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**The contemporary glass scene in Ireland:
an in-depth discussion**

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“ The Spirit of place seen through a glass focus, gathers at the threshold of the imagination
(Hiscott, 1983, pg.4)

The contemporary glass scene in Ireland has been growing over the past ten years to an international level. Contemporary glass is commissioned more in Irish State building than ever before. Everything from stain-glass, blown forms, castings and architectural pieces are featuring prominently in not only craft outlets but also in the major trade fairs such as SHowcase. Then unusual and somewhat unfortunate aspect of the contemporary Irish crafts scene is that its designers and craftworkers seem to be hidden away all over the country, so it is surprising the amount of glass being produced. I intend in the course of my thesis to highlight the strength of the Irish glass scene in Ireland.

I have especially selected a number of glass artists working in Ireland as the basis for my thesis: Killian Schurmann, Randalf Repass, Mary Mackey, and the artists of Monté Glass, Dublin. The selection of these individuals was done so with the aim of covering a variety of glass techniques which each of the designers specialise in. These artists are based in locations all over Ireland from Fermanagh to Cork, and most of them are relatively new to the Irish scene.

Because all of these designers which will feature in this thesis have set up individual studios I will be concentrating on how exactly they received support financially and professionally. Through my research I intend to establish the importance of official bodies such as the Office of Public Work, the Crafts Council and the Applied Arts Centre of Dublin - DESIGNyard. I will be interested to know how exactly these organisations and support to contemporary glass artists working in Ireland and what they offer in terms of commissions, display space, publicity and funding, all of which are vital in establishing a business in glass-making.

Finally I will look at the situation of graduate Helen Hancock from Derry, who, after a year out of college is already in the process of setting up a hotshop and studio in Northern Ireland. In discussing Hancock's achievements I will reveal the difficulties in setting up a hotshop as well as the financial, technical and artistic support she has received, as well as her views on life after college.

The first chapter of my thesis will concentrate on Killian Schurmann, a Dublin glass-blower, who is the first independent glass artist to set up a furnace in Ireland. Now an established and well-known craftsman, Killian Schurmann proves how possible it is to not just make a living, but to gain international recognition in being a contemporary glass artist in Ireland.

Killian Schurmann

The general perception of Irish glass consists mainly of an awareness of the tradition of Waterford Crystal and other sparkling cut vessels. However, contemporary hot glass now being made in Ireland is taking the form of something quite different. The days of collecting cut glass as treasured possessions and heirlooms are now over-shadowed by a more modern taste in simpler, fuller shapes of goblets and decanters. This demand for contemporary designs is being addressed by companies such as Jerpoint, a relatively new company who are popular for their modern lines of glass ware, and even Waterford Crystal have simplified their cutting patterns and forms in recent years.

In referring to smoothness of form in glassware, Killian Schurmann is one of the most obvious designers. He first came to attention for his glassware about eight years ago at the 'Design Yard'; one of the most significant commissioning galleries in the Temple Bar area of Dublin. His early work which made his name so well-known features hot blown work, usually executed without assistance, which in itself is quite remarkable. His early pieces included thick heavy goblets, simple in form and subtle in colour, and also extended to vases and bowls, which are to the modern taste very collectable and therefore in demand.

Over the last five years Schurmann has embarked upon a number of projects including public commission work in Dublin, which have made him one of the leading figures in contemporary Irish glass. Unfortunately there are very few people in Ireland making a living out of designing and blowing glass, largely due to the expense of maintaining a furnace. Having built his own furnace, Schurmann is quite conscious of the cost of running one, which can average at £100 per day. It is a brave move to make a career out of a craft that unlike most has so much start-up expenses; however, Schurmann has so far been largely successful in establishing a career for himself.

His artistic ability is not a chance gift however, His father, Werner Schurmann was a sculptor and bronze caster who came to Ireland from Munich after the war and settled in the hills of Rathfarnham where he, along with his wife, the late Austrian sculptor Gerda Freud, set up a home for their children. The artistic atmosphere of their home, and the self-sufficiency of both parents made a great impression upon Schurmann. "I thought everybody's folks worked at home" Killian says. (Downey, 1992, p15). He was always interested in glass and three-dimensional form, helping his mother with enamels as a child, as well as working in stone and marble. Then when Schurmann was thirteen years old his mother died in an accident. It can be said that in that moment his future was formed: "If I was older I might have seen the harder side of working for yourself - but everything was cut off so abruptly that it seemed like the ideal existence" (Ferguson, 1998, p.12)

Like Schurmann himself, the hot shop in which he works is secluded and private. He has no problem whatsoever in working by himself and has learned most of his skills while travelling abroad and working in other glass studios. Described by some journalists as leading 'a nomadic life', (Dowey, 1992, p.15) Schurmann believes that it is this existence which has enabled him to learn so much.

His first experience in working in glass occurred in Germany while he was living with his father in Koblenz, an important glass centre near the East German border. In 1980 he began his studies in a glass school in Frankfurt learning 'lamp work', a form of glass blowing on a very small scale, using complicated laboratory equipment. He then embarked on a series of apprenticeships in Germany, Austria and the U.S., working for many different designers and learning new techniques all the time before eventually settling in Ireland eight years ago:

'Eventually I learned all I needed to know and I knew that if I kept moving around I'd never get any decent work done.' (Ferguson, 1998, p.12).

He has won many awards in Ireland which have helped him become a known



Fig:1 , Blue, free blown, Goblets. By Killian Schurmann.

name in the international arena of glass. Using his lamp work skills, he became apparently one of the first artists in Ireland to create glass jewellery, and also entered the Kamouflage Irish Jewellers exhibition, held on Dawson St, coming away with the top prize. The artists who entered the exhibition had to design jewellery exclusively for the event. Schurmann exhibited pieces made from blown glass, coloured and textured beads. His jewellery also made the international circuit when Romeo Gigli used hair pins designed by him in a Milan catwalk show. People who were already familiar with the heavy-based simplicity of his goblets and decanters saw a very different aspect of his talent through his jewellery designs. Daring necklaces and hat-pins, and delicately ornate hollow glass beads are made with such attention to detail, and not one piece is the same as the next. This is possibly the most appealing element of blown glass-work; nothing can be duplicate exactly due to the nature of the medium. "Glass is hypnotic" Schurmann says, "you are staring at something that is spinning all the time and that you have to finish very quickly".

(McQuillan, 1990, p.2)

Ever changing, Schurmann moved on to more sculptural forms in 1992, when he began to experiment more and more with glass and the free forms which could be made out of it. Examples include his large glass bowls - 'light sources' - which can be filled with water and illuminated in different ways, projecting interesting shapes and movement. Others include his solid forms of glass such as his Ram's Head with clear bulging eyes, and finely chiselled human heads encased inside solid glass. He even poured molten glass onto the courtyard of his home, letting it cool and studying the effects. "I spend a lot of time thinking about using glass in different contexts to create a different atmosphere" he reflects. (Dowey, 1992, p 15).

Schurmann has a mature business head and realises that he has to make a living while experimenting, therefore he is very conscious of organising his time between 'bread and butter' projects such as his goblets and his commission work which is on a large scale, as well as private one-offs. "It's very tempting just to keep doing the same thing because you need to make money" he says, "it's very easy to devalue your work by repeating it". (

Dowey, 1992, p15). The solution which he has decided on is a balance between producing goblets and vases for which there is a steady demand and leaving enough time for new ideas to develop. One of his best commissions is probably the fountain-piece in Dublin Castle which he completed in 1995. Commissioned for the Castle's gardens as the centre-piece, the fountain consists of coiled snakes in dalles de verre, a technique which is also used in his present work, involving slabs of glass imprisoning birds under water, to be made into windows. The windows are both inset and free-standing, and are totally different to what has been working on in the past. "I like to change, I like to work on something that I didn't know how to do until I have mastered it, once you have complete control, you want to do something else". (McQuillan, , p).

In his windows he works wonders with the glass, creating blocks with a magical content of colour and surreal imagery. Shapes of aquatic beauty like jellyfish, deep opaque colours merge with translucent areas of blues and greens of muted frost-coloured sky. They form a collage of colour, textures and shapes built up layer upon layer containing pieces of glass dropped in while the piece is still molten in the kiln. "It took years to get the windows established the way I wanted" he says and it is clear that he is successful in his technique. "The composition, design and process is much more involved than glass-blowing. It all has to be worked out technically before-hand. Described by journalist Ciara Ferguson as "mirrors to the soul" (Ferguson, 1998, p15), the windows are truly unique and take real energy and imagination.

Another project which Schurmann is working on is a series of twelve windows for Kylemore Abbey, commissioned to raise funds for the restoration of the gardens. Schurmann was also a candidate for the 1998 Ford/Sunday Independent Arts Award. Most recently, in September of last year, he was one of a number of artists who exhibited at the "Outdoor Images" exhibition in Meeting House Square, Temple Bar. This consisted of a series of free evenings from dusk until 11pm where an outdoor slide projection gallery in Meeting House Square exhibited a vast array of images, the idea being to provide alternative entertainment through the medium of different creative talents.

“UNFOLDING”, the name of Schurmann’s exhibition was a joint project with singer/composer Denis Roche and took place from 8 -17 September. The function of their piece was ‘to allow the observer a reflection in an altered perspective of occurrences set in stone’.(Corkery, 1998,p.2) - ‘Unfolding is the first step into an area which explores a different type of optical distortion which focuses on the projected image.. This is quite an unusual project compared to the nature of those which he has been working on for the last 18 years. However, it should not be too surprising as Schurmann’s work to date is of change and variety. “ I want to create things that people will look at - not just look at and say that’s nice, but actually stare at because it moves them to another world.”(Downey, 1992, p12).

Randolf Repass

Randolf Repass is one of the few glassblowers in Ireland who has been successful in establishing a thriving business. Based in Derrylin, a small village in Co.Fermanagh, Randolph is actually the only glassblower at the moment in business in the North of Ireland.

I first heard of Randolph through a visit to the Design Yard, the Applied Arts Centre in Temple Bar, Dublin. A number of his glass flowers were on display and I was told of his establishment in the North. I was fascinated to hear that he was a Hare Krishna; and lived as part of the Krishna Community at its headquarters in Geaglim, Derrylin. I had the pleasure of interviewing him, during the recent Showcase Ireland at the R.D.S in Dublin, a trade only show held in January 1999. Randolph was one of eight designers who displayed work as part of the New Faces section. This is for artists showing their work for the first time; and it is a very popular area to be seen in, as people flock to see who and what is the latest and freshest on the Irish design and craft scene. His large wooden backdrop with illuminated display was an unique feature and impressively Showcase his extensive collection of glass. The Crystal Lotus Glass Studio is the company name for Randolph business, which was founded in the spring 1997, "in an effort to establish a sustainable economic means by which the aspiring self-sufficient, God centred community of which we are part may develop within its goal of simple living and high thinking'. (Crystal Lotus Glass Studio, 1997).

Upon settling in Derrylin, about three years ago, Randolph constructed his own furnace; using crystal glass cullet supplied by Cavan Crystal which he melts down to make a selection of wares; from perfume bottles to candlestick holders, light fittings to a huge array of other beautifully blown vessels and ornaments. He incorporates wrought iron into his work, designing and constructing it in his studio along side his glass pieces; this is notable in pieces such as the light fittings and candelabras where the iron is used in the stands and branches to support the glass. The only assistance he gets is from fellow Hare

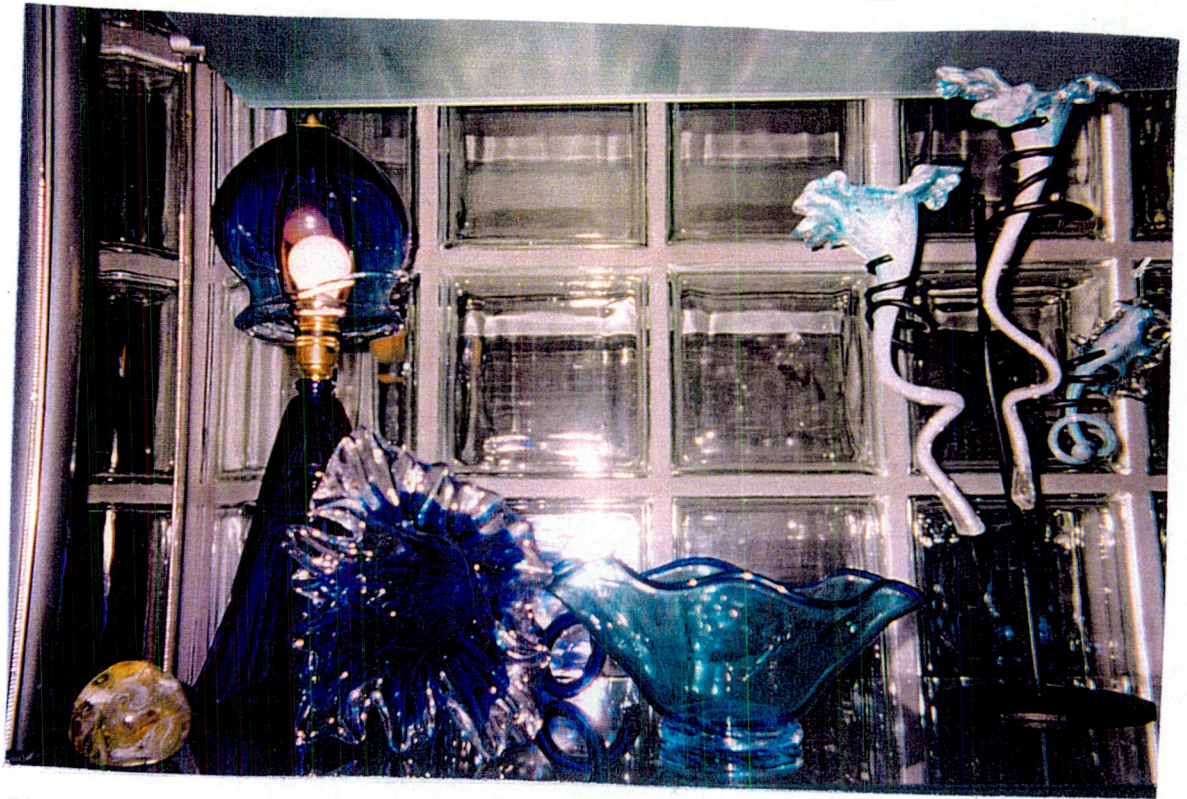


Fig:2 (from left)Blue free blown crystal table light, clear and blue crystal flower ornament, pale blue , free blown bowl, and wrought iron and free form crystal candle bra. By Randolph Repass.

Krishna, Vilinis Linusz, who is originally from Latvia, who helps Randolph in the Hotshop from time to time. Friendly, quiet but very confident Randolph attracted a lot of interest at the Show case exhibition from buyers all over the country, as well as abroad. In between potential customers, Randolph was able to tell me a little about himself, where he learned glassblowing, his emigration from America, his ambition to establish a business in rural Ireland, and how he ended up a member of the Hare Krishna movement in Ireland.

I was at a loss to know what country Randolph Repass Jr (Radhanatha das in Hare), , so I was surprised to discover he is originally from Santa Cruz, California. He went to school in Arcadia in Santa Cruz, then on to the Californian State University in Fullerton, where he did a course in Classical Ceramic Sculpture. It was here that he was introduced to glass, as his sculpture workshop was beside the university hotshop. Randolph was attracted to glass as a medium to use in his mixed media work. He graduated successfully in 1992 with a B.A. in Glass and Sculpture. During his time at college, Randolph was involved in a variety of projects including Gaffering (assisting Gaffers at New Glass Beginnings workshop in California 1989), and Teaching (assistant to Mark Piser at the world renowned school of glass, Pilchuck in Seattle in 1990). After leaving university in 1992, Randolph was fortunate to qualify for a place at Alfred University, New York State, to study in glass sculpture. Alfred University is an extremely prestigious college, in both the academic and artistic fields, attracting some of the best artists from across the country. He described himself as 'extremely dedicated' at the time and it was here that he was to do his post-graduate studies in glass. During this time, Randolph was mixing closely with some high profile glass artists such as American glass blowers Thor Buena and Zesty; and had been offered to work alongside Dale Chihuly (the founder of Pilchuck, and glass guru in his own right). Repass was very fortunate to of been working and socialising with such talented people within the contemporary American glass scene, and as a result influenced him artistically. Alfred University is situated closely to Corning (the American capital of traditional cut glass).

With all this history and talent at his fingertips, as well as his dedication and passion for glass, it's surprising that for the next four years Randolph did not practice his art.

He was confident enough in his skills and desire to work with glass. However, his personal life seemed to be in a state of turmoil. Politics and the environment were becoming important issues to him, as well as the materialism which surrounded him. As a result, he decided to travel for a period of time, attempting to set up portable recycled glass studios along the way. In 1995 he travelled all over the North Coast of America, visited Native American Indian camps, then made his way to India for a few months, all the time experiencing the spiritual ways of local life, a vast contrast to his time in California, which was more of a materialistic way of life. Repass explained that although artistically California may have seemed a perfect place to be as his career in glassblowing was developing well, he felt he was lacking in something personally. I asked him how he got introduced to the Hare Krishna sect, which has come to play a major part of his life and work. Surprisingly it wasn't in India but in Limerick in Ireland in 1995, where he joined the religion and travelled to Belfast, then to Derrylin, Fermanagh. The Krishna commune consists of several, very old converted buildings, which house Randolph's studio and hotshop, an island (where a number of the community's families live), and a picturesque view of Lough Erne, and is open for visits where the glassblowing studio and the gallery can be viewed.

He also commented on the setting up of his hotshop, saying that at the beginning he wasn't sure how he was to go about it. When visiting Cavan Crystal he met the head gaffer, John Mahern; upon which he was handed a blowing pipe and given a go. As a result, Randolph made the necessary contacts to be able to buy cullet crystal, and has done so ever since. He uses both clear crystal with applied colour, and a pure colour crystal which he makes up himself by adding oxides. He is able to produce a wide colour scheme which adds vibrance and excitement to all his works.

Randolph definitely has an American influence to his work. 'It's very hard not to be affected by the American scene.', (Interview, 1999) he says, which has itself a lot of Italian influence such as the famous glassblower, Lino Tagliapietra... But Randolph's forms are quite organic and free formed, like the soft curved edges to his bowls and the flower shapes of his vases and candlestick holders. However, due to the incorporation of wrought

iron for the frame of his candlesticks, wall-lamps, and floor lighting; there is definitely an Irish influence coming through in his work. This combination works well with the glass, as it adds to the organic forms, taking the images of branches and curved roots or stems. I like to use more than one medium in my work, as I was originally trained in mixed media sculpture back in California..(interview 1998).

Some of the other decorative pieces Randolph is producing, are the series of small perfume bottles; each different, all totally unique .Like treasured jewels, he describes these as forms you'd expect to contain some sweet exotic scent, due to their delicate smooth shapes and colourful tones.

Randolf intends to sell his goods in wide spread locations throughout Ireland, and at the moment his wares are available from Cork to Derry, including in Dublin's exclusive Design Yard. However, it is important to him that the craft outlets and galleries that sell his work, are concerned with dealing prominently ,if not exclusively Irish products. The Showcase was an excellent platform to attract a wide selection of collectors ,buyers, and fellow designers, which definitely resulted in further contacts and business. People from all over Ireland, as well as some international buyers were present, amass of which Randolph attracted much interest. Interior designers were especially drawn by his lighting, which would be ideal as a special feature for any exciting building.

When asked about the support he gets in Ireland, Randolph finds Southern Ireland good for his business, due to the growing appreciation for contemporary glass. With events such as Showcase and the Craft Fair (held annually at the R.D.S, Dublin), and the extensive selection of galleries and craft stores through Ireland, the support is substantial and ever increasing. He believes strongly however, that Northern Ireland has a longer way to go. He goes on to say ð. The government in the South seems more responsive to the arts, compared to the North and other than LEDU which support the small business..(interview 1999). Randolph believes that appreciation and help to the independent artist isn't readily available in the North. Hopefully, with the success Randolph and his Crystal Lotus

Glass Studio will improve and support will grow.

Finally, I asked Randolph how he would describe himself and his work. He sees his present work as organic and fluid; and describes himself as a misplaced artist. He titles himself as this because, although he is involved in commercial glass at the moment, he began and still is an expressive sculptural artist and intends to show more of this with future projects. Although he enjoys what he is doing at the moment, he would like to make time for more personal work. However Randolph realises, like Killian Schurmann, that by making a living on the commercial side, he will be able to make time to experiment and sculpt. Although a furnace isn't cheap to run, Randolph explained that it wasn't as expensive as it could be. For instance, by selling a number of pieces from his collection (which he does easily) he can afford to run his furnace for a month. His glass pieces run from easily affordable, to hundreds of pounds in price, depending on size and time executed in the making.

Randolph has certainly proved himself as not only a capable and talented glassblower but as an impressive and competent business man. If 1999 is anything like 1998, with appearances on television, e.g. on the Late Late Show-Dublin 1998, and in magazines such as Select-1998, Northern Ireland House and Homes-1998, and New Faces-Showcase 1999; Randolph Repass has a flourishing year ahead.

Interviewer: Dervla O'Connor, at 'Showcase Ireland' the 23rd International Crafts, Gifts, Fashion and Interiors Fair, at the R.D.S. Dublin- January 19th, 1999.

Mary Mackey

Cork has developed into a potential capital for contemporary stained glass in recent years, home to two of the country's biggest names - Maud Cotter and James Scanlon. So it is a great honour for the county that the Women's International Stained Glass Network held their Fifth International Stained Glass Workshop here in September 1997. The exhibition of nineteen artists in total was held in the Crawford Gallery along with a series of lectures, workshops and illustrated talks and its participants were from all over the world - Iceland, the U.K., France, the U.S.A., Canada, Holland, New Zealand and Japan. The local representative was Mary Mackey, the host and organiser of the event.

Some people's perception of stained glass consists of the tradition in churches, which is extremely different from that created by the women of the International Network. Mary Mackey is a stained-glass artist from Bandon, C.o. Cork and is among a growing number of artists in Ireland who are changing this traditional perception through the contemporary nature of their work. Using the traditional method of stained glass, Mary has used her background in design, proving the endless possibilities of glass relating itself to fine art in an expressive and abstract way. Her work shows "a strong emphasis on colour and the passage of light". (O'Connor, 1999,)

Mackey was drawn by 'the seductive nature of glass' whilst studying at the 'Crawford College of Art and Design' in Cork. Originally Mackey studied painting at the college, working primarily in acrylics and oils. However it was during her P.T.A. course - Principles in Teaching Art - which she completed after her degree, that Mackey became interested in using glass as a medium to paint on.

Surprisingly, Mary originally intended to study science and did not do art at school as a subject, only at home as a hobby. She describes the decision to go to art college as a difficult one, which at the time seemed like an impractical career move compared to that of science. She found Crawford Art College as very strict and that fine art was

taught in a very rigid manner.

At college, Mackey was influenced by organic forms and how they compare and contrast to man-made structures. Still life classes which studied an object's form, tone, line and shape taught Mackey skills of observation which have stayed with her since. She talked about visits to the local convent where she would draw the plants in the old greenhouse. The old plants - large, leafy growths and cactuses reflected in a rundown glasshouse - might not seem very exciting to others. However, Mackey was fully able to appreciate their organic forms set against the man-made structures of the building, the shapes of the shadows cast by the leaves and the reflections in the glass. All this appealed to Mackey and she drew and studied what she saw, translating it in her paintings. When she began to paint on glass, she found that she was able to resolve difficulties which she had encountered whilst executing her abstract paintings. The glass medium, she found, lent a certain depth to her images.

When Mackey realised that it was a career in stained glass which she wished to pursue rather than one in teaching, she approached Maud Cotter, a woman who had gained international fame and renowned for her stained glass and mixed media work. Between 1984 and 1985 Mackey embarked on a six-month apprenticeship with Cotter at her home in Cork, spending three days assisting, and two days pursuing her own work. Cotter even let Mary set up a studio downstairs from her own. As a result, the two women became great friends. Mackey has said that she learned a lot from Cotter by assisting her on large-scale projects which was a style of working which she could not have afforded financially and would not have had the confidence to undertake herself. The apprenticeship meant that Mackey was at hand to assist on joint projects between Cotter and fellow glass artist James Scanlon.

Mackey now works from her home, in Bandon, Co... Cork. For a brief period Mackey was not working in glass. This occurred when she and her husband, psychology lecturer John McCarthy, lived in Kent, England for four years. Mackey confessed that she

loved Ireland and missed the country-side there when she moved away. Unlike Ireland, Kent seemed much wilder :“You could walk for hours and see nothing but fields not even a cottage”.(interview, 1999). She enjoys walking and gets a lot of satisfaction and inspiration from the views around her, such as the soft lines of the horizon, broken only by a tumbled-down wall or some other man-made structure. This is what she draws upon for the lead-lines in her work, horizons which divide colour as well as create form. The leadline is a translation of the painted line in a cartoon which has to be both structurally and visually suitable before she executes the design in glass form paper. She insists that the leadline must work independently, expressing form and shape.

There is a particular procedure which Mackey follows in making a window which has to be thought out and carefully considered. When she begins to work the glass she must know where to make her cut lines, where exactly the lead is going, and subsequently the painting and firing of the glass, which can be done in a series of layers if necessary. It may seem like an extremely restrictive art-form, especially when Mackey was originally a painter, but working in glass has resolved a lot of problems which Mackey encountered in her work. And according to Mackey, ‘breaking up shapes and interposing others to create a whole allows for enormous spontaneity.’“ Unlike pottery, she explained, “ the colours are all ready there in front of you”.(interview 1999). The mixing of colour is a process which she does not have to worry about because the plain glass comes in a whole spectrum of colours and textures, including flashed glass, a two-layer pane which can be sandblasted or acid-etched, allowing one colour to emerge from another, a method which Mackey uses a lot in her work. In asking her whether she ever gets intimidated or frustrated with her work, due to its fragile nature, she answered that whenever she gets angry or frustrated it is when she has to render long, straight lines in large sheets of glass, rather than cutting different shapes from the glass or acid-etching it. Straight lines are extremely difficult as they can easily go wrong and crack in an incorrect way.(interview 1999). However, Mackey never has any waste as every piece of glass gets used at some stage.

The pigment which Mackey uses is largely dark-trace. She says that she does not

use enamels and even avoids them, but thinks that she will try to use them more in the future. However, through the extensive colour range of the glass that she uses, as well as the variation of depth which she achieves in layering by acid-etching and firing, her windows have a wonderful sense of movement and draw the viewers eye through the lead lines drawn across the surface.

This is evident in the fanlight window 'Untitled', a private commissioned for the room of an acupuncturist in Cork. 7" by 15" consists of mainly deep red with hints of cobalt blue. Red on clear flash glass was used to lift the red in areas. The window echoes movement through its curved shapes containing bubble-like patterns in black, outlined by the leadline outlines which surround these river-like forms.

Mackey has been very fortunate in her career, and has among other things, taken trips abroad to far-off places such as Japan. This was a result of an invitation by Maud Cotter in 1993 to the Women's Third International Stain Glass Workshop in Vienna which was being held in September of that year. As a result Mackey was asked to participate in the next exhibition and workshop, which was held in Tokyo in 1995.

Japan acted as a major influence on Mackey's work and it was truly the trip of a lifetime, having the opportunity to experience the country with fellow stain-glass artists. "The richness of images, the complexity of layers of spirituality, culture, history, similarity and difference, and the awareness of the depth of my ignorance of this beautiful and extraordinary place" (Mackey 1997 p.4)

Things came full circle in 1997 when the women's network decided to hold their workshop in Ireland and based the visit to Cork which Mackey participated in both as Artist and host. She believes that it was her illustrated talk while in Tokyo which convinced the other women to hold the exhibition in Ireland. "I included slides of the Irish landscape....when the network met to plan its next meeting it seemed that these images had made an impression". (Mackey, 1997, p.4).

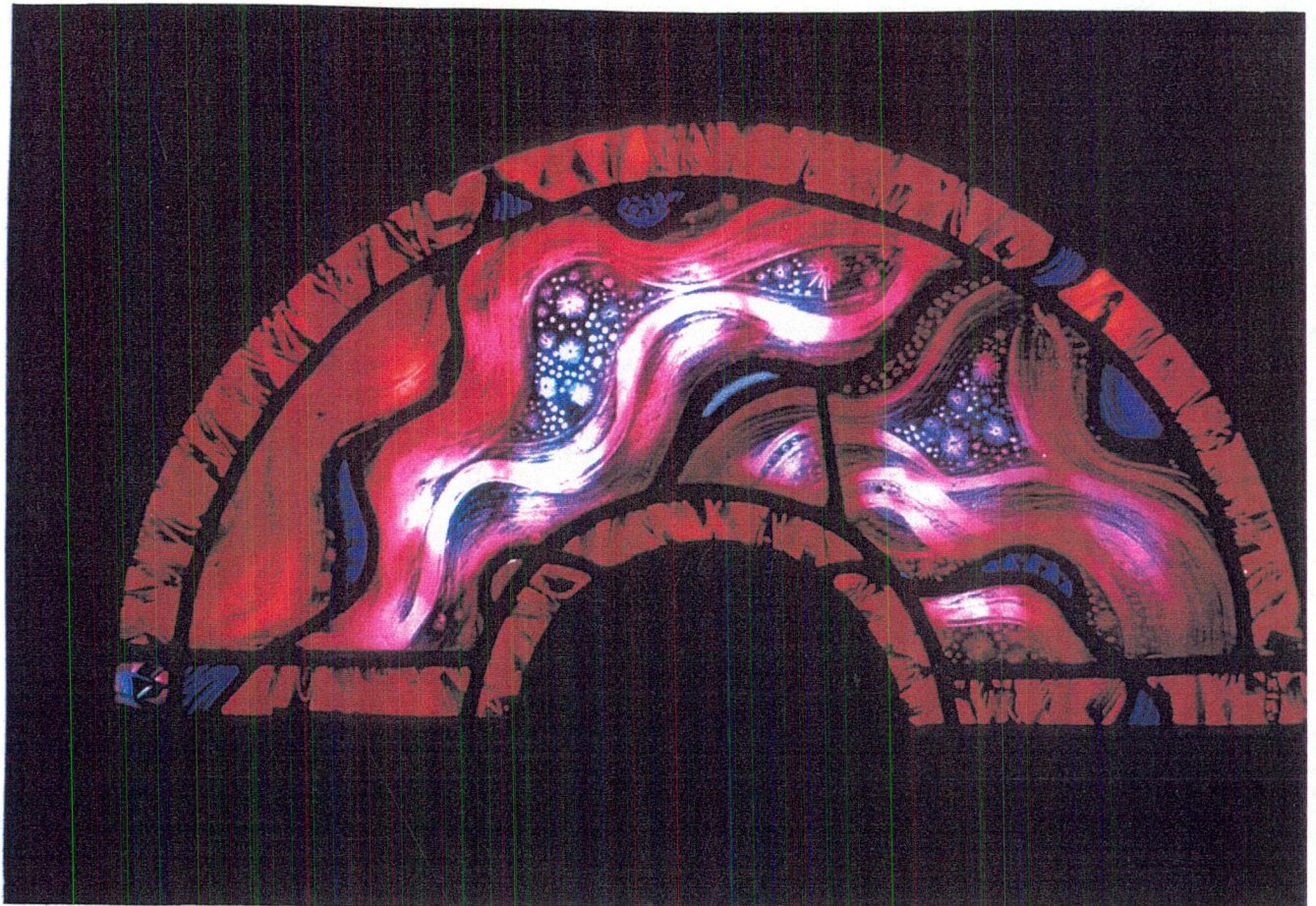


Fig:3 -Untitled Fan Window, Stained Glass, 7 x 15'. Mary Mackey

The exhibition, *Traces in Travel*, was opened in September 1997 at the Municipal Art Gallery, Cork. Work exhibited was that which Mackey designed and executed following her trip to Japan. One of them, *Untitled*, was a panel consisting of etched and painted glass. Its most characteristic feature is the blue fish to the left centre of the piece, reminiscent of those in an oriental garden pool. The fish is submerged in an arrangement of marine blue and green glass with slivers of bright yellow and red breaking through on either side. The format of the panel is rectangular but also has circular forms within the detail, which also includes tadpole-like devices in areas below the fish. The use of copper foil over the leadlines is contrasted with the greens and enhances the flow of the areas of red, as well as the areas of red flash glass incorporated above the fish.

Mackey found the process of hosting a group of artists such as those involved in the Women's International Stain-Glass Network as both revealing and rewarding. "For the host(s) there is a revelation of seeing 'home' through the eyes of a visitor, and therefore deepening an understanding of one's own identity; for the visitor, in opportunity to appreciate more deeply the host's work, through understanding the land and culture from which it springs". (Mackey 1997, p.4).

The most recent work completed by Mackey, just completed a few months ago is installed at the swimming-pool in Mallow, not far from her first Church Commission which she did in 1994 for the church at Ballychough. Unlike most of her work to date, Mackey did not use lead in the series of windows that run along high up on the banks of the walls of the pool. These panels are different because the coloured glass used is laminated on to the piece, not joined the traditional way by using leadlines. The blue wave pattern varies with the use of flash glass in parts which in some areas have been acid-etched to reveal clear glass. Further detail comes in the form of red and yellow minimalist fish forms that float in and out of the rippling wave like tiny jewels. The window comes alive when light shines through it, giving the piece movement; Mackey has described how even in the evening the exterior lights from outside the swimming-pool pick up the detail in

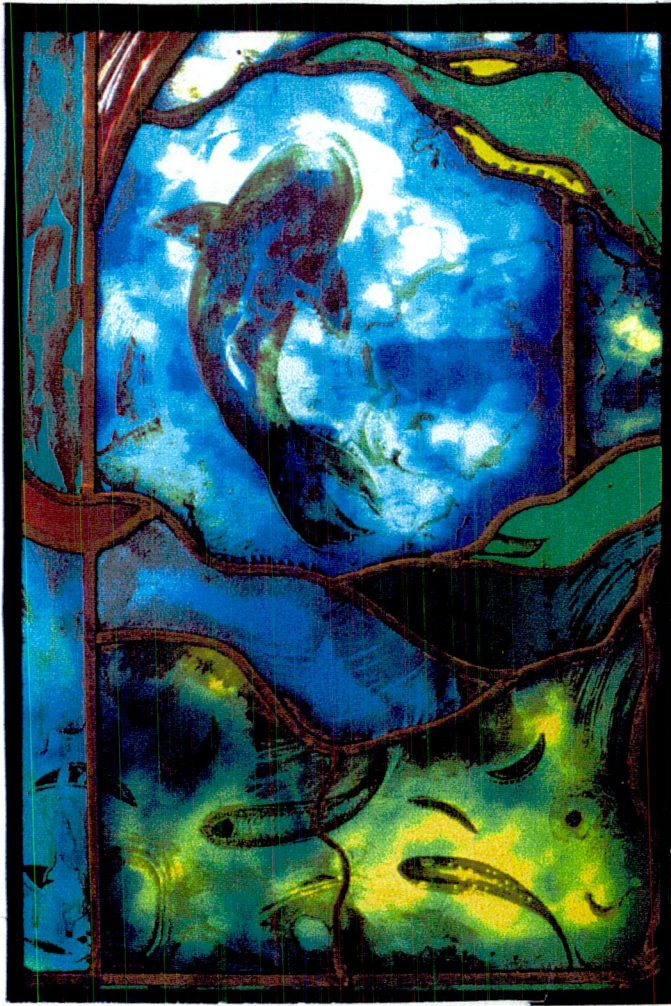


Fig 4: Detail of Fig: 5

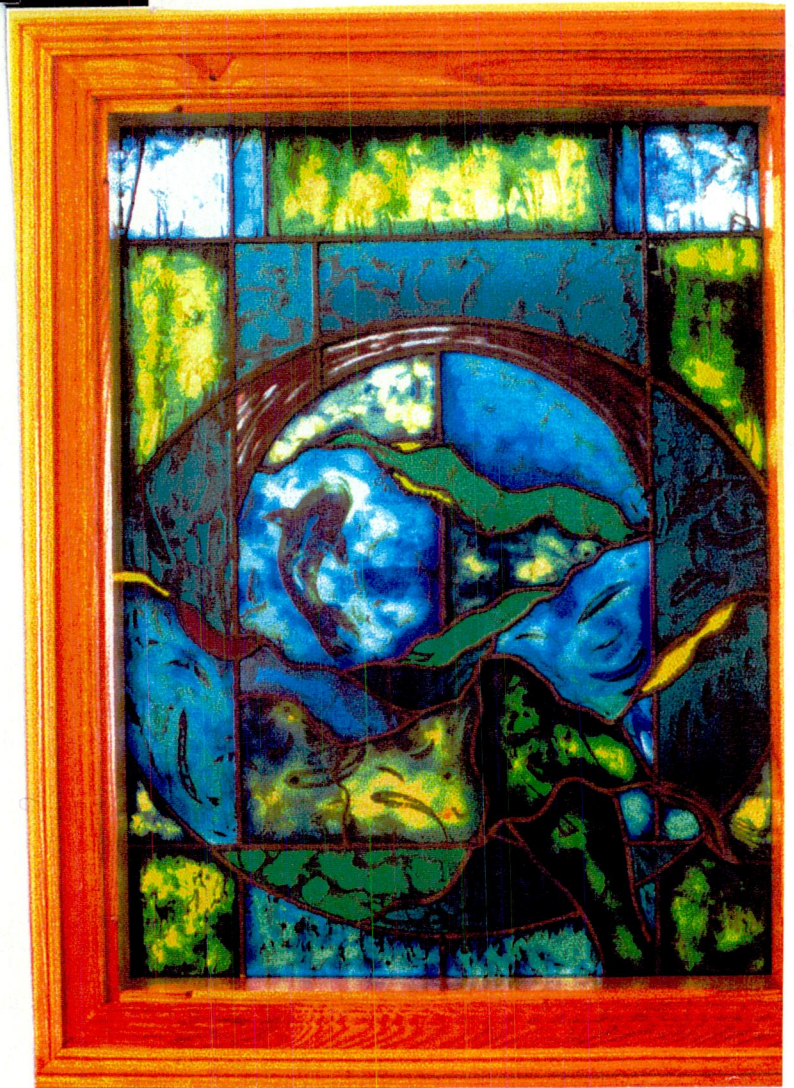


Fig 5: Untitled Window, Stained Glass, 43 x 32, Mary Macke

the window when they illuminate it.

This fresh approach to stain glass, shared by her fellow artists in the INternational Women's Stain Glass Network joins Mackey to the high standard of other glass artists such as Cotter and Scanlon which is setting the scene in Cork for the rest of Ireland.

"Colour, line, texture and contrast" is how Mackey describes her work - "Light and density, layered together and worked on, changed, destroyed and built on again until that piece, glass or painting speaks to and reflects that part of me, is a resolution arrived at - for that moment at least" (Mackey, 1997, p.4).

Interviewer: Dervla O'Connor, at 'Vicar St.Venue', Thomas St. Dublin 8, January 25th 1999.

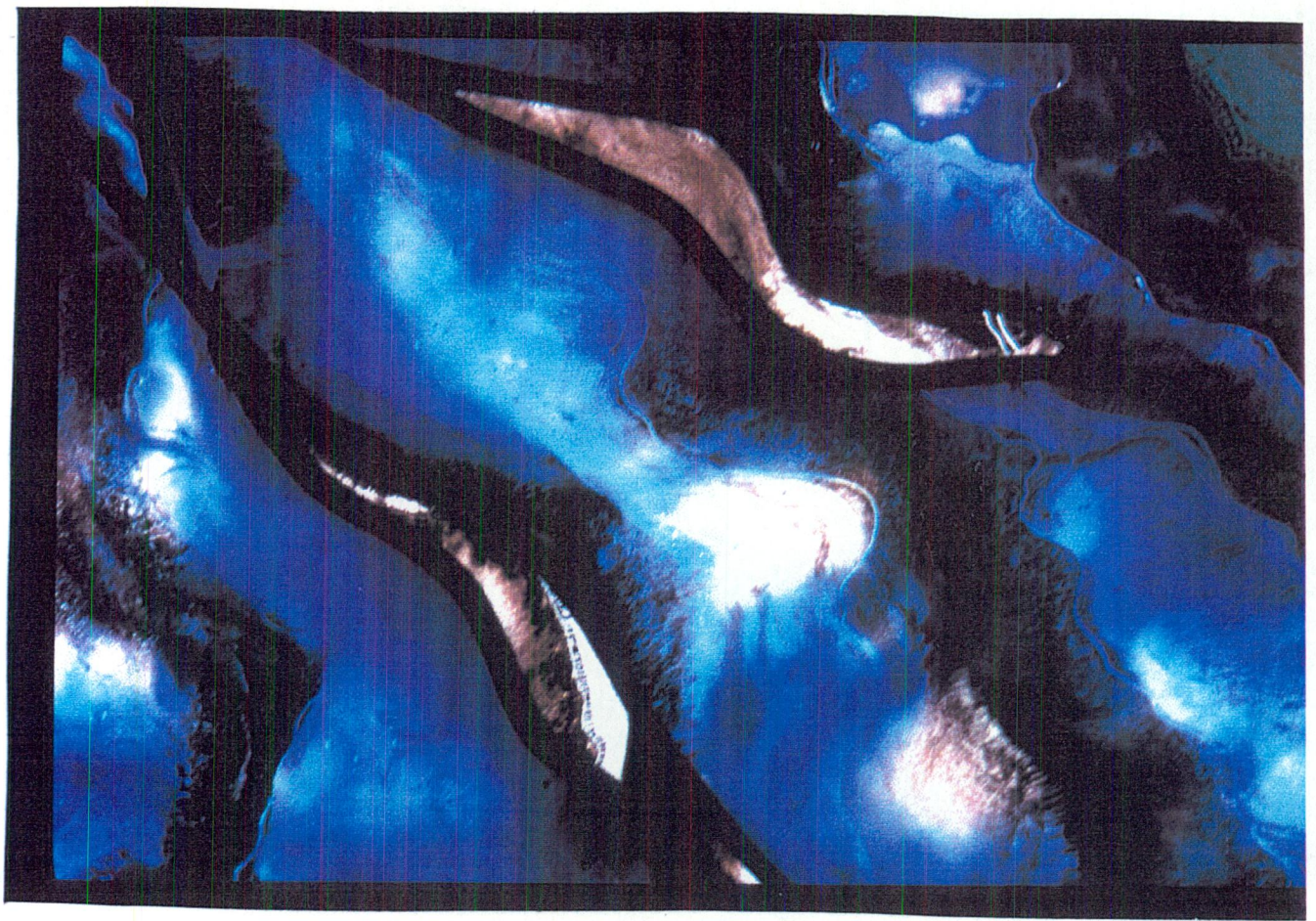


Fig:6: Storm, Detail, Free-Hanging Panel, Stained Glass, 19 x 23.
Example of acid-etched blue flash glass. by Mary Mackey



Fig:7: Mallow Swimming Pool, Cork, laminated Stain Glass Panels, 1998 by Mary Mackey

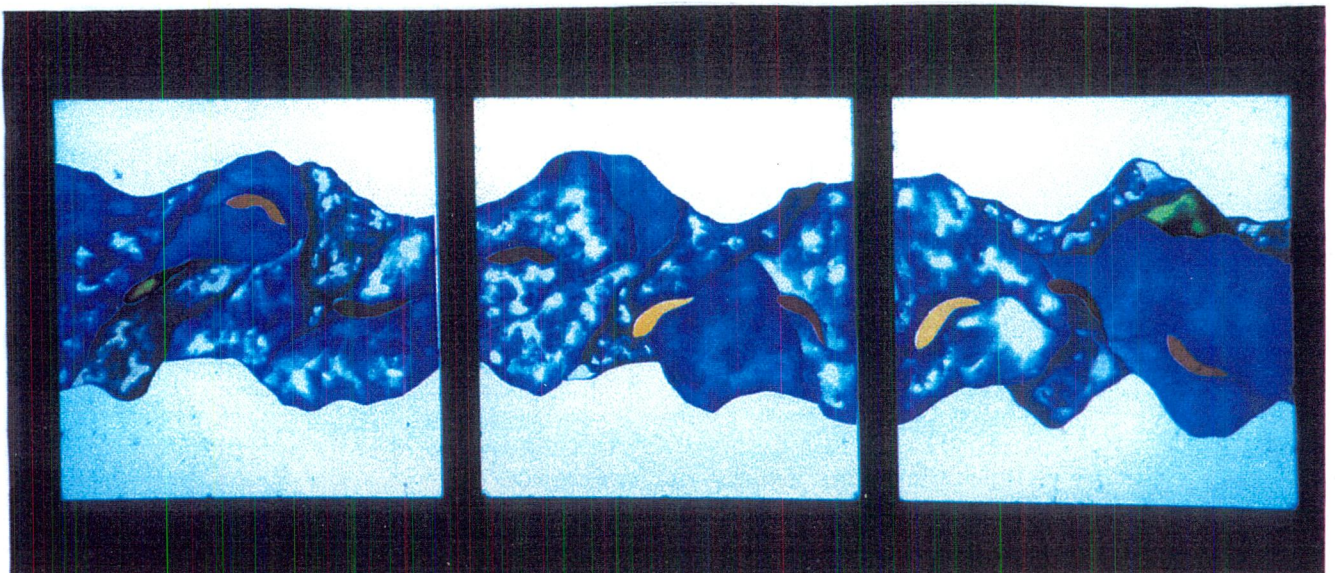


Fig 8: Detail of Fig. 7



Fig:9: View of C.C.O.I. Commissioning Gallery, DESIGNyard, Essex Street, Temple Bar, Dublin.

Official Bodies of Support: The Office of Public Works

It can be quite difficult setting up business on your own as a designer or craftsman so any support offered is invaluable. There is a selection of official bodies such as the Crafts Council of Ireland, the Office of Public Works, and Temple Bar Properties Production in Dublin alone, along with outlets such as Dublin's Design Yard, and a wider selection of businesses which support craft and the applied arts, all that fund, commission, and offer advice. It is organisations such as these that provide the opportunities and locations for designers to meet customers and obtain commissions, thus ensuring successful business.

Most contemporary glass artists rely on commissions to make a living. These can be private buyers on a small scale, multiple orders for stores, or as public works through the Government or other private bodies. All of these provide business and funding and hopefully ensure awareness and praise for the artists, while improving the chance of attracting future custom.

Most works of art commissioned for public places, for example, to complement public and historical buildings, are done so through the Office of Public Works. The O.P.W.'s function stretches from restoration and preservation of Irish monuments and buildings of historical significance, to purchasing and overseeing the art collections of the State. The funding for such projects comes in the main form of the Per Cent For Art Scheme, which dictates that 1% of all construction budgets must be set aside for an artistic feature. A specialised group, the Arts Management group was formed by the O.P.W.'s in 1991. (O.P.W., 1998, p.5). Comprised of experts, the group is available to the Government Departments and to other public bodies for advice on all aspects of art work. The main advantage of a specialised arts management group within the O.P.W.'S is that art can be promoted by the Government and therefore at a national level for the public sector. This furthers the opportunity for commissions of art for public locations. The management



Fig: 10: 'THAT SOUND MAKES SENSE' Stain glass window, Dublin Castle, 1988, Maud Cotter

group of the O.P.W.'S is also aware of the importance of variety in representing different art tastes. It is especially concerned to use artists of Irish nationality - however this does not exclude established artists. They are also concerned in using local artists when furnishing state buildings and acquiring from local galleries - commercial or otherwise. These principles mean that any artists with the most active proposal for a project has a chance of working on a public commission whether they are well-established or not. And of course, art for the public can consist of anything - paintings, prints, drawings, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, and of course, glass.

Commissioned art-work must be suitable for its surroundings whether it be government offices, boardroom, embassies or open spaces. Unlike the Irish Museum of Modern Art, which can seek art of an experimental or diverse nature without worrying about its suitability in a bureaucratic setting. The O.P.W.'S selects work that will enhance the building or location which will also reflect all that is good about Ireland. However, this does not mean that all art should be traditional in nature. A wide selection of all forms of medium projects a suitable modern image of Ireland.

Contemporary glass art can be found in some of the most prominent locations in Ireland, for example Dublin Castle. Commissions such as Maud Cotter's window **That (Sand) Makes Sense** not only promotes contemporary Irish glass but also helps to further establish Irish glass artists in the public domain.

Maud Cotter is originally from Cork. An Irish glass artist who is internationally around. Her beautiful window for Castle hall in Dublin Castle is very well-known. Situated on the north elevation of the building onto Castle Street it forms the pivot between the old castle and the new, it being located at the junction of the 18th century facade of the Guardhouse and the Courtyard extension. The long narrow window using dramatic colour and design is intended to suggest dialogue which springs from the base to the top. Powerful ruby-reds and yellow stems are used in the framework of the panels at the top. The centre length consists of a series of clear blues. The design is quite geometric,

consisting of rectangular panels. However, due to the painterly application of colour and the horizontal slash-like lines down the centre the window also has an organic feel. Various types of lettering are inscribed on the glass, from hieroglyphic-type forms at the deep red panels at the base, ascending to oriental and other exotic forms of ancient script surrounding the central panels. Here branch-like slashes and lines create a tree of language which interacts with the dialogue. This window was commissioned in 1988.

Outside in the Dublin Linn Garden in Dublin Castle other examples of contemporary Irish glass commissioned by the O.P.W.'S are to be found. Killian Schurmann created a glass water feature in 1994 incorporating the serpent motif using clear and blue glass in a Dalles de Verre technique. The pieces appear as a mosaic-type surface using large, uneven pieces of transparent glass, which are laid out in a coil composition.

The large circular lawn which has been used as a helicopter landing pad has also been cleverly decorated. A bricked path runs through the grass, which, if carefully looked at, reveals an interlocking Celtic-inspired design of intertwining snakes. The brick snakes' heads contain individually crafted eyes which were created by Schurmann.

Commissions in Ireland are not just undertaken for public buildings. Offices of State connected to Ireland in other countries such as embassies are also under the jurisdiction of the O.P.W.'S. Corkman James Scullion, another internationally-known glass-worker created a stained glass window entitled 'Dréacht na Fódhla' for the Justus Liscippus Building in Brussels. An extremely impressive example of Irish glass, the structure was a huge undertaking. It consists of numerous leaded squares of glass, and is extremely geometric in design. However the design incorporates waves of colour, mainly inky blues and greens, the density and shimmering colour of which draw the viewer in, while the interesting effect of the hints of bright red and yellow help to carry the eye across the window.

Many of these works are commissioned as part of building projects under the Percent for Art Scheme, And are therefore designed with the exact location in mind, whether

it be for the top of a ceremonial staircase or for a public garden. Commissions such as these are made possible by the Government's policy that "an arts dimension will be incorporated into every Government building project". (O.P.W.,Art in State Buildings1985-1995,Forward,p.5).

The scheme however has drawn some criticism, most notably from a steering group which reported to the Government last year that there was 'room to improve the artistic quality and range of the O.P.W.'S scheme'. Also, the group found that 'local authorities generally lack the expertise or resources to manage maintain and conserve the works of public art for which they are responsible'. (P.A.R.T, 1996, p6. The benefit of outside criticism such as this is that it can only render the scheme more effective and successful in providing Irish citizens with a wider and better-kept selection of public art.

The O.P.W.'S also furthers public awareness of the art collections in our state buildings and public areas by holding annual 'Art of the State' exhibitions and distributing catalogues. Some of the publications issued have specialised in graphic design (1992), portraits (1993), Ulster artists (1995), and Emergency art (1996). An interesting point is that the catalogue for art in State buildings from 1970 - 1985 does not feature any glass piece. Fortunately, however, the most recent catalogue for 1985-1995 prominently features glass pieces, both used in an exterior and interior context. This is encouraging for the contemporary glass scene in Ireland and is also useful as a showcase to highlight the variety of glass artists in Ireland, as well as the scale of work that can be achieved in the glass medium.\

CRAFTS COUNCIL OF IRELAND and CRAFTWORK, Northern Ireland

Another official body which supports the Craft Scene including contemporary glass is the Crafts Council of Ireland - C.C.O.I. It is nearly a year since the Crafts COuncil moved form its former location - the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre - to what has been called the 'epicentre' of creative initiative (DESIGNyard, policy, 1995), the

DESIGNyard in East Essex Street, Temple Bar. The C.C.O.I.'s headquarters and administrative offices have remained in Kilkenny, and the new Crafts Council retail gallery is now on the first floor of the DESIGNyard. In researching information on the Crafts Council and the DESIGNyard I got the impression that there seemed to be conflicting opinions on the roles of each. Is the first floor, which originally was the business area of the DESIGNyard now a totally separate venture, solely the concern of the C.C.O.I., or was the C.C.O.I. simply putting its name to a DESIGNyard venture? Through speaking to the DESIGNyard I am able to confirm that the first floor is indeed a separate Crafts Council venture. Apparently, the space has been franchised to the C.C.O.I. as a retail outlet, and they are now responsible for selecting and displaying work. All work selected for the space is incidentally all Irish and is chosen using a jury system. The retail gallery does not actually look any different from when it was run by the DESIGNyard, as the same variety and high standards still prevail, allowing to act as a satisfactory showcase for Irish designers and makers.

The advantage of joining the Crafts Councils that it is aimed at the designer and its main objective is the economic development of the Irish Crafts Industry. Although not a State agency the C.C.O.I. receives state funding via Forbairt (Ireland's industrial development agency) and the European Social Fund. Like the DESIGNyard it is a non-profit venture. Along with the Northern Ireland craft development agency CRAFTWORKS which is based in 13 Linenhall Street, Belfast, the C.C.O.I. actively promotes and develops craft design in an aesthetic, cultural and economic context.

Both of these crafts council service the public and the designer/maker in a number of ways: (1) Business Service, (2) Information Service, (3) Marketing, (4) Training, (5) Retail Gallery, (6) Exhibition Gallery and (7) the Touring Exhibition Programme. (C.C.O.I., newsletter, 1997, p.2).

Business services which are run by the C.C.O.I. include a number of programmes that are held throughout the country in conjunction with various enterprise boards, offer-

ing courses the include management, business plan preparation, financial advice, and seminars from established makers and designers who have been successful in setting up and running their own business in the craft field.

These regional based courses are part of the 'Outreach' programme which was set up to cater for the crafts people working in rural and more isolated areas of the country. The programme provides short courses which are also valid for not only the start-up stage of business, but also act as refresher courses for those wishing to 'assess their present or future position in the commercial craft market'(C.C.O.I., Outreach, 1998, p4). There are very few business courses that cater for the specific needs of the craft workers. So, through projects such as OUTREACH, people who are talented in design and craft can also become competent in administration and business management that is particularly relevant to them. With courses such as these young artists especially enable themselves to prevent their own exploitation.

The other major programme that has been launched over the last few years is the 'Contemporary Crafts of the Border'. Run jointly by the C.C.O.I. and Craftworks Northern Ireland, the project is supported by the E.U. programme for Peace and Reconciliation, administrated by co.-operation North. The programme offers workshops and seminars, and offers crafts people exposure to new markets and wider contracts. The programme which was put in place for the first time in 1998 also has a gallery in Carlingford, Co.. Louth where crafts people from all over the country, providing an enthusiastic and productive environment and support system. The contemporary Crafts on the Border project highlights contemporary craftworks that work off the beaten track and widen the map to consider all different locations in Ireland where people have studios. One of the companies that is hidden away has still managed to show at 'Top Drawer' in London September 1998 was Curious Glass, a glassware company based in Donegal and specialising in fused plate glass objects, from paperweights to partitions. The Crafts Council also own 'Showcase', the country's largest manufacturer's trade fair which is visited by thousands of national and international buyers every year. And along with the numerous

craft fairs throughout the country, including the annual Christmas fair in the R.D.S. Dublin and the Craftworks Craft Fair in Belfast. The Crafts Council of Ireland provide numerous platforms and showcases for contemporary glass artists who are established or just starting out.

Probably the most important achievement of the C.C.O.I. is their 'Media Store', the visual database of designers. Based in the DESIGNyard, the Media is based on a system developed by the British Crafts Council, "that has been designed, categorised and cross-referenced for specific application to applied art and design". (C.C.O.I., newsletter, 1998 p.1).

The system enables the DESIGNyard, Crafts Council and organisations or individuals approved by the Council to research on this visual database any aspect of Irish craft and design. The database is constantly being updated and features designers who exhibit at Showcase, and a wide selection of designers who work to private or public commission. Any selections made by the Jury are done so with quality and innovation in mind. Fresh submissions of artists are required every three years, when the present list of artists is completely reviewed. This helps to maintain credibility. The Database has as much as a million photographic images stored with five qualities of image ranging from thumbnail to 5th level publishing quality. However, to protect designers, only thumbnail images are initially available, which do not give precise details. These are then printed for the public in Media Store. Larger and more prominent images are only allowed to be viewed by the public with the express permission of the designer. Information such as addresses and studio locations also can only be given with the permission of the designer also. Therefore the system not only protects the artists but also provides both visual and factual information for the public.

Along with the monthly bulletins, newsletters, exhibitions and sponsorship, the Crafts Councils enable artists both in the north and south of the Country to come together professionally and artistically, generating jobs and careers within the craft business.

“Designyard is a centre of excellence in the field of contemporary applied arts. It exhibits and sells the work of selected designers and makers, with emphasis on quality in terms of design, innovation and manufacturing”. (DESIGNyard, Policy, 1995).

This is a quotation from an original policy laid out by the DESIGNyard in 1995. Four years have passed and the Applied Arts Centre of Dublin is still a centre of innovation, continuing to house a selection of the best jewellery, interior ware and furniture design Ireland has to offer. It also has been a strong supporter of contemporary Irish glass, frequently selling the work of Killian Schurmann, Eva Warzyniak the sandcaster, Maura Whelan the kiln-worker, Deirdre Rogers and more recently Randalf Repass. Production glass from firms such as Jerpoint and Glassworks in Wexford are also often on sale at DESIGNyard.

DESIGNyard also acts as a showcase for new design as well as more established artists working in Ireland. The standard is high and the quality of work sold is next to none. which gives designers and makers throughout the country a level of finish to strive for. As a non-profit organisation, the DESIGNyard tries to competitively price the goods that they sell.

Based at 12 Essex Street in Temple Bar, the DESIGNyard is housed in a ‘sensitive refurbishment’ (DESIGNyard, Building, 1995), of a late Victorian warehouse. The conscious use of Irish designers in the architecture of the building further promotes Irish talent. For example, on the ground floor of the building, there are four monumental wrought-iron gates, which were designed by sculptor Kathy Prendergast. Each pair of gates – 4 in total – are based on maps of major cities of the Western World – New York, Vienna, Madrid and of course, Dublin. The Poddle River runs beneath the foundations of the building and this is traced by a mosaic river which flows over the ground floor. The mosaic was designed and executed by Sarah Daly. Other features included glass display cases which take up the whole first floor Jewellery Gallery. The second floor, originally the commissioning gallery of the DESIGNyard, has recently been franchised out to the Crafts Council of Ireland, which continues to display as wide a selection of Irish designed and

manufactured contemporary wares as before.

The third floor, originally designed as a seminar room, now acts as the DESIGNyard's commissioning gallery. Launched in May 1998, the gallery can be visited by appointment only, and is a resource centre which through the project management service offered, claims to 'take all the anxiety out of the process of commissioning'.

The DESIGNyard projects manager is Kerry McCall, and the projects co-ordinator is Ann Dack, who are both in charge of the new commissioning gallery. The aim is to 'aggressively market and promote Irish design and the Irish designer in the corporate, architectural and domestic markets'. (DESIGNyard, Press release, 1998).

Through their access to the Crafts Council Media Store, as well as the DESIGNyard's own collection of files customers and potential commissioners can spend time in comfort researching the extensive database of designers and craft workers. This is excellent for contemporary glass artists, especially those who deal mainly in commission and private works, as this means that they are still able to promote their work for potential business. Because the Designyard has such a prestigious name as an applied arts centre, as it concentrates primarily on Irish products. The significance of this for the designer is that the credibility of the Centre will reflect on the artists and also the contemporary glass scene. Due to the constant display of contemporary glass work on display in the DESIGNyard, people are becoming ever more aware of the variety and amount of Irish glass workers and therefore will consider the medium of glass more when commissioning a piece.

Through the DESIGNyard, I was able to get in contact with Mary Mackey and also find out more about Randalf Repass. Killian Schurmann also gained a lot of publicity through the constant selling of this goblets in the DESIGNyard. With the recent alliance of the Centre with the C.C.O.I., the DESIGNyard is invaluable to the contemporary glass scene as a promoter, showcase, retailer, and link between the maker and the buyer.

GUINNESS GALLERY

Most art is supported by patronage, and the contemporary glass scene is no exception. That is why it is important for galleries, exhibitions and craft retail outlets to see the potential of Irish glass, especially studio glass, as an attractive and unique art form. Fortunately Ireland is home to many outlets from Donegal to Cork that sell glass and in turn promote their local craft designers and makers. There are also a growing number of private collectors commissioning and buying glass not just from the retailers, but also directly from the maker.

Elizabeth Guinness of the Guinness Gallery in Foxrock Village is one of the country's most avid collectors and supporters of the Irish contemporary glass movement. The gallery has been open more than 5 years and deals in painting, sculpture, studio ceramics, studio glass and other forms of giftware. Tucked away in a small southern suburb of Dublin, the gallery has attracted much publicity for its display of studio glass alone. Originally an art dealer, Guinness became interested in glass some 18 years ago when she purchased an outstanding Orrefors plate. This led to her reading all she could about contemporary glass and subsequently travelling and collecting examples of glass whenever she could get the opportunity.

The Guinness gallery has held a number of exhibitions, one of the most prominent being 'Artists in Glass and Eyas', opened by Michael Robinson, past curator of the Applied Art Section at the Ulster Museum. The exhibition consisted of a joint show of some twenty Irish and British glass-makers selected for diversity of artistry and technique, as well as work by Eyas, a group of constructed form artists. Glass makers exhibited at the show included Róisín de Buitléar and Jim Griffith, both lecturers at the Glass Department in N.C.A.D., Killian Schurmann, David Sisk, Salah Kawala, an Egyptian-born glass-maker based in Clanbrassil Street, and many other British artists who had featured in the 1993 Britain-based touring exhibition 'Contemporary British glass'.

Guinness likes to exhibit as much prestigious studio glass as she can but she is also interested in the work of newcomers. Her gallery is surprisingly small for the amount of crafts and fine art that she sells, however it is satisfying to see such a prominent selection of glass on offer at competitive rates. "Glass is desperately undervalued" she says "You can buy a seriously good piece by a top name for £250.00 to £1000.00 - an awful lot less than for a painting of similar standard".

The more support of individuals such as Elizabeth Guinness the faster and stronger that appreciation of Irish glass will propagate itself. The public and corporate bodies were slow to realise the potential of glass. One single exception to this backward attitude has been the that taken by the Ulster Museum in Belfast. Led by the afore-mentioned Michael Robinson (who retired a number of years ago) the Museum has now an outstanding collection of contemporary European glass.

Exhibiting of work is of course to the artist as well as the public, and one of the most important elements of exhibitions is the actual venue. It is something to be proud of that a venue as prestigious as the Ulster Museum has a permanent collection of contemporary glass. However, smaller, less high-profile galleries have to exhibit temporary exhibitions in a serious and sophisticated manner.

The Solomon Gallery in the Powerscourt Townhouse in the Centre of Dublin is a well-known venue for exhibiting fine art and has hosted a number of prestigious events and shows. These include the exhibition of Dale Chihuly's work in 1995 and in February 1997 an exhibition of Irish glass which featured the work of ten artists. It is refreshing to see another great venue exhibiting good work on its premises. The Solomon Gallery, under the direction of Suzanne Mc Dougal, held a show by N.C.A.D. glass students who won the Waterford Crystal Art and Design in Crystal Competition in 1993. Glass exhibited included work by Elaine Griffith, Niamh Lawlor, Deirdre Rogers and Ruth Shortt - all

female glass artists who since leaving college have continued to work in glass in a professional context.

'The Dance of Light', was a show of stained glass held in the Spiddal Craft Centre, Galway, in 1997. This exhibition featured a staggering 26 artists with guest speaker Nicola Gordon-Bowe. Artists included Mary Mackey, Donna Coogan, James Scanlon - all Cork-based, glass-blower Elaine Moore, Niamh Lawlor - (who is to hold an exhibition of her stained glass work in Cork in February 1999), and an array of other designers and makers. Group exhibitions are invaluable as the show increases the selection and variety of glass artists from all around the country, especially rural-based individuals that may not be as well-known as some. Compared to the English glass scene, that of Ireland is quite small, however it is competitive and is becoming more and more prominent to the public eye.

We have already discussed how public commissions especially have increased dramatically over the last ten years. The industry here is changing too. Waterford have introduced new, contemporary lines of table and glassware designed by John Rocha including 'Signature' 'Aegis' 'Geo' and 'Imprint' which are "aimed at 25-35 year olds..." who want, "presigious but miminliet approach". (Flynn, 1997, P.6). Tipperary Crystal, have similar ideas and are currently designing ranges exclusively for Tiffany's of New York. Breakthroughs such as these introduce contemporary crystal as an equally valuable, beautiful and highly skilled artform, as that of the traditional art glass ware that Ireland has formerly been famous for.

Further down the industrial scene and veering toward the contemporary market is Jerpoint Glass Studios in Stoneyford, Co.. Kilkenny. This factory is making pure blown glass much different to that of Waterford Crystal. Founded by Keith leadbetter who trained in the famous Orrefors factory in Sweden during the late 60s, Jerpoint Glass has a fresh modern fee, but unlike Waterford is only available in large retail outlets such as Brown Thomas. However, Jerpoint can usually be found in the DESIGNyard.

It is important to incorporate modern glass into the mainstream to enable the general public to appreciate fully the modern qualities of its forms. By doing so the appreciation and value of exhibition pieces will increase to a level which is truly deserved, where it is accepted as a true form of art

MONTÉ GLASS

When a student graduates from college usually after 4 years of study, it can be very difficult and even quite scary when considering what to do next. Questions most often asked are "Am I qualified enough to make a career for myself in the commercial world?" "Do I have the experience to start up a business by myself?" "Will I have enough contacts and facilities to be successful?" "Where do I actually begin?"

The idea of starting up a business or studio just after graduating is quite daunting, however it is possible. as we can see from the example shown by Vicki Rothschild, Paula Boyle, and Julie- Ann Foley who formed their studio, ' Monté Glass' in December 1998. The second success story , or rather potential success story is that of Helen Hancock, a Derry based based artist, who, like the Monté Glass workers, is a graduate from N.C.A.D. and is in the process of setting up her own hotshop and studio in Derry. Both projects are ambitious, and if they are successful they could earn their owners a place among some of the leading contemporary glass artists in Ireland.

'Monté Glass' is a glass studio based in inner-city Dublin, whose aim is to produce top quality pieces for both the private and corporate market. Their main priority is 'to create a collection of work that is unique in every aspect and reflects the individual taste of our consumers.' (Monté Glass, 1998, post card). The designers behind Monté Glass, Rothschild and Boyle, from Armagh and Dublin respectively, have recently been joined by

Fig:11: 'MELT' exhibition Dec. 1998 at Dalkey Heritage Centre, Dalkey Castle, Dalkey, Ireland



fellow NCAD graduate Julie-Ann Kelly from Kerry.

Rothschild concentrated on making blown vessels for her degree show, which were based around botanical life - cacti to be precise. Her novel pieces fetched between £75 to £95 at her Degree Show in 1997.

Paula Boyle prefers casting and also uses kiln work, pate de verre and mixed media to create vessels from copper concentrate and glass. Her glass work is quite sculptural, incorporating copper when the glass is still molten, which results in a deep-red reaction of the metal. Like the rest of the Monté workers Boyle has no problem in working with other media and techniques.

As part of her thesis research in NCAD, which was concerned with mosaic, Boyle worked part-time for Laura O'Hagan of 'The Tile Works', a mosaic company based on the South Circular Road, where she was involved in assisting on a huge commissioned mosaic floor.

Julie-Ann Foley's work takes the form of flat architectural glass involving kiln work and enamelling, but she also enjoys casting which she used for her Degree Show. Her work is centred around the human form which she translates through the medium of glass

The three artists stayed together after N.C.A.D and attended Dudley College's International Glass Centre in the West Midlands, England. The one year course offers the opportunity to learn techniques in hot glass from blowing and casting to millefiori and colour work, kiln glass including fusing, slumping and pate de verre, stained glass including mosaics, cold glass decoration including sand-blasting covering, cutting and polishing. Most important of all, they were taught glass technology which covered furnace building, glass compatibility and the science behind glass-making. It was through meeting Denise Hunt and Malcolm Andrews, two tutors at Dudley, at the Design Week in Islington, that

both women found out about the International Glass Centre, The Design Week is held for all the Design and Art colleges in Britain and Ireland. Student work is selected to represent each college. It is a fantastic opportunity to research other colleges and compare standards, which at the exhibition are generally very high.

During the summer, the three graduates exhibited as part of the Kilkenny Arts Week organised by the C.C.O.I.'s then exhibition manager Rhoda McManus. Then, in September, all three moved to Dudley for one year to attend the Glass Centre course. The difference between this course and the skills that they learned at NCAD was that the course in Dudley was almost totally theoretical rather than practical, teaching the theory behind glass, how glass is made, the chemistry of science, kiln firing and furnace building. Most helpful was a module where they learned to make a batch of glass from scratch. Paula says that although NCAD was invaluable for getting a background in design and creativity Dudley was excellent for its 'hands-on-making' way of learning. Skills were all taught stage-by-stage. Foley found the glass-blowing course extremely helpful. She had not done much glass-blowing in NCAD due to her concentrating on plate glass, but Dudley showed her the precise techniques which have given her a lot more confidence and skill than she had previously.

Boyle explains that it was definitely an advantage having a degree in design behind them. Some people whom she has met are very capable glass-makers but do not have an education in design which inevitably brings their work down. Dudley was an opportunity to further their education in glass techniques by trying things that they had not had the opportunity to try before, as well as to produce a lot of glass. The centre has excellent facilities - three furnaces, six glory holes, two annealing ovens and six benches. The cold facilities area is considered one of the best in Europe. Having finished the course, the students then have to exhibit at Dudley College's annual contemporary glass exhibition. It was at Dudley that the three met fellow glass artist Eleanor Lowry from London Bridge workshop, and Eleanor Long from Wiltshire who also were attending the course. They are all still in contact and have begun to exhibit together so far in Ireland with plans to show

in England under the group name of 'MELT.'

I asked the group how they got their business experience and studio space organised. Through Rothschild's father, who had space in his steelworks company, they established Monté Glass. Rothschild herself wrote to Emer Ferran, head of business development for C.C.O.I. for advice on setting up a business as well as applying for grants. Ferran informed Rothschild of a course in September 1997, running in Arthouse in Temple Bar in conjunction with the C.C.O.I. and Dublin Enterprise Board. Unlike Ledo in Northern Ireland and other starting-up business courses, this was a craft-based intense 8-week course concentrating on the craft and design industry. The course dealt with management issues, funding, promotion, telesales and presentation, providing recent graduates with seminars by professional businessmen and established craftspeople to advise and lecture, drawing from their own experiences. The course only costs £60, but even this can be funded by local authorities such as that of the Dublin Inner-city Enterprise Board, who assisted Rothschild.

Now that Monté Studios are established I asked the group how they manage to find facilities and equipment for the making of their pieces, the process of which can be very expensive. Boyle, who is interested in hot work and blowing, does not have a furnace of her own but can hire a hotshop to blow or make a frit, shards or castings. Ken Kelly in GLASSWORKS, Wicklow rents his furnace out for £140 a day and uses crystal.

Rothschild does most of her work in England, as this is where she engraves and finishes her work. However, acid dipping can be done in Dublin Crystal, and she sometimes uses the sandblasters at Campbell machinery, Dublin in executing kiln work, Rothschild had her own kiln custom-built while studying at Dudley. The cost of making it was about £1000 and is a top loader. Kilns can also be rented out by the Firestation Studios near Connolly Station for £30 a week (additional charges for each firing are from £10). The Firestation is convenient for stain glass designers such as Peter Young whose studios are only a few streets down at Foley Street, Dublin 1. A lot of equipment can be

bought second-hand and there are huge trade fairs in Germany which deal specifically with the demand for used equipment. However, Rothschild and Boyle prefer to wait and hire facilities as work builds up.

Their first exhibition under the Monté Studio name occurred in December 1998. Joined by Esther Adesigbin, and Eleanor Long, the joint show entitled 'MELT: an exhibition of contemporary glass' was held in the grand surroundings of Dalkey Castle in the heritage centre. This was the first time that the castle had held a glass exhibition which worked out at being quite inexpensive. Each of the 5 designers gave £150 and this paid for the venue (a steal at £150), the wooden and glass custom-made plinths, lighting and electrics for the displays, professionally printed display cards and posters and invitations. The night was a great success and launched Monté glass studios as an established and impressive company. The exhibition attracted a lot of business including interest from Elizabeth Guinness of the Guinness gallery Foxrock. Unfortunately she could not acquire as much work as she had hoped due the amount of work that sold the first night!

"A year after graduating makes a big difference," explained Rothschild. "It's all to do with how you present yourself" Confidence and business-sense are obvious traits that the designers have developed fast since leaving NCAD almost two years ago. "People make beautiful work and produce excellent glass every year at NCAD - its just a matter of carrying it on" (Rothschild, interview, 1999).

The most invaluable assistance came from the Crafts Council in England which they feel is more efficient than that of Ireland. The British Crafts Council has a library full of records and information on artists, colleges, courses and everything you need to know about the craft you practice. The Crafts Council Magazine is published bi-monthly and covers exhibitions, galleries and up-to-date information on what's going on and who's doing it. The glass scene is a lot bigger there than here in Ireland, although Ireland has more potential to be competitive. However, Rothschild claims that here " people always just leave it to someone else" (Rothschild, interview, 1999), which is why nothing gets

done as fast. there are also very few courses for students who graduate in glass and want to continue. The facilities are just not available. There is an excellent course available in Kilkenny city however that runs for a year and offers individual studio space along with the use of a kiln, as well as experience in putting together a business plan, which eventually leads to a chance of exhibiting at Showcase.

The main problems that glass designers have is saying yes to too much. They tell me that they are booked up until Christmas with a heavy workload and are careful in what commissions they accept. They have to be professional and each of them has a portfolio of their work to date. They work individually and frequently and are each aware of having their own invoices and getting as much information on a commission before they will be accepted for an MA. The next thing Rothschild intends to do is apply for a grant for materials and equipment funding.

There is a choice of two grants from the Dublin City Enterprise Board - the Employment grant or the Capital grant. The first is a 4-year grant of £4,000 to be used as rent allowance for a studio or wages. However, this means that the business has to be registered and therefore tax must be paid. It also means that the business must operate in one location for the full four years. The Capital grant (which is more appealing to the group) gives half the required money minus tax for use in buying equipment and facilities. Both grants require applications which include research and business plans. If everything goes as planned, Monté Studios will be able to expand and buy another kiln. With exhibitions already organised for April in Armagh at St. Patrick's Turian and a second MELT exhibition in July, this time in Battersea Arts Centre England, the Monté Glass Studio has proved that establishing a contemporary glass business in Ireland is not only possible but can also be very successful.

Interviewer: Dervla O'Connor, at Monte Glass Studio, P.O. Box 746, 46-50 Foley St., Dublin 1. February 3rd 1999.

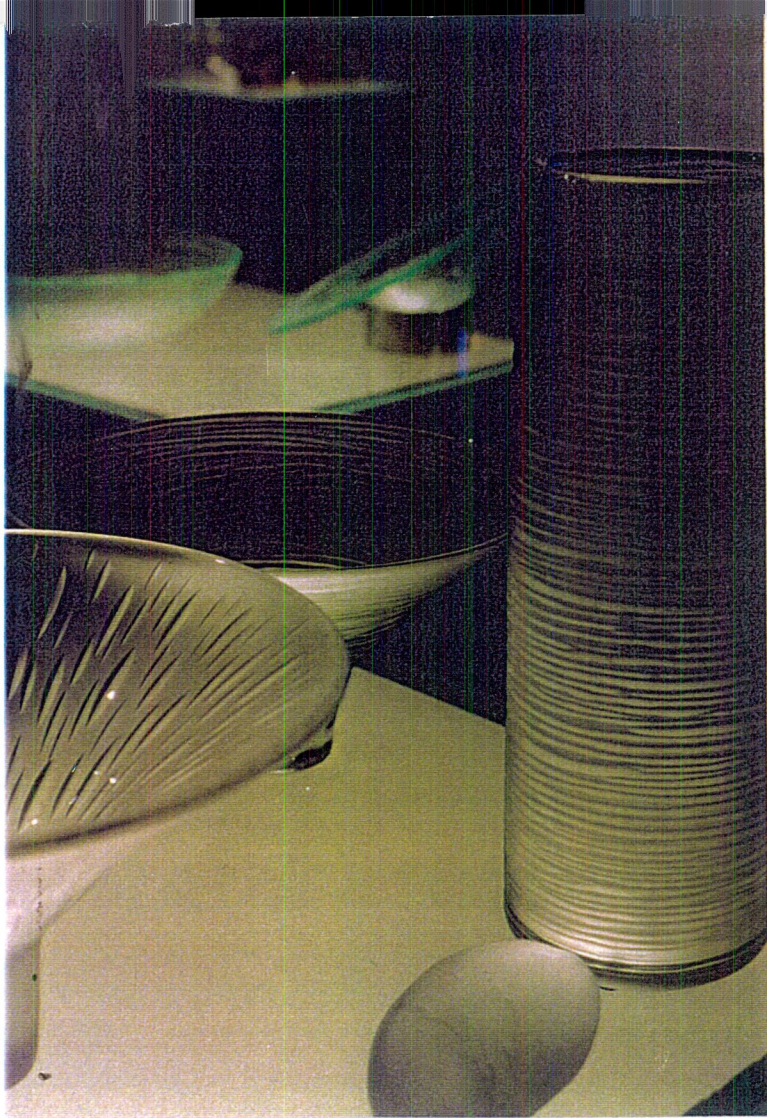


Fig:12: 'THE WATER SERIES',

1998. Blown, cut, and sandblasted glass vessels displayed with hotworked sandblasted glass 'stones' -

By Vicki Rothschild.

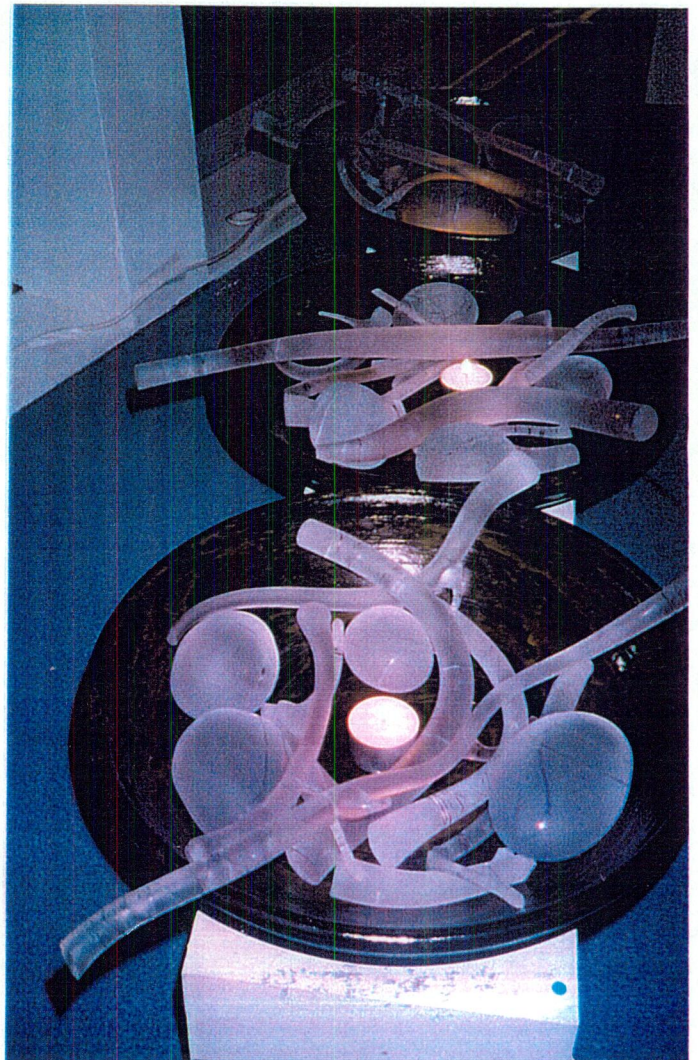


Fig: 13: 'FROZEN EMBERS', 1998. Clay bowls containing Hot glass worked 'twigs' and 'stones'. By Vicki Rothschild.

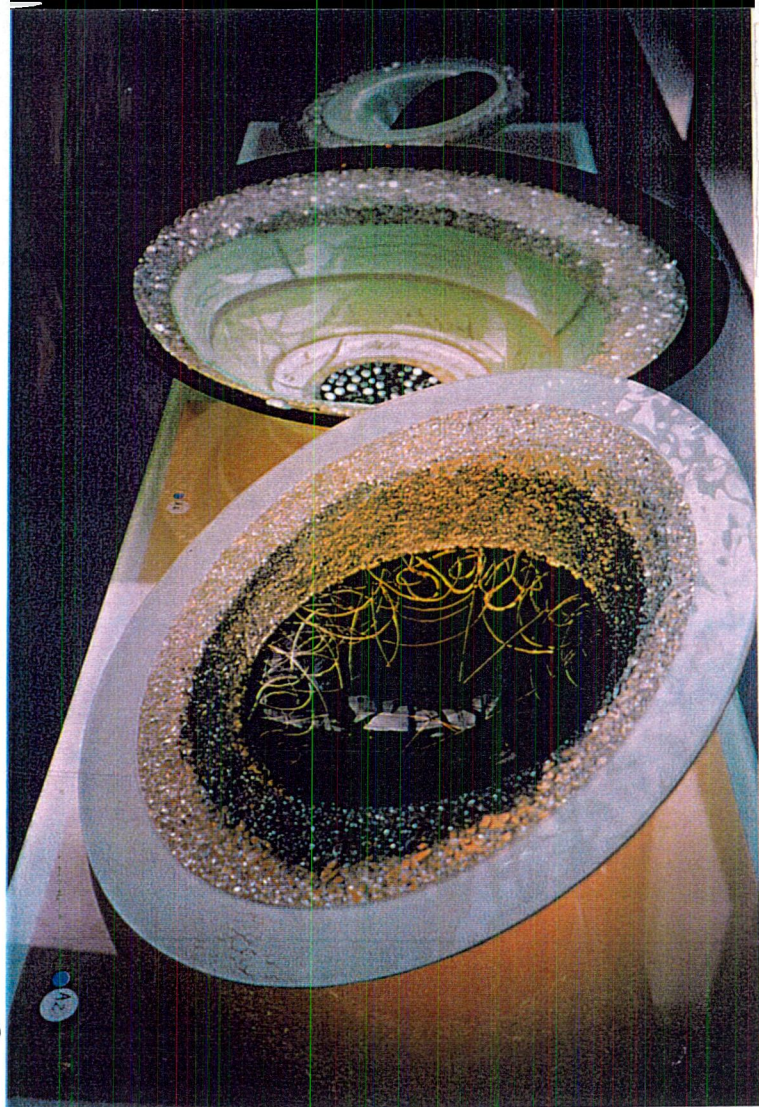


Fig: 14: 'Pebble-dash' (back) and 'Enscribe' (front) - 1998

Soda flat glass and soda frit,
slumped and incorporating On-Glaze Enamels.

By Ester Adesigbins.

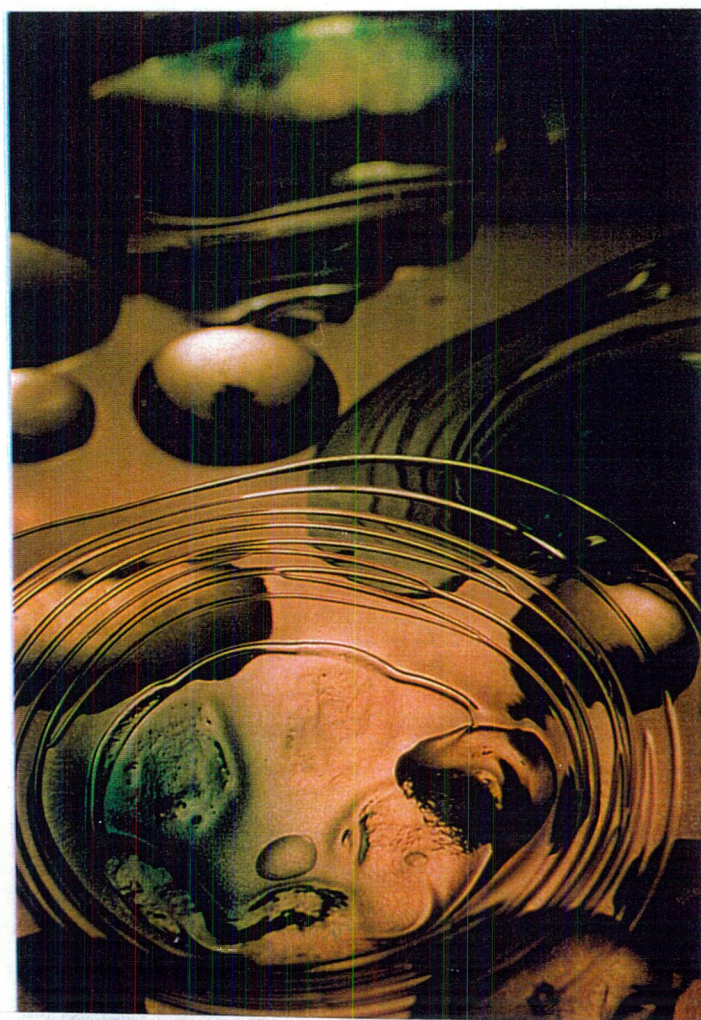


Fig: 15: 'Whirl Pools', 1998. Free blown bowls resting on clear glass 'stones'. By Vic Rothschild.

Fig:16 : 'Wrapped' 1997. Soda flat glass slumped,
rock and aged timber for the base. By



Fig:17: 'Reclining Figure', 1997. Acid dipped, clear kiln cast containing betonite and sand figure. By Juile- Ann Foley.

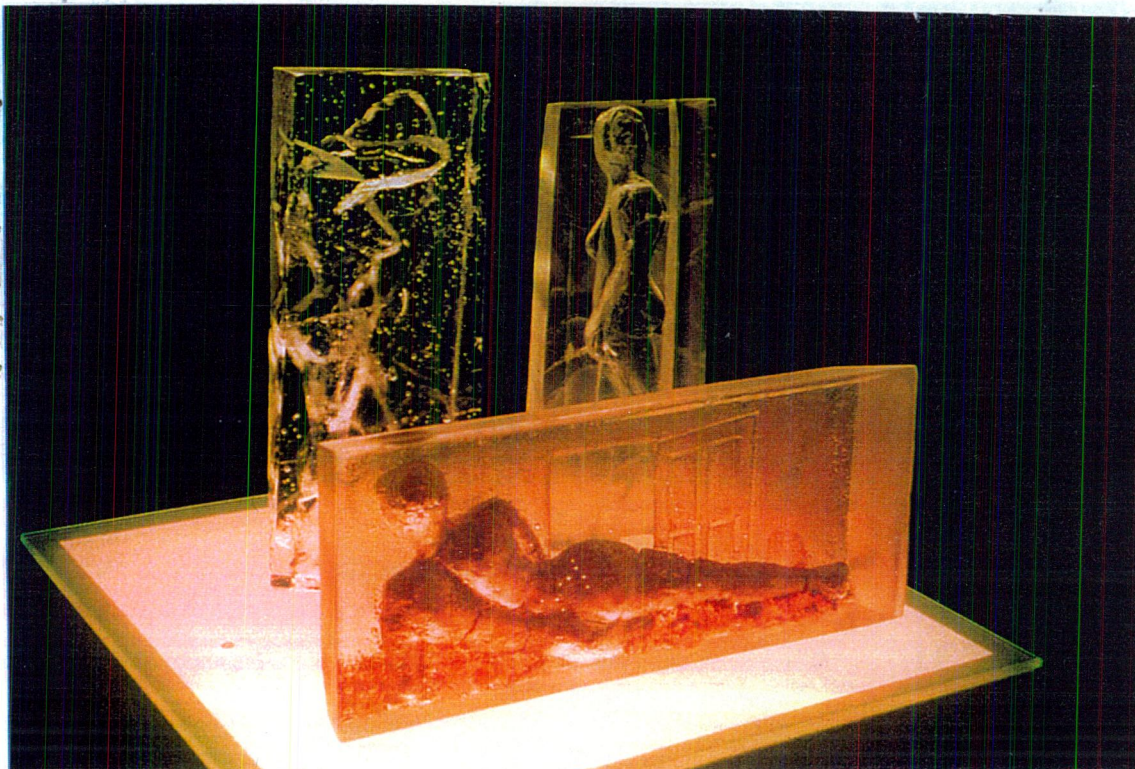




Fig: 16: Untitled, 1998. Clear, crystal,

kiln cast with Acid Dip finish. By Juile-Ann Foley.

Fig:17: 'Walking Through', 1997. Clear, crystal
sandcast with submerged sand and ben-
tonite figure. By Juile-Ann Foley.

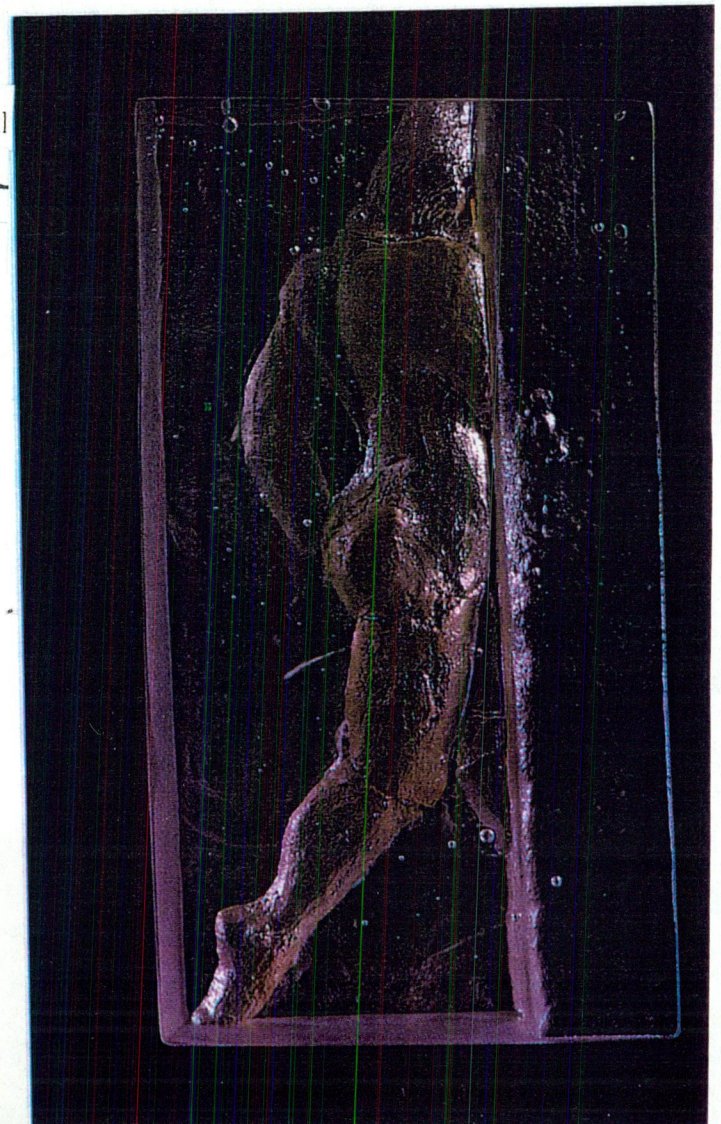




Fig:18: 'Ship Wrecks', 1998. Kiln cast crystal using oxides. By Paula Boyle.

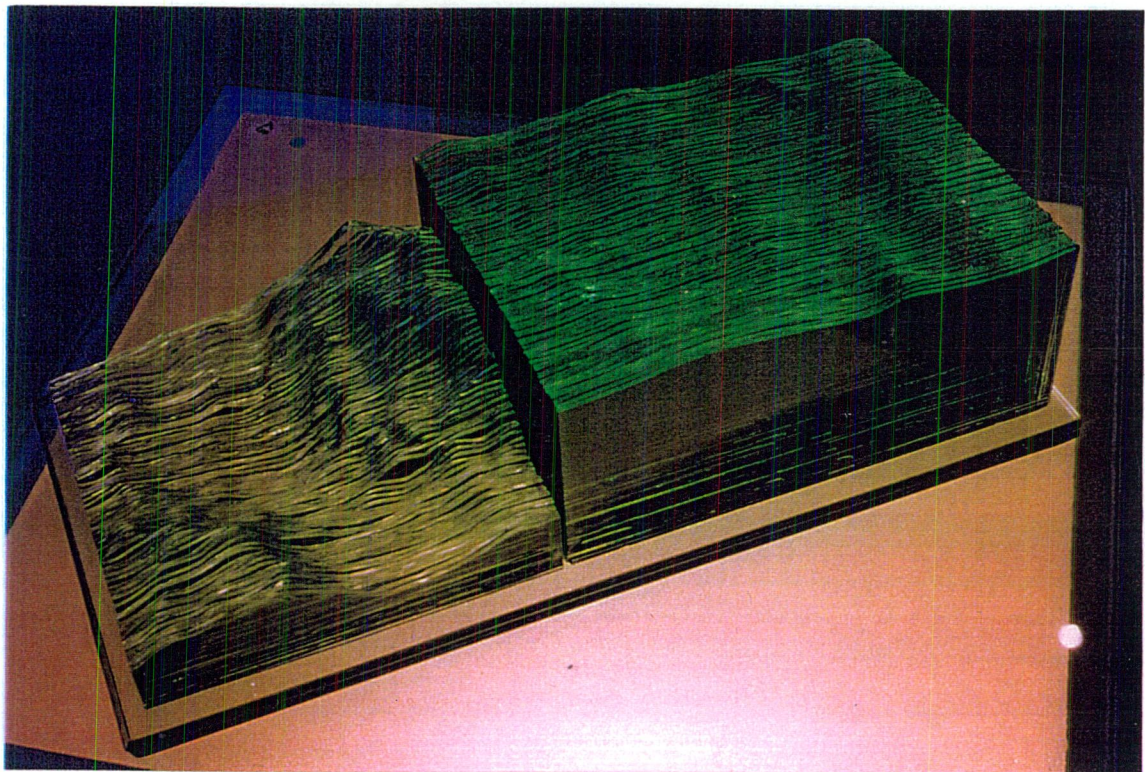


Fig:19: 'Relief', 1998. Laminated soda flat glass. By Eleanor Long.



Fig:20: Pate de verre bowls, 1998. White crystal bowl and remaining 3 soda bowls all contain oxide colour and copper wire. By Paula Boyle.

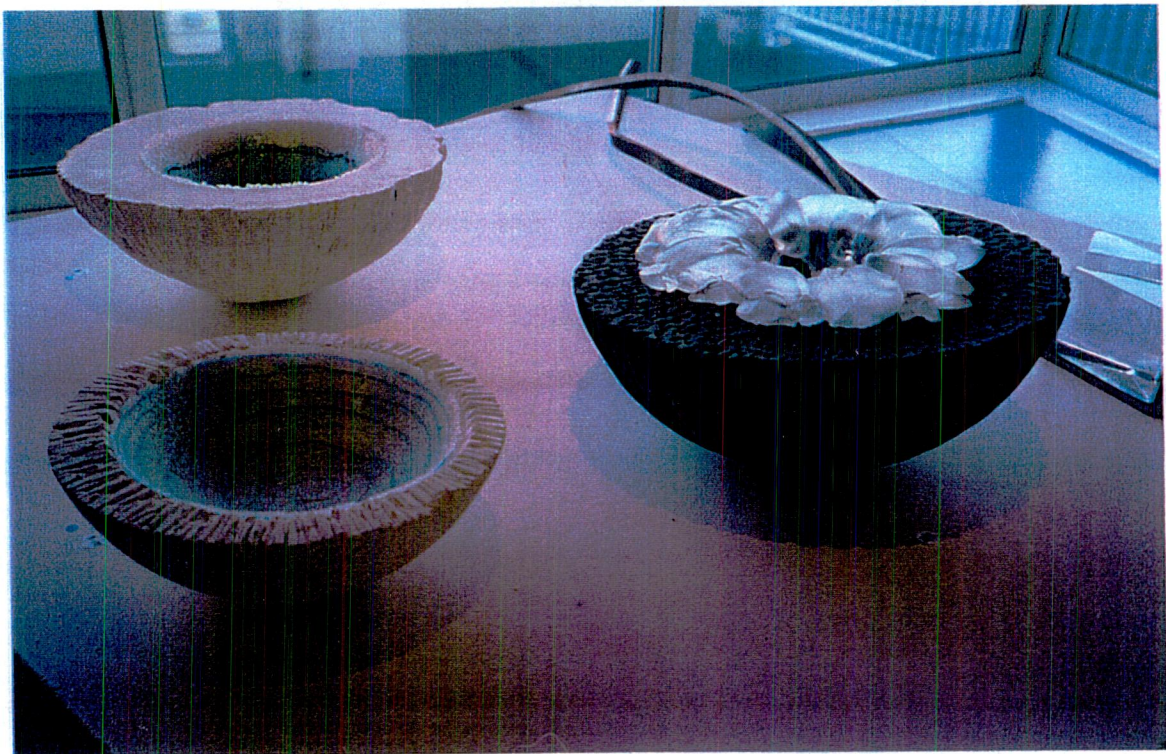


Fig: 21: 'Glaciation', 1999, (right), cement and kiln slumped crystal. Cement and pate de verre bowls with copper and oxide colours. By Paula Boyle.

HELEN HANCOCK

Helen Hancock graduated from NCAD in 1998. At the moment Hancock is in the process of setting up a glass studio and hotshop near her home in Derry City, and if all goes to plan she will be the second independent glass-blower in Northern Ireland (Randall Repass being the first).

This is an extraordinary development for one person, even more impressive as she has so recently graduated. Although only 23, Hancock has been involved in some impressive projects, and has even travelled to Seattle - the American capital of contemporary glass.

When I asked Hancock how she became initially interested in glass she said that it was a visit to NCAD in Dublin, 1992. "I was 16 and in first-year A-levels at Limavady College of Further Education at the time. The National College of Art and Design is the only college in Dublin that teaches hot glass work". (interview, 1999).

"In Second Year A-Level I applied to Core Year at NCAD, but due to a low grade I was unable to attend". (interview, 1998). Helen decided to remain at Limavady College to study for the year at Core.

Limavady in Derry foundation course in art and design is small comparable to that of the larger University of Ulster in Belfast and N.C.A.D. Dublin, however the standard is as high if not higher and has been graded in the past as one of the best in Ireland. With this excellent visual education received in Core from Limavady College behind her, Hancock applied to the Craft department of the N.C.A.D in Second Year to study for a B.Des. At this stage, ceramics was her first choice with glass second.

It was an experience at Waterford Crystal within her first month at N.C.A.D that confirmed her passion for glass. Dale Chihuly visited Waterford Crystal in the autumn of 1995 as part of a tour around the main glass-producing areas of Europe for his 'Chihuly over Venice' exhibition. He planned to make a series of chandeliers in each country then

display them over the canals of Venice. Along with the rest of the glass department (including Vicki Rothschild, Paula Boyle and Julie-Ann Foley) Hancock visited Waterford Crystal and was able to watch Chihuly and his team at work first-hand. Many of the students helped to assemble the chandeliers and handled the glass, carefully packing and dismantling it. On her return to Dublin Hancock transferred to glass as the area of specialisation for her Degree. The experience in Waterford influenced all those who visited and worked there. It was the first time that many of the students had heard of Dale Chihuly, and therefore he made an enormous impact upon them. They would not forget easily this opportunity to work with one of the biggest names in American glass and the founder of the best and most prestigious glass school in Seattle.

A year later in 1997, two of Dale Chihuly's assistants, John Kiley and Bruce Greek, who had worked as part of Chihuly's team at Waterford Crystal, returned to Ireland to run a workshop in the NCAD. Hancock became friendly with the two and learned much from them. Her work in Third Year was mainly hot-glass work and blowing. She decided to apply to 'Haystack' and Pilchuck, the two major glass schools in America. Haystack is based in Maine on the East coast. It is a craft school which uses metal, ceramics, glass, painting and mixed media courses. Pilchuck is based outside Seattle on the West Coast and specialises in all forms of glass. Both schools run summer courses for a number of weeks. Hancock got accepted into 'Haystack' to work with Lino Tagliapietra, the famous Italian glass maestro. Originally from Murano, Tagliapietra is a major influence on the American glass scene. "I was unable to afford to attend the course so I kept in touch with John (Kiley) and decided to go to Seattle myself".

Hancock travelled to Seattle in the summer of 1997. She worked at Pratt Fine Art Centre as a teaching assistant to Kiley and as a part-time assistant in Chihuly's boat-house, where his furnace and work-shop studio was being rebuilt. Hancock says she became friends with Chihuly and was interested to attend a viewing of Pino Signoretto's work at Pilchuck. It was here that she was personally introduced to Chihuly, who was delighted to discover that Hancock was Irish and had attended his talk at Waterford two years before:

“ Later Chihuly invited me to dinner with Lino Tagliapietra at his home which is part of the boat-house. The dinner was especially for glass-collectors in America.....John and I drove Lino back to his hotel afterward, on the way he tried to teach us some Italian phrases. Everyone in the Seattle glass scene called him ‘Maestro’ and not Lino”(interview 1999).

When Hancock returned to NCAD for her final year she found working back at college very challenging. It was strange to be back in the hotshop after visiting America and seeing how things were done differently – and in some ways more efficiently. Even the glass used was different. In NCAD the glass that is melted down is from Waterford Crystal. In Seattle the glass used is the lighter ‘soda’ glass more commonly used in plate glass.

“Around February 1998 I finally realised what a degree in craft glass was really all about. Steven Doe Edward, the external assessor, explained to me that is not the quality or quantity that counts, rather the creativity. When he explained this I was reminded that on the assessment forms for Second and Third year we were marked on craftsmanship, something I realise now that I never really focused on. Technique is what is needed to produce work. Creativity cannot work without skills.(interview 1999).

Hancock found the second Year in N.C.A.D extremely short – “too short to learn about something that takes decades to master”. After graduating from N.C.A.D in June 1998 Hancock had planned to travel back to America to work with Chihuly’s assistant Bruce Greek. She went to Seattle to work for a month and learn new skills, and also researched setting up and producing work for retail and exhibitions. Hancock also travelled to Canada – “ Canadian glass artists are a lot like Irish, they have the same way of working”.(interview 1999).

When she returned to Ireland in August, Hancock planned to work with a glass artist if possible. However, after some thought, she decided that she really wanted to set up on her own. “ Everyone I have ever met who makes glass all got the same ambition to finally set up on their own, yet they all end up working for little money for a few years with a glass artist who knows how much these people want to keep on making glass”. (interview 1999). Hancock realised the best way to remain in control and minimise

exploitation was to work for herself. "This way I have my own thing happening and I can invite people to come and work with me and teach on my own premises." (interview 1999).

In November 1998 Hancock got in contact with LEDU, an organisation in Northern Ireland which helps fund and train people starting up their own business, She was put on a six-week business start-up course "during which time I exhibited my degree work at the Guildhall Craft Fair in Derry" (interview 1999). On the opening night she was introduced to the mayor and the head of the Economic Development Office at the Derry City Council, Mark Lusby. Mr. Lusby offered to help Hancock to stabilise her business. A lot more positive feedback came from Dupont and the marketing department at the Council, who are both interested in commissioning pieces when she has established herself. By getting in touch with another body, R.A.P.I.D., (Rural Area Partnership in Derry). Hancock has been offered further encouragement, as they are lobbying for her to get a £10,000 grant .

By this time Hancock has nearly completed her Ledu course. " Usually only about £1,000 'self start grants' are available to the people who successfully complete the course, but due to word of mouth, I was offered a Home Start Grant, which entitles me to £4,000 and another £400 when I employ people. Ledu also pay £40 a week to any previously unemployed employee" (interview 1999). Hancock has been very fortunate in the contact which she has made. She has even managed to buy the bricks for the furnace for under £100 due to her hunting around and finding companies in the process of closing down who were selling off their merchandise at cheap prices. Ledu has obviously been a great help and, through the business course, Hancock has been taught about marketing, business plans, accounts and other information essential for setting up on one's own.

"At present I am planning to set up in June/July 1999. I hope to get my equipment from Seattle. Fortunately, the Derry City Council have been working closely with the Seattle City Council. So it may be possible to get a little help in purchasing my equipment.

I asked Hancock what she thinks will happen in the future and how would she handle the possibility of things going wrong.

“I think going to Seattle in ‘97 and ‘98 was something that made me realise that anything can be achieved in the glass world and it isn’t just about the product, but also publicity and marketing strategy. Its not going to be easy and I may fail. Its the first year and if I do, I’ll just review the situation and try again. I think that the main thing to focus on when setting up is not to act too hastily. Think logically. Location is vital to your trade. More people will want to buy your product when they actually see you making it. So a good location where you are accessible to the public and possible tourist trade is essential .”(interview 1999).

I asked Hancock does she ever get frightened or overwhelmed by what she has taken on board: “At times I get very excited and realise that if you don’t try how will you ever know what could happen. I still have a lot to learn and plan to keep learning while I’m working”.(interview 1999).

(Interviewer: Dervla O.Connor in telephone conversation from January 27th 1999)

CONCLUSION

I have already discussed how public commissions especially have increased dramatically over the last ten years. The industry here is changing too. Waterford have introduced new, contemporary lines of table and glassware designed by John Rocha, such 'Signature' which are aimed for the 25 - 35 year old, and are designed to be minimalist in detail but still sophisticated. Other Irish Glass Company's have similar projects such as Tipperary Crystal, who are currently designing ranges exclusively for Tiffany's of New York. Breakthroughs such as these introduce contemporary crystal as an equally valuable, beautiful and highly skilled art-form as that of the traditional art glass ware that Ireland has formerly been famous for.

Further down the industrial scene and veering toward the contemporary market is Jerpoint Glass Studios in Stoneyford, Co. Kilkenny. This factory is making pure blown glass much different from that of Waterford Crystal. Founded by Keith leadbetter who trained in the famous Orrefors factory in Sweden during the late 60s, Jerpoint Glass has a fresh modern feel, but unlike Waterford is only available in Ireland in large retail outlets such as Brown Thomas. However, Jerpoint can usually be found in the DESIGNyard.

It is important to incorporate modern glass into the mainstream glass retail market to enable the general public to appreciate fully the modern qualities of its forms. By doing so the appreciation and value of exhibition pieces will increase to a level which is truly deserved, where it is accepted as a true form of art.

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