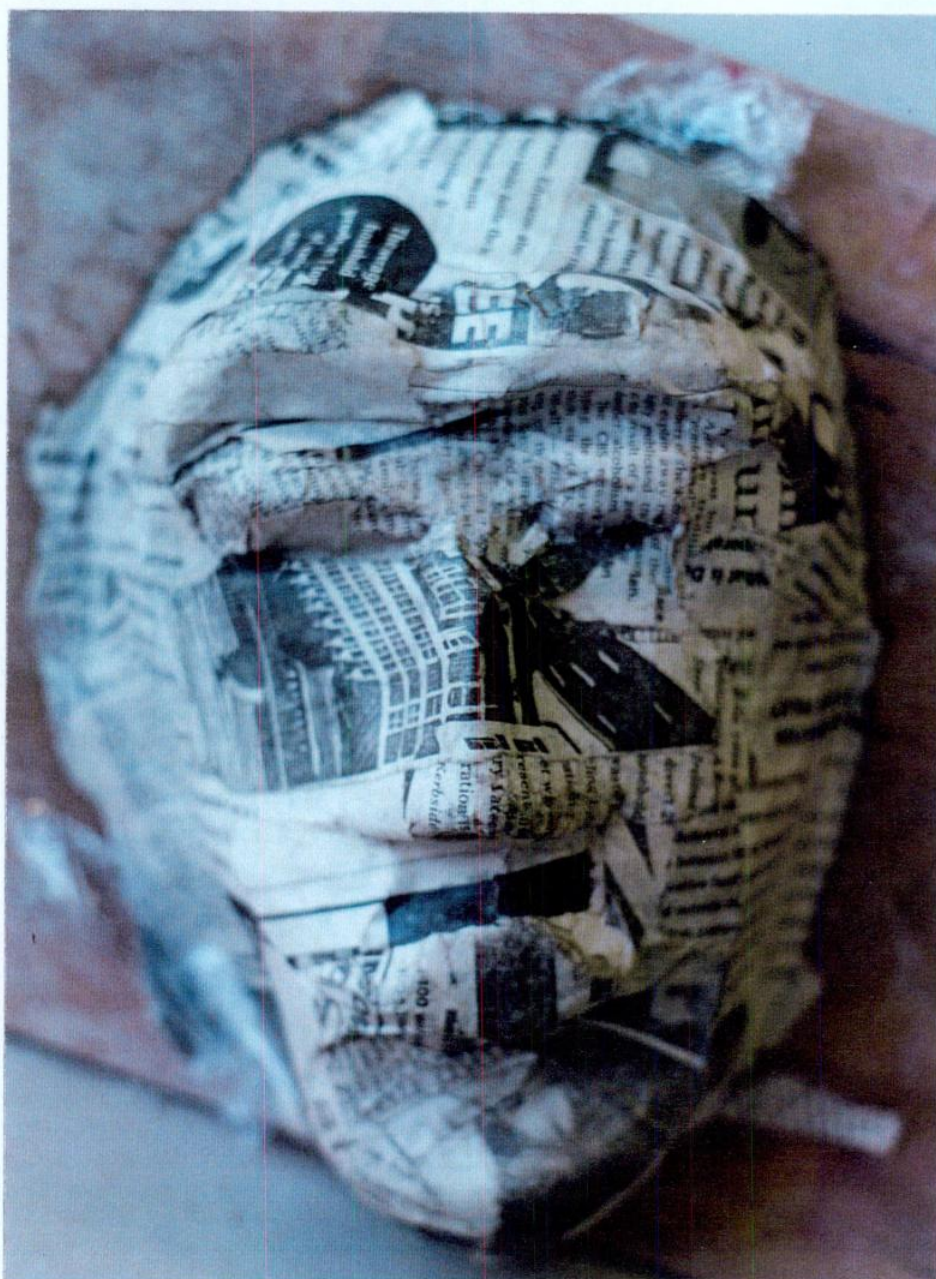


Plate 14. Papier Mâché, Students Works, Lesson 8







Plate 15. Papier Mâché Masks, Lesson 8, Support Study





## **Lessons 10 to 14**

**TASK:** The construction of leaves for the Green Men from cardboard and string, working from source drawings (Plate 16).

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:**

To develop an understanding of the interpretation of 2D information, design, into 3D construction using cardboard and string. This involved the reaffirmation of the relevance of the initial drawing and designs.

### **SUPPORT STUDIES:**

My own work, the linear quality and use of string (Plate 17).  
Edward Smyth, River Gods on the Customs House, thematic.  
Edward Steichen, photograph of Gloria Swanson, thematic  
(Plate 18) Cyprien Tokoudaeba, Aziza, God of the Forest,  
thematic.







Plate 16. Construction of Leaves, Students Work, Lesson 13





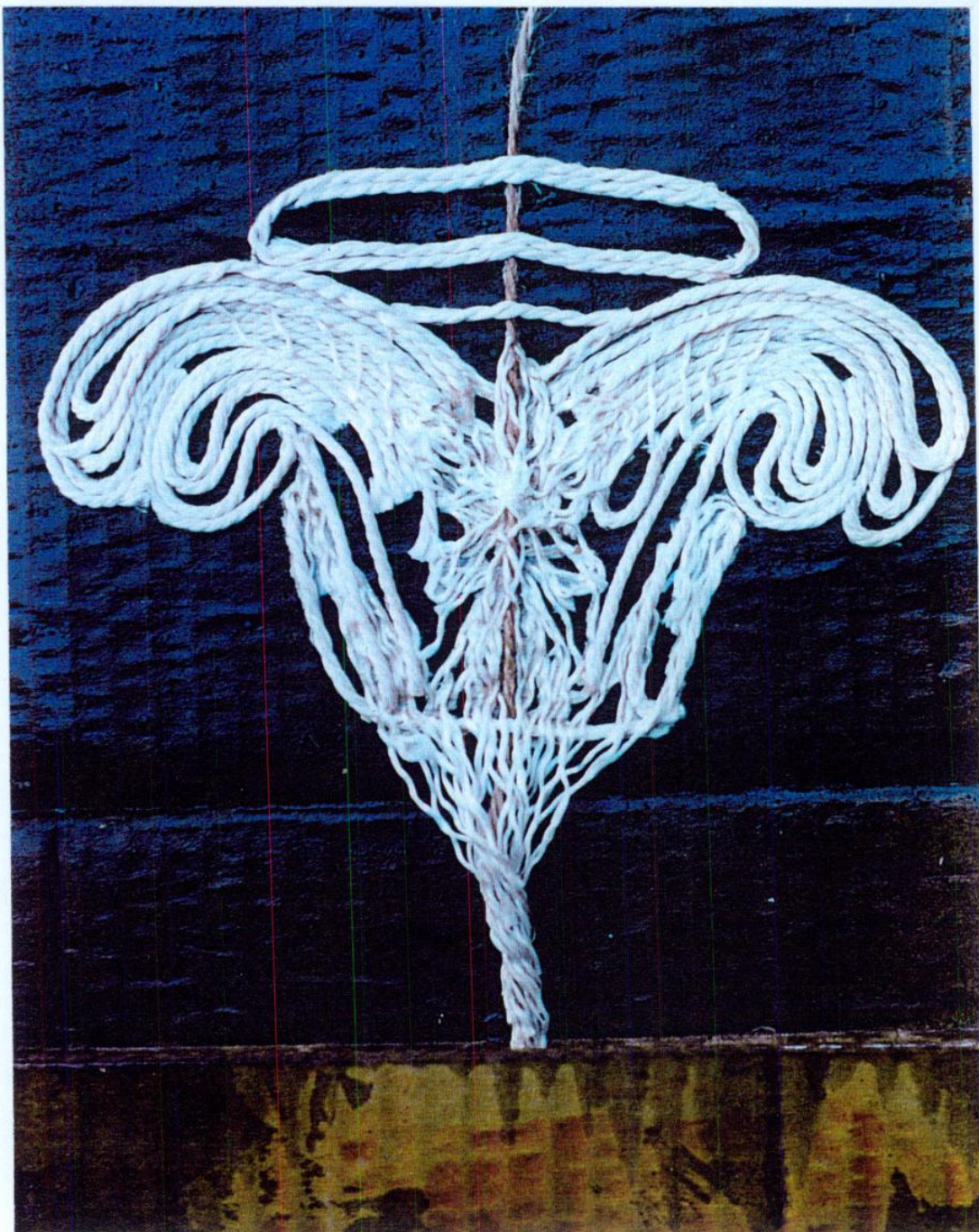


Plate 17. Use of String, My Work, Lesson 13, Support Study







Plate 18. Photograph of Gloria Swanson, Edward Steichen,  
Lesson 12, Support Study.







## **Lessons 15 to 17**

**TASK:** The connection of the two constructed elements, the heads and the leaves and the rendering of the finished surface texture in Papier Mâché, (Plate 19).

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:**

To develop an understanding of composition, shape, line, form and texture through the connection of leaves and the application of a bonding skin.

### **SUPPORT STUDIES:**

Linda Brüchner, thematic (Plate 20). Andreas von Weizscher, use of paper cast heads. Wenzel Zamnitzer, Daphne transformed into a laurel, thematic.





Plate 19. Connection of forms, Students Work, Lesson 16







Plate 20. Work of Linda Brückner, Lesson 15, Support Study





## **Lessons 18 and 19**

**TASK:** Thumbnail colour studies of design (Plate 21).

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:**

To develop an understanding of colour combinations through thumbnail colour studies. (Returning to design in consideration of colour. The pupils were made aware of various colour effects, complementary, monochrome.....but the decision was theirs. The Support Studies were integral in the remaining classes as reference to how certain artists have utilised colour).

### **SUPPORT STUDIED:**

Andy Warhol, colour combinations (Plate 22). Gothic Green Men, original colouring.







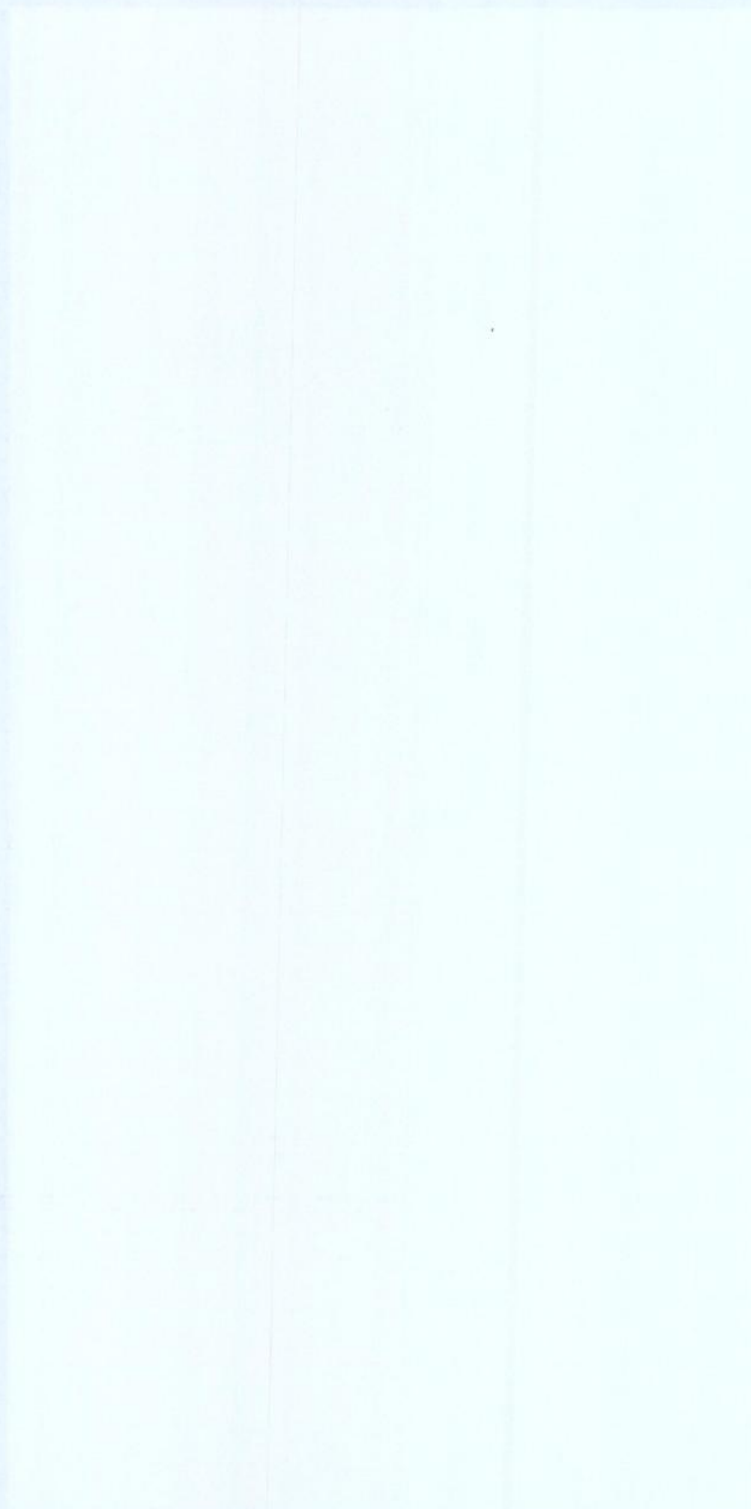
Plate 21. Colour Studies, Students Work, Lesson 18







Plate 22. Marilyn Monroe, Andy Warhol, Lesson 18,  
Support Study





## **LESSONS 20 TO 24**

**TASK:** The painting and finishing of the Green Men. The paint was built up in layers, different techniques were used and effects created. The finished work was varnished (Plate 23).

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVE:**

To develop an understanding of colour combinations and paint applications through the painting of the Green Men.

### **SUPPORT STUDIES:**

Matisse, Picasso, Native American Indian Carvings, (Plate 24) all relate to various colour and paint applications.





Plate 23. Green Man, Students Work, Less 24.



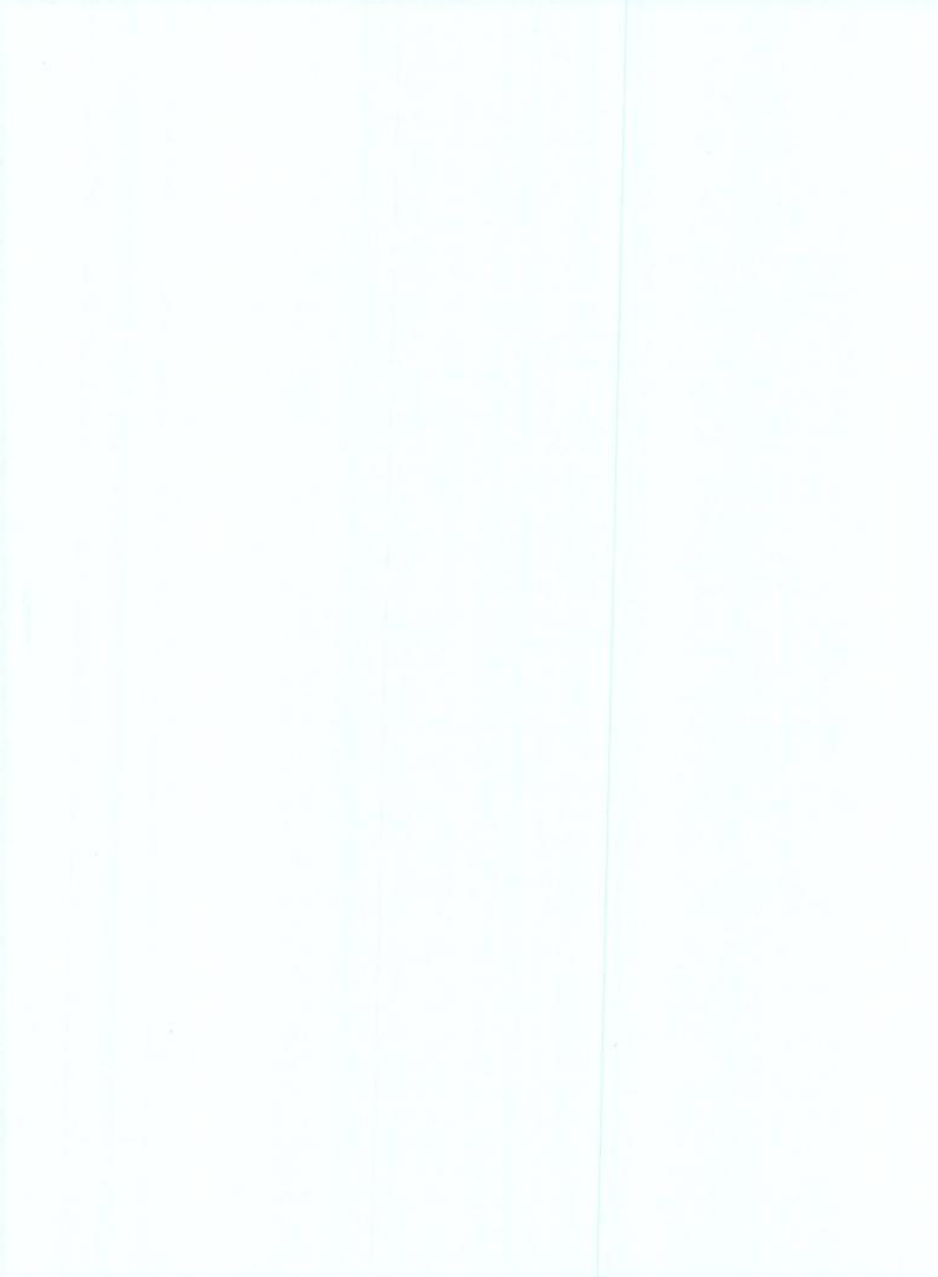




Plate 24. Native American Carving, Lesson 22, Support Study.





## **Lesson 11**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE:** To reaffirm the relevance of the various support studies covered to date and the directional progression of the scheme.

This lesson was an exception in its structure as it contained no practical task, its purpose was to evaluate, through discourse, how meaningful the Support Studies actually were to the students and assess whether or not they understood the progression of the work they were doing and where it was going. This was the last lesson before the Christmas break and formed a bridge between Part 1 and Part 2 of the scheme.

In this lesson it became evident that genuine learning was taking place with this class, through this scheme. They were able to competently discuss aesthetic issues relating to composition and signification, for example, and of fundamental importance they were able to relate particular Support Studies to the specific activity or issue with which they had been discussed. A marked, positive improvement in their attitude was also significant and obvious and will be elaborated upon under Class Evaluation.

### **Assessment**

Assessment of the pupils progression was carried out in two ways. Firstly, verbally as in Lesson 11 and more particularly during the course of every lesson, in the introduction, and evaluation and through the lesson on an individual basis. Secondly, visually in how evident comprehension of aesthetic issues discussed had been assimilated by the





pupils and translated into their own work. Written examination was not used and handouts were kept to a minimum. Pupils were however required to keep notebooks relating to issues and terminology.

### **Evaluation**

The aim and objectives of this scheme were to develop in the pupils an understanding, both critical and productive of the various art elements, line, texture, form...through a very definite sequential process beginning with drawing and design and developing through clay modelling, papier mâché and construction on to painting. Through these processes the pupils were confronted with manipulating the elements in many different ways. The scheme also aimed to use Support Studies in an integral manner to complement and contribute to the pupils own art work while simultaneously developing their knowledge and understanding of others art, craft and design in terms of aesthetic and signitive values and in terms of historical context. This combination of critical and productive was epitomised in its motivation and subject matter, the Green Men, which established, from the first lesson, the bridge between the two areas of the students concern. A further aim was to develop, through this work, the pupils self-esteem and confidence, thereby contributing to the growth of the individual as a whole.

In all three areas the scheme has, in my opinion, been very successful. The quality of the students work at every stage has been very high and reflects not only their growing comprehension of and empathy with the creative process and productive process but also the positive attitude and level of commitment which it requires, especially considering the length of the scheme. Their ability and also their willingness to discuss other works of art, craft and design with competence is testimony to the success of the contextual approach to the critical side of art education.





In relation to self esteem, the scheme has been overwhelmingly successful, the class have developed genuine pride regarding their work and have proposed that it should be displayed in public and permanently in the school. Some of them have developed the habit of working on their art work after the lessons, through their lunch time. A huge improvement is evident in one or two students whose attitude was initially quite negative.

### **Evaluation of Self**

I am pleased with my own input into the scheme in the role of teacher. The scheme was well planned from start to finish and proceeded through logical and fundamentally sound, sequential stages. It was set at a level suitable for the class in question, challenging but not overwhelming in its content and concepts. At no stage was the work activity irrelevant or superficial and learning was involved and evident at every stage and importantly, the students were made aware of the learning.

No reference has been made so far in relation to Visual Aids, as opposed to Support Studies. At all times the Visual Aids used, as with the Support Studies, were relevant, appropriate and instructive and informative in relation to the specific task and learning objectives involved.

The role of the teacher involves a balance of instruction and nurturing. In this it is important for the teacher to cultivate an atmosphere that is conducive to optimum learning. During this scheme such an atmosphere was created, informal and unthreatening but structured and purposeful, and was based upon a policy of positive affirmation and encouragement. A very good relationship developed between the pupils and myself, both as a class and as individuals, involving mutual respect, at no time were the students treated as inferior or patronised.





## Footnotes Chapter 4

1. Cabinteely Community School, Handbook for Teachers 1997 1998 (Dublin: C.C.S., 1997) p.1.
2. An Roinn Oideachais, The Junior Certificate , Art, Craft, Design, Guidelines for Teachers (Dublin: N.C.C.A. 1988) p.5.
3. William Anderson, The Rise of the Gothic (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1985) p.105.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.113.



## CONCLUSION

The Chief Examiners report relating to the Art History and Appreciation Leaving Certificate papers 1996 described a general standard of answering in which students provided inappropriate rote answers, were unable to discuss, describe, compare or analyse particularly visual characteristics of art work, were unable to contextualise knowledge they did possess about artists and in general displayed a lack of comprehension in relation to the aesthetic and historical issues involved.

Although the actual outline of the Art, History and Appreciation syllabus is minimal and vague, inspection of the course content and the nature of the questions being set on Leaving Certificate papers reveal that it resembles very closely a traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century view of art history. It is concerned exclusively with Irish and European art, it strongly emphasises the chronological, schematic progression of art history. As a discipline that has perceived itself as a science it is segregated from the practical productive area of making art. Perhaps because of this, it has always had difficulty in defining "Art" and has therefore become overconcerned with academic historicism and mystified the artist and the act of making art and in doing so alienated the 'non-artist' and, in the school context, the pupil from the subject. This alienation is reflected in the lack of comprehension evident in the Leaving Certificate answers.

In contrast to this ideology in which art appears to be elitist and its purpose mysterious, there exists simultaneously in schools at secondary level a view of art education and an approach to art history and appreciation in which art education is perceived as very worthwhile, not only in the production of art, craft and design, but in the development of the individual as a well balanced, open minded person. This is the





ideology of the Junior Certificate programme discussed in detail in Chapter 3. In this programme the critical, productive and contextual aspects of art education are perceived as intrinsically linked to each other and the relevance of the critical (Support Studies) to the pupils own experience and practical art work is perceived as being of fundamental importance.

It is obvious from the quality of the Leaving Certificate answers referred to by the Chief Examiner that the current Art, History and Appreciation syllabus is flawed. As this syllabus is currently under review I recommend that an alternative contextual approach to the whole area, in which the history and appreciation is made relevant to the pupil's own work and experience, would be far superior and founded upon much sounder educational principles. An example of how such an approach may be implemented is provided in chapter 4.





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