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PERSONAL AND CLASS DOCUMENTATION

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COLAISTE NAISIUNTA EALAINÉ IS DEARTHA  
NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

A PERSONAL PROJECT - 'A WOMAN WORKING AT HOME'

AND

A CLASS PROJECT - 'INVESTIGATING A LIVING SPACE'

IN CANDIDACY FOR

DIPLOMA FOR ART AND DESIGN TEACHERS

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

### Personal Project

My personal project began in January 1989 with the theme - 'A Woman Working at Home'. The aim of the project was to enhance my perceptive and critical understanding of the world around me.

### Class Project

My class project began in early February 1989 with a 5th Year group at Sallynoggin Community School.

Theme - 'Investigating a Living Space'. The aim of the project was to enlarge the students' perception of his/her immediate environment.





## CHAPTER I

### THE EDUCATIONAL JUSTIFICATION OF THE CLASS PROJECT

The principal educational justification of a class project is that it provides a group of pupils with the opportunity to enlarge their perception of their environment. Educationally, however it not only aids and heightens their perceptual development but has a knock-on effect of enlarging their understanding of the world they live in.

As an experience therefore the class project seeks to open up new areas for the pupil outside the context of the traditional classroom. It provides a structure through which the pupil is provided with the opportunity to observe the chosen environment, to discover it, to consider it and finally to create from the experience.

There are of course educational offshoots from such a structured project. In the first instance, the process of looking, discovering through observational drawing helps enhance the students capacity to discriminate visually and verbally and appraise the environment not just in terms of the specific project but in terms of any future understanding of the environment in its larger context.

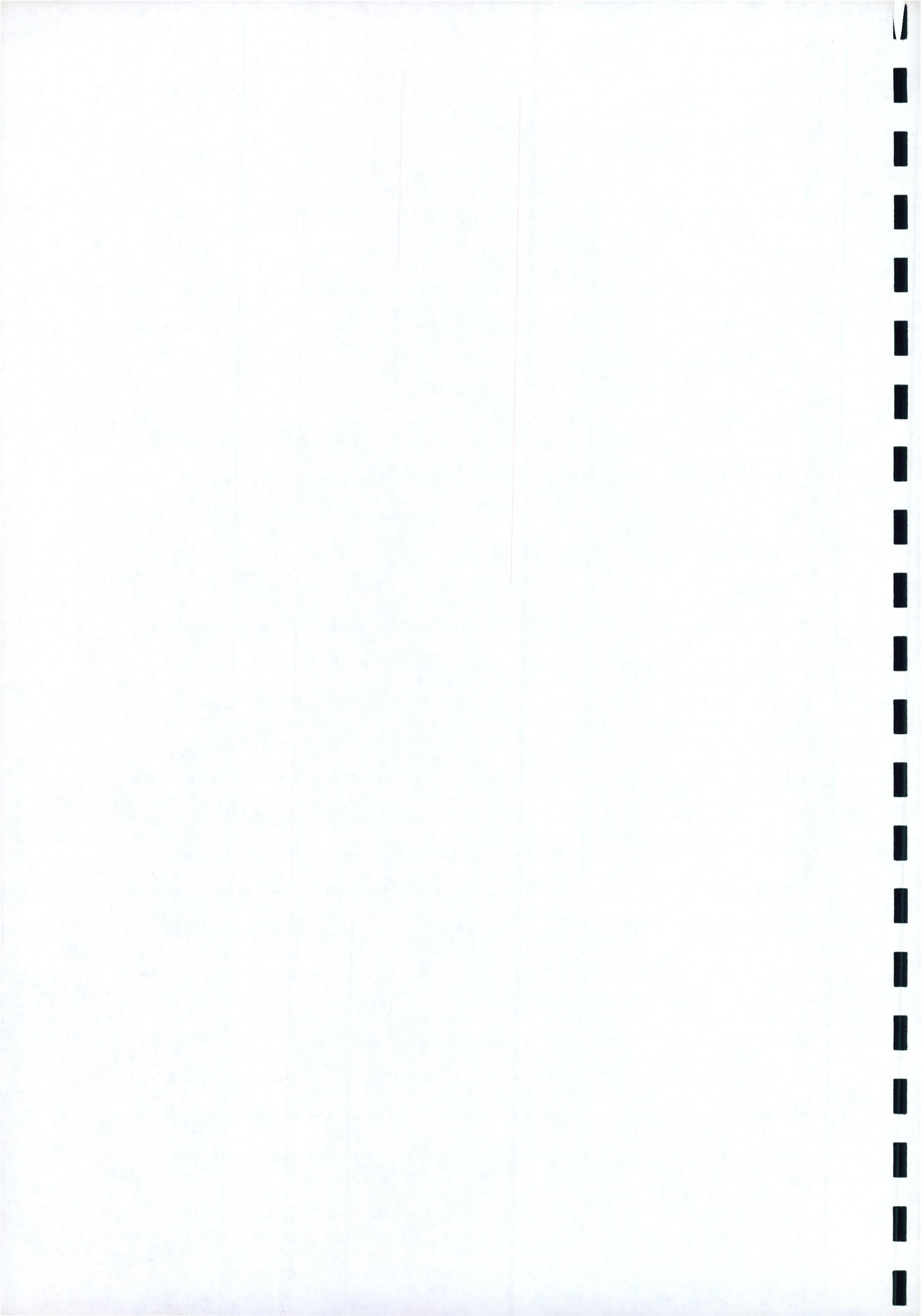
In terms of the specific structure of the project itself, it is envisaged that as it develops it will focus on a variety of differing but closely linked educational objectives. Initially the concentration will be on heritage study, a selective historical overview of relief, from the clay pictograms of early Mesopotamia to the more sophisticated marble relief of Michelangelo. The second stage will be the discovery stage. The focus will be on observing the environment in question and translating into pen

and ink wash. The focus will be on gathering information and discovering the variety of form within the environment through tonal studies. Educationally, this will demand as Arnheim would suggest in his Art and Visual Perception a confrontation with the difficult task of transforming three-dimensional objects perceived into a two-dimensional surface. The transformation is one of the central objectives of the project as it demands looking, understanding, considerable skill and ingenuity in affecting a drawing result.

A further concern of the project would be to translate the drawing research into an interesting composition that would adequately reflect the theme of 'Investigating a Living Room'. Educationally this stage would demand an understanding of composition through a process of experimentation with shape, picture planes, etc. This would be seen as the creative stage of the project. The motivation at this instance would be the demand for originality, to create a composition that would not just be interesting but would be unique, one of a kind.

The final stage of the project would require the translation of the composition into clay relief. Educationally this stage is justified by the fact that the class is introduced to a new craft, a craft which demands an understanding of form, perspective, etc., a sensitivity to the clay medium and considerable technical skill in manipulating and modelling the clay.

In the final analysis, the project is justified for a fifth year group because it provides initially the most convenient vehicle for the group to consider Art not in terms of class activity alone but as an instrument for looking at the outside world. It is also appropriate because it concentrates the mind of the class on the real world and not on abstract notions that so much occupy the minds of this age group.



## CHAPTER II

### THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S STRUGGLE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE HOME

The History of the World as we know it today is essentially the history of Man, not Woman. Logically we are forced to recognise that almost from the beginning of time women were cast into a position of forced dependence on men. The lines were drawn by a male dominated society, men were perceived and promoted as the decision-makers and breadwinners, women were housewives and mothers. In this context women were irrevocably tied to the will of their husbands and inevitably developed a keen sense of meekness and servility which did much to sustain the patriarchal system. Incredibly it was not until the 17th century that any systematic questioning of woman's position or role in society began to occur.

The 17th century saw major strides in economic growth throughout Europe. During this century old relationships of property and domination came under new forms of pressure through the development of Capitalism. This brought into being a class which owned the means of production and which created the need for labour. In effect, this demand for workers in Europe led to the disintegration of local agrarian communities. Dramatic though this change was it still did not disturb the power that men had over women, many may have escaped the clutches of landowners through urbanisation but they still acted as if 'they owned their women body and soul long after they themselves ceased to be the property of other men.'<sup>1</sup> (Although their own oppression continued if not increased under capitalism). However within the new cities women began to meet and before long seeds of unrest began to grow.

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1 Hidden from History, S. Rowbotham, Pluto Press, 1974, London, p.305.

The modern period saw a very major transformation from aristocratic and mercantile societies into an industrial capitalist society in the course of which the 'industrial bourgeoisie'<sup>2</sup> emerged as the dominant class and thereby consolidated its hold on political power. Disparate groups of women emerged and flourished in this atmosphere of change, each with its own political allegiance, reforming positions and strategies yet all united in their condemnation of 'the divine rights of husbands as well as that of kings.'<sup>3</sup>

By 1820 working class British women groups began circulating birth control information. In doing so these women groups had begun to recognise that complete control over reproduction was the only way to avoid the misery of large families and the reality of poverty. These movements were viewed with deep suspicion by the authorities who saw any movements towards contraception as seditious and blasphemous.

This form of radicalism naturally evoked strong reaction from English evangelical conservatives. Their tactics involved the infiltration of these groups by the conservative women members of these churches. So successful were they in fact, that by the mid-19th century a more united women's movement had purged itself of its more radical elements and had itself become embarrassingly influenced by this form of religious conservatism. Suffice to say that the evangelical movement was anti-Jacobin, aristocratic, patriotic, sexually conservative and very influential in the formation of Victorian society.

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2 Hidden from History, S. Rowbotham, Pluto Press, 1974, London, p.305.

3 Hidden from History, S. Rowbotham, Pluto Press, 1974, London, p.306.

In early 19th century Britain, women were mostly restricted to work like weaving, spinning, lacemaking, dressmaking and obviously domestic service, but they were able to leave one form of restriction, that of family life and adopt another, that of industrial exploitation. As more and more women were co-opted to the capitalist labour market their confidence began to grow, some joined trade unions, some even joined radical political parties, the restrictions in terms of trade union and political activity were historically determined. Men controlled both, men set the agendas for discussion, women's issues were obviously not a high priority.

By the early 1830s and 1840s increasing disenchantment with intolerable social deprivation and economic dependence saw an increasing mobilisation of working class women. These women flocked into women's trade unions and small radical political parties. Seeds of dissatisfaction were simmering beneath the surface of working class society. An example was the Female Political Union from Newcastle upon Tyne who declared in their pamphlet of 1839:

"We have been told that the province of Woman is her home and that the field of politics should be left to men this we deny." 4

It was however not just the working classes that were rebelling against social conditions, increasingly Victorian middle class women were sharing an equal disregard for the growing misery of their situation. In truth the middle classes had progressed and prospered in the 19th century but this increased improvement meant that the wives of these wealthy men were even more dependent on their husbands. These women were almost

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4 Hidden from History, S. Rowbotham, Pluto Press, 1974, London, p. 343.

considered ornamentation in a society where they had no legal rights to property, little or no say in education, work or politics, no legal claim to their children, no visible outlets save occasional charity work.

As the 19th century progressed however increasing agitation from disparate women's groups resulted in a concession whereby independent ownership was conceded by Parliament in 1882. This concession can only be seen as an exception as many other amendments which sought to help the plight of women failed. Before long, women's groups began to conclude that their only salvation lay in attaining the 'Vote' for women. In 1889 the Woman's Franchise League was formed by a group of political activists. Emmeline Pankhurst was one of its founding members. The key issue for these women was the Vote but the League also campaigned for complete equality of women in divorce, inheritance and custody of children.

In 1894 Emmeline Pankhurst and her husband joined the Independent Labour Party. Mrs. Pankhurst agitated not just on women's issues but also on class issues. Within a short while she had gathered a number of likeminded women members of the Labour Party to form the Women's Social and Political Union. Essentially they saw themselves as a splinter pressure group within the Labour movement. Their objectives were to achieve 'Votes for Women' but their immediate intention was to get the New Labour Representative Committee to sponsor the Woman's Enfranchisement Bill. The Labour Party did finally take the Bill to Parliament but it was not taken seriously and was subsequently laughed out of the House.

The extent of the derision that accompanied the defeat of the Bill caused a rethink of strategy within Mrs. Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union. Clearly they saw not just the need to intensify their campaign politically but sought to attract media attention through





militancy.

Initially Mrs. Pankhurst's followers disrupted political meetings yet inevitably as their campaign intensified they became more violent. Street demonstrations were organised, confrontation with the police, arrests, hunger strikes and forced feeding followed.

Yet another Bill for Women's Suffrage was introduced by Lord Lytton in 1910. Unfortunately, it too failed. In exasperation the women's movement became even more militant.

In 1912 the Labour Party Conference finally committed itself to the Vote for Women, but a Parliamentary Bill in the same year was again defeated, this time by a mere 14 votes.

More violence ensued, the women's groups involved in the struggle were driven underground into hiding as increasingly the tactics outraged British society. This violent behaviour also caused a split within the movement itself. By 1913 the women's movement was in some disarray with their objective still not realised.

Inevitably "World War I" interrupted further political activity, but incredibly it was just this war that provided the opportunity for women to demonstrate their abilities to the full.

Before the war less than one quarter of British women were employed. During the war years however shortages of manpower in industry meant that women were asked to work. It appeared to the women of the movement that only in the exceptional circumstances of the war would the male

establishment overcome social ideas about women's place.

Women played a full part in the war economy, working in armament factories, engineering works, and on the buses. For the most part the work was demanding so by the end of the war, women had assumed that they had more than earned their vote. That same year Parliament conceded to British women the right to vote. At long last women had access to power and at least in theory equality with their fellow male citizens.

Throughout Europe female emancipation spread and with it the opening of many doors to freedom and choice.

The Irish Republic was founded in 1922 and with it equality of franchise for male and female alike. Circumstances however militated against Irish women using this opportunity to the full. The role of women in Southern Ireland was spectacularly different from that of their neighbours in Britain. Ideologically the split with the rest of the United Kingdom brought a strong emphasis on Nationalism, insularity and dogmatic Catholicism. Rural life was glorified, the family romanticised. The definition of family was conservative, Catholic, rigid and patriarchal. Woman's role was wife and mother, strictly bound to her bed and kitchen she tended to her husband and her family. Her independence was denied, her employment outside the home strictly discouraged. Before long, Catholic morality became enshrined in the Constitution, contraception became illegal, divorce was banned and abortion a criminal act. In tandem women were openly discriminated against in education, employment, government taxation and within the welfare system.

Essentially women were being discriminated against from all sides, Church, State and Family.

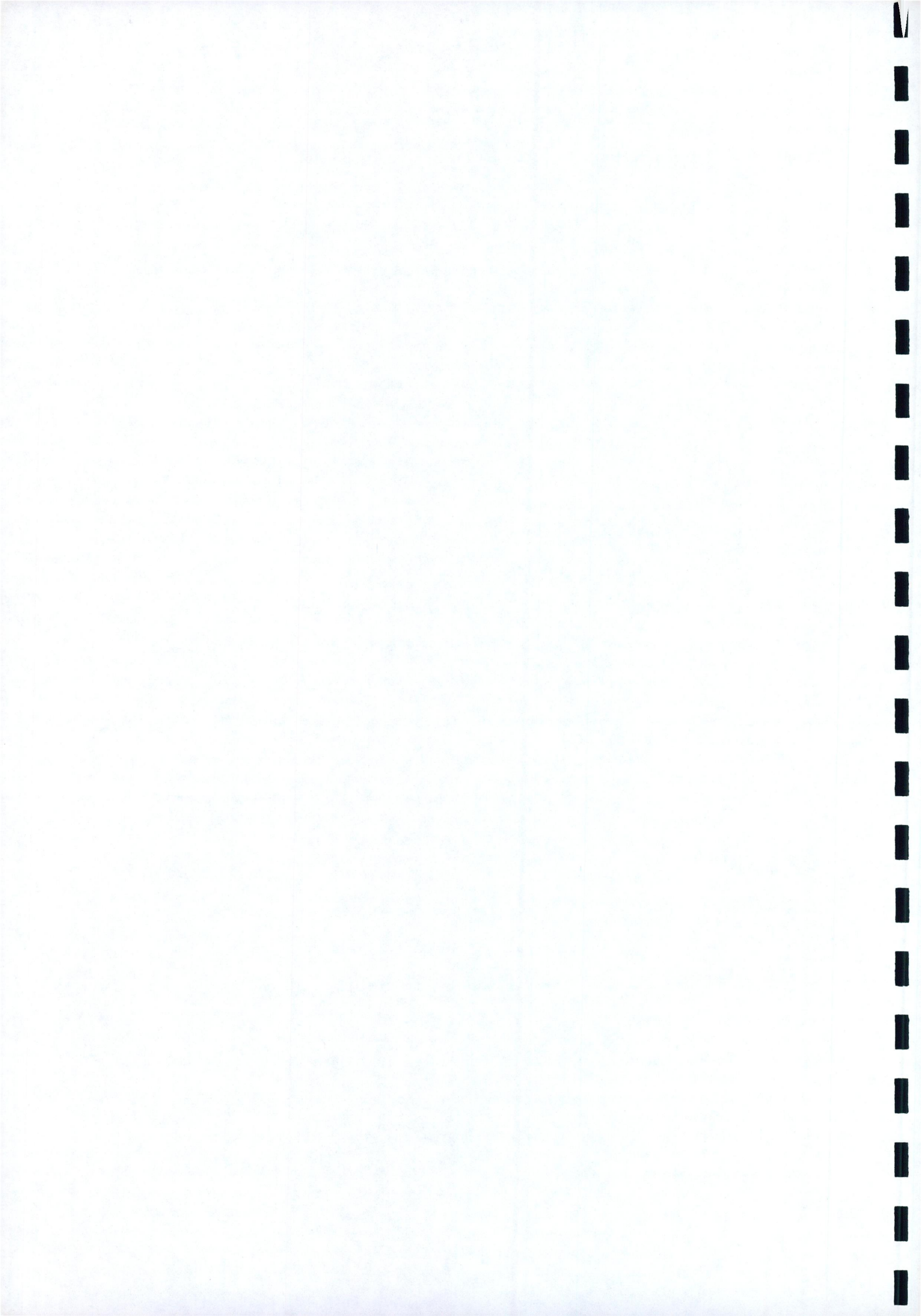
The Church promoted the image of woman as Mary, mother of her family, comforter in times of trouble, meek, sensitive, subdued, obsessively clean and obedient.

The State denied woman the right to work after marriage, it defined her role simply in terms of her duties in the home, to clean and breed.

The Family itself were also a controlling influence. They daily reminded her of her duty, her unpaid slavery to the cause of family comfort. Her guilt became her spur, her drudgery her only companion.

Throughout the 30s, 40s and early 50s, women unbelievably remained tied to the limitations of these narrow value systems. Increasing industrialisation towards the late 50s brought a breath of fresh air to this stagnant situation for women. Ireland suddenly had begun to open its doors to the industrialised West. It tempted multi-national corporations in an attempt to overcome economic isolation and thereby sought to create an export oriented base within the State. Married women were for the first time in the history of the State being tempted out of the home to work.

Change was also coming from other direction with the advent of television in the 1960s. Television brought British and American values into the Irish family sitting-room. Suddenly, issues long since buried began to surface. Moral, religious and constitutional absolutes seemed quite suddenly not to be so absolute. Other views, other values, other opinions were emerging. Expectations clearly began to change, women naturally began to notice that women in other countries were claiming a greater role for themselves within society. Naturally dissatisfaction among women began to surface.



Living standards generally improved with the influx of the foreign corporations and their capital. Some housewives began to view domestic bliss for what it really was, drudgery and boredom.

By the early seventies not much had changed for women in society. To a limited extent more women were working, more women were coming together to discuss the sense of grievance and inequality that they felt in relation to their role, their position with regard to the home and the work environment. By 1971 disparate women's groups in the larger cities of the Republic united in a movement under the umbrella of Women's Liberation.

In the early years of this movement campaigns were mounted to champion their rights and to demand change. These campaigns did have some effect with the removal of the Marriage Bar in 1973, Equality legislation in 1974 and Employment Equality legislation in 1977. However, the greatest change that occurred during those years was the separation of Church and State. For decades it appeared that the Roman Catholic Church had a stranglehold over any decisions made by the Irish legislature. Instances such as the Mother and Child proposals bore witness to the very real influence the Church held over Irish morality and legislation. In 1979 legislation on contraception had been enacted giving women the right to avail of contraceptives. Maternity leave was granted to women in 1981. The Government of the time under pressure from the Women's Movement had clearly begun to tackle basic areas of personal freedom.

Unfortunately the reforming crusade did have some setback when a 'Prolife' pressure group managed to amend the constitution to prohibit abortion for all time in 1986. A divorce referendum was similarly defeated in 1987.

Such changes were bitterly felt by a large section of Irish women. Basic freedoms which on the one hand were fought for were easily offset by the refusal of any access to abortion and a truly unjust ban on divorce.

At this point in time sixty seven years after the foundation of the State women's position had not really changed. For the most part their lives are led within the narrow parameters of the domestic situation, they still tend to their husbands and their families, they still cook and clean with no real sense of purpose, no real sense of achievement.

'Sure what am I, I'm only a housewife.'

### CHAPTER III

#### WOMEN'S' ISSUES IN ART

Historically, we have seen how women have agitated throughout the centuries for a variety of domestic, social and political causes. In terms of art content however women's issues did not seem to come to the fore until the early 1970s.

In terms of art history the early seventies were a very important time. The most striking characteristic of this era was the destruction of male chauvanistic Pop Art and the gradual emergence of conceptual art with its specific focus on content. This new shift brought with it a range of new issues for artists to concern themselves with. Some chose political concerns, others the environment and the nuclear question, in doing so artists sought to influence the public, to reach out and communicate ideas and in so doing to challenge established conceptions.

By the early seventies women artists began finally to express their dissatisfaction on a whole range of issues relating to them. This was not an easy thing for women to do publicly chiefly because women artists had been alienated from the art world. At the time women artists appeared to be in a minority. In real terms of course women artists were isolated within their domestic sphere and imprisoned in a male dominated world yet with the great feminist upsurge of the late sixties women artists slowly overcame their lack of opportunity and experience and began to claim a place within that same art world.

One of the first women artists to grasp the opportunities presented by the conceptual movement in the seventies was Judy Chicago. This artist



Figure 1 Judy Chicago, Sappo plate from 'The Dinner Party', 1979. Chinapaint on porcelain, The Dinner Party Project Inc.





bravely recognised the general impotence of female artists within the reality of male dominated society. Initially Chicago looked to the strengths of women in traditional crafts and saw within them the key to creating important work by women on women's issues.

During the years 1973 to 1979 Judy Chicago co-operatively executed 'The Dinner Party' - a multi media sculpture comprised of china painting and needlework.

Briefly 'The Dinner Party' was a huge and elegant installation piece comprised of an 'open-centred triangular table', <sup>5</sup> 46.5' on each side, set on a raised triangular platform. The three wings of the table contained place settings for 39 women from the mythical past <sup>6</sup> through history until 1973. This rested on a foundation of 999 women's names which were inscribed in gold on a white 'lustre tiled floor'. <sup>7</sup> Each setting included a 'gold edged napkin, porcelain plateware and gold lined chalice' <sup>8</sup> and centred on a 14" painted or sculpted porcelain plate and an 'elegantly ornamented needlework runner'. <sup>9</sup> Each setting had the image, style and technique geared to the contribution and period of the women honoured. The plates themselves were all centred with an image of a vaginally suggestive butterfly image which had been recognised as a symbol of rebirth since the beginning of time and Judy Chicago's trademark since 1972. As the table settings appeared to move through the ages, e.g. Queen Elizabeth I, Ethyl Smyth to Virginia Woolf, the plates rose from flat to high relief. In fact

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5 Lippard, Lucy, E.P. Dutton, Get the Message, N.Y. p.110.

6 ibidem

7 ibidem

8 ibidem

9 ibidem

after the place setting for Mary Woolstomecraft, the images began to enjoy almost complete sculpted form but appropriately enough none did succeed in 'flying off the plates'.<sup>10</sup> As it appeared all still know their "PLACE".

Essentially, 'The Dinner Party' is a monument, a testament to three separate and distinct objectives.

First, and quite obviously it was a monument to all those women mentioned by image and name. In doing so it paid tribute to the achievements of these particular women. It paid tribute not just to their courage and their talent but to the pioneering inroads their work had made for women in all walks of life. In many ways 'The Dinner Party' set out to redress the imbalance in the knowledge of women and their achievement. In doing so it becomes in many ways a history of women.

Secondly, 'The Dinner Party' was notable for its beautifully executed craftwork throughout its design. As a result, it is a monument not just to the beauty of the patterns, textures and forms and those women who executed the work but to the history of all such craftwork. In some way it sought recognition for all those women who struggled in the homes and executed beautiful craftwork for little financial gain down through the centuries. Thus 'The Dinner Party' sought to redress the cultural snobbery of an art world system which even still relegates such work to the level of the amateur.

Lastly, 'The Dinner Party' installation is good art. It is sensitive, sincere, beautifully and intelligently conceived and executed. It engaged not just the senses but the mind. It challenged the art world of its time

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10 Lippard, Lucy, E.P. Dutton, Get the Message, N.Y. p.110.

thus fundamentally propelling art beyond the pale of its own limited existence. In doing so it provided a precedence whereby women artists could engage at the highest level of important women's issues. Fundamentally 'The Dinner Party' worked because it fulfilled its objective in raising levels of consciousness of women's issues internationally, and levels of confidence among women about their ability to achieve at the highest levels both inside and outside the art world.

Judy Chicago's 'The Dinner Party' prepared the way for other women artists to follow in her footsteps. However to date the response has not been overwhelming. There were of course many reasons for this.

Firstly, as the conceptual movement proceeded artists in general began to realise that broadly speaking the general public were alienated from and uninterested in contemporary art. In fact although significant inroads were made artists were imprisoned within the claustrophobic cultural compound of the art world. Art it seemed was keenly sought after by a limited audience and few else.

Secondly, there was the realisation among women that no matter how successful their art was they were competing with a multitude of chauvanistic propaganda that oozed from the media, the churches, the establishment, etc.

Thirdly, there was the question of access. All artists' work generally within the male dominated art gallery and museum system. As such men have complete control in terms of policy, direction and co-ordination of what is and what is not exhibited. Against this background women working on women's issues found it increasingly difficult to gain access to

exhibit work which was anyway associated with feminism.

Fourthly, there was the isolation felt by women artists working in the main within the home environment. Conditioned by guilt to focus on their domestic responsibilities, these women artists in time spend less and less of their time on their art. The result is that confidence and in time career expectations drop, their isolation from other artists only supports this.

However, some feminist orientated artwork survived that era by capitalising on Judy Chicago's work, notably Miriam Schapiro's handkerchief exchanges of the mid-seventies, the 'Mother Art' group in Los Angeles which still performs in 'laundromats' and similar public domestic situations, the 'British Postal Art Event' and a few other examples were the exception rather than the rule.

Most notable of all the artwork of that era was the British Postal Art Event. In its original form isolated women housewife artists around England communicated together by sending each other art objects derived from 'non-prestigious folk traditions'. These non-prestigious art objects had to have been 'cooked or washed and worn'.<sup>11</sup> The object of the exercise was not simply just to activate a process of correspondence but somehow to create a climate of identity that other women may have recognised. What was significant here surely was the necessity to overcome the conditions of isolation which so often resulted in insecurity and lack of confidence. This work finally culminated in an ICA exhibition in London in 1977 called A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Housewife. Principally the work of Kate Walker, Monica Ross and Sue Richardson, it focused on the stark

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11 Lippard, Lucy, E.P. Dutton, Get the Message, N.Y. p.105



Figure 2 Kate Walker, Monica Ross, Sue Richardson, detail of an installation, *Feministo*, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Housewife', ICA, London, 1977.



reality of the domestic situation where grim livingroom installations presents evidence of the grim routine of the ordinary housewife, i.e. irons on ironingboards, table set for meals and as always obsessive cleanliness.

In more recent times British women artists have continued to voice their opinions on a range of topics related to women's issues. However as before problems arose when they sought to show this work. Central to overcoming this handicap has been the necessity for like-minded female artists to collectively come together and organise their own shows. Perhaps the most recent example of this was the Pandora Exhibition of 1988. In this instance a number of artists chose to organise a woman's art exhibition which explored the theme of Pandora in a number of guises and in doing so expressed opinions on a range of problems and situations affecting women in their ordinary lives.

Gill Calvert was one such artist. Her submission, a single oil painting on canvas, was aptly called 'Women's Estate'. Here she shows us her view of the narrow role that society seems to expect from women, her painting depicts the domestic sphere of cleaning, washing, mothering and baby minding. In the main the colours of the painting are subdued, they reflect a pretty depressing reality for women, a limited existence. Certainly this art is not glorifying women, not presenting the domestic sphere as an ideal, rather it is presenting an image on canvas which demands both thought and analysis. Obviously, some questions do come to mind. Is this how it really is? Why do women accept this situation? Clearly the objective of this work is to get the viewer to question, to seek answers to the problems that women are confronted with in their everyday lives.





Figure 3 Gill Calvert, 'Women's Estate', oil painting, Dimension unknown, 1983.



11 462 9444 522

Gill Calvert herself writes that this type of work is concerned with trying to portray the relative positions of women in society and the sense of guilt which has kept them there throughout time. In Gill Calvert's opinion this sense of guilt or duty has been induced by religion, education and the law.

"My paintings are all concerned with the struggle of women to surmount the ideas and conventions which keep them at a distance from their objectives." 12

Deirdre Shulman was another exhibitor at the Pandora show. Her painting called 'Jessica' revolves around a young girl who within the frame is depicted twice, firstly as a mother smiling feeding her little baby girl and secondly on her wedding day smiling, blissfully happy. Incredulously we wonder is this the reality that most women's lives are touched with or is this merely a misty eyed, unrealistic vision of what life should be like? Clearly we are drawn to wonder is this image fact or fiction? Thankfully however the artist having written about this work fills us in on the details. Jessica is an eighteen year old girl Shulman knows. She explains that this work relates to the quandary that the young girl has found herself in. A product of the dreamy-eyed romantic literature that abounds, Jessica has chosen even at her young age to marry rather than accept a place in drama school in London. Shulman obviously feels a sense of helplessness as this young girl accepts the idyllic glamour vision of wife and motherhood that years of mummies and daddies games provide. Jessica obviously does not see ahead the concrete evils of screaming babies, boredom, despair and loneliness. To her, the path is gilded with misty-eyed love, beautiful weddings, and above all marital bliss. Uniquely however Deirdre Shulman accepts that in the 1980s blame need not rest at

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12 Calvert, Morgan & Mouse, Pandora's Box, Trefoil Books, London, p.82.



Figure 4 Deirdre Shulman, 'Jessica', 1983, pastel on paper, 27 x 20"



the feet of men "Men are not to blame for Jessica's story".

Jessica had been urged by her teachers, her parents and her friends to try drama school yet she herself made her choice. In former times men could surely have been blamed for the lack of choice for women. Thankfully however things have changed. Women now have the freedom at least to choose, this much has been earned for them by years of struggle. The time has come for women to accept the challenges and opportunities that now come their way. What is required is courage and above all confidence. Courage to grasp challenges when they appear and confidence to demand an escape from the traditional roles. In the last analysis, Deirdre Shulman highlights women's greatest weakness, their ability to compromise with their potential.

Penny Woolcock's work included in the same show opens up a Pandora's box of yet another kind. The work itself entitled 'Man Made' explores in a crudely graphic sequence of drawings accompanied by handwritten script, a debased and violent world of sex and brutality. Clearly the emphasis is on women as sex objects and the male myth of women as mother and whore. Obviously these graphic images of rape, etc., represent a deviant underworld of exploitation, through which she seeks to sensitize us to the extremes to which women have and continue to be subjected to. These situations are clearly 'man made'. They came about because throughout history men have always been in a position to pay or through threat of violence demand what they wanted, women it would seem have always been in a position of need or fear. In this context with male sexual desires regarded as sacrosanct, female sexuality becomes even worse than a commodity, a mere toy for the gratification of whim. However nothing in the work suggests that we regard these situations as extreme. The question remains as to whether this is or is not a fair reflection of how women are



Figure 5 Penny Wookcock, details of 'Man Made', pen and ink wash drawings, 1983





treated by men? Hopefully, what we witness in this work is an extreme example of how women have suffered at the hands of men, however perhaps a greater truth emerges from any great examination of the subject. The truth that beneath the myth of male sexuality lies the ingredients for such behaviour. Male sexuality is either nothing more than a myth or nothing less than animal instinct. In any case what Penny Woolcock has unearthed is both a challenge and a cause for real embarrassment among all who would claim to be men.

### CHAPTER III

#### CLASS PROJECT - 'INVESTIGATING A LIVING SPACE'

I began to consider a class project in early December 1988. Initially, I proposed to take my class on an environmental trail outside the school grounds and down to the seashore. Upon discussing my ideas with the resident art teacher however it became apparent that because of recent school regulations I would not be allowed to take the pupils outside the classroom. This restriction meant that I would either have to use the classroom itself as the focus of my project, or structure the project so as to allow the class prepare for it themselves in their own time.

After some thought, I finally decided on the latter of the two options in the belief that in tandem with works done in class the pupils would be motivated sufficiently to undertake a project over a number of weeks as part of their homework.

There would of course be a significant challenge associated with this type of project. In the main however, the challenge would be to motivate the class sufficiently and to challenge them as individuals in terms of their own honesty, integrity and drive. Secondly, there would be the demand and challenge for the students to be more critical of the work produced at home, and finally there would be the very obvious challenge for the pupils of overcoming the demands on their homework time from other subject and other activities.

#### THEME - INVESTIGATING A LIVING SPACE

Initially, I considered adopting the theme of my personal project as the basis for my class project. However, as my own project proceeded I

realised that there were very real technical difficulties associated with drawing figures moving, difficulties which would be too difficult for this group to grasp at this particular stage. Eventually I considered that my only option was to select a space within the home where people generally remained still for quite long periods of time. In the end, I chose to ask the pupils to pick a room within their own home environment that was usually occupied by people and to investigate over a period of weeks the room itself, the people that occupied it and to some extent the activities that went on within the room. The theme I decided upon was INVESTIGATING A LIVING SPACE.

#### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CLASS PROGRAMME

##### Aim:

To enlarge the students' perception of his/her immediate environment.

##### Objectives:

To enhance his/her capacity to discriminate and appraise that environment.

To develop awareness of and encourage experimentation with proportion, background, movement, pictorial depth, composition, memory and form.

To learn and develop new skills in drawing with pencil, brush and pen and ink wash.

To introduce the craft of ceramic relief.

I began to introduce the project on two fronts, firstly within the structure of the class and secondly through a specific homework programme.

Essentially the combination of class and homework programmes set out to provide the structure through which each member of the class would be encouraged to become sensitive to his/her environment and those people

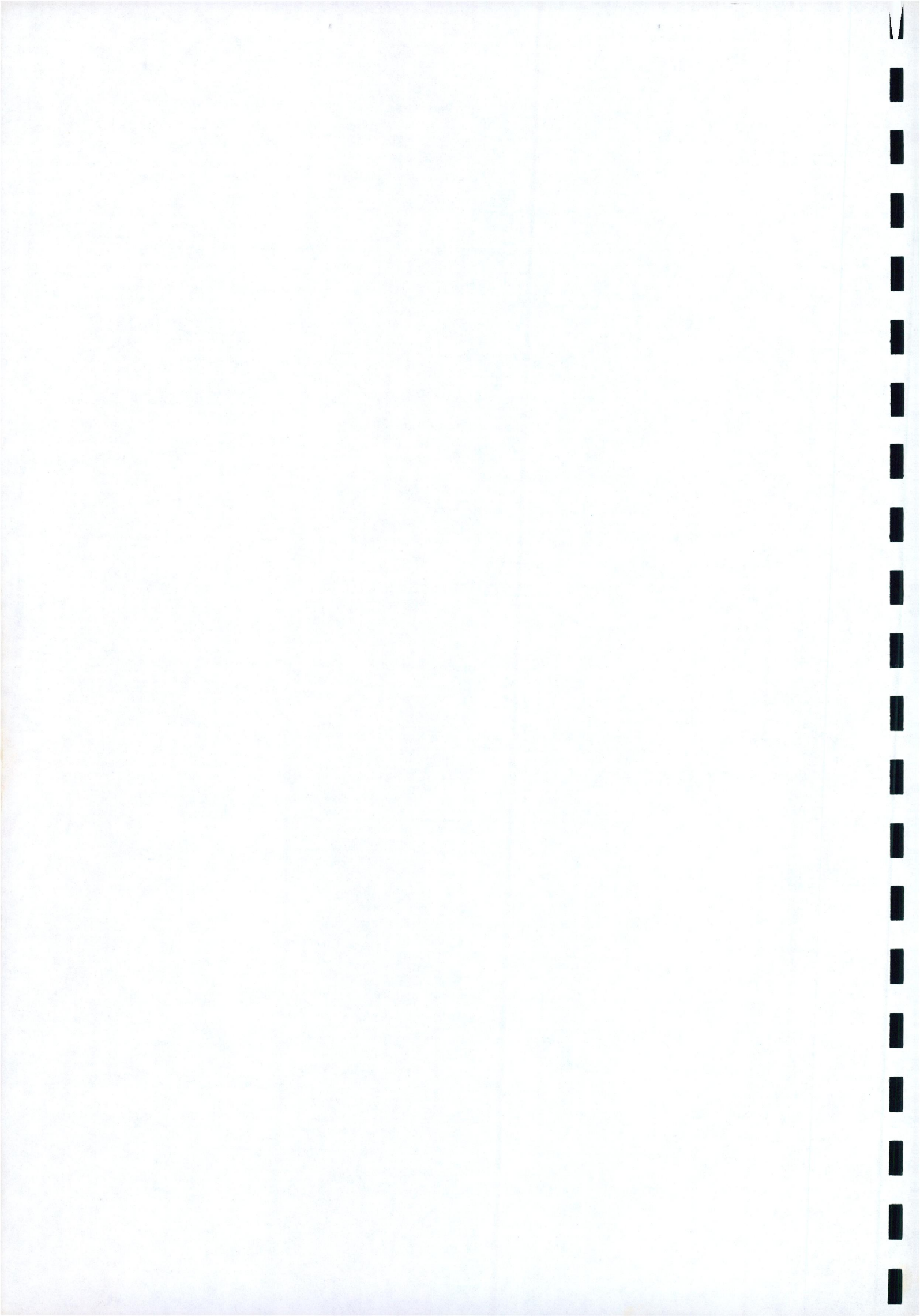




Figure 6 Michelangelo, 'The Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs', marble, 33 1/4 x 35 5/8", 1492.



inhabiting it.

#### HISTORICAL CONTENT OF THE CLASS PROGRAMME

The purpose of this historical introduction was to interest and motivate the class in the project that was to come.

This initial part of the programme was concerned to give a selective historical overview of relief work and to give an insight into the potential of the medium. In order to show this the class were introduced to the early clay relief pictograms of Mesopotamia, to the relief work of Michelangelo and finally to the more contemporary relief work of Robert Morris.

As the class programme progressed they were introduced at intervals to a view of the great Vatican collection of relief work the class were also introduced to the pen and ink wash of Rembrandt, Daumier and others in those classes which were particularly concerned with this form of drawing. Again the emphasis was on the potential of the medium and on motivating the class.

#### CLASS PROGRAMME

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of the project I set out to provide a programme that would stretch over a ten week period.

Initially the project directed the pupils towards a very basic understanding of proportion (Lesson 1), of movement (Lesson 2), and of the effects of background (Lesson 3). In the fourth week the pupils were introduced to pen and ink wash with an emphasis on tone and form. The pen and ink wash continued for well over three weeks until the class had developed a sufficient grasp of the process and seemed quite adept at



Figure 7

Example of pupil's work, Tom Doorley, 20 February 1989, pen and ink wash drawing.





gathering information on groups of figures. The following class was concerned with pictorial composition, with arranging shapes, changing scale, experimenting with picture planes, etc. Central to all this work was the emphasis on the necessity for experimentation. Having finally arrived at a satisfactory compositional arrangement the class were introduced to the craft of ceramic relief. Unfortunately, this became a difficult class chiefly because the main body of clay was too wet to knead, and therefore awkward to model. In the second last class the emphasis was placed on arriving at some form of pictorial depth within the relief. At this point, it became apparent that the class had not gathered enough information to successfully carry out a detailed ceramic relief tile. In the final class of the programme the pupils were asked to use their memory to provide the missing information. Interestingly, this provided a challenge for the class to recall from memory and again to arrange that same information within the picture frame.

#### HOMEWORK PROGRAMME

In tandem with the classroom programme I initiated an ongoing sequence of homework directed chiefly towards looking at, analysing and gathering information on their living rooms and those people that inhabited them.

Initially the class were asked to do a series of memory drawings based on the room. The results of these memory drawings proved conclusively that they were not even aware of their most immediate surroundings. This provided the initial motivation for the project. The first homework task they were given was to gather as much information on their living rooms as possible. All pupils were given a handout which asked them questions initially about very basic things like height and width of the room, about the colours of the walls, ceilings and floors, about the objects in the room, about the form and structure of those objects, about their position



Figure 8 Example of pupil's work, Derek Lyons, 12 February 1989, pen and ink wash drawing.

Figure 9 Example of pupil's work, Conor McMullan, 5 February 1989, pen and ink wash drawing.



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within the room, etc. The emphasis was on getting the pupils to look and study the room and finally to do two studies of the room and its contents from different angles. The following week the class was asked to capture the movement of people as they moved throughout the room. This involved the students using brush and ink in quick gestural strokes. At all times the homework given in this sequence corresponded and followed work done in the classroom that same week. Therefore, with the introduction of pen and ink wash on the third and fourth weeks the class were asked to use their new drawing skills to collect information on people actually living within their living rooms. The emphasis was placed on gathering information on tone and form.

Upon completion of the sequence of homework it became quite obvious that homework did not receive quite the same attention and concentration as work done in class. Unfortunately, the vast majority of drawings executed at home lacked detailed information with the result that relief work could not be executed without further preliminary work.

#### THE RESULTS

This project set out to achieve a number of aims and objectives. The aims were principally to cultivate and enlarge the students' awareness of his/her environment, to explore and discover through the project an awareness of proportion, of background, of movement, tone, pictorial composition and depth, the use of memory and of course the ability to translate into shallow relief form.

To some extent the objectives outlined were achieved. There was evidence to suggest that the pupils did clearly come to terms with the basic elements of movement, tone, form and composition. In terms of the project's aim there is no doubt but that the project was a success.



Figure 10 Example of pupil's work, P. Geoghegan, ceramic tile in relief.

Figure 11 Example of pupil's work, T. Doorley, ceramic tile in relief.

Figure 12 Example of pupil's work, R. White, ceramic tile in relief.

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Clearly through discussion in the class, through their observational drawings and their ability to recall through memory there was sufficient evidence to suggest that their perception of their immediate environment had been enlarged by the project experience. However, I was aware that greater evidence of incisive observation in the drawing stage would have been restricted by the limitations of their drawing skills.

In terms of craft skills the pupils were clearly restricted by both the limited time spent on working in relief and the quality of the clay they were using. However, there is evidence to suggest that not alone did they understand the process but did manage to achieve quite interesting results in terms of the planning of the composition, the manipulation of the material and the achievement of form and depth. As a first attempt at ceramic relief the results were quite interesting.

Perhaps the most pleasing results of the project were the pen and ink wash drawing carried out in the course of the project. In the course of a three week period it became apparent that the pupils had become adept at translating even the most sophisticated information into pen and ink wash. However, I did feel the observational drawing done at home would never reach quite the same standards as those done in class and therefore it would have been more appropriate for the research to have been executed during class time.

#### PRACTICAL LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE CLASS PROJECT

- (a) A 3D design problem should be incorporated into the project with the emphasis of an imaginative conclusion.
- (b) Pen and ink wash would only be used if there is sufficient time.
- (c) Research should always take place within class time but in a selected



environment outside the school where possible.

- (d) A design problem could be incorporated into the project.
- (e) Materials should be fully inspected before use.

## CHAPTER IV

### PERSONAL PROJECT - 'WOMAN WORKING AT HOME'

My personal project began on 6 September 1988, the day Grace Somers and I got married. In essence this represented a turning point in both our lives, a turning point which resulted in new challenges, more responsibility and a re-evaluation of ourselves and our roles within our marriage.

Initially, my mind was engrossed with concepts and theories and how I could integrate those ideas onto a work of art. However, before long my attention was drawn to the fact that the only way I could possibly come to any understanding of our relationship was to look and observe. To watch how we lived together, how we talked, looked, etc., how we interacted together. Through this process of looking and observing I began to notice how much work Grace did around me and for me. Slowly, it began to dawn on me that while I lazed about she was assuming the role of wife, she was doing all the cleaning, all the tidying, all the cooking, etc. At that stage, I chose to look and gather information through drawing on just how much work she actually did. I also thought it appropriate to begin sharing the workload.

In terms of a wider art context I had begun to investigate artists who had dealt with these same issues in a variety of different ways. My interest was drawn particularly to those female artists who sought to project their real life domestic situations to public scrutiny through their art works. I realised almost immediately that there was quite a lot to learn and understand. I became motivated by the fact that this was in one sense the hidden world that most men had chosen to ignore, an area



Figure 13 Personal work, 'Working Woman', pen and ink wash, 1989.



which had been hidden from view for countless centuries. I felt challenged by the hope that not alone would I discover a very great deal about how women saw their respective roles within both the domestic sphere and society at large but discover the practical consequences of these respective roles.

#### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PERSONAL PROJECT

Aim of the personal project - to enhance my perceptive and critical understanding of the world around me.

Objectives of the personal project -

- (a) To discover facts about how I live and what others do for me.
- (b) To develop as a result of this research into a person who genuinely helps and shares responsibility with those around him.
- (c) To combine the information and research to create a ceramic panel.

#### Stage 1: Discovering

Essentially this was the information gathering stage. It involved the drawing and photographing of a housewife undertaking her daily chores. The problem at this stage was to capture something of the workload a woman would undertake during a few hours of housework. As this stage proceeded I began to only concern myself with work done within the ground floor of the house in a two hour period.

#### THEME: A WOMAN WORKING AT HOME

Housework by its very nature is dull and repetitive, it demands an unending commitment to cleaning, tidying, cooking and washing. There is nothing glamorous or romantic about the work, it is soul destroying and monotonous, incredibly there is no tangible product for all this work, save

a transitory shine or a momentarily satisfied belly.

On the day in question I was privileged to watch and record the routine of the housewife. Firstly there was the traditional tidying up of the bedroom area, the folding of the clothes and the making of the bed. The next step was the inevitable cleaning, preparing and cooking. After breakfast there was a further spell of clearing away, washing and wiping.

Suffice to say this type of work continued throughout the day in an unending ritual of cleaning and cooking. Before long there was the cleaning and tidying of the living room, the preparation of lunch, the washing and arranging of the vegetables, the chopping and mincing of the meat and inevitably the cooking, washing up and tidying. Later there was the shopping and the preparation of the final meal of the day.

Obviously what I have recorded is only a mere fraction of all a housewife would do in the course of a normal day's work. What is obvious however is the physical demands the work entails, the regularity and inevitability of the work, the loneliness and isolation associated with such work and endless nature of housework.

#### STAGE 2: COMPOSING

Stage 2 involved the crystalising of all the drawing and photographic information gathered in the course of the day into a composition that would capture and communicate the struggle and boredom of a housewife's life.

Initially I began by photocopying my original drawings and cutting out the figures from each of them. Using these cut-outs I began to experiment with ways of creating an interesting composition. At this stage the images

seemed dull, there was no sense of depth and the figures appeared isolated with no obvious relationship to each other.

DEPTH: This was the problem I set out to deal with first. I began by enlarging some of the photocopied figures and reducing some others. In the end I had copies of various sizes, some large and others quite small. Initially I experimented with these cut-outs in the same picture frame. In doing so I only managed to achieve a very limited sense of depth, however by extending the small figures up the picture plane I began to realise that the farther up the composition the smaller figures were put the greater the figure seemed to recede. When a much bigger figures was then placed in the foreground a real sense of depth seemed to be realised.

BACKGROUND: It seemed quite obvious that these figures should have been put into a context. As it was they appeared to float in a sea of white space. I returned to the drawing gathering information on the various rooms in the flat and the objects, type of space, etc., within the rooms. The astounding thing was that suddenly I was beginning to notice just how little I observed. In fact although I had lived for well over five years within the walls of these same rooms, I had not really been aware of what I was living in. I had looked at the space but in a sense I had not really seen it.

Having gathered all that information I then set about amalgamating them into a background that would be accurate, interesting, would contribute to a sense of depth and would work in terms of composition. In order to succeed I first decided on the basic composition of the room space. When I was satisfied with the results I began to juxtapose and experiment with the objects and figures within the room space. Again the object of the exercise was to provide an interesting and diverse

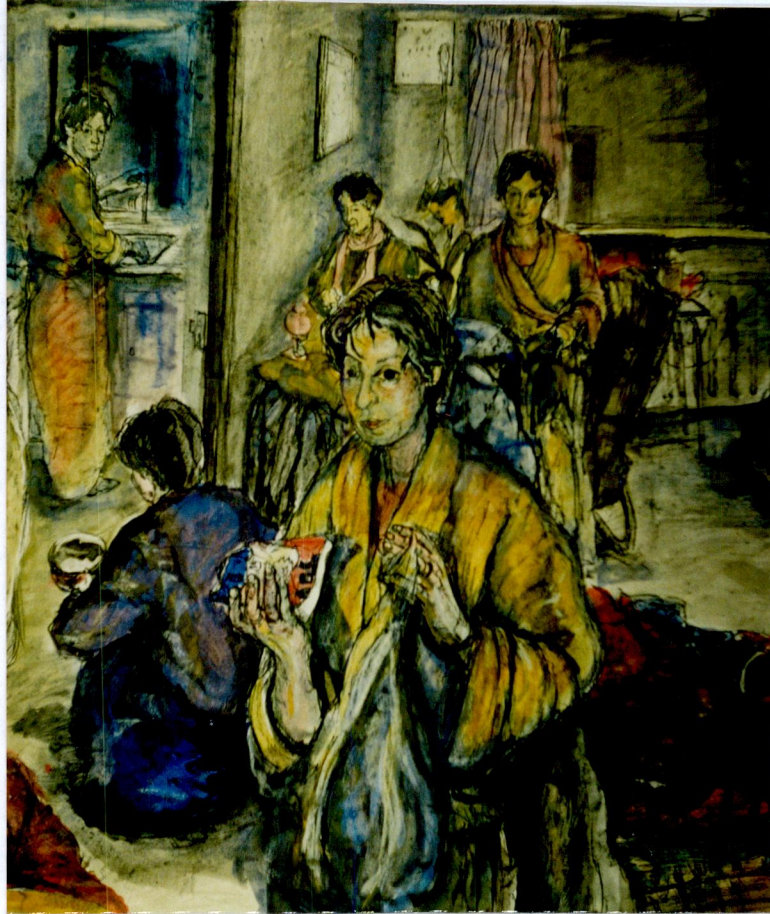
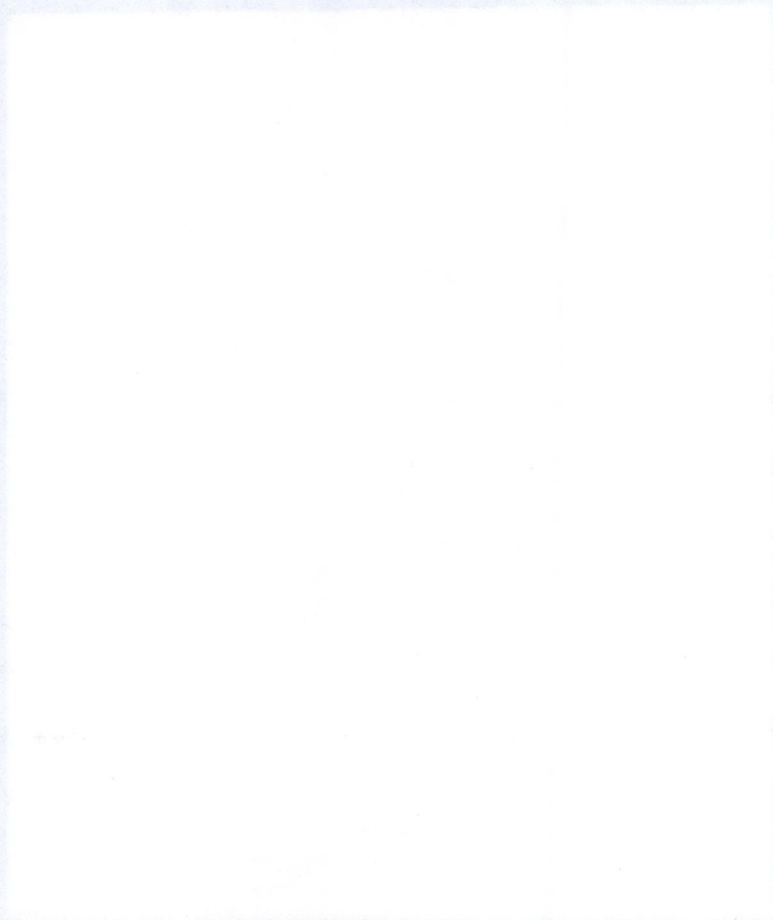


Figure 15 Basic cartoon, pencil drawing, 'A Woman Working at Home', 1989.





composition of figures and objects which extended the theme of a woman working in an environment.

I chose to execute my cartoon in pencil paying particular attention to detail and form. In the back of my mind was the realisation that whatever information I was gathering would have to be transferred into a ceramic relief tile.

### STAGE 3: TRANSFERRING THE COMPOSITION TO CERAMIC TILE

The initial stage of this operation concerned the creation of the basic clay tile. This was achieved by kneading white stoneware clay and then rolling it out through a roller into a panel 1.5 cm in thickness. Given the time limitation I chose to transfer only one third of my original composition into relief.

Having successfully rolled out the clay I began the process of modelling. Immediately I became aware that in order to achieve any real sense of depth I would have to reduce both the scale and mass of the figures significantly as they receded into the background. Therefore while the figures in the foreground appeared impressive in terms of their individual mass and size or scale the background figures and object became little more than scratches in the clay. In order to emphasise this sense of depth I also used the perspective lines of the room. I overlapped the figures and extended figures and objects up the plane of the page.

As the modelling progressed it became obvious that no part of the panel could be modelled without reference to the total composition, all had to be approached in a co-ordinated fashion paying attention at all times to the total effect.

As the modelling was completed the clay panel was let dry out. The next step was to place it in the kiln for firing.

At the time of writing, I am awaiting the result of the firing, the next step will be to glaze it.

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