

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT.

In my dissertation I discuss the importance of teaching the basic art elements at post-primary level. The focus of attention is directed toward students at junior level.

As line and shape are the most basic of the art elements, I chose to discuss the importance of drawing as a means of self-expression, exploratory research and as a way to record information.

I devised a drawing block, which was undertaken by a first-year class, in an all boys school. Emphasis was on observational drawing. Students explored ways of "seeing" differently and I used visual aids to demonstrate to the students that through concentrated observation they could achieve good results. The dissertation shows how the students undertook the drawing project, each time seeing the objects differently and through the use of a variety of media became more self-assured, which I felt was evident in their work.

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April 1998



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DRAWING THE BASIC ELEMENT

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Education

in

Candidacy for the

Diploma For Art and Design Teachers

by

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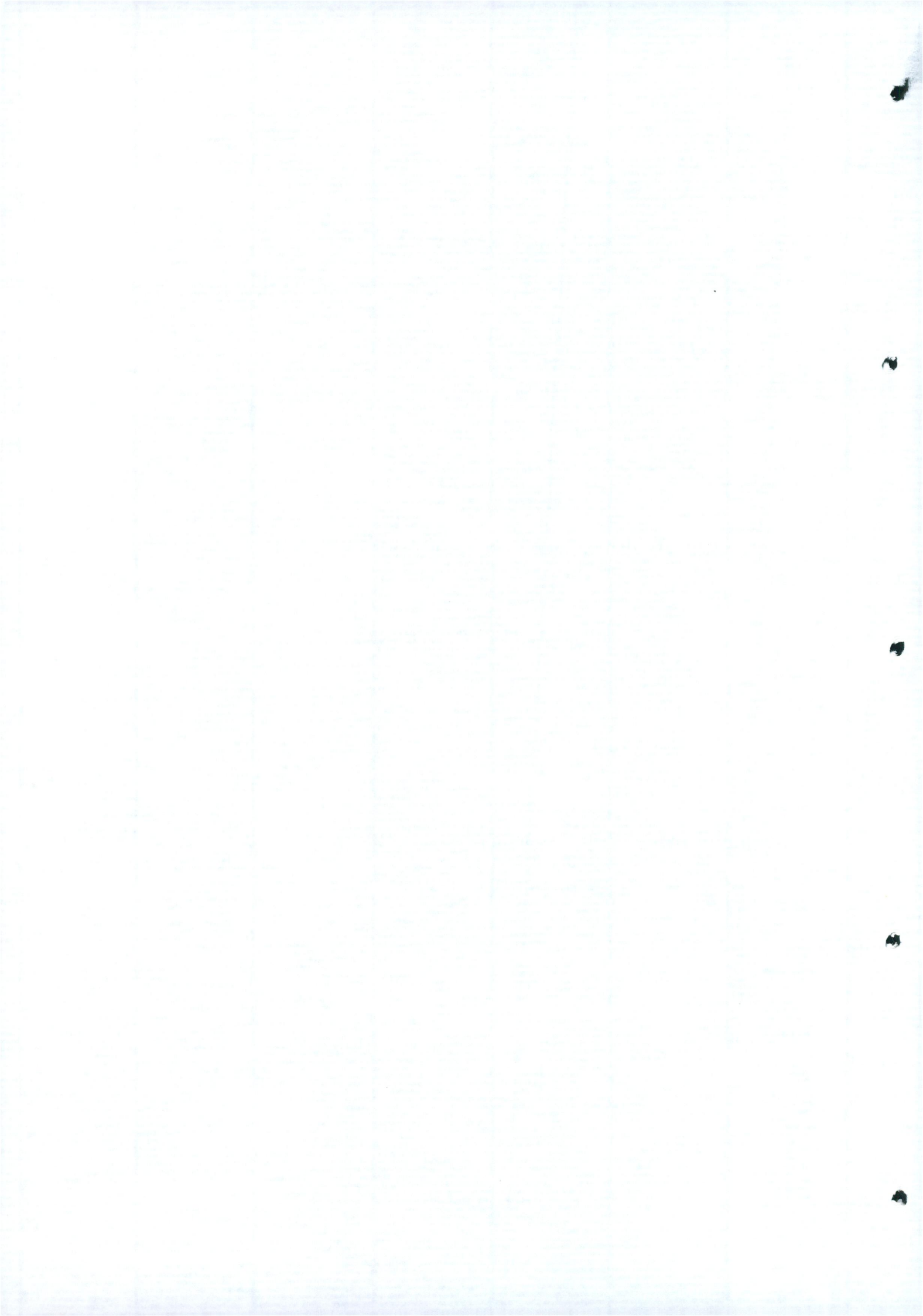
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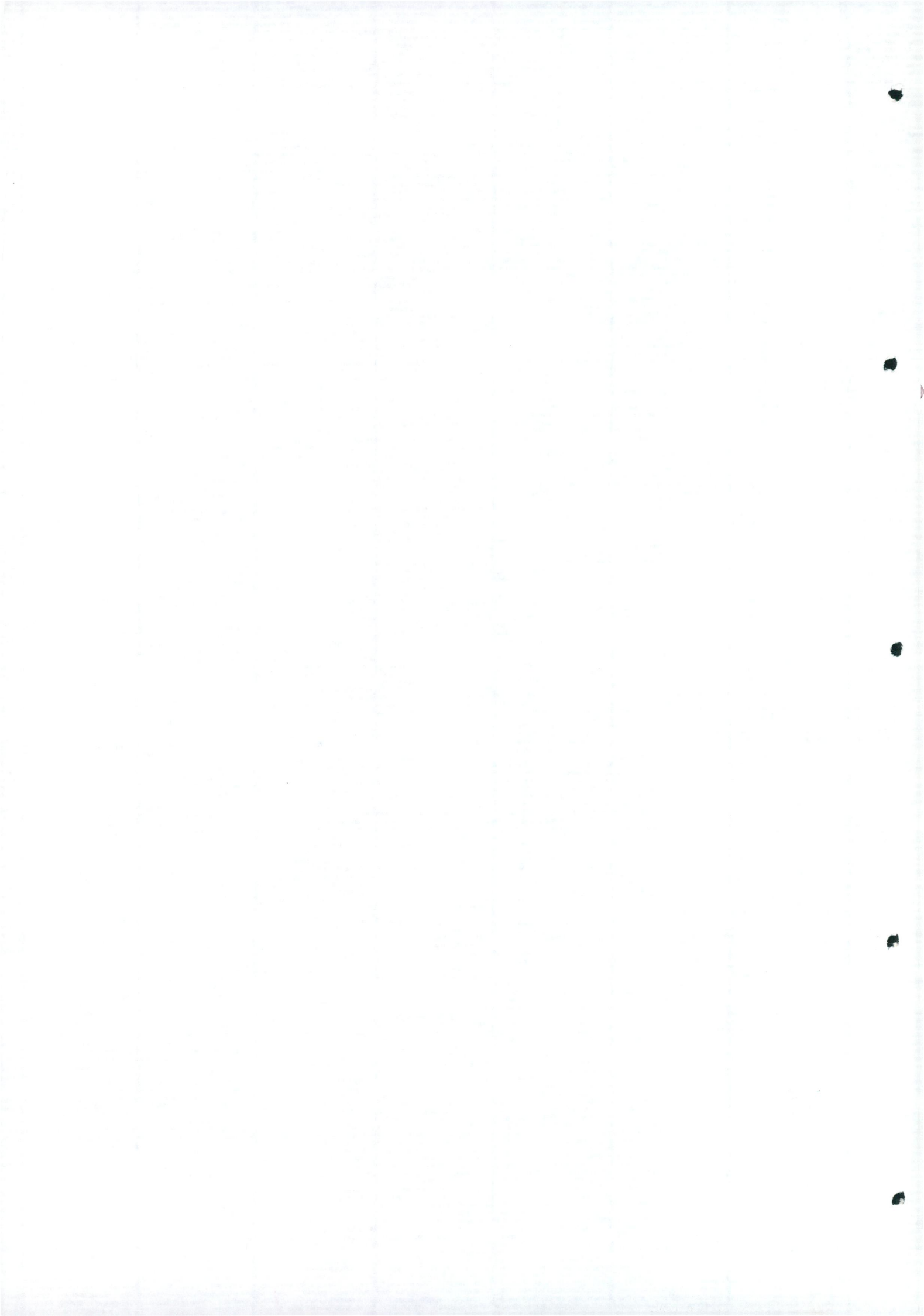
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INTRODUCTION

Children who are exposed to a wide range of sensory experience are more likely to be self-assured. Through regular repetition and reinforcement of the child's natural experiences, he builds concepts about himself and his environment, and the relationship between the concepts of art are realised. (1)

Sensory experience is the sensation of the senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch and the use of these senses gives us the ability to perceive, to feel or be conscious of the presence, or properties of things. Visual art involves at least two, if not more of these senses. In every society from prehistoric times to the present day there are expressions of artistic activity, from Egyptian hieroglyphics to modern day graffiti.

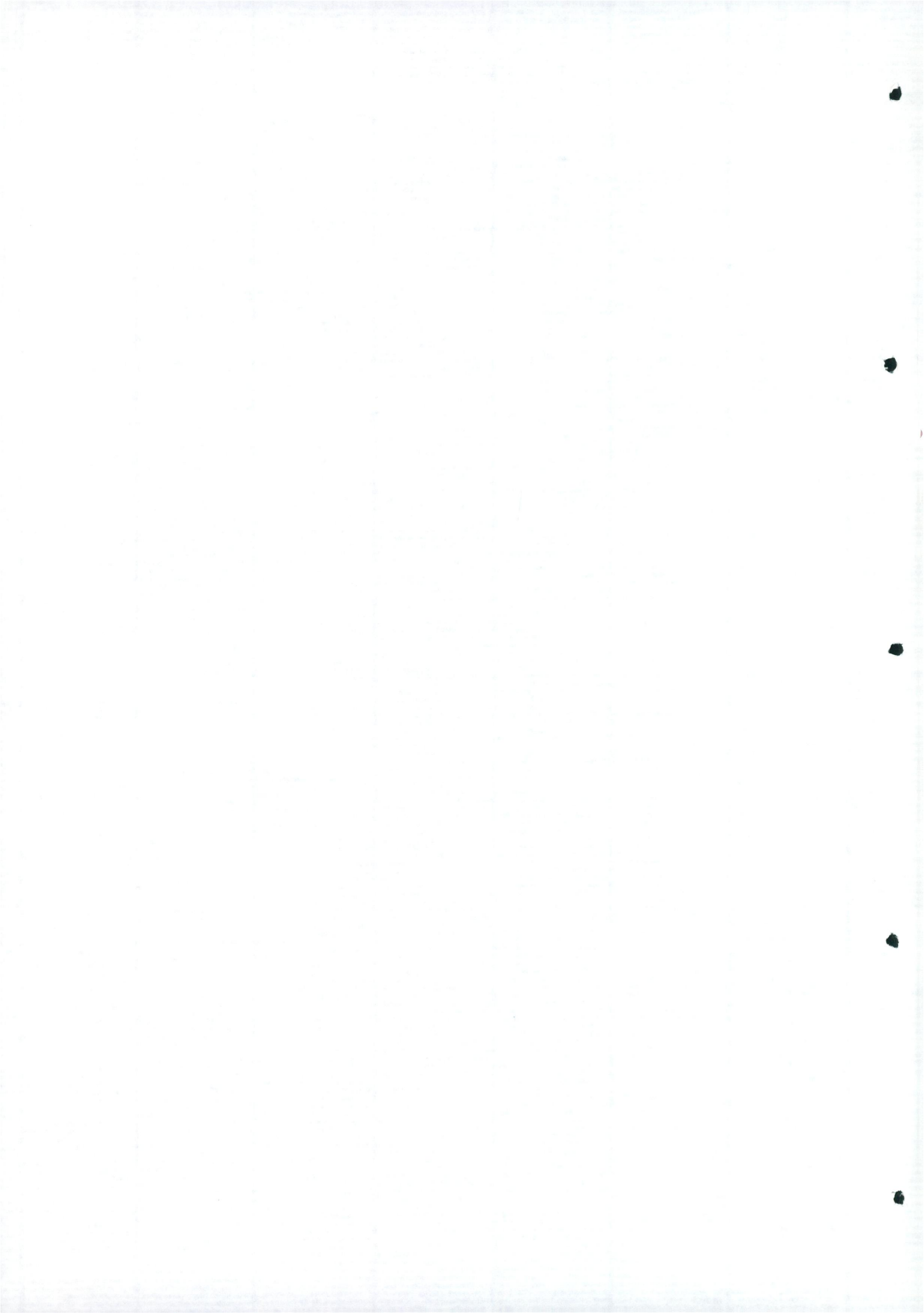
Benson in "The Place of the Arts in Irish Education" refers to a report from an international Symposium (1977), under the auspices of UNESCO, in which it was recognised that art was vital to a people's development (2). It also recognised art as a means of understanding society and a way of expressing the day to day life of a society. Art can define itself, its values and beliefs. The UNESCO report recognised people's need to rise above everyday life by having a vision as to how it might be lived. This vision might be expressed in religious, political, or personal terms or by any combination of these. There have been endless symposia, reports and discussions about the necessity for art



in people's lives. In Ireland there has been significant growth in the number of community-based art groups countrywide. New galleries and museums have mushroomed and visual art is finally getting the recognition it deserves.

In this dissertation I propose to examine the place of art, craft and design in the Irish curriculum. The particular focus of the study will be on the importance of drawing at junior cycle as the basis for the design process and product.

It will also include a description of a drawing block I completed with first year students which I feel bore out beliefs I have held about drawing, by teaching students how to 'see' differently and how their drawings improved greatly. In conclusion I express my belief that teaching the basics to children should begin at an early age and continue throughout the post-primary level and I make recommendations which I feel should be implemented to improve the standards in art practice.



FOOTNOTES INTRODUCTION

1. Diarmuid Larkin, Art Learning and Teaching : A Seven Year Manual for the Primary/Secondary Teacher, (Dublin : Wolfhound Press, 1981) p.9
2. Ciarain Benson, The Place of the Arts in Irish Education, Report of the Working Party appointed by the Arts Council, (Dublin : The Arts Council, 1979) p. 14



CHAPTER ONE

The Importance of Drawing at Junior Level

In 1989 the new Junior Certificate in art, craft and design was introduced.

The syllabus was changed radically, and for the better. I have had personal experience of teaching this new syllabus and have nothing but praise for it.

The Leaving Certificate has remained the same, but there are plans to radically change it also within the next two years.

The aims of the Junior Certificate syllabus are to develop a sense of personal identity and evaluation skills, to promote an informed and discriminating attitude by students in relation to their environment and to develop the student's aesthetic sensibilities. Its objectives are to develop the student's ability to work from imagination, memory and direct observation. It also aims to use drawing for observation, recording and analysis, as a means of thinking, communicating and expression and as a means of developing the art elements.

The Chief Examiners Report, 1992, acknowledges that the new syllabus has had a liberating effect on the subject. But it also criticises the standard of drawing. The report states that:

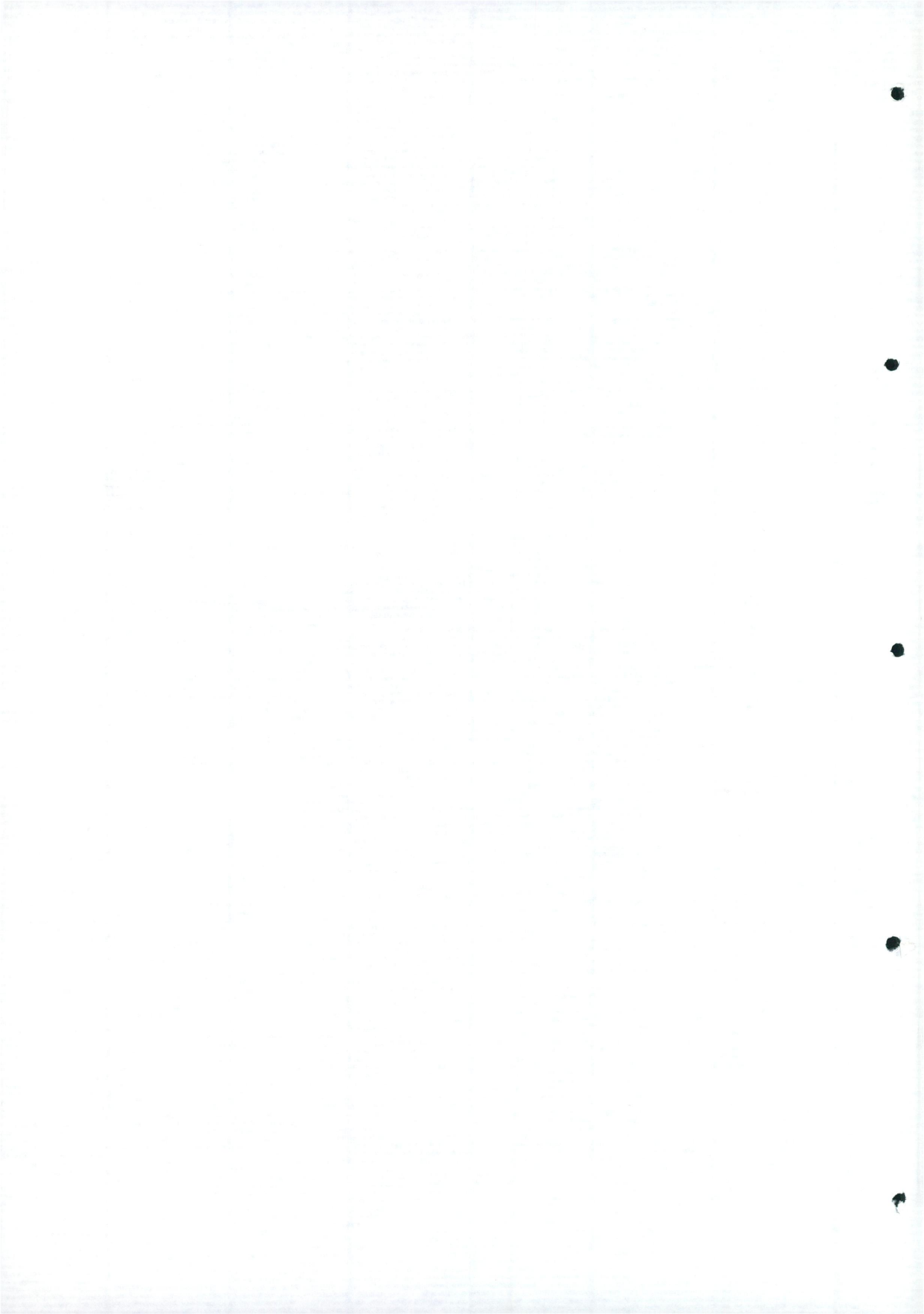


Little or no use was made of their drawing abilities in their Projects as submitted. The importance of drawing cannot be over-emphasised, it is the basic tool of Art and Design. It has been given an examination in its own right to underline its importance and its relevance. Drawing should pervade all aspects of the Project because it is a necessary support structure on which the development of the Project depends. As a probe and as a provider of structure, drawing is central to the Project. (1)

This is especially true of the preparatory work, the design process, which makes visible the student's response to the chosen theme. The Report went on to say that :

Many candidates were obviously directed to carry out their work in this manner and the simple elements such as line, shape, texture, colour, tone, form, movement were not explored or expanded on. Without this substance the areas of preparation and development suffered and cohesion in the Project as a whole was minimal. (2)

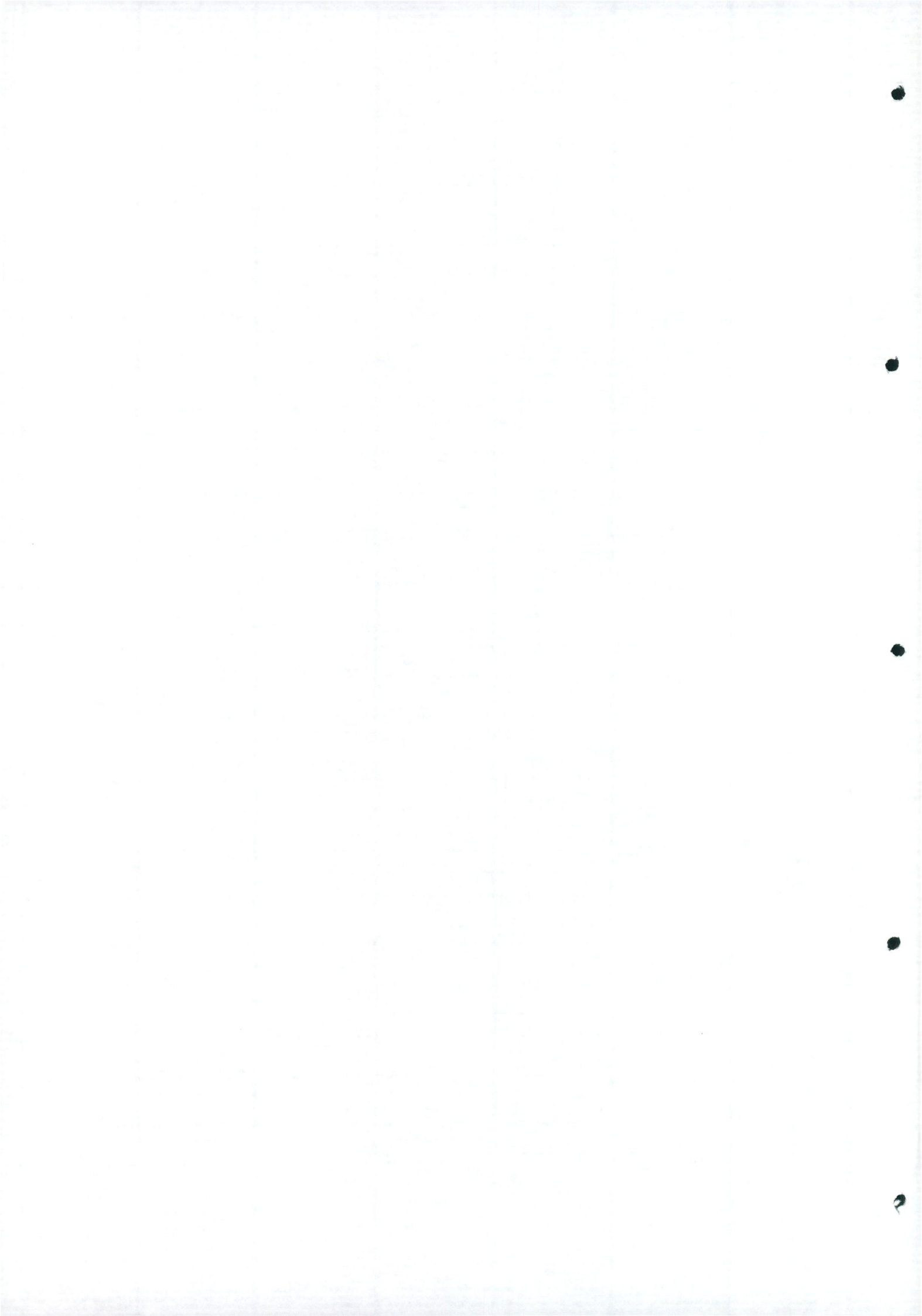
These very strong words, are directed at the teacher of art, craft and design. If the students have arrived at this point without any grasp of the basic art elements, then surely it is the responsibility of the teacher.



The Language of Art

Every subject taught in school has its own language. Science subjects and mathematics have symbols instantly recognisable to those students who study them. Written language has its own symbols, capital and lower case letters, colons, hyphens, full stops, apostrophes and others. Art is not different from other disciplines. There is nothing mysterious about its language. It is a visual language comprised of line, shape, pattern, texture, form, colour and composition. Like any other discipline, these basic elements are fundamental to learning the subject. When students have learnt all of these elements they can be selective, discarding some elements and emphasising others as desired. Picasso and Cézanne used shape; Van Gogh and Rothko used colour; Kiefer and Schnabel's interest lies in texture. But to make these decisions, to be selective, a clear understanding of the basic art elements is essential.

Post-primary students when shown contemporary work for the first time, are often aghast, their reactions derisive. "That's not art, anyone could do that!". A consideration of artists' earlier work reveals that they began at the beginning with the basics. Why do students have such an aversion to the basics of drawing? Introduce clay, lino-printing, puppetry, construction, to any class at post-primary level, and the teacher will win their attention. Introduce drawing from observation and it will be greeted with an audible groan. Comments such



as 'I can't draw' or I'm no good at art' are very common responses. Many times I have tried to explain that drawing is task that can be taught and more to the point, a skill that may be acquired. There are some students who seem to have an innate talent for drawing. They are the minority. The rest have to learn, to observe, to grasp that they do not just draw what they think is there, but from observation, to draw what is there. Again there is no mystery in this. It is quite simple but to transmit that to students is extremely difficult. They seem fixed on the idea that only "artists" can draw. And if this is their attitude, then it comes as no surprise to read the Examiner's Report for the Junior Certificate which states that :

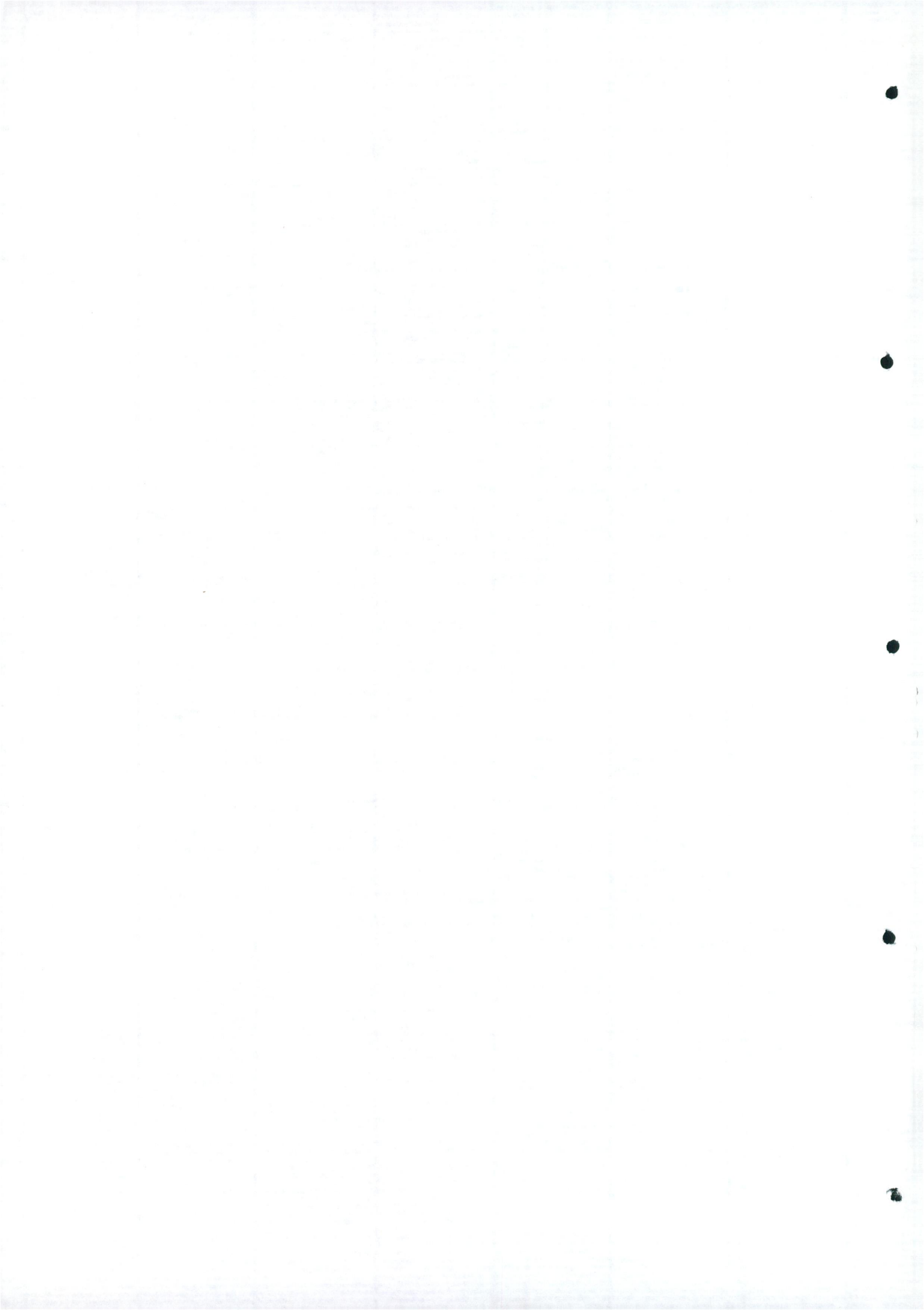
the most common characteristic encountered pertaining the weak work is the absence of initial investigative work - exploratory research and drawing. There is a tendency in the absence of good exploratory research and drawing to repeat one image throughout the entire project thereby causing ideas, feelings and development to remain dormant. (3)

Implications for the Senior Cycle

If there is an absence of exploratory drawing and research at this level of the students' development, during the junior cycle, what of the senior cycle ? This deficiency in the basic elements in art will be manifest in the senior cycle. This basic knowledge, is not going to suddenly appear in transition, fifth or sixth years. With the present senior cycle there is quite an emphasis on history/written work. The time allocated for the practical work is lessened,



thereby making it difficult for a teacher to teach basic skills. By the beginning of the senior cycle it is not uncommon for students to be unmotivated. Their image may be negative, except for the few who have chosen art because they love it and have ambitions to attend art college. Students who have excelled academically at Junior Certificate level and even those who have excelled in art tend to give up art in favour of a more 'serious' subject, a subject that will be more relevant to getting a job. This has to have an effect on those who enter art college. They enter foundation level quite literally at foundation level. If these basic elements have not been covered from first year up to the end of the senior cycle, it is likely that the standards entering art college will be lower. One has only to look at the proliferation of portfolio courses which are offered outside the school curriculum and some of which are run on a nightly basis by the art colleges themselves. If the basics have been covered right through the junior cycle through to the senior cycle there would be no need for such courses. If the basic art elements of line, shape, pattern, texture, form, composition and colour are not taught over and over again and are not properly understood and practised by the students it may have a domino effect through the system. The result will be that standards will be lowered.



FOOTNOTES CHAPTER ONE

1. The Chief Examiners Report - Examination 1992, The Junior Certificate, Art, Craft, Design, (Dublin : An Roinn Oideachais) p. 1
2. Ibid., p. 2
3. Ibid., p.1



CHAPTER TWO

The Place of Art within the Curriculum : An Historical Overview

Visual art has never been given the recognition it deserves in Ireland. In 1961 a Report by a Scandinavian group called "Design in Ireland" noted that "the Irish schoolchild is visually and artistically among the most under-educated in Europe."⁽¹⁾ In literature Ireland can lay claim to being on a par with the greatest writers, poets and playwrights world-wide and to have a great oral tradition. During Europe's darkest time, Ireland produced the world's finest examples of illuminated manuscripts. Colonisation denigrated native Irish artistic accomplishment, although during the 1880's there was a cultural revival, though the emphasis was on literary achievement. The visual arts never seemed to achieve the same heights or accomplishments in Ireland. Why? It is important to consider the place of art in the curriculum, which has never received much attention. 1872 saw the introduction of the payment-by-results scheme which placed huge importance on "the 3 R's, which gave pupils basic literacy and numeracy skills. It was very narrow and rigid, the aim of which was to give everyone, a basic education.



The year 1900 brought about a very different programme which was more child-centred. But with the establishment of the Irish Free State, the curriculum, became restricted once more and among some of the subjects dropped was drawing. The emphasis in the State was on the Irish language and literature. In 1926 compulsory education was introduced. From then until the 1970's the curriculum remained virtually unchanged.

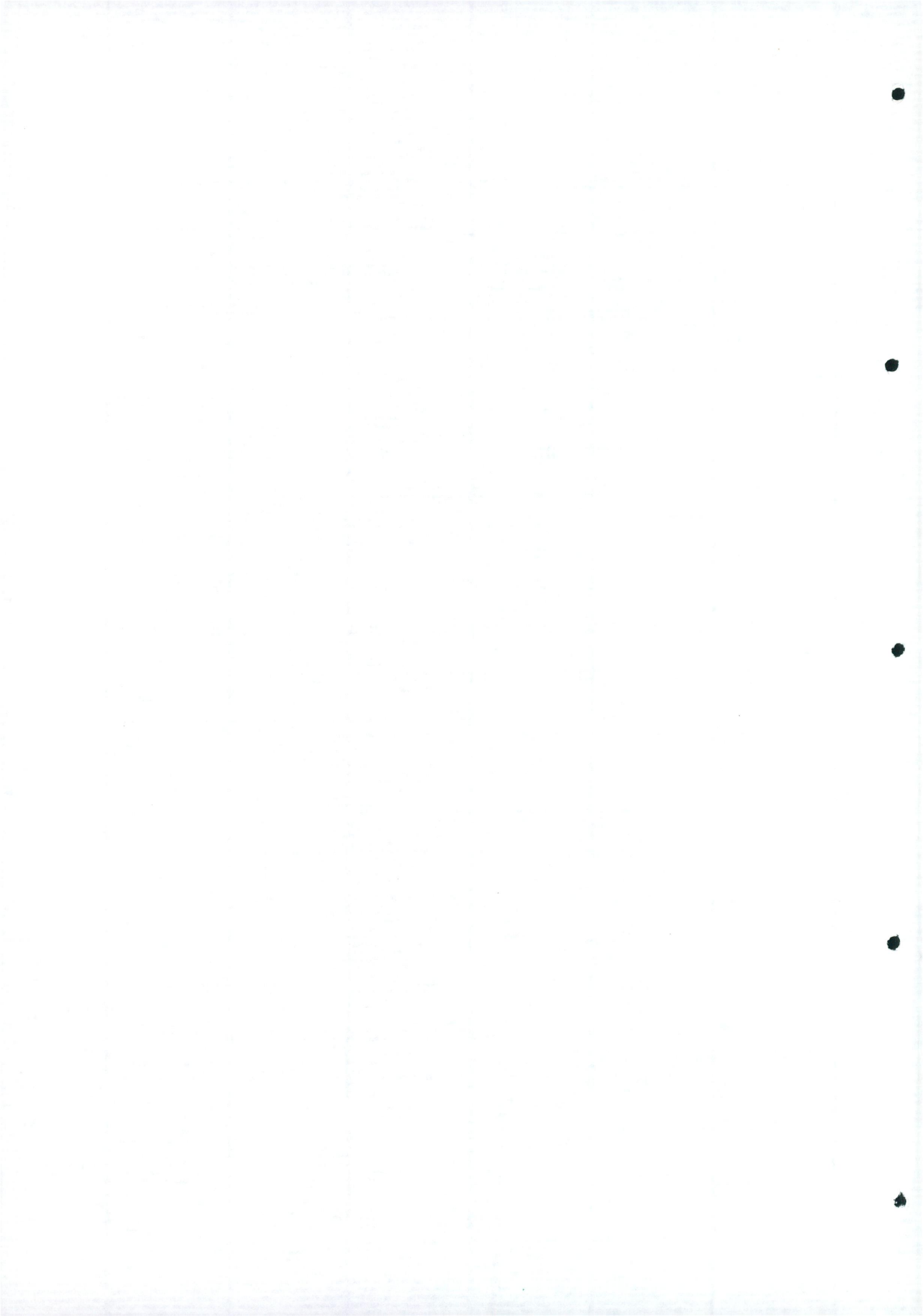
The New Curriculum : A New Approach

In 1971 the new national schools curriculum, "Curaclann na Bunscoile", included programmes such as music, art, craft, drama, dance, and physical education. Schools became better equipped with libraries, TV sets, projectors, and tape recorders. There was no attempt to invest in art education in the schools. Some 63% of secondary schools and 73 % of vocational schools had less than 150 pupils. As a result staffing and facilities tended to be directed to providing mainstream subjects. Art was not seen as one of these. This has changed radically over the past twenty years. The introduction of free education in September 1967 began what has been a dramatic increase in pupil numbers in second level schools. Community and comprehensive schools were a reality by the mid-seventies and they have encouraged students from all social backgrounds to stay on in school. Government aim is to ensure that ninety per



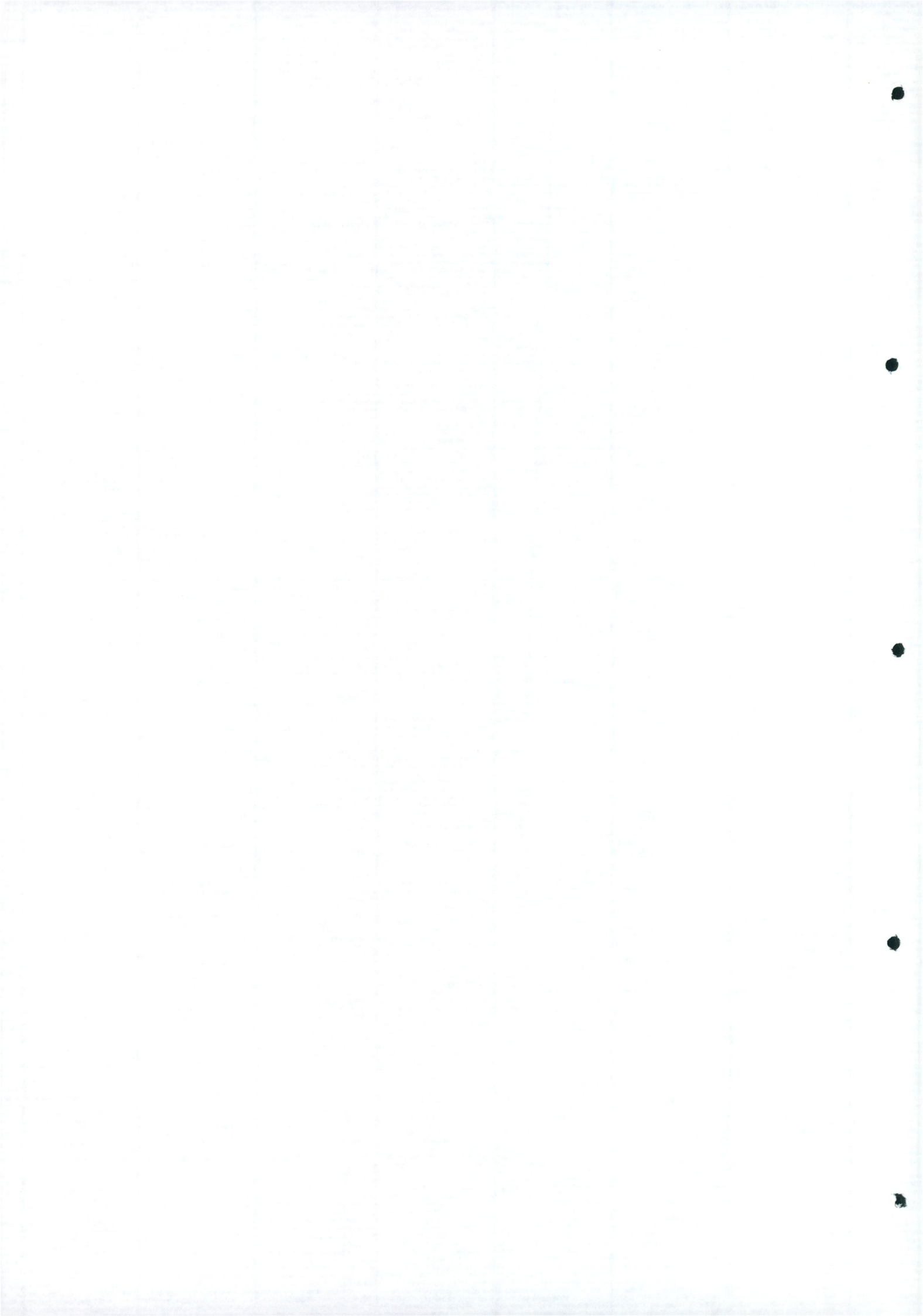
cent of the cohort will continue to Leaving Certificate by the year 2,000. The widespread introduction of the transition year in 1973, and the Vocational Leaving Certificate Programme and the Applied Leaving Certificate since then, has further contributed to enabling all social classes to avail of more education.

Schools have become less traditional in curriculum. Many schools incorporate activities and even programmes for parents. Communities are being encouraged to become involved with the school, either on a social level or in a decision-making capacity through boards of management. Members of boards can actively participate in the important decisions which ultimately affect their own children's education. The introduction of the Home-School Liaison Scheme in 1994 in disadvantaged areas has facilitated a dialogue on a more personal level with the school. The school can develop a human face and the old stereotype of a strict, rigid environment is dying out. It was not until the aforementioned Scandinavian Report (2) that major changes took place in third-level art colleges. Student unrest in the National College of Art and Design in the late sixties brought about a restructuring of the college in 1971. The eighties saw more development in art and design education in third-level than in the previous fifty years. Added to that was the establishment of the Arts and Design Board of Studies by the National Council for Educational Awards which was significant in this development.



One might wonder why the attitude towards art did not develop parallel to these innovative changes. The notion that art is for girls and not for boys is still prevalent. In 1996, 9,687 boys compared to 14,069 girls took art for the Junior Certificate. Two years ago I taught after hours in an all boys' school, in the biology room because art was not on the curriculum. There was no art room though the school was attempting to offer art outside the main curriculum. I have done my teaching practice this year in all boys' schools where art is not given enough time. Most of the classes are single class periods which makes teaching the subject difficult and impractical. Unless the school principal is sympathetic to art, it is difficult to see how art may be recognised as important.

In some schools art continues to be seen as a subject for the less academic students to while away an hour or two, where they can have "fun". It is still not viewed seriously enough, despite all the reports, symposia, discourses on the value of art, craft and design. If this attitude is still so prevalent, is it not surprising that art is often pushed to the periphery of the curriculum, thereby compounding the problems faced by art teachers and reiterating the views of those who see it as a "leisure" subject.



Art as a Skill for Life

An education in art can be a good training ground to acquire many skills. The objectives of the junior cycle and the proposed objectives of the new Leaving Certificate course talk of inculcating in students, evaluative, critical, aesthetic, problem-solving skills, which will enable them to develop self-awareness and self-esteem. It is becoming increasingly recognised that thinking, feeling, personal interests, and achievements, the development of knowledge and problem solving are integral to all subjects, and art is very important in developing these skills.

In the discussion paper "Design in Education" this argument is made forcibly.

The motivating factor behind the paper is the notion:

that design should be at the heart of the curriculum, that design should be explicitly and implicitly addressed in all subjects and at various stages from early primary to late senior cycle and that design can serve to fulfil many of the objectives of education for a learning society. (3)

It suggests that design should be at the very centre of the curriculum and not just part of art as a programme. It should pervade all subjects. The European Commission in a White Paper "Towards a Learning Society (1996) stresses three important elements; expanding the range and forms of student



knowledge; developing skills of autonomous learning; and fostering critical awareness. (4) Education is becoming less of a body of knowledge to be learned and regurgitated. The school's experience is now more concerned to give students a basis for the development of knowledge, skills, and understanding which will prepare them to participate fully in a constantly changing society.

These evaluative, aesthetic, critical skills manifest themselves in the preparatory work for the Junior Certificate. The marks for this design work is equal to those marks given to the finished piece, which serves to demonstrate the importance the Department of Education places on the acquisition of these skills. These skills are evident in our daily lives. In its Guidelines for Art Teachers of the Junior Certificate, the NCCA stresses that attention should be given to these skills. The end product is not a barometer of success or failure, and should show the process, from the idea, to development through to the final piece of work. "Student's work therefore should be evaluated as a whole with equal emphasis on both process and product". (5) There are to be radical changes in the traditional Leaving Certificate syllabus. It has remained the same since the seventies. In 1976, the National Council for Educational Awards, (NCEA) in its Report on NCEA Recognition and Awards for courses in Art and Design stated that :



The standard of art at second level is so mediocre that the results obtained in the subject at the Leaving Certificate examination are no indication of a student's potential. (6)

The suggested new art syllabus which has yet to be ratified proposes that one of its aims should "help prepare the student for participation in a changing environment for adult and working life." (7) Of the many objectives stated, it wishes to allow the student to "respond to an ideal, experience or other stimulus related to the world in visual, tactile and spatial terms". (8) This new syllabus is long overdue, and it is interesting that it mirrors the new attitude to education as a whole, and will become an extension of the Junior Certificate. The existing syllabus was in place when I was in school. I do not recall ever hearing references to the language of art, line, shape, pattern, texture, form, or colour. We were literally left to ourselves to make pictures.

This disregard for the understanding of the basic art elements was evident when I was at art college. With the exception of foundation year, little if anything was taught, except in the craft areas. In fact there was an attitude amongst some tutors that art just happened; all one had to do was express oneself. It is not unusual to hear of third-level art students who have completed their four year studies to go back to the drawing board literally. And one expects students at post-primary level to grasp the concept that those basic art elements are paramount to learning how to make art. Though this can prove



to be a daunting task to any art teacher who happens to be in the unfortunate position of having those students who are placed in the "art room". As art is too often regarded on the curriculum as "leisure time" those students who are not academically bright, or who are "difficult" are simply placed there regardless of whether or not they wish to be there. Again I have experienced this first hand. This is not a pleasant experience for the teacher, as any teacher of any subject will acknowledge that one disruptive student can destroy a class. It is not fair on the student either, which is more important.

I have also experienced the opposite, those students who have excelled in their Junior Certificate have opted for more "serious" subjects for their Leaving Certificate. It is difficult to endow the students with a respect for art and to set about teaching the language of art against these odds. To explain this concept to willing students is difficult enough but it is nigh on impossible to transmit this to the student who is there in the art room under protest. This attitude exists still in schools. In the wider area of adult and community education art can provide for personal and social development. It can help individuals to make sense of their experiences, and the ability to communicate this to another person is desirable. The "Once Is Too Much" exhibition in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham in '97/98 is a good example of this. Over a period of two years, women from St. Michael's Estate in Inchicore, worked with Irish and international artists to produce work exploring issues of violence against women. Art in this instance allowed these women to express themselves

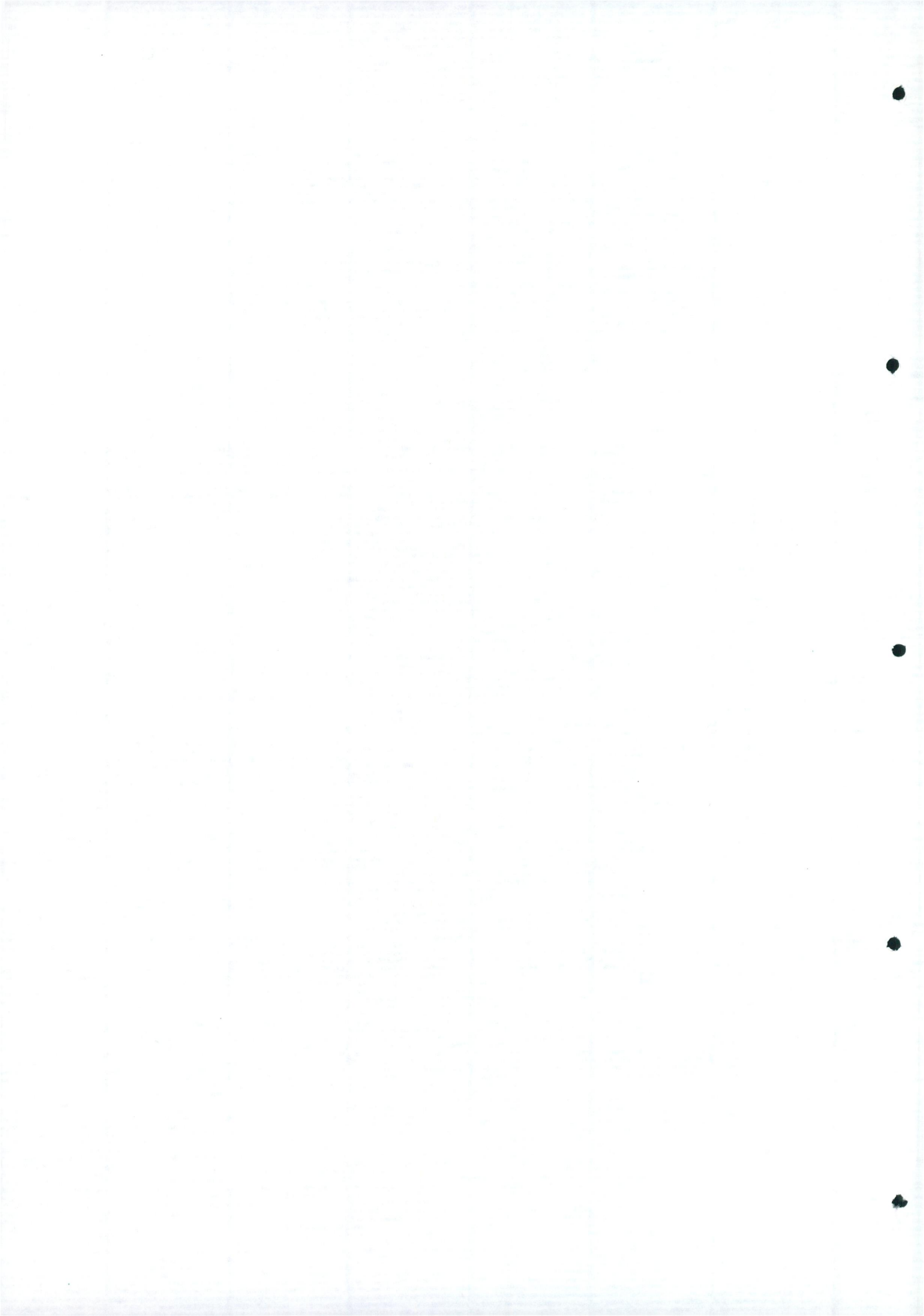


through the medium of image, and in turn express themselves to a wider audience. "Talking" through the visual images can only be beneficial to the society as a whole, and if we believe that art is a means of understanding ourselves and our society, then art can provide a way of seeing the community and how that community perceives itself. This is not art as leisure, and reiterates what can be achieved through visual imagery.



FOOTNOTES CHAPTER TWO

1. Benson, The Place of The Arts in Irish Education, p. 6
2. Ibid., p. 6
3. Eds. by I. McCarthy & G. Granville, Design in Education, A Discussion Paper, (Dublin : Faculty of Education, National College of Art and Design, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, December 1977) p.3
4. Ibid., p. 1
5. Guidelines For Art Teachers, The Junior Certificate, Art, Craft, Design. (Dublin : The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) p. 6
6. National Council for Educational Awards NCEA (Dublin : Report on NCEA Recognition and Awards for Courses in Art and Design, 1976) p.2
7. Draft Leaving Certificate Syllabus (Navan : The Arts Course Committee, 1977)
8. Ibid.,



CHAPTER THREE

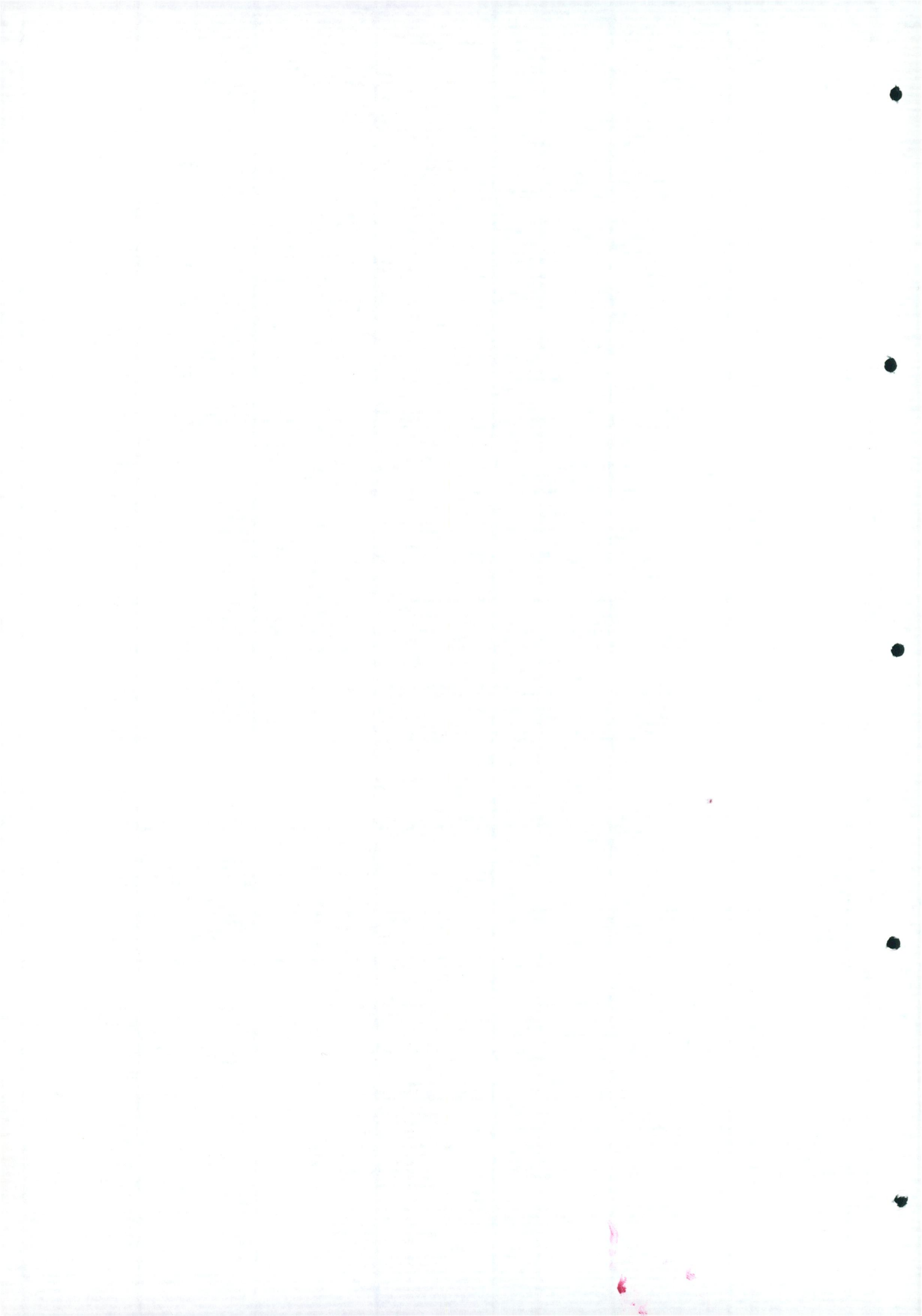
Defining Drawing

What is drawing ? The encyclopaedia of World Art describes it as follows :

The word drawing, covers all those representations in which an image is obtained by marking, whether simply or elaborately, upon a surface which constitutes the background. (1)

Drawing was used before writing to explain a society to itself. It is also a means of non-verbal communication. During the Renaissance it was seen as a technique which distinguished itself from colour, and as a way to make visible an idea for a preliminary sketch. Leonardo believed it to be a science, and as a way of making visible the works of God.

Drawing is as old as mankind. The cave drawings at Lascaux are as good as any drawings made since. Drawing has been an integral part of all past societies, the Aborigines, the native Americans, Celtic societies etc. used drawing in a spiritual way. Before we could write we had this overwhelming need to make our mark, to describe our lives. Ogham in Ireland was made by the Druids. Only the holy, educated members of a society made these marks. All these ancient drawings or marks documented the lives of the society.



We draw with a gesture. We put hand to a surface and simple movement creates line, shape and so on. Leonardo advised artists to study the gestures of deaf mutes to find expressive attitudes. Why do we draw? As previously stated it is a way of communicating. It is a visual language and artists and students alike use it as such. It can also be used as a means of gathering and recording information. We can visually describe objects and western artists since the Renaissance in particular have always used drawing to make preliminary studies before painting them.

Susan Lambert's book on drawing gives a very good description of drawing, its techniques and purposes and history. (2) Since 1400 western culture has regarded drawing as the basis for all creative activities. In England, goldsmiths held drawing classes for their apprentices, and in the 1700's a book on drawing was published by Thomas Sheraton for cabinet makers and upholsterers. Examples of his work can be found in Collins Barracks Museum in Dublin. The front page shows artists designing, surrounded by allegorical figures of Geometry, Perspective, the Genius of Drawing and Architecture (3). Engineers also had their apprentices take drawing classes, as this skill was seen as being very valuable.



Ingres declared :

Drawing is three quarters of painting If I were to hang out my sign I should write on it Ecole de Dessein, and I know that I should educate painters. (4)

During the fourteenth century, the training of artists was based on the masters workshop. Out of these workshops evolved informal gatherings where artists would draw from antique statues and hold critique sessions afterwards. From these informal sessions came private and later still public academies which spread throughout Europe. During the nineteenth century drawing from life and drawing outdoors became popular. From the mid-sixteenth century the study of anatomy, geometry and perspective was considered to be all important. Despite the variants in the theory, the primacy of drawing has remained into this century. Renaissance drawing was seen as a tool to record information as preliminary, investigative studies, which were then later transferred into painting.

Leonardo said :

The young man should first learn perspective, then the proportions of all objects. Next copy work after the hand of a good master, to gain the habits of drawing parts of the body well; and then to work from nature, to confirm the lessons learned. (5)



Rembrandt encouraged his students to copy both his drawings and the works of others, and he also made copies himself. Manuals on drawings were in abundant supply during the nineteenth century and the proceeding years.

There were also manuals describing shortcuts and mechanical solutions to problems, in the classroom today we call these visual aids. I have used the grid with my first year students, which Albrecht Durer invented. These manuals were directed towards engineers, draughtsmen or the amateur painter.

As a result drawing became important and was identified with the theoretical aspects of painting. In 1837, in England, the first state run school, The London Schools of Design, was opened, and great emphasis was given to the importance of drawing. The educationalist and painter William Dyce, published a book shortly after 1837 titled "The Drawing Book of the Government School of Design". Its purpose was to :

serve as an elementary drawing book for schools whose ultimate purpose is to educate young persons in the art of inventing and executing patterns and designs for the various branches of ornamental manufacture : and in the second place, to be a hand-book of ornamental art for the use and guidance of manufacturers and pattern draughtsmen. (6)

This is very utilitarianism approach to drawing, the function of which was to serve the consumer, with little or on regard to art and its contribution to society. This type of drawing is very different. They are not an end in



themselves, and have no artistic aspiration. They are drawings for furniture, architecture and so on. At the same time, the artist as individual came about and was expressed by Gauguin later :

to know how to draw does not mean to draw well. Let us examine that famous science of draughtsman we hear so much about. Every Prix-de Rome has that science at his fingers-tips, so have the competitors who came in last
(7)

This is as extreme to me as the previous quote, the utilitarian versus the liberal approach. Van Gogh in a letter to his brother Theo, sits nicely in between, I believe. He wrote in 1884,

I have bought myself a very beautiful book on anatomy.... It was in fact very expensive, but it will be of use to me all my life, for it is very good. I have also what they use at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts, and what they use in Antwerp.... The key to many things is in the knowledge of the human body, but it costs money to learn it. Besides, I am quite sure that colour, that chiaroscuro, that perspective, that tone, and that drawing, in short everything has fixed laws which one must and can study, like chemistry or algebra. This is a far from being the easiest view and one who says, 'Oh, one must know it all instinctively,' takes it very easy indeed. But it isn't enough, for even if one knows it ever so much by instinct, that is just the reason to try ever so hard to pass from instinct to reason. (8)



This notion has, with its emphasis on drawing, continued to be valued as a good grounding. During this century these attitudes to drawing have been discarded on and off.

Drawing as Enquiry

Drawing as I have said previously, has meant different things to different people. It can be a design drawing for a piece of furniture, a preliminary study for a painting or simply an end in itself. The basis for any drawing is the act of translating an idea into lines and marks on paper. This act can free the imagination and allow for creative thought. A writer uses the same method, thoughts can be clarified on paper. The writer can start with the outline and continually go back to further develop the outline, getting to the core, constantly revising until the desired result is realised. For the artists/students the process involved is similar, except that instead of words, they employ the use of lines or marks on a surface.

Henry Moore said, "drawing is a means of finding your way around things, and a way of experiencing, more quickly than sculpture allows, certain tryouts and attempts," (9) Whether designing for architecture, making preliminary drawings for a painting or designing for a car, the process is the same. These drawings can be highly detailed or very sketchily worked drawings. It is



acknowledged that during the Renaissance drawing became recognised as an art in its own right. Drawings can start out as enquiry, problem-solving sketches, which we refer to as thumbnail sketches. Rembrandt, when making preliminary sketches for specific paintings, would keep all these sketches and would refer back to them for inspiration. Watteau did likewise, in fact, his contemporaries noted that he preferred his drawings to his paintings.

Constable made drawings of Stonehenge and used them fifteen years later for an exhibition on the theme. Toulouse-Lautrec drew constantly in clubs and cafes and used these quick sketches for fully composed paintings.

During the fifteenth century drawings on loose sheets of paper became more popular than notebooks. These were kept for the artist to refer back to. It was during this period, that the practice became popular for masters to give their apprentices drawings as a keepsake, and so they became tokens of esteem. Drawings became collectors' items. Artists broke from guilds and the artist as individual became regarded as having an important place in society.

Drawing became inextricably linked to the notion that it gave visual expression to the artist's creative thought. This, together with the advent of manufactured paper, helped to establish drawing in its own right. This notion is still as relevant today. It is quite common to now to see exhibitions of drawing. The Armand Hammer and Alfred Beit collections have a huge array of drawings.



In the nineteenth century drawing was seen as an accomplishment of the cultivated person, in that it helped express the “occupations of the mind” and “perfects the hand, for all manner of writing”. (10) Diagrams and symbols have been used to describe something, by use of line only, to express chains of ideas or actions, without actually representing them, but which can be quickly understood without the use of words. This type of drawing has been used since the dawn of civilisation, we have evidence of this in the passage graves in Ireland.

Before the invention of the camera, recording information was done through drawing. These drawings contained all manner of information, botanical, zoological, anatomical, medical and archaeological. Draughtsmen usually accompanied explorers to record and bring back information about the inhabitants, the land formation, flora and fauna. Leonardo used this type of drawing for his anatomical studies. Drawing is a major art form, and as I have shown, artists have recognised its importance throughout the centuries. It has been used as a means of exploratory studies, to record information. It can be used to describe the external and internal world of the artists. Artists and writers on art have, through the centuries stressed its importance, some considering it the most important and basic skill of both artist and designer.



FOOTNOTES CHAPTER THREE

1. Frederick Malins, *Drawing Ideas of the Masters - Artists Techniques Compared and Contrasted* . (Oxford : Phaidon Publications, 1981) p. 8
2. Susan Lambert, *Drawing, Techniques and Purpose - An Introduction to Looking at Drawings* (London : Trefoil Books, 1984)
3. Ibid., p. 53
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9. Ibid., p. 77
10. Ibid., p. 98



CHAPTER FOUR

Drawing : A Way to See

“Design is intelligence made visible.”(1)

“Design is thought.” (2)

“I think and then I draw a line around my think.”(3)

Drawing is a very subjective activity. It can express our experiences and feelings. A line, whether it is curved, vertical, or horizontal, or tonal, can suggest form, space, light and movement and can describe an object without having much similarity to it. Drawing links us directly with the artist. The marks made by hand, have a power to communicate with us directly. An artist can use a variety of materials and media, and the drawings can be detailed or sketchy, large or small. Drawings can be finished, or can be a drawing for a plan of a building, or a thumbnail sketch for a painting or piece of sculpture. This preparatory drawing is small compared for a subsequent painting can include the values of colour, (Seurat), or the artist might wish to stress the linear qualities of the drawing (Mondrain) or he might wish to express movement through the use of line (Van Gogh) or wish to emphasise the use of light and shade (Rembrandt). While drawing is a practical activity, it is also a means of interpretation and expression. It is important to understand that there are ways of seeing, to understand drawing we must be able to differentiate between the “seeing” we do when drawing and the “seeing” we do in our everyday lives. Nowadays, we are bombarded with visual stimuli. We see the



Dart we wish to catch, but do not notice it becomes larger as it approaches us. At a meeting, the guest speakers on the podium do not appear any smaller than those sitting next to us. The kind of "seeing" necessary to make visual analysis can be difficult, but it can be achieved by training and self-discipline, and some would say an innate talent.

Most drawings consists of discovering the difference between what we know and what we see. In other words, drawings reveal the difference between the appearances of everyday experiences and our preconceived ideas of those visual experiences. Foreshortening poses huge problems for the student. We know two arms are the same length, and beginners will usually rely on this knowledge they know to be true. This is the preconceived ideas of our experiences and they will draw the arm its usual length, and then wonder why it does not "read" correctly. We have a tendency to verbalise things, which conjure up the image. In life drawing students will emphasise those landmarks familiar to them. Most students' drawings at the beginning look very similar and unreal. With my second year students this year, before giving them an understanding of proportion, they all made this mistake, the eyebrows in particular were drawn in very heavily.



Constable said; "We see nothing truly until we understand it." (4) It is by really looking that we arrive at this understanding. The experienced eye, will see, when life drawing, that certain muscles are flexed, others relaxed and clothing will describe the forms underneath. Sometimes people feel they should be able to draw, because they can see. If this were so, we would all be able to draw flawlessly. But drawing is more than merely being able to see. Drawing is thought and understanding. Everyone can draw a stick person, as a very common image of the human form. Children naturally draw them, cave people inscribed them. This stick person was used for the TV series, "The Saint". But does it look like any one of us ? The point is we do not draw what we see, this lack of "seeing" can be attributed to lack of observation. The more closely we pay attention to the information in front of us, the better the results. This closeness of attention, of observation, will help to rid ourselves of these preconceived ideas of what we believe to be there. When we look, really look, the results achieved can be quite startling. When drawing it is vital for us to focus our sight and senses to what is in front of us.

Our emotions are called upon as well, to respond to what we are drawing, to feel the shapes, the direction of lines, to feel the movement. When we draw we can see through our feelings, when all the faculties are riveted to the observed subject/object. Drawing is about observing, memorising, drawing and repeating this process over and over. By this process the students can greatly



strengthen and develop their powers of concentration. Drawing is about developing visual “muscles”. Good drawings are made with concentration and repeated practice.

Children’s Responses & Development

No I can’t drawsometimes it tells you things about you.
No, I don’t like drawing because it bores me and I’m not very good at it. I don’t know how it is going to help me in life. I just don’t have the knack.

I don’t think drawing is important because there is not much jobs needed for it.

It’s good to draw, it’s important because you might want to be an artist when you grow up.... you are born with it.

It’s important because if you want to become an architect you need drawing skills....I think it comes naturally.

If you are bored you can draw. Drawings are not important, paintings are.

It’s something to do when you’re bored. It’s not time consuming.

I am no good and it won’t get you a job...some people are way better than others.

Drawings in cartoons entertains young kids. Teachers can sometimes bring out the talent some people have. (5)

In the previous chapters I discussed the recognition of the importance of art in our lives. I also showed the importance placed on art and more particularly, drawing, in the new Junior Certificate curriculum and in the proposed new Leaving Certificate curriculum and showed the value artists and designers placed on drawing, and how it achieved the status it receives today. It has also been stressed that drawing is an area that we learn by doing. Leonardo said; “the greatest tragedy is when theory outstrips practice.” (6) Drawing has two



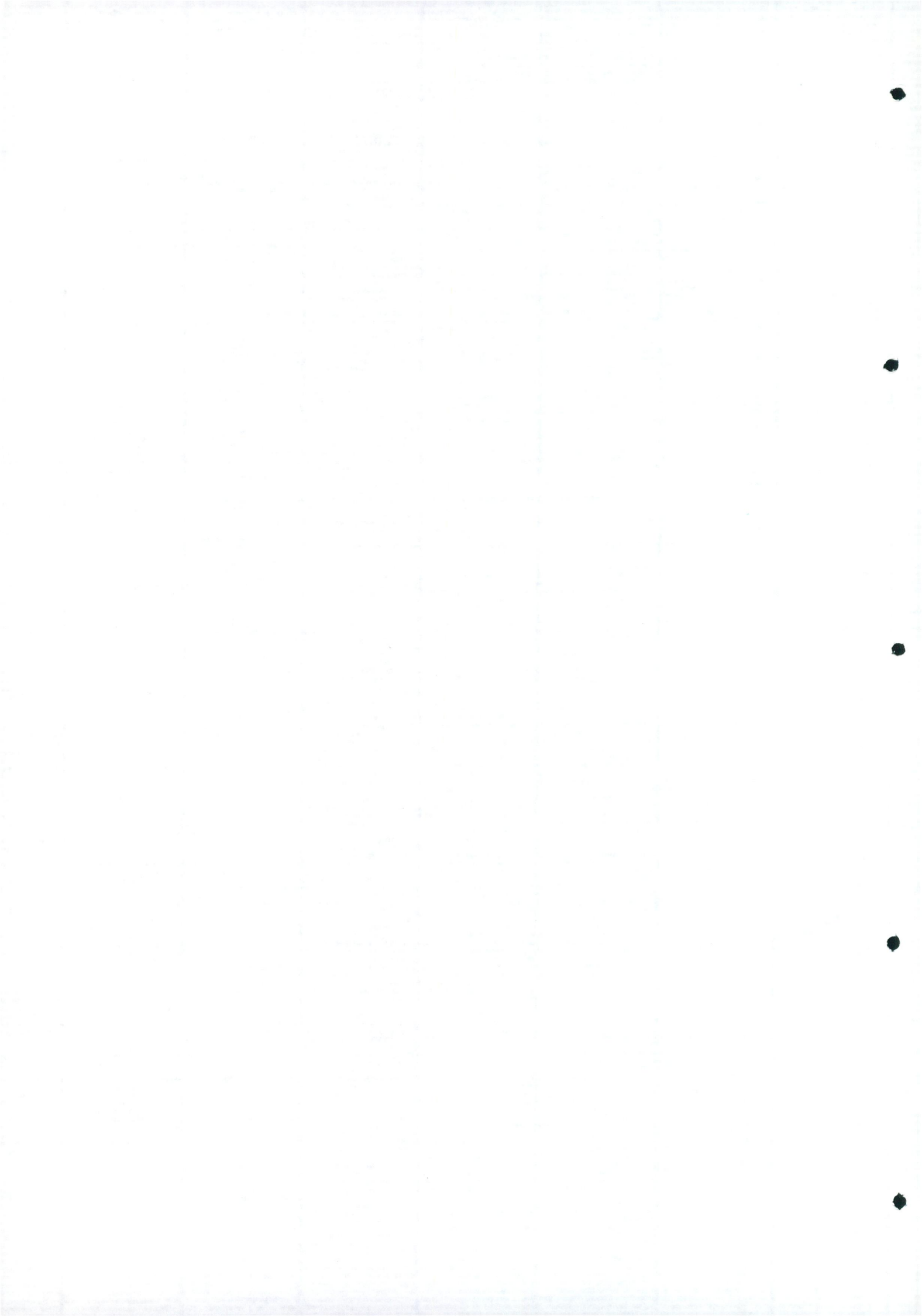
qualities, it is about itself, and something else. It is realistic and abstract. The artist can bring these differences together by taking a leap into the unknown, it can be a hunch, or intuition. This act of creativity cannot be taught, and can only occur when art is learned and practised, through constant training. Our development is cumulative and progressive. We work with who we are now, when you are able to do one thing, you can move on to another. Drawing is an expression of this state and as children acquires these skills through progression and regular repetition they become more adept, which helps to reinforce their views about themselves and their environment. Which brings us back to the quote I opened this dissertation with, and these are the aims and objectives to which the new syllabuses aspire. Children tend naturally to draw, it is their way to describe their world and their feelings. The child will describe what is important, which alters as the child develops. In the beginning it can be a simple circle to indicate parents.

Robert Clemens (7) describes the various stages children's drawings go through. Up to age six or seven they do not analyse their environment, and will quite happily while away the hours ignoring scale and space. This is the absolute appeal of children's drawings. It is this quality that makes them so lively and spontaneous. As verbal skills increase, their desire to describe their world visually wanes. They are responding to their world, independent of feelings. They become more aware of images other than their own. Between nine to thirteen they desire to comprehend their world, and how it works, and



through image they desire to make things look “real”. In adolescence, art becomes more complex as teenagers become acutely aware of their personal relationships and their social experiences, and at this stage they can describe through image things that have meaning for them. Over simple description, their images can have an ambiguity and contain emotional personal significance. It is often at this stage that teenagers stop drawing, and this in turn means that learning to see by drawing stops. Teenagers are bombarded daily by visual images, TV, and MTV in particular, teenage magazines, comics, movies and music posters, which contain endless varieties of graphic images, that are extremely sophisticated and slick. This tends to overwhelm them, and they give up, despairing that they will ever be able reproduce the images as good as those seen. Clement believes that when a child says, ‘I can’t draw,’ it is clearly a plea for help. Interestingly he says that children before the age of eight never make such a statement. (8)

If this is true, it has serious implications for the art teacher. If, through drawing, we believe that it is more than merely representing things, that it is a vehicle for expression and also a skill which describes a process, putting thought into visual language, then the Chief Examiner’s Report on the Junior Certificate makes for gloomy reading. The absence of good drawing ability is commented at length. The course objectives regard drawing as vital to the project as a whole. The Junior Certificate syllabus, issued by An Roinn Oideachais, mentions observational drawing, drawing from memory and

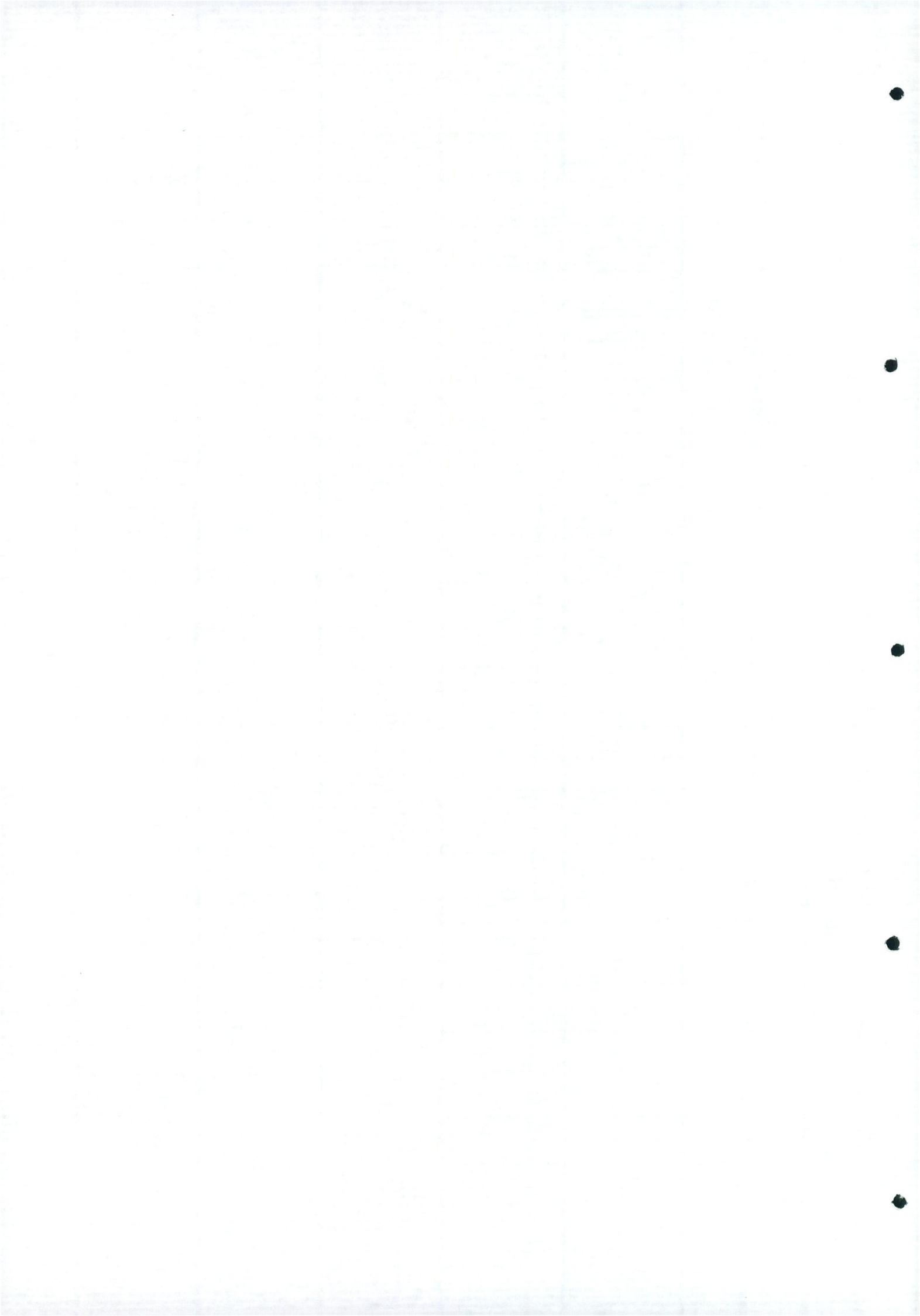


imagination. The importance of drawing in the design area, it stresses, is not merely "decoration or embellishment" (9), it is seen as a means of analysing design problems, researching, clarifying ideas through the use of working drawings and a way of carrying the work to completion. This method of working is found throughout the whole project.

Methodology

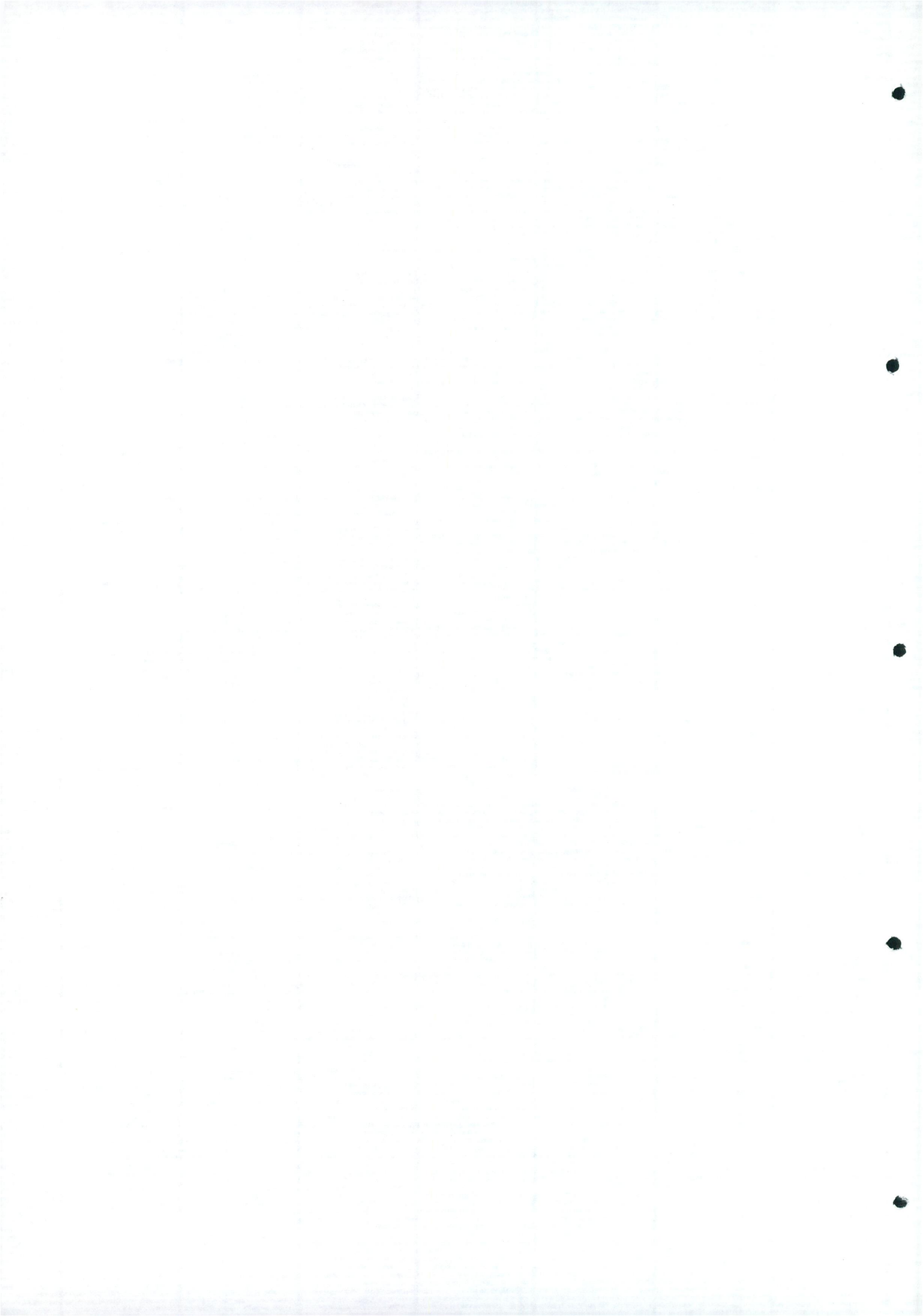
The Drawing Block

I did a drawing block with the first years, over a six week period. I had then once a week, two separate classes on a Monday. The quotes at the beginning of this section are quotes from them before we began. What came across quite strongly, was the students' belief that they could not draw, that drawing was an innate talent, or that it was not important in terms of a career later on. The comment I found the most interesting was, "I can't draw." Drawing is a skill, and as such, can be taught and acquired through understanding and practice. The student might not have the interest in art, which is saying a very different thing. I never had any interest in mathematics, so I never tried or bothered to learn. That is very different from saying, I'm no good at mathematics, I just don't have the knack, it is an innate talent. Clement says that when a child says, "I can't draw," it is a cry for help. (10) Help is there, if the teacher can persuade the student that the skill of drawing is one that can be acquired. But as I have shown throughout this dissertation, the skill requires practice and

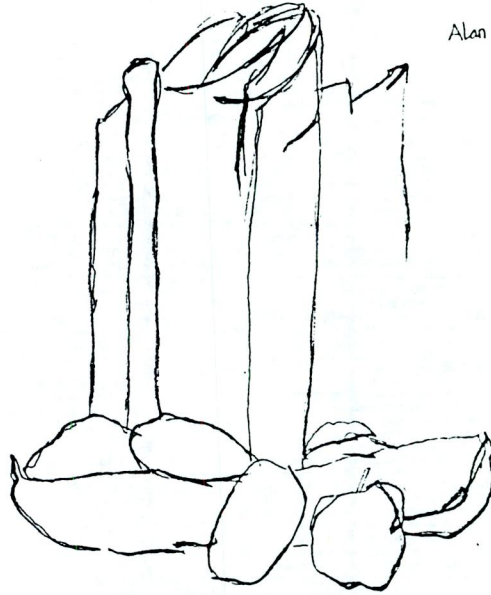


involves a different way of seeing, which can only be realised by truly looking and observing, and understanding that we draw what we see in front of us, not what we think is there.

The drawing classes with the first year students bore out these beliefs. When I told them they would be drawing for a few weeks, there was the typical responses, and audible groans. They were horrified at the prospect. A couple of the students were openly hostile to the idea. I explained the importance of drawing and referred to the comments made in the Chief Examiner's Report. I wanted to show the students that by concentrating and employing observational skills, they would see a marked difference in their drawings. I set up a still life, a very simple one of lemons, green apples, a yellow jug on a white cloth. Students were asked to draw what was in front of them. They made all the usual mistakes, flat bases, leaving the still life hanging in mid-air, in the middle of the page; they did not consider the whole page, all very classic mistakes. I wanted linear drawings only, and in the first half of the class, I had asked them not to erase which they did throughout the class. They wanted their drawing to look "right". I deliberately did not correct them or teach them during the lesson. I wanted to see what they could do. In the next class we discussed their drawings. (Fig. 1) They were pretty despondent at this stage. During this class, I showed them how to use a pencil because I had noticed they were holding it as though they were writing, hunched over their desks. I explained that writing and drawing were two very different activities.



Alan Connolly



Lines showing in pencil of real life

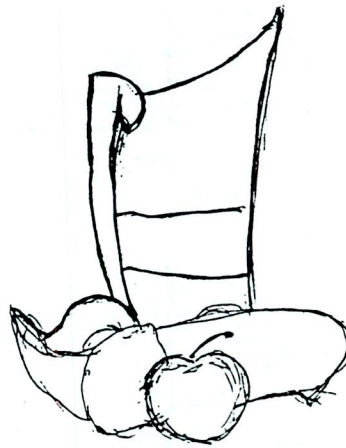


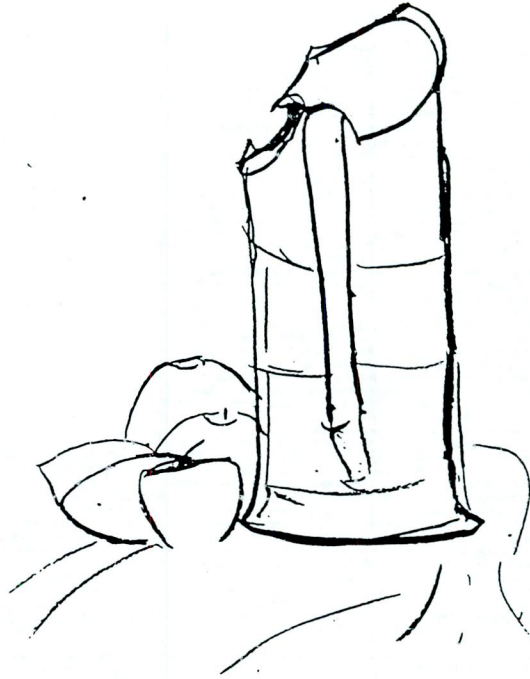
Fig. 1 Two examples of initial student drawing



When drawing one should sit back and hold the pencil or charcoal correctly, allow their wrists and arms to move freely. Making any mark involves this simple movement. I also drew attention to the fact that all assumed they must remain seated. This is not a requirement and standing can also be a way of "loosening up". They also spent most of their time looking at their page, trying to correct their "mistakes", rather than looking at what they were drawing. During this class I introduced them to contour drawing; that is drawing the object without looking down at their page. (Fig. 2) This is a very good exercise because it forces the students to observe closely. It usually proves to be difficult for the student, they verbalise mentally what is in front of them and they try to describe visually an apple without really looking. The appropriate way to see, would be to really look, to discard the word and follow the outline with the pencil, without any terms of reference other than what is in front of them. That is where the abstract way of "seeing" is relevant. I draw an apple, it is a representation of the apple, but "seeing" differently, it becomes something else, it is quite simply a shape. If seen in this way, the student can throw away all the preconceived ideas of what it is they are drawing, which should enable them, to achieve more success with "seeing". When I demonstrated drawing the still life, standing up, holding the pencil correctly, and making quick sweeping movements, this helped them when they began their drawing, they were much looser, and this came through in their drawings. At this stage they were still reticent about working to a large scale.



EDW



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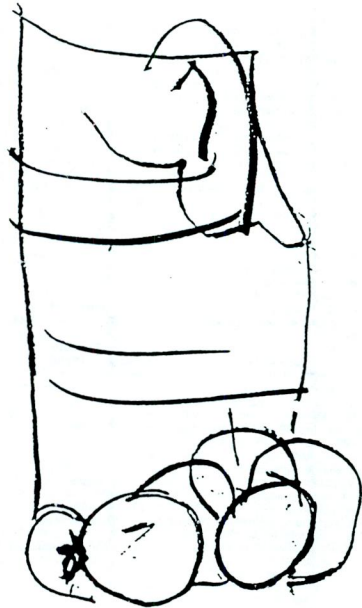
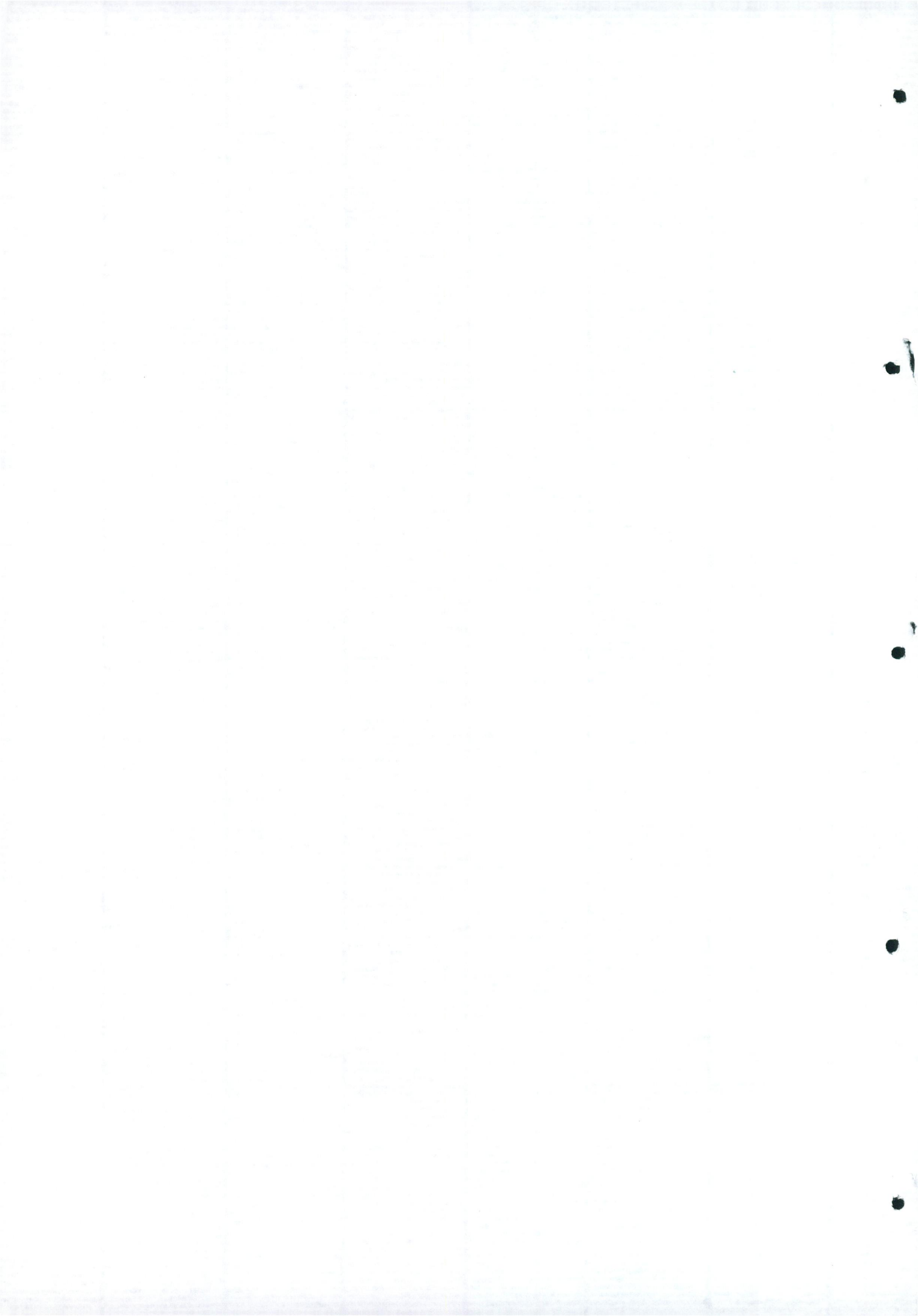
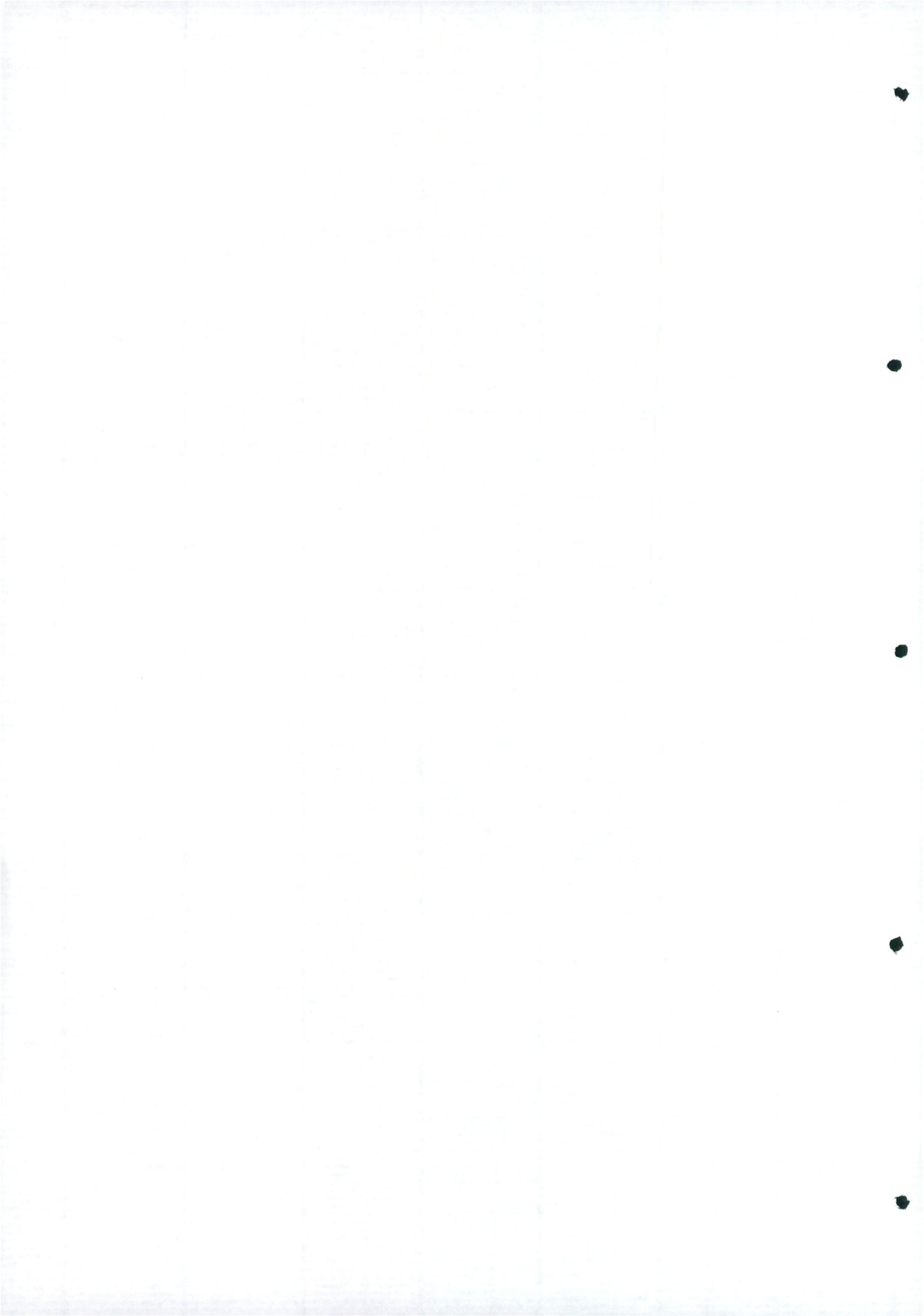


Fig.2 Examples of student's contour drawing



In the next lesson, I introduced a visual aid, a grid, using the same method that Albrecht Dürer used. (Fig. 3) I had gridded the paper to correspond with the squares of the grid. They were very impressed when they entered the room and saw this. It immediately caught their imagination and seemed to bring home to them that there is more to drawing than they had previously thought. As only eight students could work at the grid, I had another simple still life set up, using a white jug on a green cloth, with green apples and lemons. (Fig. 4) As all students would be working from both still lifes, I explained what was required of them for both. The use of the grid I have already explained. With the other still life, I told the students that they were to study it intently for five minutes and then I would cover it up, and they were to draw from memory. When they were finished this exercise, they were to make a continuous line drawing of the same still life which I had now uncovered. I gave demonstrations for both. While this was going on, the other group would be working from the grid. As with the previous lesson I wanted to use these methods, to reinforce the idea of looking very intently and closely at what they are drawing.

The grid helped the students to work in large scale and to put the objects in perspective. This reinforced the learning to see things as they are, and put aside any preconceptions and memorised images they had. This exercise is to get the students to have a clear look at what is right there in front of them.



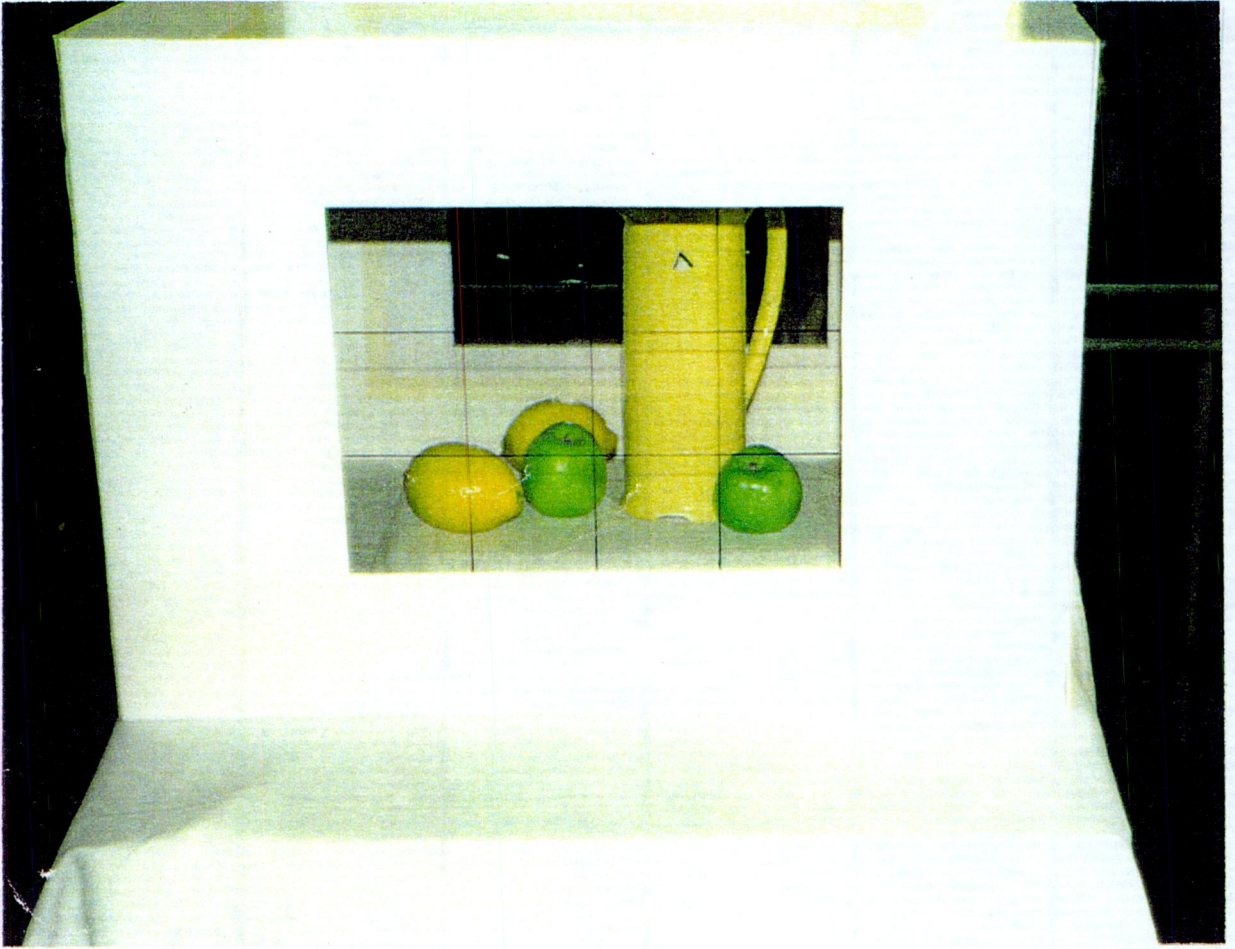
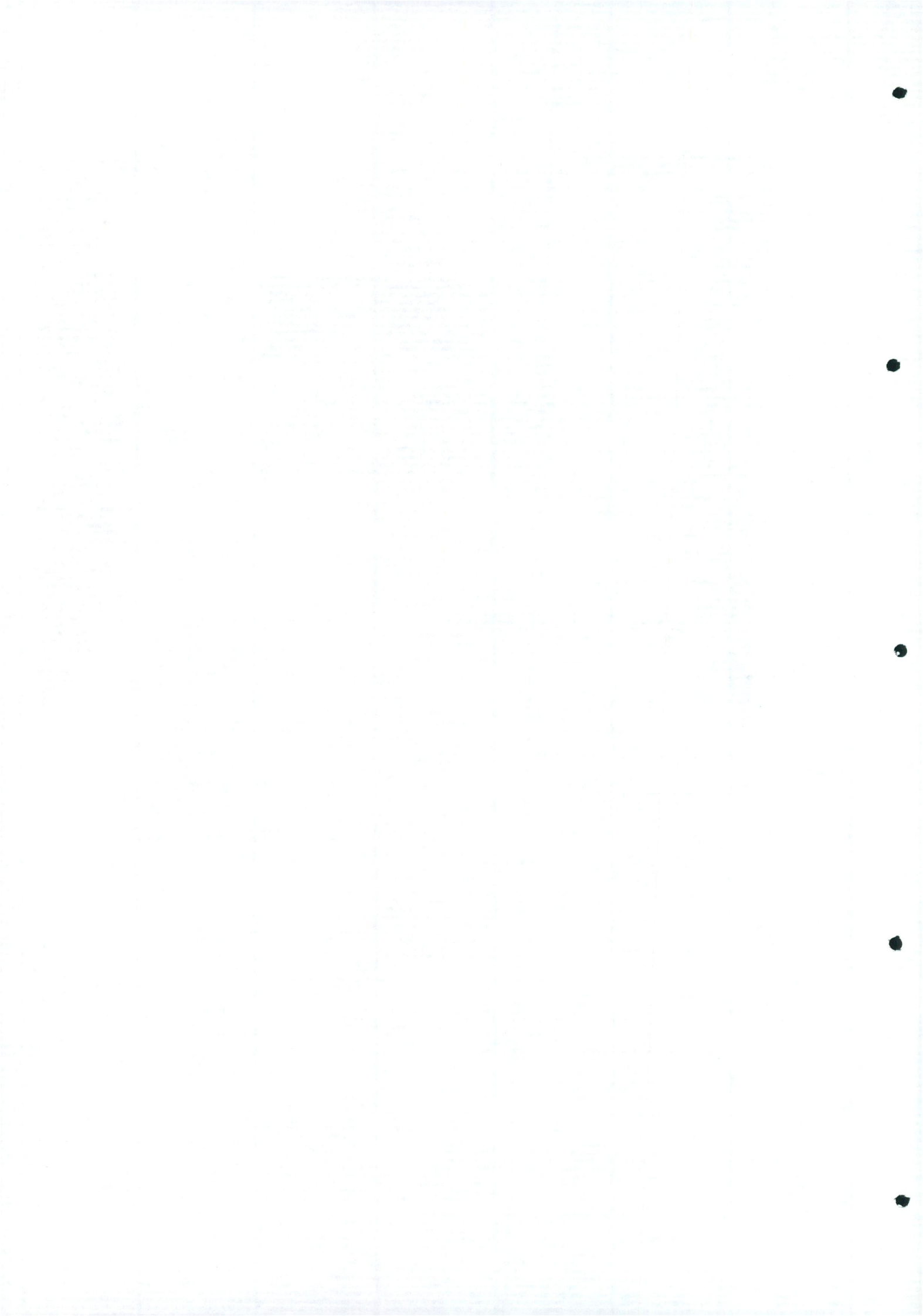


Fig. 3 Still Life with grid



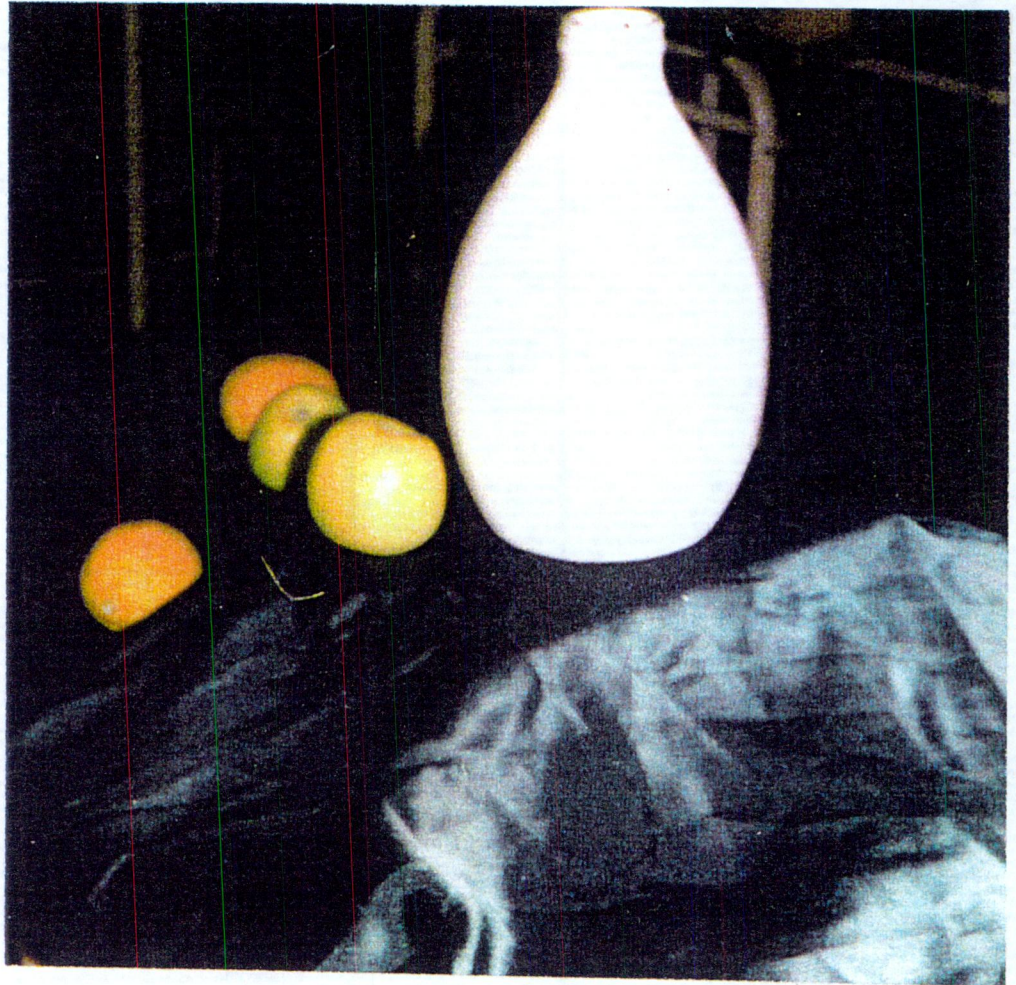
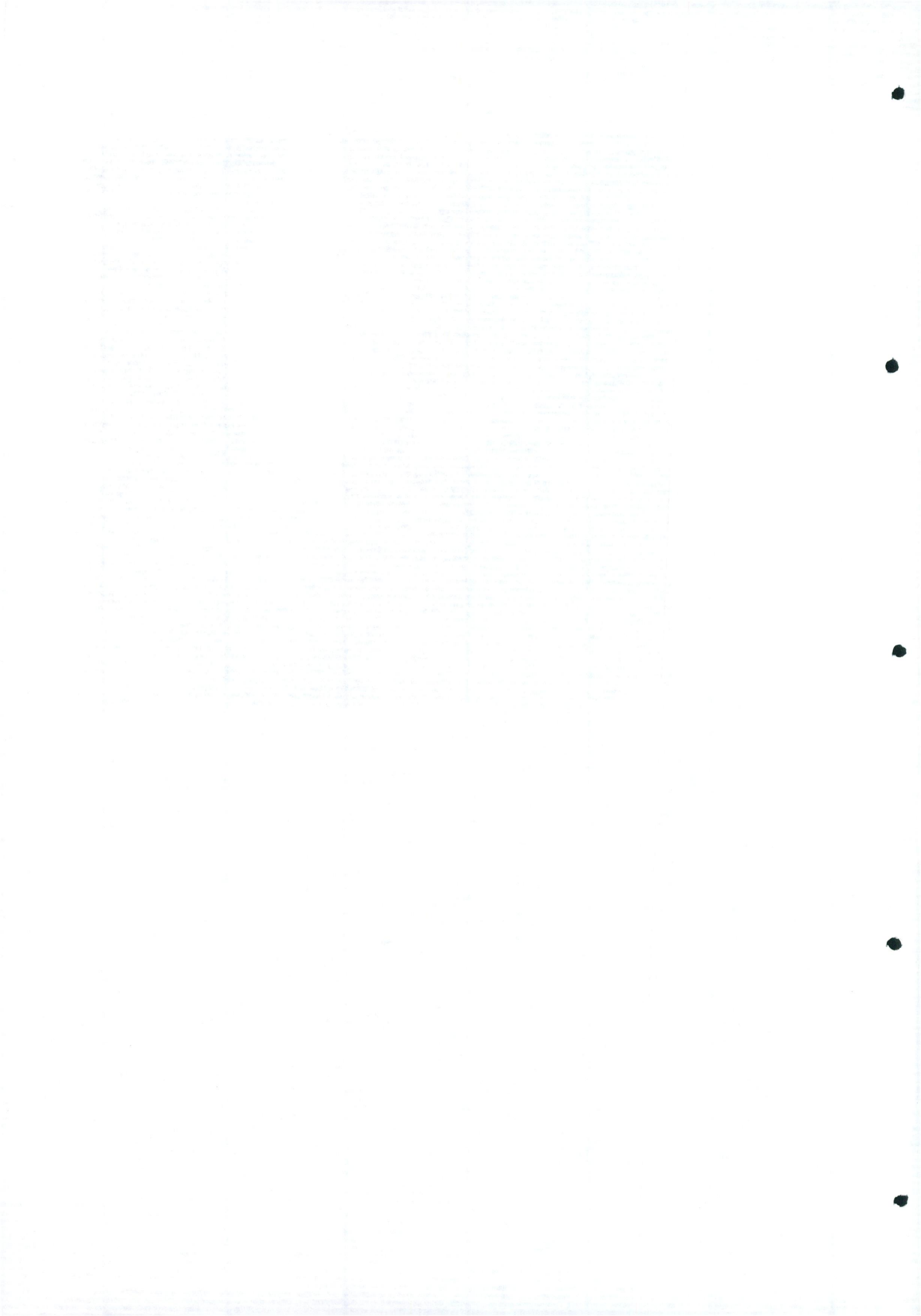


Fig. 4 Still Life Without Grid



The grid was an upright lined grid. The still life was placed inside the grid. The students worked on paper marked off with lines which corresponded to the grid itself. This forced the students to draw in perspective and to scale. You can draw what you see through the grid, matching in the drawing the exact angles and curves and lengths of line compared to the angles, curves and lengths of line on the grided paper. In terms of scale alone, the students were pleasantly surprised by their drawings. (Fig. 5) The other group, who were firstly working from memory, were surprised at the lack of attention they had given. I had shown them how to approach this exercise, by carefully scanning all the objects and seeing them in relation to each other. I suggested that they hold the pencil in their hand, and squinting at the still life, draw around it with the pencil, making visual notes, observing where the objects were in relation to each other, noticing the different shapes and the spaces in between the objects. they did this exercise seriously, when they understood that it was another way of looking. They also enjoyed the challenge of trying to remember where each object was after the still life was covered up. It was also a fun exercise for them, which I felt was important, as it demonstrated to the students that drawing can be enjoyable. These students also made continuous line drawings, another exercise they enjoyed. I instructed them not to lift their pencil from the page, as they looked intently at the still life. One of the students commented, that without even having to try, he had established the base. (Fig. 6) The object of these exercises was to demonstrate to the students what results can be achieved by focusing their attention and really observing what is



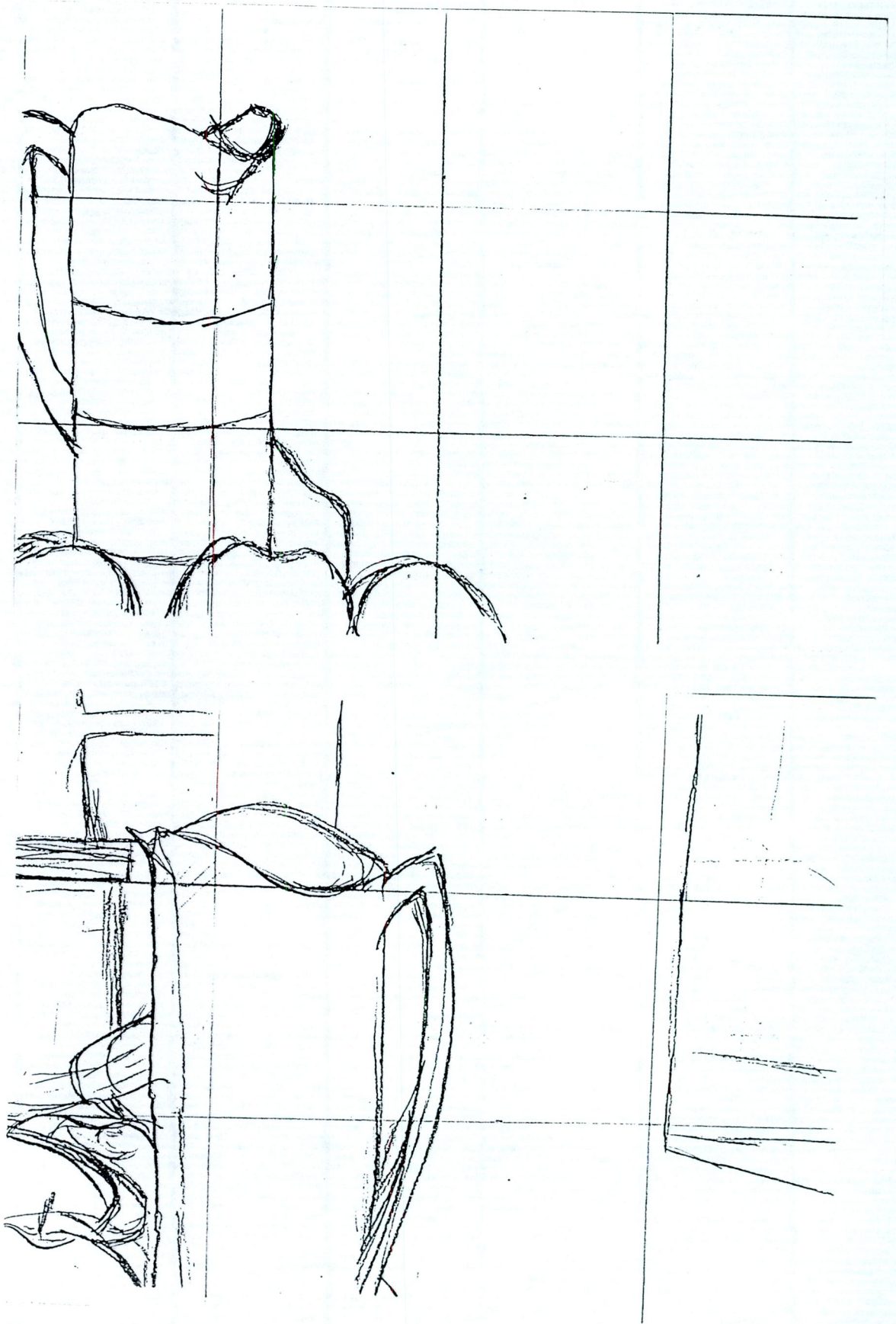


Fig. 5 Drawing with the aid of the grid



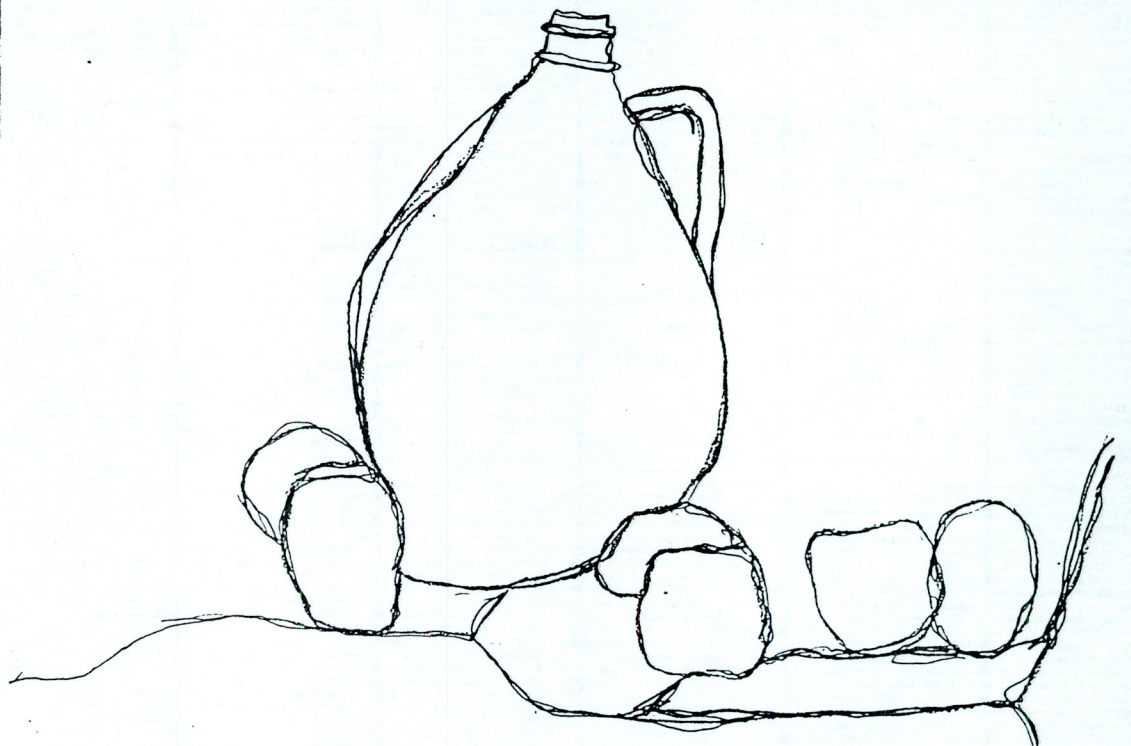
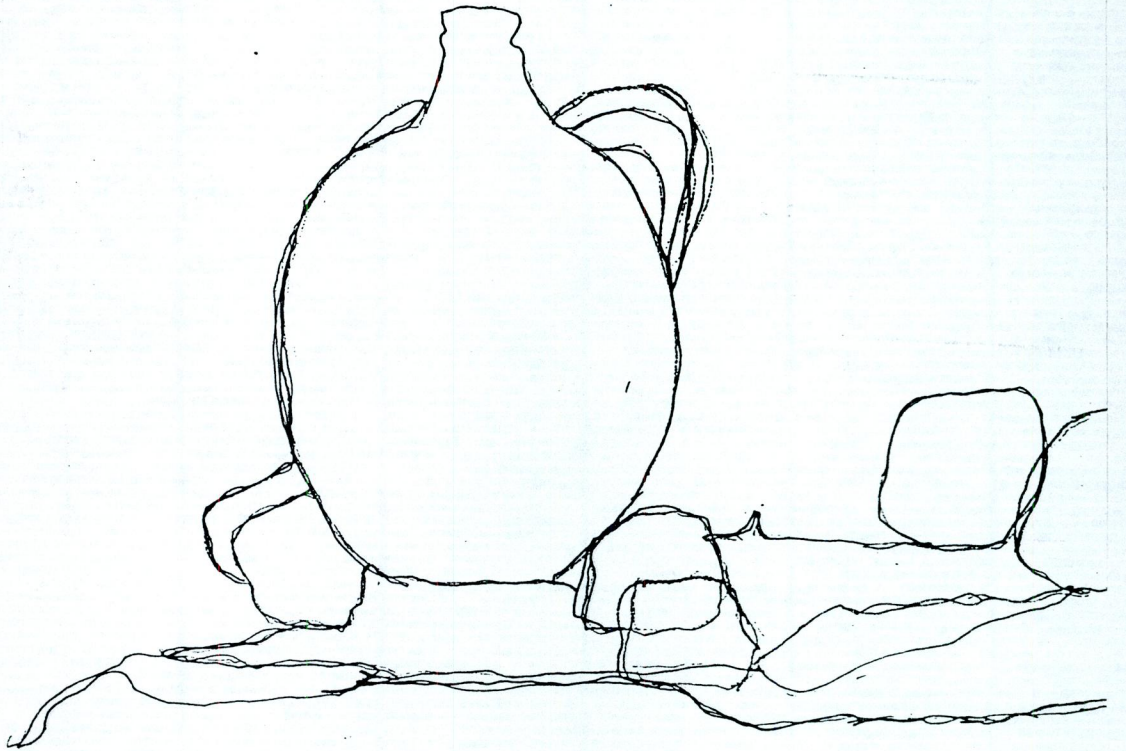


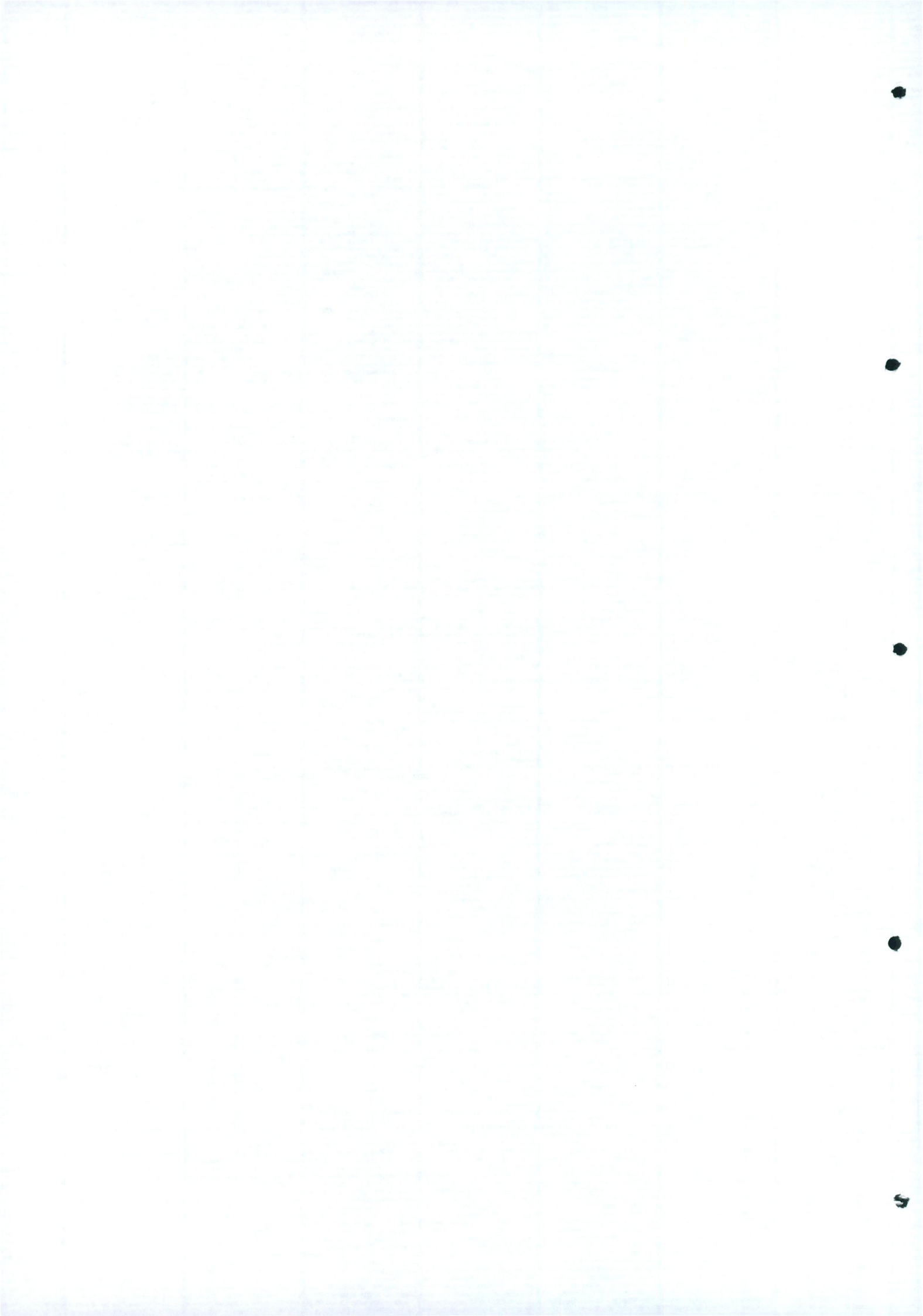
Fig. 6 Examples of student's continuous line drawing.

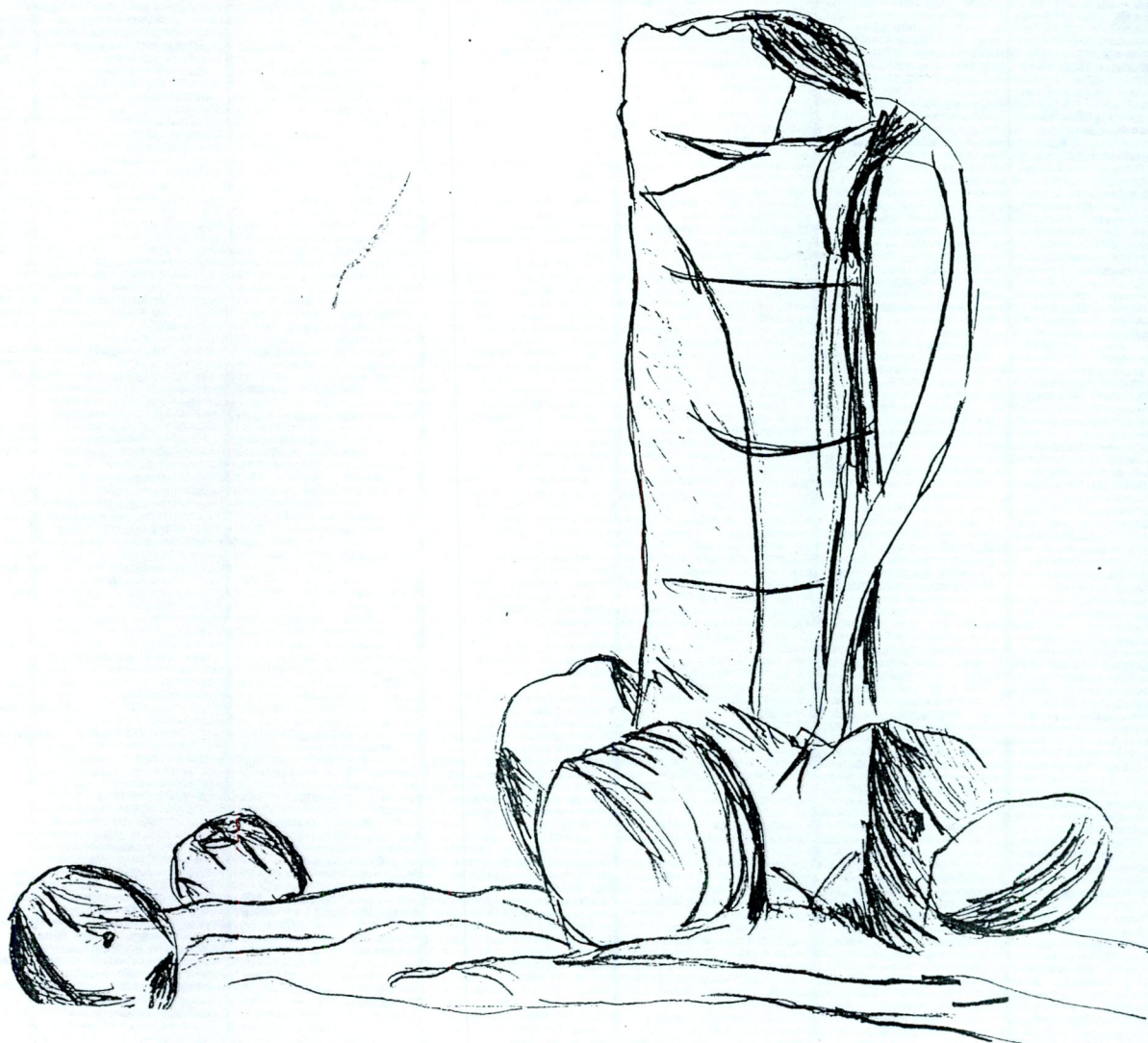


there in front of them. I had insisted that the students concentrate and not talk during their exercises. Drawing is an activity where all the senses are brought together, where one must be focused on the task in hand. I believe that you cannot draw and talk. The desired results will never be those sought.

As I have previously stated drawing requires closeness of attention and of observation. Talking and this concentrated drawing do not go hand in hand. One cannot do both. I explained this to the students, and much to their credit, they were completely focused. The third lesson was a reinforcement of the previous lessons. The aim was for the students to see each object individually and breaking up this object into shapes. In this way the students were forced to see again in a different way, instead of simply drawing the outline of the objects, they were to consider the "internals" of the objects, in other words to create volume on a flat surface. They were to look for the darkest tone, see it as a shape, then the mid-tone and then the lightest area. I chose not to talk to them about tone, or in the previous lesson about positive and negative shape. I simply wanted to show them that by observation alone, their drawing could be improved dramatically. (Fig. 7)

In lesson four, they were introduced to a new medium, oil pastels, and explained that they would be drawing with these. The aim here was to explain that colour can describe foreground, middleground and background. And to explain what happens when colour recedes that it becomes thinner. The nearer





Alan Connolly

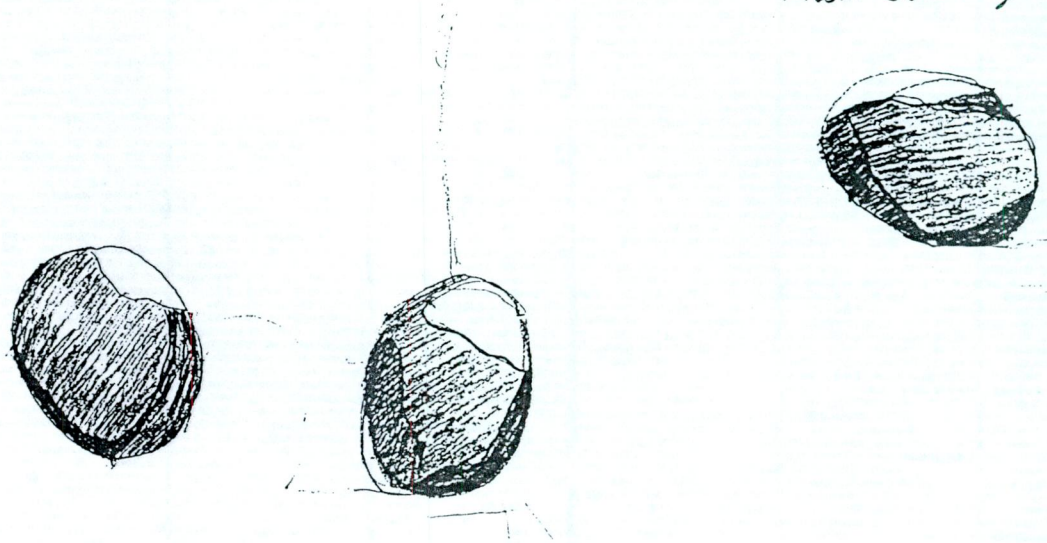
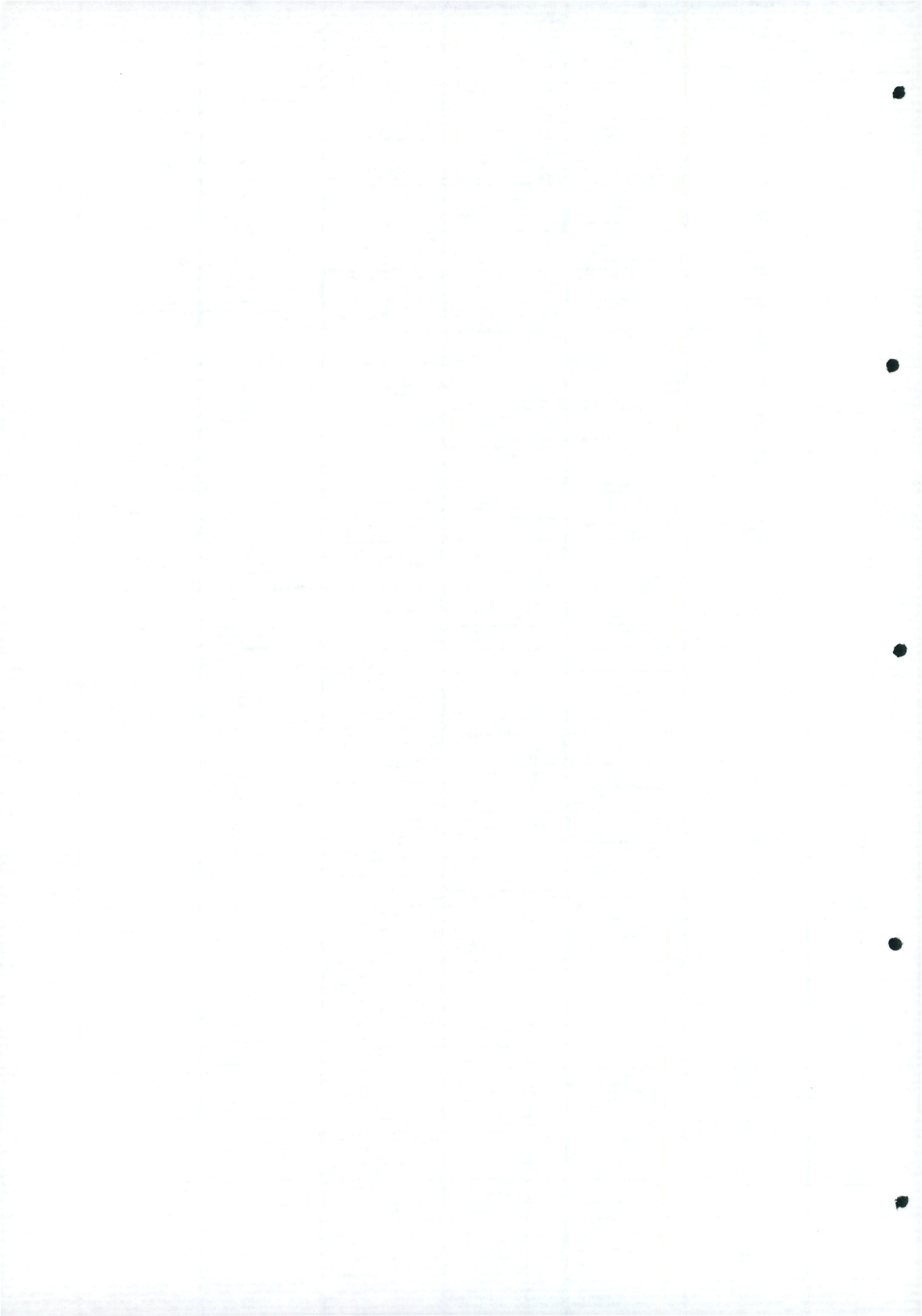


Fig. 7 Seeing the areas as shapes



the colour, the more intense and opaque it becomes. (Figs. 8/9/10) The drawing block culminated in a paper stained glass, using black sugar paper to mimic the lead, and coloured tissue paper to mimic the glass. The students initially experimented with layering the tissue paper to discover the effects which could be achieved. The paper stained glass took two weeks to complete and these classes reinforced the previous lessons, of line, shape and colour application. (Fig. 11/12)

I felt the students learned a great deal from this short block on drawing. This was evident by an improvement in their drawings. As I stated at the outset, some of the students were openly hostile in the beginning but by the end this attitude had changed considerably. Drawing became a challenge that could also be an enjoyable activity. The emphasis was on observation only, to teach the students that by looking and “seeing” in a different way they could achieve results. It proved to the students that drawing was a skill that through practice and proper focus could be acquired.



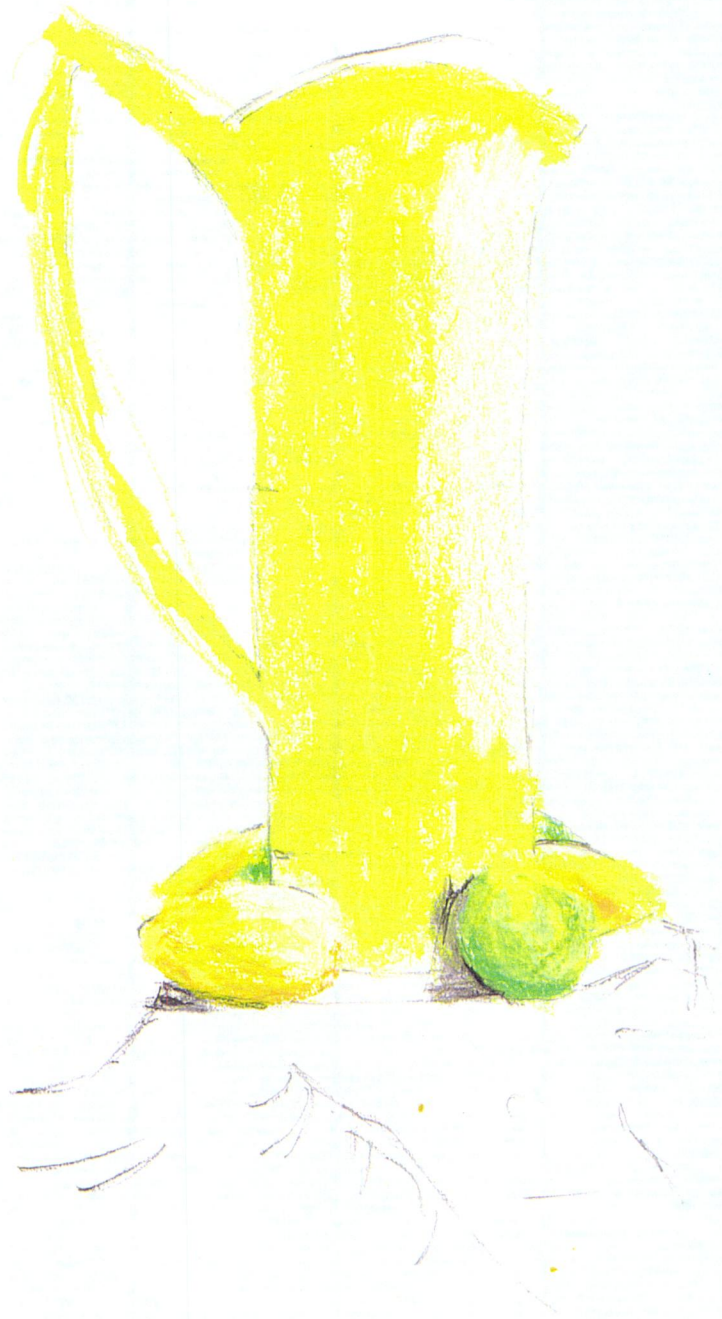


Fig. 8 Colour Application



Donna

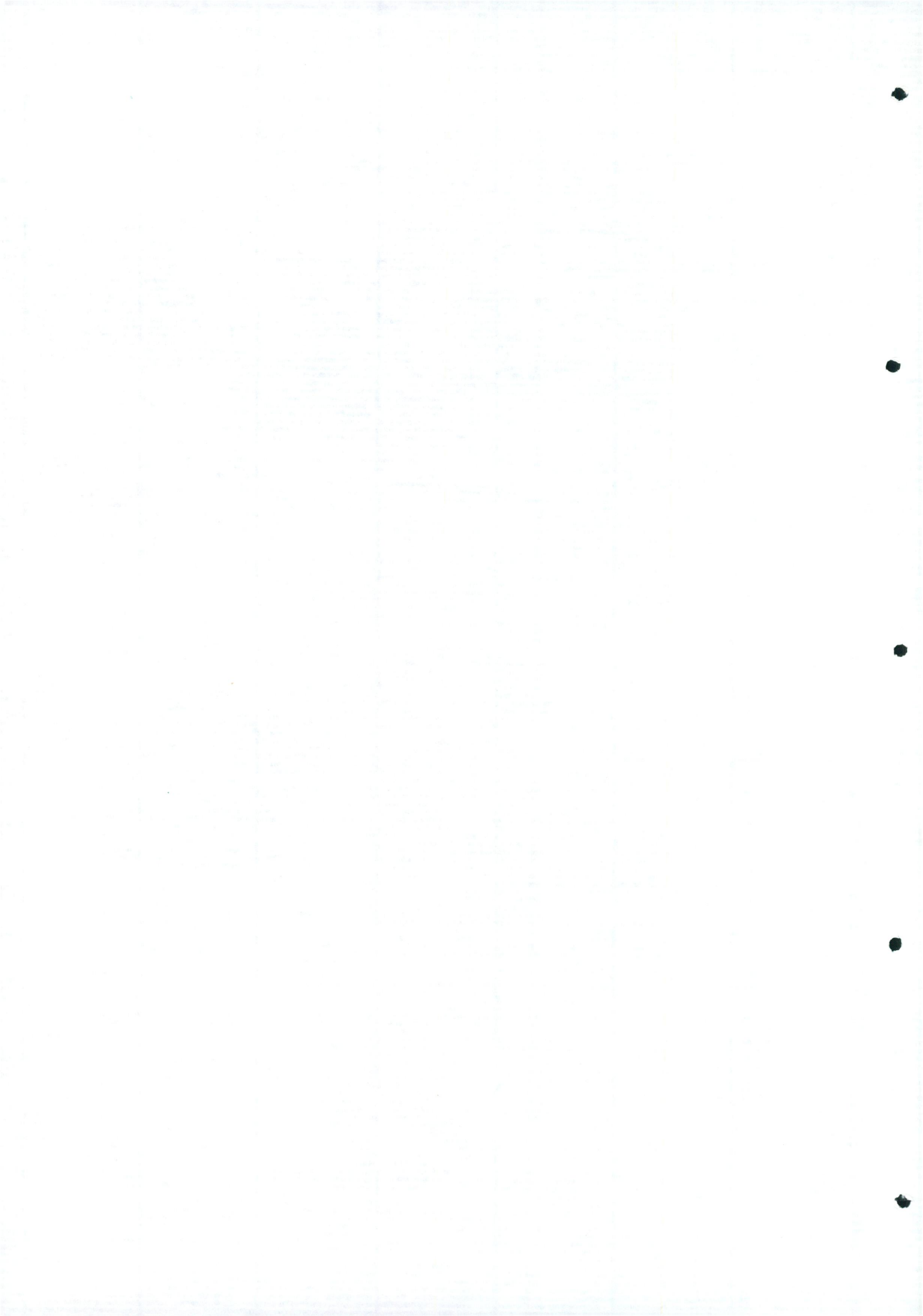


Fig. 9 Colour Application





Fig. 10 Colour Application (Details of student work)



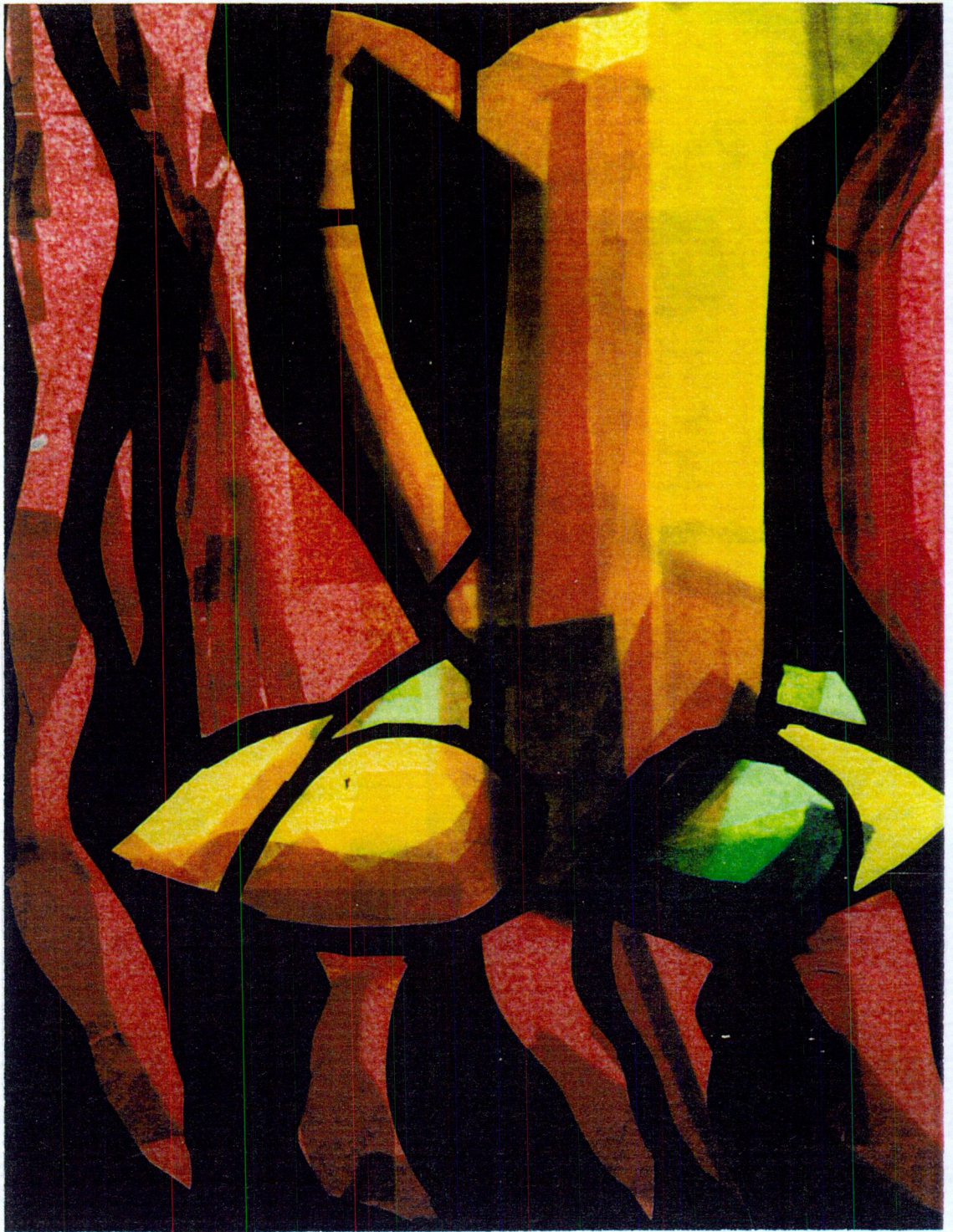


Fig. 11 Paper Stained Glass

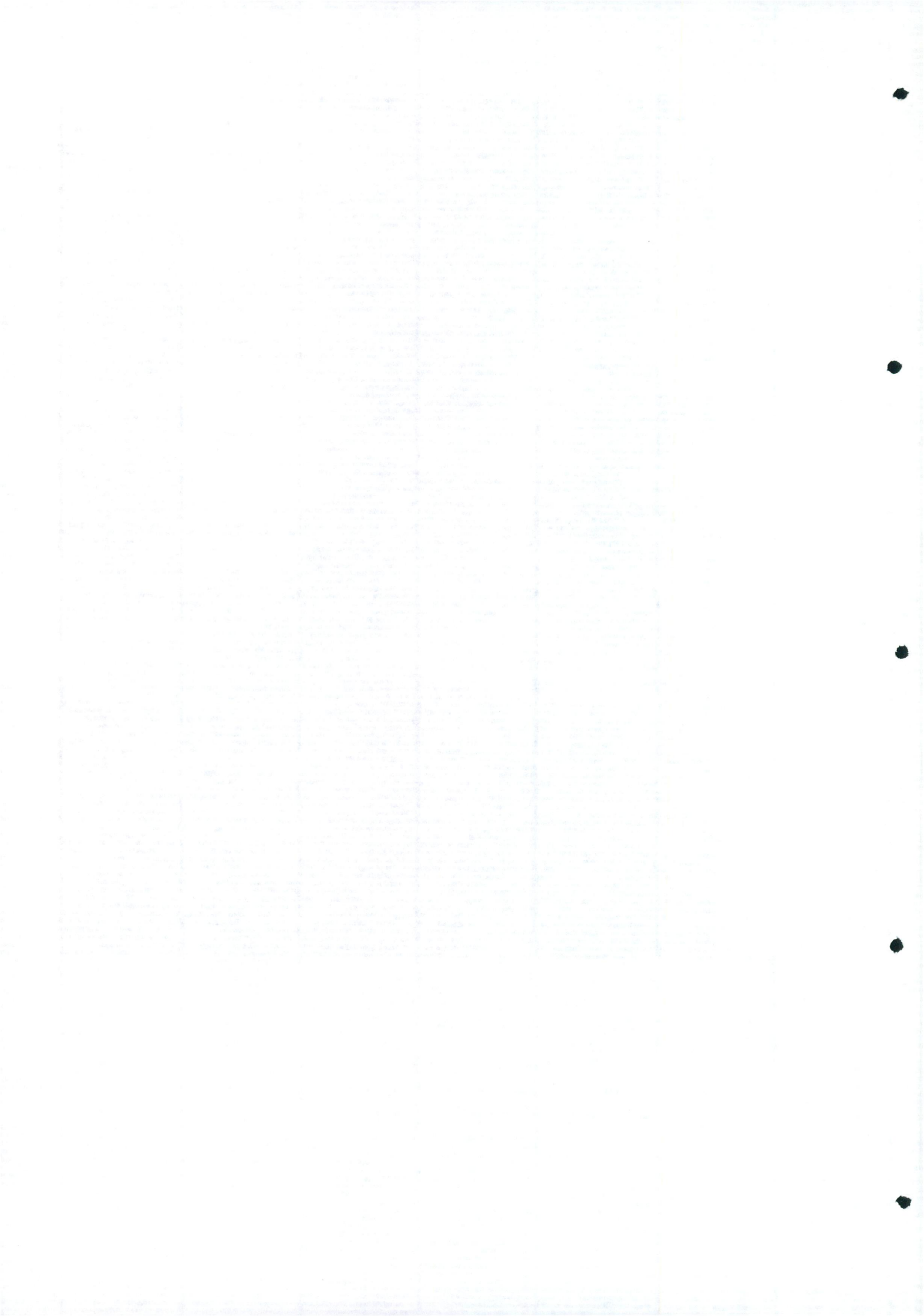
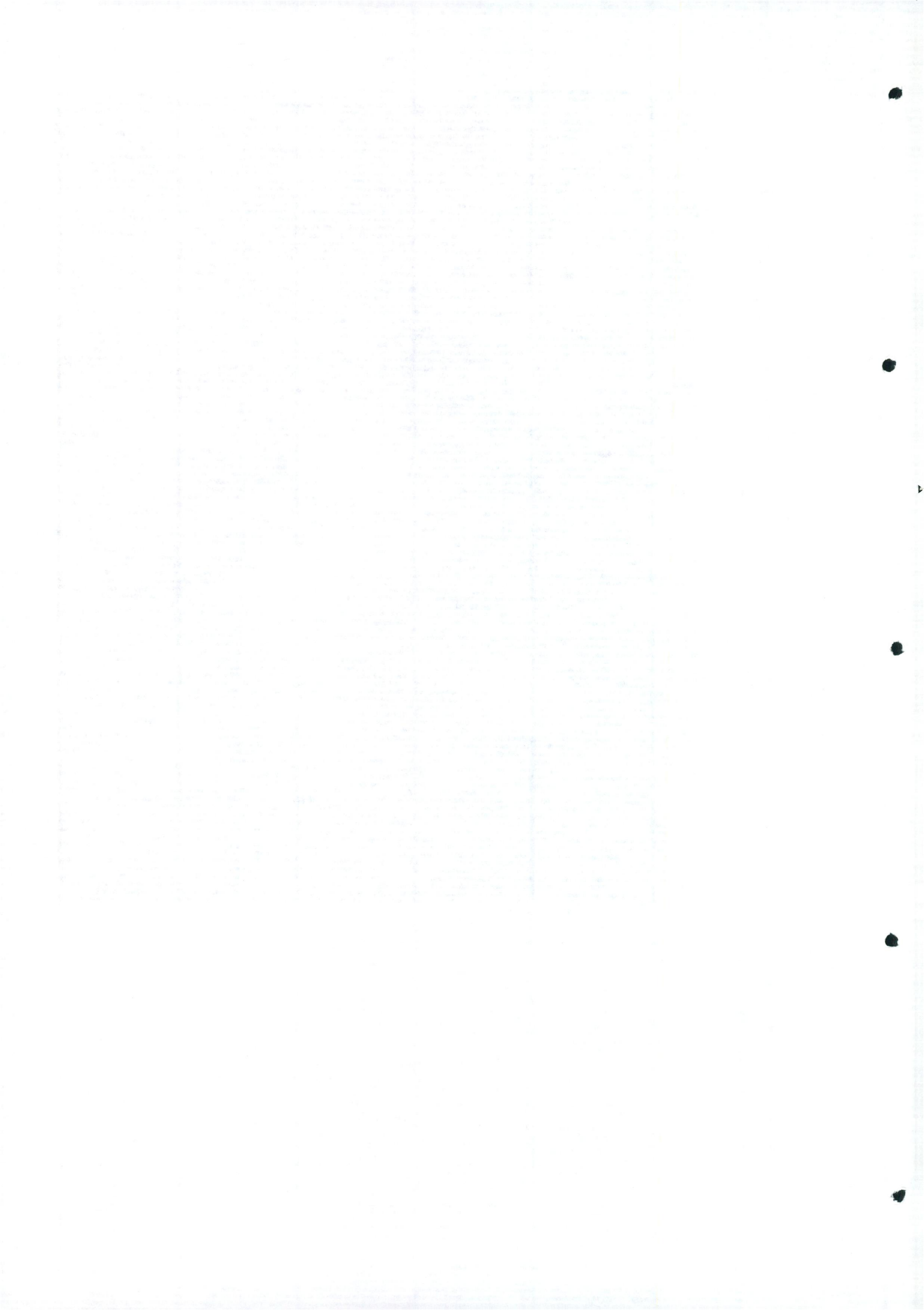




Fig. 12 Paper Stained Glass



FOOTNOTES CHAPTER FOUR

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3. Robert Clement, The Art Teachers Handbook (England : Stanley Thornes Ltd. 1993) p. 112
4. Malins, Drawing Ideas of the Masters p.9
5. First Year Students, St. Benildus College, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin, 1998
6. Edward Laning, The Act of Drawing (Devon : David & Charles Publishers, 1971) p. 37
7. Clement, The Art Teachers Handbook. p.32
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9. The Junior Certificate Syllabus, Art, Craft, Design. (Dublin : An Roinn Oideachais) p. 7
10. Clement, The Art Teachers Handbook. p. 111



CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation I have explained about the importance of drawing as the basic element in art. I have shown its place in history. The importance that artists have given it throughout history, how it becomes an art form in its own right has been explored. Through the drawing block with first year students I showed them that through observation and constant practice their drawing could improve. The time span available was short. I believe it is vital that the art teacher gives adequate instructions on the basic elements of art. The lack of this basic knowledge and the poor drawing ability in the Junior Certificate may be attributed to art teachers. This weakness places an onus on the individual school to recognise the value of art as an important subject. In England, the Department of Education and Science (1) conducted a survey on schools which produced a very high standard in art. Of the fourteen schools selected, the budget allocated for facilities and materials showed the value placed on art in these schools. Most had three or four full time art teachers; some had technicians. Some were equipped with separate drawing and painting rooms. One school had a budget of two hundred pounds yearly for art books. One school complained that the annual four tons of clay, just about covered the needs of the students. This school conducted twenty-three firings a week. Schools had ground floor suites for 3-D work. Another had a library with carpet and chairs which students also used and it contained an

office for staff. In Ireland such facilities would be more likely to be available only at third level. There needs to be a serious reevaluation of art in the Irish curriculum. The budget allocated needs to be improved. But this does not excuse the art teacher from teaching the elements of drawing. Art as "leisure" or the place to send the less "academic" or "difficult" student is an attitude that needs to change in some schools. Getting back to the basics should begin at primary level. There should be a qualified art teacher in every primary school to give this foundation to students. This would have a beneficial effect through the system. If the language and the importance of art is recognised at this early stage of education, the level of art will be higher at second level. This has implications for those who go on to further art education at third level.

The endless discourses, papers, symposia and reports on its value have not appeared to have made the huge impact they should have done on giving art its just place within the curriculum. The 1961 Scandinavian Report on Design In Ireland noted that : "the Irish schoolchild is visually and artistically among the most under-educated in Europe...." (2) It appears that this is still true to some degree, especially at second level. The problem lies with the attitude of the school, which can be seen by where art is placed in the curriculum and how many classes are allotted to the subject. Some schools still do not have art in the curriculum, and as previously stated, this is especially true of boys' schools.



This is an attitude which must change, if we are to alter the view that we are visually undereducated. Art must be given its proper status in the curriculum.



FOOTNOTES CONCLUSION

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2. Benson, The Place of the Arts In Irish Education p.6



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