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TABLE OF CONTENTS **PAGE NO.**

LIST OF PLATES

LIST OF PLATES

LIST OF PLATES

Footnotes

1-3 "The Irish Theatre" P7, Christopher Fitzsimons 1983 London, Thames and Hudson

4 "Cara" Aer Lingus Magazine Sept/Oct 1998

5 "A Statement of Policy for the National Theatre Society Ltd., 1998 to 2000" P14

6 "Oxford Dictionary of Irish Theatre"

7 Neil Wallace "The Four Estaits" in "Views in Theatre in Ireland 1995" Arts Council

8 "The Stage of Play: Irish Theatre in the Nineties" Ed. Eberhard Bort P29 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

9 "Cara" Aer Lingus Magazine Sept/Oct 1998

10 Macnas Website : http://www.failte.com/macnas/comm/htm

11 "A Statement of Policy for the National Theatre Society Ltd. 1998 to 2000" page 7

12-14 Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 19/10/98

15 "Community Art: An Insight into Macnas" Thesis by Jennifer Fox NCAD 1995

16 Macnas Website : http://www.failte.com/macnas/comm/htm

17 "Cara" Aer Lingus Magazine Sept/Oct 1998

18 "Community Art: An Insight into Macnas" Thesis by Jennifer Fox NCAD 1995

19 Gary McMahon, PR Officer for Macnas, in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

20/21 Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 19/10/98

22 Gary McMahon, PR Officer for Macnas, in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

23 "Views of theatre in Ireland 1995" Arts Council

24/25 Gary McMahon, PR Officer for Macnas, in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

26 "Views of theatre in Ireland 1995" Arts Council

27 Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 19/10/98

28 Declan Gibbons and Gary McMahon in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

29 Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 16/10/98

30 "The Irish Times" article "The World's a Stage" by Katie Donovan 12/12/98

31/32 Gary McMahon, PR Officer for Macnas, in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

33 "Macnas Board of directors Meeting Agenda" 30th August '96

34 Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 16/10/98

35 "The Irish Times" article "Shiny Abbey People" by Mic Moroney 5/11/97

36/37 "Views of Theatre in Ireland" Arts Council 1995

38 "Oxford Dictonary of Theatre"

39 Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 19/10/98

40 Gary McMahon, PR Officer for Macnas, in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

41 Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 19/10/98

42-44 Monica Frawley in interview with Aoife Cleary 16/11/98

45 "Fabric Painting & Dyeing for the Theatre" Deborah Dryden 1993 Reed Pub. USA

46/47 The Irish Times article "The World's a Stage" by Katie Donovan 12/12/98

48 "Stage Costume Handbook" Bernice Prisk

49 "Stage Costume Techniques" Joy Spanabe Emery 1981 New Jersey

50 Gary McMahon, PR Officer for Macnas, in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

51/56 "The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre" John Russell Brown 1997 Oxford Uni Press

57/58 Monica Frawley in interview with Aoife Cleary 16/11/98

59 "Macnas" Article in IT Magazine by Trish O'Donovan Sept. '98

60 Interview – A. Lawless in "Macnas" article in IT Magazine by T. O'Donovan Sept. '98

61 "Macnas" Article in IT Magazine by Trish O'Donovan Sept. '98

62 Gary McMahon, PR Officer for Macnas, in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

63 "A Traitor's Kiss" biography of Sheridan by Fintan O'Toole

64 Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 19/10/98

65 "The Rivals" programme for Abbey 1998

66/67 The Irish Times Article "Praise the Curtain" by Robert O'Byrne

INTRODUCTION

Throughout my thesis I wish to discuss the current state of Irish theatre, and in particular, costume design in Irish theatre. By focusing on the National Theatre Society of the Abbey & Peacock, and Macnas as my two studies I hope to provide information from a lively cross-section of contemporary Irish Theatre.

My analysis of the two companies will come under the following headings:

Aims
Inspirations
Activities and Productions (Stage & Street)
Funding
Spending
Future Plans

Costume Room
Costume Designer & Maker
Costume Design Process
Costume Production
Costume Functions
Costume Design in Future

I propose to interview, photograph, document, and generally study the productions, the people, the costumes and the driving force behind these two national theatre companies. Although they are both working within the realm of theatre in Ireland today, the Abbey and Macnas work very differently, so comparison and contrast under the aforementioned headings will be an essential part of my thesis.

To fulfil the first list of themes, I propose to interview an artistic director, or staff member in a similar position in each of the companies. They will be able to give me an overview of the company and its general ethos, as well as its day to day running. I need this information to form a picture of the companies; one creating history for the past century and the other bursting with the energy of its first decade past.

Being a textile student, the second list of criteria, focusing on the costumes of the two companies, will be the main body of my thesis. I will interview and research the costume designers and makers, as well as making notes on the costume room and facilities available to both. Photographs will prove invaluable records when it comes to comparing and contrasting.

Ultimately my aim is to produce an original, lively, informative thesis that will not only document the methods of costume design of our National Theatre, The Abbey, but will also put into related context the innovative and dynamic work of our national street theatre company, Macnas.

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THEATRE IN IRELAND

INTRODUCTION OF ABBEY & MACNAS

Picture this: The Dublin Theatre Festival 1998; physical and metaphorical stage for Irish Theatre of the day. The companies square up for performance; one with just about a century of dramatic history behind it, the other fresh from a decade of moving from street to stage and back again. The Abbey (or National Theatre Society) is the former, and the latter goes by the name of Macnas.

Where are these companies today, what has lead them to their current positions, how are they run, how do they compare and most importantly what is the role of costumes in these companies? Throughout the course of this writing, these questions and more will hopefully be discussed and some conclusions drawn.

Ireland may possess, "the oldest written literature in Western Europe", [1] but its theatrical history occupies a much shorter period of time. The Gaelic language of literature did not lend itself readily to dramatic performance. Instead a file (poet) or seanchai (storyteller) would recount poems, passages or stories to a small group of people. Dialogue certainly existed within these recitals but it was all undertaken by the teller himself and no attempt was made to introduce actors to help with the narration.

Such was the rural tradition of entertainment in Ireland up to the 19th century partly because of the dispersion of the population. Western drama developed in cities, and in Ireland there were no cities or concentrated areas of population to create a dramatic culture, before the Normans arrived around the 12th Century on the invitation of Diarmuid MacMurchu, King of Leinster. Gradually a Norman urban administration was set up and soon followed an outlet for entertainment. Cue; the introduction of theatre to Dublin and Ireland, however non-indigenous its beginnings.

[1] "The Irish Theatre" P7, Christopher Fitzsimon 1983 London, Thames and Hudson

A metropolitan theatre was founded after the Elizabethian and Jacobean settlements and it basically only served a colonial audience, and was run by appointees of the colonial government. The writers, and most of the actors came from England [2]. Basically up until the Irish Literary Revival of 1898 (ironically, also pioneered by Anglo-Irish) the entire fabric of Irish Theatre was either Anglo Irish, or just pure English.

Probably the biggest and most enduring achievement of 19th Century Anglo Irish Theatre is the invention of the stereotypical stage Irishman which still haunts us today in the torrents of American films and sitcoms that pour out of our T.V. screens. Every Irish person knows, and cringes at the sound of that breathy lilting voice emanating from a harmless drunken creature of an Irishman. Laziness and good humour combine in a most stomach-turning concoction of Emerald Isle portrayal. We have the playwrights and actors of 19th Century Ireland to thank for this legacy. Tyrone Power and Dion Boucicault are two examples of such creators of stereotype.

In particular, Dion Boucicault, the most important Irish playwright of the mid 19th Century and the only one whose works are still regularly performed, bred and fostered a plethora of drunks, eegits and patriots, all under the banner of Irishmen on stage. This "master of melodrama" [3] was born at 28 Middle Gardiner Street on 27th December 1820 to a family of Huguenot winetraders. He was sent to school in London and spent his time between the 2 capitals just like Yeats. After years of theatrical success in America with productions such as "The Poor of New York" (later adapted to suit each city of its performance), Boucicault found success in Ireland and Britain, as well as America with his Irish Trilogy. "The Colleen Bawn" (1860) is probably the most famous of the three. In this love story set around the lakes of Killarney, the most memorable character was Myles Na Coppaleen (Myles of the Little Horse), a part which Boucicault had written especially for himself.

[2] "The Irish Theatre" P7. Christopher Fitzsimons 1983 London Thames and Hudson
[3] "The Irish Theatre" P7. Christopher Fitzsimons 1983 London Thames and Hudson

Myles embodied all that American and British audience loved about the stereotype Irish. Even Irish audiences lapped up this charming rogue.

The other two plays to make up the trilogy by Boucicault are, "Arrah-na-Pogue" (1865) and "The Shaughran" (1874). It is worth noting the irony of the National Theatre Society being founded in 1898 to eradicate the kind of drama being produced by Boucicault when the Abbey subsequently in the 1960s and 70s achieved great success with the revival of these productions. Occasionally the ethos of both movements overlapped for example, Boucicault demonstrated Nationalist tendencies when he put on special performances in his tour of England. "The Shaughran" special performances raised money for Fenian Prisioners in British jails. What is even more bizarre is that English audiences paid to fund such causes.

The Anglo-Irish theatre developed in 1898 into Irish Literary Theatre with the main aim of building up "a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature" [4]. W.B.Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn were the founder members who dreamt up the idea in Duras House, Kinvara, Co. Clare. It was clearly a response to the aforementioned Irish melodrama, that charicaturised the whole population. The Irish Literary Theatre, now known as the National Theatre Society, sought to give dignity and credibility to Irish drama, playwrights and actors, and ultimately, as Patrick Mason still states, to endeavour that people, "should have a more abundant and a more intense life" [5].

Such abundance and intensity only came from text and language, as it was Yeats theory, certainly in the first and second seasons of the Abbey, "that actors should speak deliberately and move only when necessary" [6], an ethos which won great approval from the Theatre's Critics. This theory immediately downgrades the importance of movement, set and costume, by

[4] "Cara" Aer Lingus Magazine Spet/Oct 1998
[5] "A Statement of Policy for the National Theatre Society Limited 1998 to 2000" P. 14
[6] "Oxford Companion to Irish Literature" Robert Welch, Oxford Clarendon Press '96

default. If the focus of the production is on deliberate speech and minimal movement, then superfluous elements like set and costume will not be emphasised. And so we have the seeds of ignorance with regard to theatre design in Ireland sewn. "For Ireland the past century really has belonged to the writer and...artists and audiences are underexposed to theatre conceived and made in other ways" [7].

Theatre conceived and made in other ways is firmly taking route now in Ireland or as Ann McMullan puts it, "In Contemporary Irish Theatre, performance is making a comeback" [8]. A group which was the first, if not the first successful, performance based theatre company is Macnas. They nearly need no introduction; they are the Galway-based stage and street performing company whose big red transport van says, "MACNAS : Theatre and Spectacle". They have toured extensively in Ireland and indeed have spread their wings as far afield as the U.S. and South America, as well as Britain and Continental Europe. Although they are probably most famous for their Galway Arts Festival Parades every year, they have featured at the 1995 MTV European Music Awards and even toured with U2 Zooropa, so it is safe to say that most Irish people have seen them in some guise or other. But how much do we know about them? What are their founding ideas, developments, work practices and design ethics? What do they place emphasis on? How do all their attributes relate to the criteria of the Abbey? Overall taking these two vastly different theatre companies, what is the state of Irish Theatre today, particularly in the area of costume design?

A basic observation is the fundamental difference of style between the two companies. Yeats aforementioned theory of deliberate speech and minimal movement, is turned on its head with Macnas who deliver extremely little or no speech and massive amounts of action and dancing.

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[7] Neil Wallace "The Four Estaits" in "Views in Theatre in Ireland 1995" Arts Council
[8] "The Stage of Play: Irish Theatre in the Nineties". Ed. Eberhard Bort P 29. 1996 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Styles develop from founding principles and while the Abbey's ethos worded by W.B. Yeats in 1898 was as follows "We propose to have performed in Dublin in the Spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever their degree of excellence, will be written with high ambition, and so build up a Celtic and Irish School of dramatic literature," [9] Macnas wrote in 1985, "We interpret the word community in the broad popular sense. We are interested in the pastimes, games and rituals of our community in the West. We wish to create dramatic visual spectacles using and exploring these popular forms of communal entertainments. Our spectacles will be created in the community, in large outdoor familiar spaces. We hope to make fun and have fun on a grand scale and amongst ourselves"[10].

At first glance, the tone of the two different mission statements is very evident. The Abbey adopts sombre definitive language, while Macnas speak in easy terminology about laymen's activities. The community is Macnas' axis upon which everything else turns. The productions derive from the community, are made in the community and are finally performed in the community. Truly indigenous is the work of Macnas. The Abbey, or more precisely, The National Theatre Society, which includes the Peacock, has as its centre of gravity, TEXT. Speaking of the Society, Artistic Director, Patrick Mason (see picture 1) says, "it values a production approach that seeks always to animate text as fully and accurately as possible, to amplify its meanings and sound all its resonances, rather than reduce or distort them". [11] In an interview with me, he lays it on the line very clearly, " in terms of where we start and where we finish; the text, the text, the text". [12] It could be summarised by saying that while the Abbey's centre focus is the text, Macnas' is the movement. Both companies would collapse without their respective raison d'être. Equally if they swapped these vital criteria, the companies would be thrown into very unfamiliar territory.

[9] "Cara" Aer Lingus Magazine Sept/Oct 1998
[10] Macnas Website : http://www.failte.com/macnas/comm/htm
[11] "A Statement of Policy for the National Theatre Society Limited 1998 to 2000" Page 7
[12] "Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 19/10/98

(1) Patrick Mason, Artistic Director, Abbey Theatre

It is worth noting at this point that both companies have never collaborated on a production although a lot of designers and craftspeople have singularly worked in both companies at different times. The Irish Theatre scene is so small and compact that it is difficult to believe that these two major companies have never come together to create, when they have shared the same creative people on an individual basis. Patrick Mason spoke directly in an interview with me of the National Theatre Society reaching our to other Irish companies like Bickerstaff Theatre Company, Coisceim Dance Company, and Barrabas. He spoke of a flow of information, technical advice and indeed resources. Nevertheless, he cautioned : "these are never just political alliances, never just financial alliances; the starting point is always an artistic imperative, that between us we can create a performance, and act of theatre, that could not exist before, so it's a new venture for both parties". [13] When further questioned about Macnas, Mason outlines how different the two companies are and concludes: "I don't judge whether one is high or low, or one is better or worse: I simply say look, both are aspects of theatre, both are aspects of performance, however, both require very different disciplines" [14] By simply mentioning high and low culture, and not linking each to either the Abbey or Macnas, Patrick Mason has made his opinion clear. Of course, it's not a new idea; sombre stage text-based drama has always held the high culture title, whereas carnival type action-based street theatre is always relegated to the depths of low culture. There is a possibility that this idea currently exists in the mind of the director of the National Theatre Society.

Elitism certainly exists in the theatre of modern Ireland. The National Theatre Society is seen as top of the pile both in terms of audience and staff. The directors and designers of the Abbey and Peacock should be and, debatable, are the best in the country, whereas Macnas, not only employs FAS workers in abundance, but also has a policy of involving large numbers

[13] Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 19/10/98
[14] Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 19/10/98

from the community in both production and performance. Padraig Breathnach, (see picture 2) one of the founder member's of Macnas, once said that for them the process is as important as the product, and this admirable quality is frowned upon by the critics. Of course the fact that Macnas employs a number of mostly unskilled FAS workers, is an issue of funding, which will be dealt with later.

It seems to me that Macnas are working in the ultimate ensemble manner, an approach which Patrick Mason refers to as, "the contribution of director, actor, designer is of equal importance and ensemble is about everyone working from their own expertise but all working towards the same end". While Mason speaks of the Abbey's ensemble methods, much like, "the

Moscow Arts Theatre towards the turn of the century", Macnas does the same and even involves the whole community.

Despite the many aforementioned differences between the Abbey and Macnas, the unite in their resolve towards all things Celtic. Yeats mentioned this in his 1898 Manifesto, and Breathnach refers to games, pastimes, and rituals of the community in the West. Both companies have heartfeld desires to foster areas of Irish culture, they simply choose to express this in diverse manners.

Padraic Breathnach, one of the Macnas founder members, tells us the Irish word Macnas means, "joyful exuberance and abandonment, but it comes from a story we have of a young calf that is born in the winter and wouldn't be let out until the first fine day of Spring, and when he's let out, he's jumping around the place with great enthusiasm, that's called Macnas."[15] Along with three others, Ollie Jennings, Tom Conroy and Pete Sammon, Macnas was formed in 1986, with the stated intention of " hoping to make and have fun

[15] "Community Art : An Insight into Macnas" Thesis by Jennifer Fox NCAD 1995

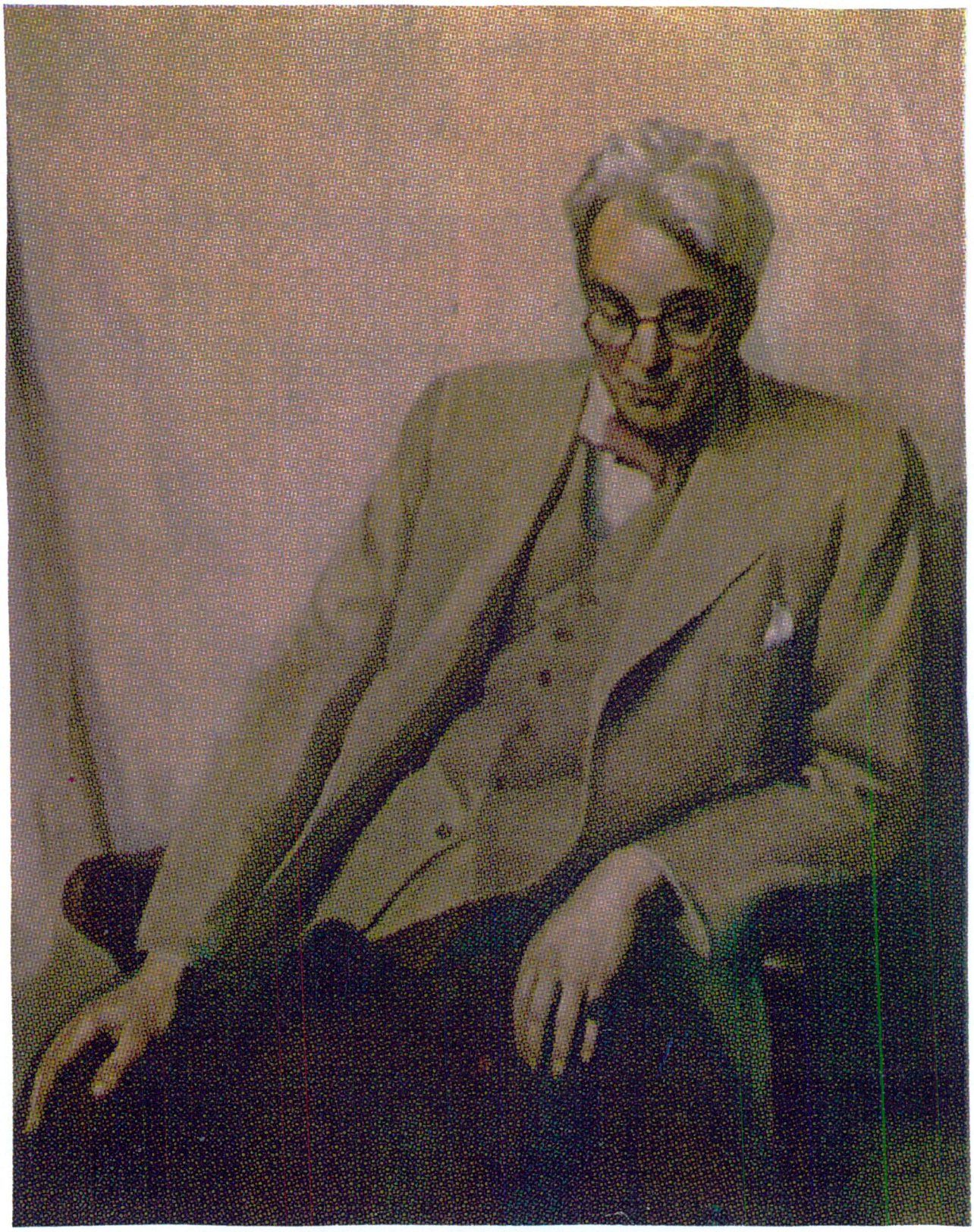
(2) Padraig Breathnach, Founder Member of Macnas

on a grand scale" .[16] This is quite different in meaning and even tone to Yeats (see picture 3) keynote statement of foundation of the Abbey in 1898. His aim was to build up, "a Celtic and Irish School of dramatic literature". [17] We see the great chasm between the two companies also in the venues of their first performances. Although modest, Yeat's first play "The Countess Cathleen" was performed in the rooms of the old Academy Cinema on Brunswick Street, now Pearse Street in 1898. Macnas, on the contrary, performed "The Big Game" at the interval of the 1986 Connacht Final because as Breathnach said, "After Fianna Fail and the Catholic Church, the GAA is the only other organisation with a cuman in every parish".[18] In staging and audience terms we have the Abbey's idealism versus Macnas grassroots realism.

The truth is actually quite different in inspiration and production terms. The Abbey pioneers realist drama in Ireland using Irish themes, whereas Macnas depict the fantastical like "Magpies" [19] of the theatre world. Macnas seem to have the desire, intent and success of delivering magical stories to the senses of the community. They are about elevation of the senses, and general creation of enjoyment and entertainment. It is only more recently, like with the production of "Diamonds in the Soil" that Macnas has taken on weightier issues, while still using the same mime-based, minimally scripted, colourful, action-packed style. The production of "Diamonds in the Soil" will be dealt with at more length later.

With Macnas seeking to elevate the senses, the National Theatre Society endeavours to elevate the intellect through its realist productions. Are the visuals secondary to the text at the Abbey? "Not in terms of production

[16] Macnas Website : http://www.failte.com/macnas/comm/htm
[17] "Cara" Aer Lingus Magazine Sept/Oct 1998
[18] "Community Art : An Insight into Macnas" Thesis by Jennifer Fox NCAD 1995



(3) W.B. Yeats, Founder of The Abbey

[19] Gary McMahon, PR Officer for Macnas in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

importance.....but in terms of where we start and where we finish it's the text, the text, the text," says Patrick Mason. [20,]

As already mentioned Patrick Mason spoke of the Abbey and Macnas being poles apart and he said that a day may come when a project leads them together more naturally but at the moment we are "working with every different disciplines." [21] Recent Abbey collaborations have been with Bickerstaff Theatre Company, Coisceim Dance Company, and currently Barabas Theatre Company. PR Officer for Macnas Gary McMahon, gives a maybe answer to the question of collaboration with the Abbey, and commends their aforementioned project with Barrabas, saying there are something like fifteen women, one man, a few directors and no script in one room. [22]

The stage V street issue is fundamental when talking about these two companies. Macnas have done both, with some of their earlier stage shows of Balor, Sweeney and Tain being really well received in America. The extremely minimal, if not non-existent, dialogue of these plays, means they can tour extensively and communicate to people on another visual-storytelling level. Macnas receive £36,000 a year specific touring grant from the Arts Council and generate about £50,000 gross from the touring itself. The Abbey tours for a minimum of twelve weeks a year and fund this from a portion of their M£3 grant from Arts Council and their M£2 revenue generated.

Plot is a primary difference. The Abbey lives on the text or plot of a play, whereas even in their stage productions Macnas hang their visuals very loosely on a storyline. The progress of the production is communicated through colour, movement, sound, music, sets, props and, of course,

[20,21] Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 19/10/98

[22] Gary McMahon, PR Officer for Macnas in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

costumes. A mood is created through a combination of all these elements and the audience is sensually vulnerable to the meaning intended. Because our senses are so intuitive, we cannot help but understand the story before us.

As Production Manager for Macnas, John Ashton, tells me, Macnas thrive on both stage and Street theatre. Indeed no one in the company was eager or even able to choose one discipline above the other. Street theatre traditionally and logistically has even looser plotlines. John Ashton elaborates that, whereras stage theatre is by definition encapsulated in a controlled situation or box, street theatre has a number of production elements to consider carefully. The elements of wind, rain and snow are understandable, but who would have considered the position of the sun in the sky as an important point to note when producing a piece of street theatre. Fundamentally the nature of this type of theatre means the plot must have an element of repetition in it. Ashton is of the opinion that more things can be done on the street; the reason being possibly that the audience is more open in this situation. They casually turn up to free events and hence there is no expectation as to the intellectual content of what's on show. The street theatre, if in parade or carnival form, moves past the stationary crowd at a certain pace. Therefore the audience only sees a set piece of the action for a short amount of time. It has to be big, it has to be colourful, it has to be loud and above all it has to be impressive. There is no requirement that it has to intellectually stimulating. However, when the paying audience of the Abbey settle in to the auditorium of an evening, they have a firm idea of the standard and content of what they expect to see.

It leads one to believe that Macnas, and groups like them, are freer to experiment with different styles, than the stage theatre groups like the Abbey. Monica Frawley, (see picture 4) freelance designer who often works

(4) Monica Frawley, Freelance Designer, Abbey Theatre

with the Abbey, would not share my view of Irish street theatre groups being experimental:

"I've worked with most theatres really, whether Macnas is experimental or not is questionable. I think its street theatre. I don't think that it's particularly experimental; it happens in Spain, in America, South America; it's just newish here. I think in terms of actually experimenting in theatre it doesn't exist in this country."

It is indisputable however that Macnas are definitely more independent, both in administrative and inspirational terms. John Ashton speaks of there being a danger of groups being pigeonholed, so Macnas make a point of trying out new things in order to keep everyone interested, both audience and staff. The Arts Council Theatre Review 1995 adds, " Many Independent companies claim no discernible aesthetic, rather are groups of artists who got together to make theatre because there was no other means for them to gain entry to theatre." [23] The theatre infrastructure in Ireland is so weak that many of the artists and practitioners like Padraig Breathnach, were forced to collaborate and form a group. They seemed to have been driven by a strong desire to create a theatre group rather than a particular type of theatre. Breathnach himself has often spoken of the process being equally important as the product. This is indicative of a community-based group which places "emphasis on both access and excellence." [24] Macnas don't just want people to participate passively, they also expect a standard to be achieved. They want people to "take part in a meaningful way." [25] Of course the question of quality of work arises here. Can community arts groups be judged critically for their productions? Should Macnas have to rely on FAS workers and students who may or may not be trained in the discipline? Incidentally Gary McMahon states that training is provided as long as general interest exists. Ultimately the achievements of a theatre group all come down to funding.

[23] "Views of Theatre In Ireland 1995" Arts Council
[24] Gary McMahon in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98
[25] Gary McMahon in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

"But there is a town and country schism, a professional unwillingness from artists, policymakers, and critics to engage with theatre-making outside Dublin." [26] This view stated by Neil Wallace, Director of Offshore Cultural Projects, Amsterdam, is compounded by the Arts Council funding figures : £3,130,000 to the Abbey, and £228,000 to Macnas. Patrick Mason retorts, "The Abbey is the only theatre in the country, as the National Theatre, which builds its own sets, makes its own costumes, has workshops, technicians. We have a large staff team, co-ordinated by our production office here, so there's immense co-ordination involved in that." [27] This large staff team is probably where all the money is going, as Declan Gibbons, General Manager of Macnas, states that wages are the largest output for Macnas, and no doubt, groups like Macnas would have something to say about the Abbey being the only company in the country which, "builds its own sets, makes its own costumes....."

With the Abbey seeking to elevate out intellects through realist drama, and Macnas trying to elevate our senses through fantastic spectacles, the main common thread running through the two companies is their dedication to all things Celtic.

[26] "Views of Theatre in Ireland 1995" Arts Council
[27] Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife cleary 19/10/98

ANALYSIS OF ABBEY & MACNAS
STRUCTURE, STAFF, FUNDING, SPENDING

How do the two companies, the Abbey and Macnas run on day to day terms?

What is the structure and staffing situation in both?

What do they receive in funding and how do they spend it?

Interestingly enough, both Declan Gibbons, Macnas General Manager, and Gary McMahon, PR Officer for Macnas, laughed and answered, "wages" [28] when asked the single biggest spending output by their company. Patrick Mason, artistic director for the Abbey says, "the single biggest is production," and then goes on to list out the various departments that consume the money. Undoubtedly it is keeping these departments running and buzzing with people working is the core of the cost. The Arts Council's Theatre Review 1995, cements this fact, "the single largest expenditure category was that of staff costs." Altogether (in the 73 Irish companies questionnaired) staff costs totalled IR£6.266 million, or 35% of the total expenditure. It is quite apparent that people's wages in theatre takes the largest chunk of capital but ironically, without people theatre does not exist. The people, both in terms of staff and audience, create theatre and simultaneously stunt its growth with wage requirements and poor attendance figures respectively.

What types of staffing figures are we talking about here with the National Theatre and Macnas? And we must remember that these companies, and indeed most theatre companies, will only staff to the bare minimum, because of the aforementioned wage requirements. Without specifying numbers, Patrick Mason says, "We have a core staff to kind of run the whole operation and, depending on the demands of the season or a particular play we would supplement the core staff." [29] An Irish Times article clears up any uncertainties regarding staff numbers at the Abbey, "There are 110 staff in the building." [30] I get down to specifics with Macnas' Gary McMahon, "we

[28] Declan Gibbons and Gary McMahon in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98
[29] Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife cleary 16/10/98
[30] "The Irish Times" article "The World's a Stage" by Katie Donovan 12/12/98

have ten full time staff, we have two different FAS schemes, and community employment programmes, which accounts for another 24 people, and depending on what's going on at the time, we have up to 50 people on contract doing different things." [31] That's 84 staff members getting a cheque on a Thursday, which doesn't include the summer students who get paid through the students' social welfare job scheme. Gary goes on to say that this Summer, they were simultaneously preparing for the parade at the Galway Arts Festival, "The Dead School" and preparing for the Tour de France parade in Cork, resulting in a necessity of having 120 wage-earners working there at the same time. That kind of operation would be on the scale of the Abbey.

What is the structure and nature of this staffing in both companies? Paradoxically for a creative field of work, the administrative jobs are for the most part, the full-time and more stable positions. The full-time staff at Macnas have, by and large, been there from the beginning and mainly engage in managing, administrating, producing, and generally running the business side of the company. The artists, designers, directors, actors and general theatre practitioners mostly work on a part-time or contractual basis.

This enlightening fact highlights the important business aspect in theatre and arts organisations and practices in general. It is a widely dreamed fantasy that artistic talent and success will bring practicalities like work, money and a stable lifestyle, but the observation of creative workers in any organisation will provide a big wake-up call.

A successful business attitude and creative minds and hands don't usually occur in one person. There may well be a need therefore for some national guidelines for the protection and welfare of theatre practitioners. Surely the very instigators and fabricators of theatre, without whom the art would not exist, have the right to adequate pay and stability of work. The 1995 Arts

[31] Gary McMahon in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

Council Theatre Review concludes that, "members are often unpaid on social welfare, paid on a profit-sharing basis or paid for performances but not for rehearsals.....100% of respondents agreed or agreed strongly with the statement that, 'Irish theatre is heavily dependent on the existence of a hidden subsidy'." This 'hidden subsidy' of un-unionised isolated practitioners must come out of hiding and together make demands for better work conditions.

At the moment, Macnas does not have an Artistic Director, and the Abbey has. The Abbey has one singular visionary and Macnas has not. What do they have to say about this? Gary McMahon points out "It's very difficult for a company like Macnas to have one single visionary person running the whole creative end of the company, Breathnach was it for a long time, and Breathnach left. This pointed out a lot of gaps in the company." [32] General Manager, Declan Gibbons goes on to say that they have no plans to get permanent company artistic director, that they are working well with different directors on different projects, and that they are happy as long as the productions turn out well artistically. The only criticism that he hears of this current Macnas ethos is that if Macnas does not have one creative director, how do they know where they are going? How do they have a continuity and indigenous style? However, is this a necessity for a theatre group to be instantly identifiable in a production? Not for Macnas, it seems, who thrive on new ideas and challenges and are the self-confessed "Magpies" of theatre.

At present, the artistic direction is largely a communal effort stemming from the meeting room in the very new Macnas administrative offices in the black Box in Galway. At the moment everyone's trying to settle in to this new environment separated from the workshops by the Corrib, when for the last twelve years the running of the company took place in tiny incidental offices sprinkled around Workshop A. The administration was very much

[32] Gary McMahon in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

intertwined with the artistic, what with both working side by side and indeed on top of each other, and with staff members often doubling up in both roles.

Now the two are very clearly separated, not only physically by location, but also by clearer job description details. The latter clarification in Macnas life is a result of a crisis that culminated in August '96 with the resignation of the chairman, members of the board, general manager and artistic directors. The staff also resigned from their existing positions. Effectively the company did not exist for a short period during the meeting, until they reorganised the board, management and staff. The essential move of that fateful meeting in August '96 was, in the words of the agenda, "the appointment of people to positions by Board and / or General Manager with clearly defined functions and job descriptions." [33] The new element of job descriptions is integral to the ensuing changes in Macnas. People who possibly were not stationed in one particular place doing a stated job were assigned a designated function.

Previous to this meeting there were two artistic directors on the board working on two separate aspects of Macnas, one focusing on theatrical productions, and one dealing with community arts. They were not accountable for their work and possibly did not overlap well with their individual projects. After the meeting, however, it was the turn of Rod Goodall (see picture 5) to take over as the singular artistic director. Coming from a mime background at Jacques Le Coq's Theatrical Experience school, and having worked with the English Theatre group, Footsbarn for twelve years, Goodall became the driving force of Macnas for roughly a year. His leaving has left Macnas at their present stage of absence of artistic director, which seems to be the right thing for them now. They decide creatively in a group setting. People have more input into the end result and in turn the company can pick and choose potential directors to work with. They can even take risks with first time novice directors like the Sculptor Patrick

[33] "Macnas Board of Directors Meeting Agenda" 30th August '96

(5) Rod Goodall, 1996/97 Artistic Director, Macnas

O'Reilly, who brought the company great acclaim with his brainchild creation of Van Gogh's life, "Diamonds in the Soil."

"If we were a straight theatre company, it would be a lot easier to get an artistic director," Gary McMahon of Macnas tells me. The diverse nature of his company impedes this appointment. It would be very difficult to find one person to creatively decide on the stage, street, community and commercial productions of the company. The Abbey, however, is a "straight theatre company," and they do have one artistic director. The current artistic director, Patrick Mason, has been in that position since 1994 and is contracted to stay till the year 2000, when in the period previous to his appointment, 1985-1994, there were six successive artistic directors. While distinctly uncomfortable talking about this issue, Mason summarises his thoughts with, "nothing is quite what it seems when you read about the Abbey....you just have to be aware that there are a lot of agendas running." [34]

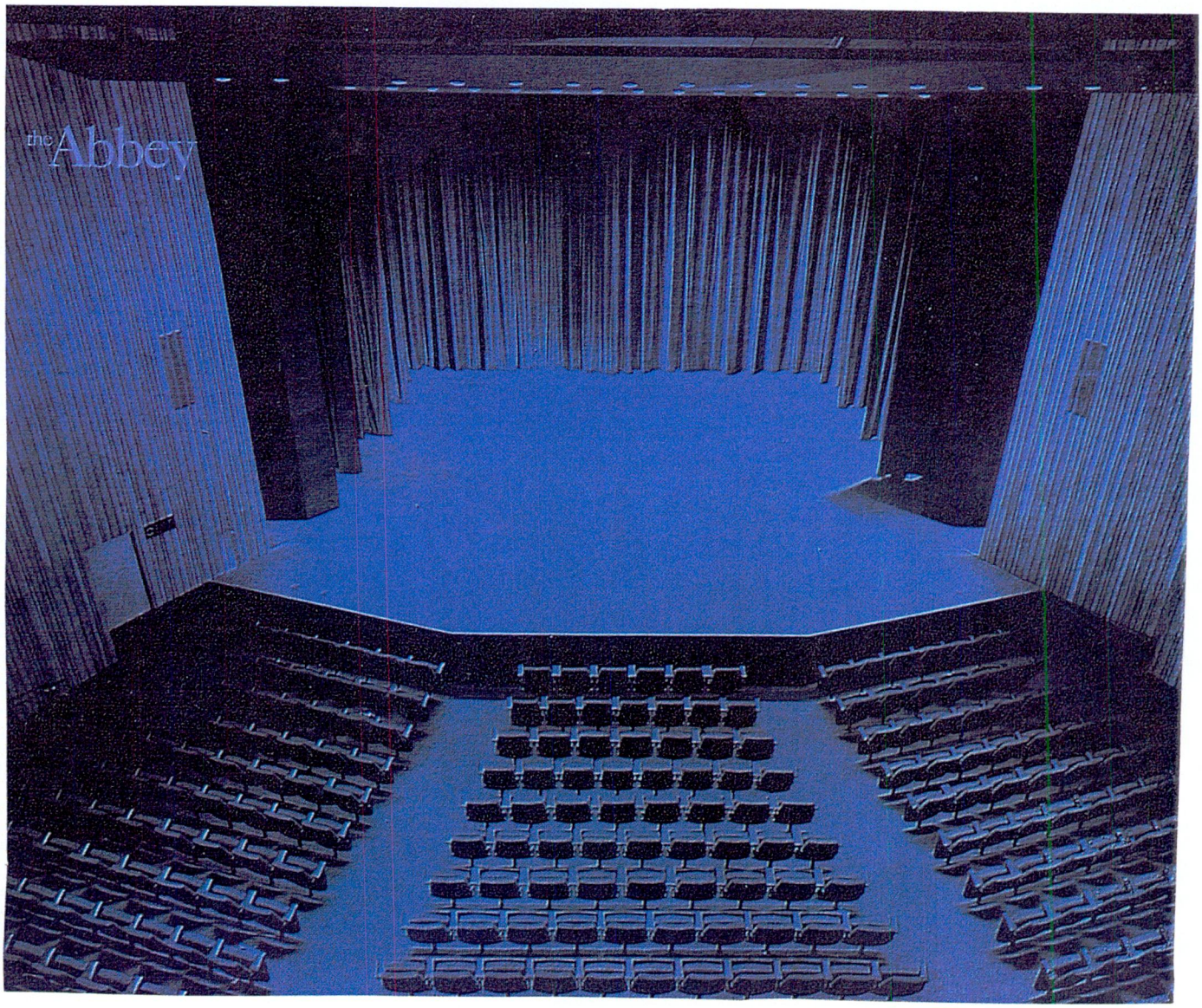
While two of the aforementioned six directors only took on one-year caretaker contracts, it is still a notable turnover of directors in one company, and the internal problems of the National theatre Society are widely documented. These difficulties culminated in an internal report in August '96 by David Brierley, the former general manager of the Royal Shakespeare Company in the U.K. A week of brainstorming with Abbey heads of departments concluded with the report. It was no surprise to anyone on the inside that the Abbey was not a happy ship. "Harshly critical of a number of internal realities – including the ambiguities in the contractual clauses of the general manager and the artistic director, which has resulted in much friction in the past – he (Brierley) came up with a large number of far-reaching recommendations." [35] The key result to come out of this report was the creation of a new executive position in the Abbey, and the subsequent appointment of Richard Wakeley as managing director in this new position.

[34] Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 19/10/98
[35] "The Irish Times" article "Shiny Abbey People" by Mic Moroney 5/11/97

The role of the new managing director was threefold : to put the theatre on a more sound commercial footing, to stabilise the executive structures and to free up the artistic director to do the job he is supposed to do.

The crisis at the Abbey has similarities with the crisis at Macnas. Besides happening at roughly the same time, both centered around contractual job description problems. Both companies required clarification of the roles and requirements of staff members. Both cases illustrate the fact that theatre, and indeed all arts organisations, do not survive under a haze of creativity, and job satisfaction, rather they are more likely to crumble under bad management if not analysed and rectified.

Another serious source of contention within all arts organisations is funding, and, in fact, numerous theses could be written on the subject itself. My key topic is not funding however it is necessary to discuss it in some format at this stage. In plain and simple terms, the Abbey receives Arts council funding of £3,280,000 broken down into categories of drama (£3,130,000) and Capital (£150,000), and Macnas receives a total of £228,000 in segments of £85,000 for drama, £36,000 for touring and £107,000 for community arts. The dramatic difference in funding is probably for three reasons. Firstly the Abbey is the National Theatre Society (along with the Peacock), secondly the Abbey has been established and producing theatre since 1898, and thirdly, the Abbey prides itself on supposedly being, "the only theatre in the country, as the National Theatre, which builds its own sets, makes its own costumes, has workshops, technicians. " Macnas, on the other had, is mere fledgling company in comparison, and so receives less funding. Asset-wise, Macnas do not compare to the Abbey. They do not have a theatre of their own, but rent workshops on the banks of the Corrib from UCG. The Theatre Society is housed in the buildings of the Abbey & Peacock on the corner of Abbey Street and Marlborough Street in Dublin,(see picture 6) and hence receive their funding primarily for drama, but also a token £150,000 for the capital development of their building. Built towards the end of the 1960s, the

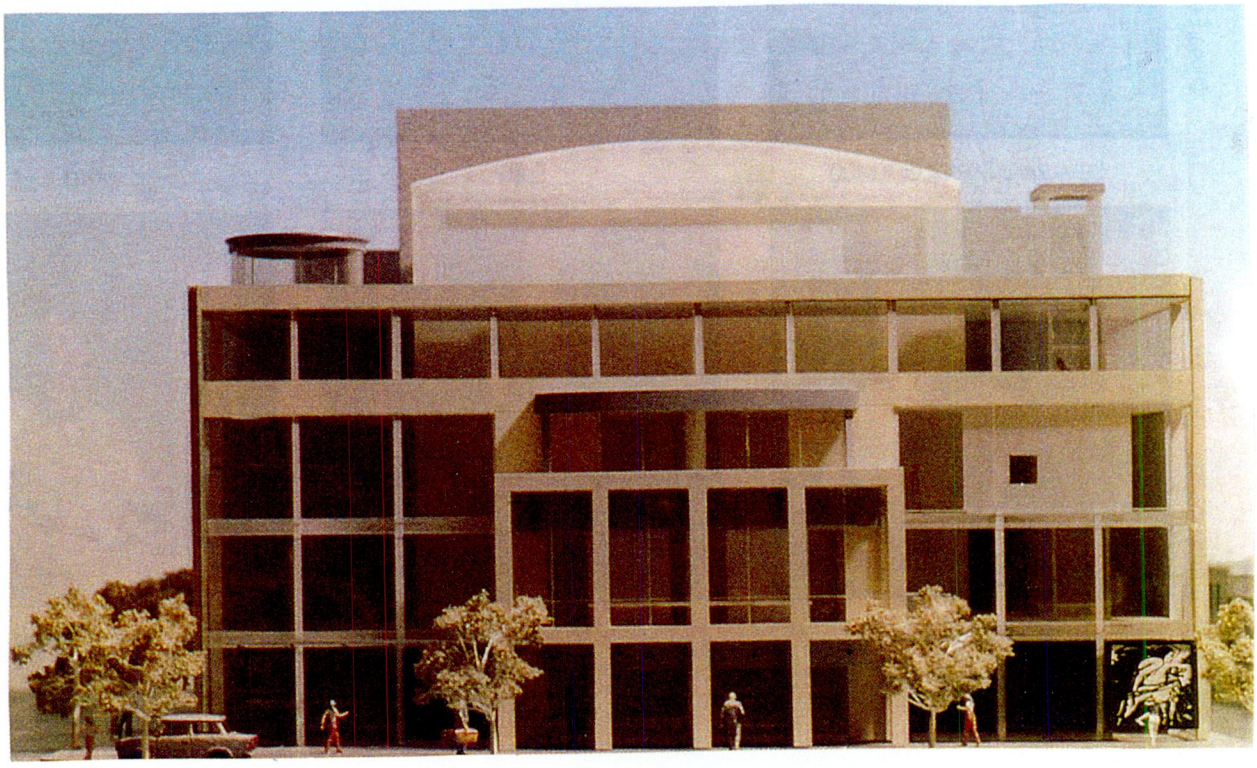


(6) Abbey Theatre Auditorium, Abbey Street, Dublin

building is in untimely disrepair and disfunction, a fact which management is currently pursuing with the Arts Council for a subsidy of £20M over four years to develop the building. (see picture 7). Interesting the emphasis of Macnas Arts Council funding is firmly placed on community arts, with drama coming next in line. And because of a combination of the lack of a theatre buildings base, and the nature of community arts theatre, Macnas receive a touring grant to enable them to bring their creations around the country and indeed around the world.

It is difficult to get any hard facts on the breakdown of spending in these two companies without delving deep into figures, a task which is both unnecessary and undesirable here. As already mentioned Mason names production as the biggest cost to the Abbey. The running of all the departments and payment of staff costs the most, a fact which members of Macnas reiterate, detailing that 60-75% of budget would be eaten away by staff wages.

Not including the human resources, what department consumes the most cash? Of course, it depends on the show, for instance, it can regularly be costumes like in the Macnas Tour de France parade in Cork this year where Mags Linanne designed and produced very elaborate Court de Versailles costumes. Declan Gibbons, Macnas General Manager, says that in a parade situation the floats are the most expensive due to the large labour cost, for example, if a float costs £20,000 to produce, then roughly £15,000 of this would solely pay the labour. It's clear from speaking with various theatre practitioners through the course of my interviews, that it's not the raw materials of theatre that are expensive, but instead the people that take these raw materials and make them into fantastic ephemeral creations are the largest price on the theatres' bill. Peculiarly these supposed high earners are referred to as the "hidden subsidy" of Irish Theatre and it is widely acknowledged that they receive very little in proportion to their workload and skill. Clearly there is something very amiss if theatre management list



(7) Architectural Model for proposed new Abbey Building

human resources as their top spending output, and simultaneously the Arts Council names theatre practitioners as the underpaid "hidden subsidy" of theatre. [36]

To summarise this analysis of the running of the Abbey and Macnas, both companies went through a similar structural crisis and survived; the Abbey with a new and strong artistic director, and Macnas without a lone artistic director by choice. It is notable that there is a great chasm of difference between the funding of the two companies. It is arguable that both have achieved roughly the same amount of national and international acclaim, yet one does it on an infinitely smaller budget. One of the most striking and worrying facts uncovered is that the administration side of theatre is a lot more stable than the creative. Indeed the creative "hidden subsidy" mostly exist on contractual bouts of underpaid work. This taken on board, still the largest spending output within these two theatres, and probably most theatres, is the wages to pay these underpaid "hidden subsidies". Something is amiss here and needs to be put right.

[36] "Views of Theatre in Ireland" Arts Council 1995

ROLE OF COSTUME

COSTUME STAFF

COSTUME ROOM & FACILITIES

Now to discuss Theatre Costume Design in Ireland. What is the role within Irish Theatre?

"Irish theatre banks on one of the strongest internal and external cultural identity patterns in Europe. The cross influence of parallel disciplines such as music and poetry build a strong creative environment in which drama grows with self confidence." [37] Music, poetry, aural stimulants? There is no reference to visuals. Theatre by its very nature is a 3-dimensional moving art. It is created by people in space with sets, costumes, movement, expression and, yes, music and poetry if the need be. Nevertheless one would not have suspected that music and poetry could solely create theatre, but apparently in Irish drama circles, they have. This observation is indicative of Irish Theatre origins. Drama in Ireland did not emerge from the Grand English establishments, but instead it grew from conversation and incidental casual fireside performances of songs, music, poetry and storytelling. From these humble beginnings our world-famous "Kitchen-table" Irish dramas emerged. They mirrored real life in Ireland at the times and involved much talk, song, and heartache centred around the kitchen-table. They purposely lacked colour, movement and pretension. Yeats even said of acting in the Abbey, "that actors should speak deliberately and move only when necessary. [38]

In fact the realist nature of the first true Irish plays, (The National Theatre Society at the Abbey formed the first genuine Irish drama), is an antithesis to visual theatre. The discernible aesthetic of the Abbey has always been, and will continue to be, skilful storytelling through a visual medium. The theatre medium, and all its appendages of sets, costumes, lights are all at the process stage in the Abbey, whereas the product of dramatised text has to be drawn directly from the naked text.

[37] "Views of Theatre in Ireland" Arts Council 1995
[38] "Oxford Companion to Irish Literature", Robert Welch, Oxford, Clarendon Press 96

Still where does this leave costume designs at the Abbey? A short cycnical answer would be, "in the wings." When questioned about the possibility of the visuals being slightly secondary at the Abbey, artistic director, Patrick Mason, rebuts, "in terms of production importance, the visuals are just as important as the text,...but in terms of where we start and where we finish....the text,...the text,....the text" [39] At the very beginnings, costume design was taken on quite freely and almost whimsically. Annie Horniman was one of the first to design for the Abbey. Her connection came through Yeats, for whom she designed set and costumes for his 1st play "The Land of Hearts Desire" in 1894 in the Avenue Theatre in London. While rumoured to have had a fancy for Yeats, Horniman pursued him so far as to become patron to the new theatre forming in Dublin in 1898 called the Abbey. While the National Theatre Society roamed Dublin theatreless for its first few years of existence, Horniman stepped in and secured the disused theatre on the corner of Abbey Street and Marlborough Street for the Society in 1904. The early costumes of the Abbey , not being a priority of the theatre, seem to have been simple and minimal.

Now, as already mentioned, costumes (and general visuals) have assumed equal part with the text in production terms in the Abbey. Mason, and other decision-makers in the business, realise that in our visually-saturated world, theatre will drown without visual floats. From Nintendo Playstation to "Reservoir of Dogs", we've seen it all, and this is the society that near 21st century theatre finds itself. Having said that, there is one point that theatre directors have to remind us of and which we have to remember, and that is the following: theatre is a unique medium of expression in itself that does not have to, nor even pertains to, compete with the same verbal and visual language as anything else like film or television.

Theatre cannot rely on camera angles, extra-takes, editing, digital remastering or anything of the sort like its counterparts. We as the audience

[39] Interview with Patrick Mason by Aoife Cleary 10/11/98

must appreciate the ephemeral words and scenes before us and shake off our screen mentalities. Ultimately theatre is live storytelling in three-dimensions. The storytelling can exist on many levels, with which there has been much experimentation throughout the 20th Century "Live performance has taken on new and wonderful shapes in this century, because its traditional role has been usurped by cinema," Fintan O'Toole tells us in the Irish Times on the 5th January this year. This, very articulately summates for us how theatre is no longer required to painstakingly imitate life. It is now free to make theatre for theatre's sake in many diverse forms.

One company experimenting with the forms of theatre is Macnas. What is the importance of costume in Macnas? Being a highly visual theatre company, Macnas seem to have a great emphasis on costume. However, when pressed on the issue, Public Relations Officer, Gary McMahon, did not want to make a commitment one way or the other, "I don't know if any one area gets priority over the other. You can't really separate them. In a parade context, costumes have a very strong focus but also there can be a strong emphasis on floats. At times it comes down to budgets; the costliest one is the one that gets the most attention" [40]

From Macnas' beginning in 1986 costume would have to be one of the more memorable elements of their shows. Costumes give Macnas actors colour, movement, size, scale, texture, and most of all, excitement. The exhilaration of performing in wacky costumes exudes from the Macnas troop and vice versa. Masks are another vital raison d'etre of Macnas, and were the crux of "Diamonds in the Soil". Papier mache painted Van Gogh masks took on an eerie edge when twisted and turned denoting insanity. It was a simple, yet strikingly effective theatrical dance. For more Macnas mask success, we only have to cast out minds back to the U2 '95 Zooropa tour, where fibre-glass Macnas "Bigheads" of Bono, Edge, Adam and Larry took to the stage with the real rock superstars. And their fame is not over yet as they are currently

[40] Gary McMahon in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

appearing on a screen near you on Channel 4's "T.F.I. Friday" with Chris Evans, and again with the boys in U2's "Sweetest Thing" video.

The masks are largely thanks to Aine Lawless (see picture 8) and her workshop, and returning to the costumes, Margaret "Mags" Linanne (see picture 9) is the designer and costume-maker along with a small and ever-changing team of machine and wardrobe hands. Largely trained in Macnas, Mags has quickly risen to the top. She gave up a secure retail management job to work in the Macnas wardrobe department on a FAS scheme, she is now a freelance designer working for Macnas, among others, on contract. "Diamonds in the Soil" which opened in the 1998 Dublin theatre Festival in the Olympia, is the first show where Mags is the credited designer. On previous shows, like the 1997 Galway Arts Festival Macnas Parade, Ger Sweeney would have been the credited designer of the floats, masks and costumes. His input would have been largely the detailed illustration of the hundreds of elements involved. The job of Aine on masks and Mags on costume would be to translate these sketches into actuality, taking into account time scale, budget, available materials, skill factor and other criteria. It might be said that the job of the costume maker here draws on infinitely more creativity and ingenuity to produce the goods, rather than the possible fantastical job of the designer who imagines this potentially beautiful piece of theatre that is not particularly rooted in reality. I know from working on the team with Mags for the 1997 Parade that many changes were made to the original impression drawings by the time the finished garments were produced. While most of these were for practical reasons like movement or fabric availability, some were for aesthetic reasons. Once the design drawings have been passed on to Mags, or indeed any other costume maker, she assumes control over the destiny of the costumes, to an extent.

The extent of this control is important. In the case of a Parade where 600 people have to be kitted out in costume, essentially anyone ready to take control of a job is welcome to do so. Especially towards the deadline, it's a

(8) Aine Lawless, Mask Designer & Maker, Macnas

(9) Mags Linanne, Costume Designer & Maker, Macnas

case of dividing out the tasks, both designing and making up. We, as students, were assigned certain sections to basically solve designwise and make up as well. For instance, Lucy and I were given the task of producing thirty monkey costumes for kids! (see picture 10). One may think a monkey is a monkey but, believe me, there are variables. We came up with the idea of a basic calico all-in-one suit, with foam padding attached and fur and leatherette appliquéd on top. It was a big job that posed many practical and aesthetic problems for us, but it was our responsibility and we achieved a successful end result.

Macnas probably allows this extent of decision making and control at all levels because it, as an organisation, places a lot of emphasis on community arts, and the process being as important as the product. The question is whether the Abbey doles out freethinking and action within the walls of its departments. It is interesting to note that, among many of the notable changes Mason has made at the Abbey, is the fact that he has fused the Design & Production departments. Apparently after Director of Design, Joe Vanek, left at the end of '97 the Abbey had about ten freelance designers who wanted to stay that way to be able to design for other theatres, film and T.V. Patrick Mason thought at the time, "what we really need is a continuity in the building but we also need to have flexibility" [41] They opted for amalgamation of the design and production departments, with the creation of a new post of Design Co-ordinator, someone who basically liaised with all the designers, and between designers and production manager and the workshops. This fusion of design and production is quite obviously a move to create better communication and flow of ideas between the two. The designers supposedly have all the ideas, and the production workers have all the know-how, but the reality is, if the two were able to swap some of their criteria for work, both would benefit, and most importantly, the end product would be of a higher quality.

[41] Patrick Mason in interview with Aoife Cleary 17/10/98

(10) Monkey Costumes, Macnas Galway Arts Parade 1997

Design cannot be carried out in a vacuum. By it's very nature it has a function of some sort and the more knowledge attained about the nature of this function and the method of production, the more appropriate the design. Macnas seem to be successfully fusing the design and production of costumes with Mags Linanne overseeing both. While the Abbey have fused the relevant departments, they still have separate designers and makers. For instance, Monica Frawley, (see picture 4) designed sets and costumes for "By the Bog of Cats" in the 1998 Dublin theatre Festival, and the Abbey's wardrobe department led by Anne Cave produced the costumes. While Monica readily admits, "I can't thread a needle" [42] her job entails researching the text for imagery, drawing designs, doing detailed specifications and swatching for fabric. She then must oversee the production all the way through to the opening night and beyond. Basic requirements for this position involve at least a knowledge of, if not an ability for, production methods, as Monica points out "I have a fair idea of cutting, theory, and fabrics etc. but generally would always have worked with wardrobe people." [43] It is highly likely that Monica is showing modesty in her above statement, as she received a degree from NCAD in a theatre design course, which she and another student invented, and she went on to complete a masters in Theatre Design in Central St. Martins in London.

Although Monica Frawley appears to have a lot more official qualifications behind her, she also worked a stint at Macnas about eight years ago. She expresses frustration firstly, at the amount of untrained, unqualified FAS workers to deal with, and secondly, at the small amount of money paid out to workers. She says, "I was in my 20's and that was fine but people can't go on having that kind of money." [44] Monica is now in a more stable freelance designer position, where "you lease your designs for the duration," of the production. As already mentioned, Mags Linanne has become a freelance designer and is getting more credit for her work. The freelance situation has

[42-44] Monica Frawley in interview with Aoife Cleary 16/11/98

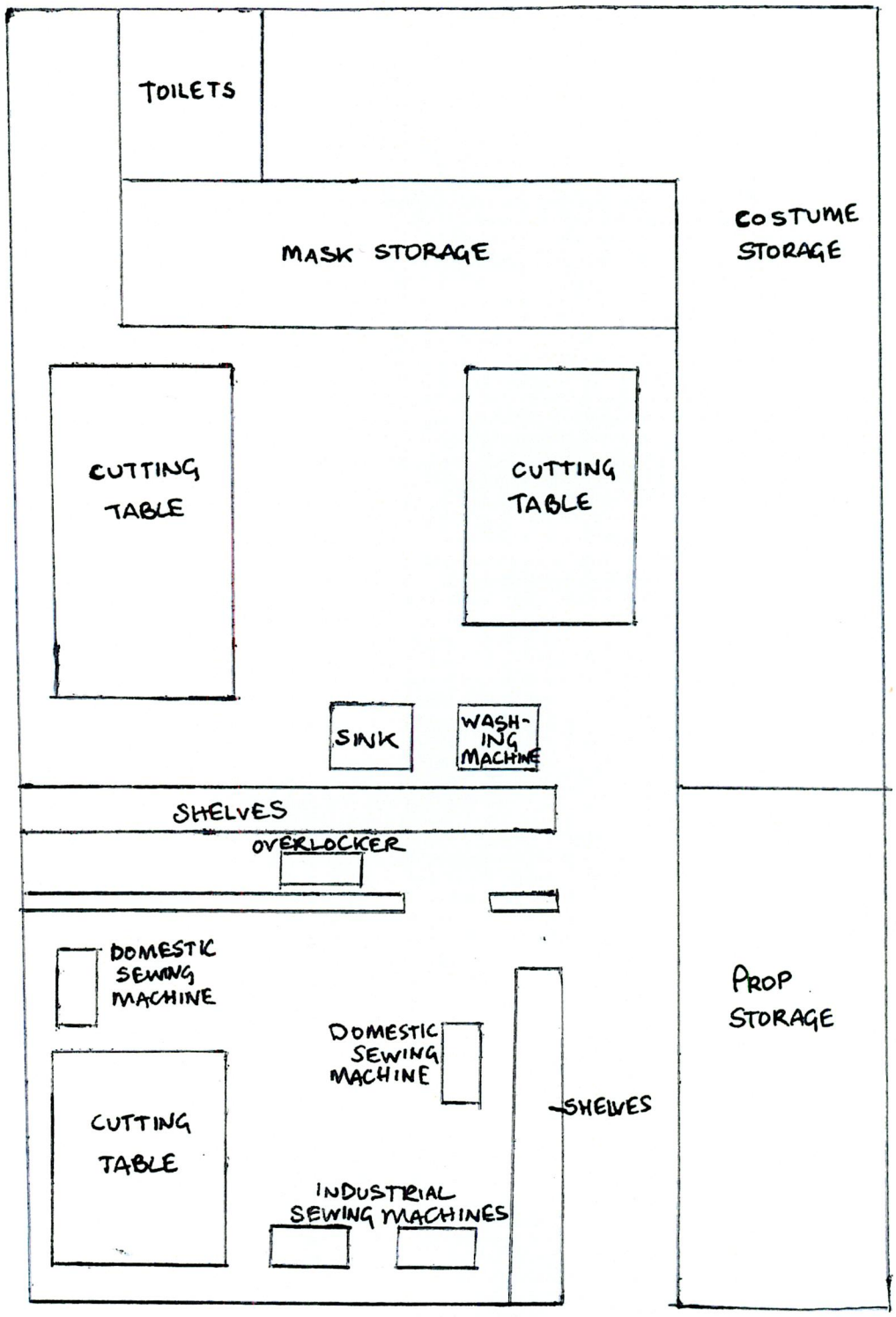
undoubtedly awarded both Monica and Mags with more acclaim and money for their efforts.

What are their respective costumes rooms like?

I shall begin with the one of which I have most knowledge and experience, that is the Macnas Costume Room upstairs in workshop B, Fisheries Field, Galway. It is quite an organic place of work, where one might marvel at the fact that over six hundred costumes are produced here every year. The upstairs section of an old warehouse is the Aladdin's cave-like costume room. Walking in is like entering into the wardrobe of a children's fairystory, because the storage of the costumes is alongside the workspace. (See picture 11 - plan of Macnas costume room). Actually the storage of the majority of the masks, heads, props, and costumes is alongside the costume working area. (See picture 12,13). There is a lot of natural light as one wall is virtually taken up by large windows, some small ones of which have become dislodged and are temporarily replaced by plastic sheeting. However, when darkness falls, the artificial light is just about adequate, for instance there is no proper lighting in the storage area and this proves difficult when locating a costume. Adequate lighting is crucial in a costume room, not only for issues of eye strain after hours of detailed sewing, but also for colour judgement in costumes. Whereas, "tungsten or incandescent lighting is mandatory for all work involving colour judgement," [45] Macnas seem to have fluorescent lights around the costume area. There is no operating ventilation system within the Macnas and windows are relied on when an unusual heatwave hits Galway. It must be said at this stage that it was required and inforced that sprays, adhesives and paints that created dangerous fumes were used outside and handled correctly.

The general working conditions and facilities in Macnas are good. In the costume room there are usually two industrial sewing machines (see pic. 14),

[45] "Fabric Painting & Dyeing for the Theatre" Deborah Dryden 1993 Reed Pub. USA



(11) Plan of Macnas Costume Room, Galway

(12) Masks Storage, Macnas Costume Room

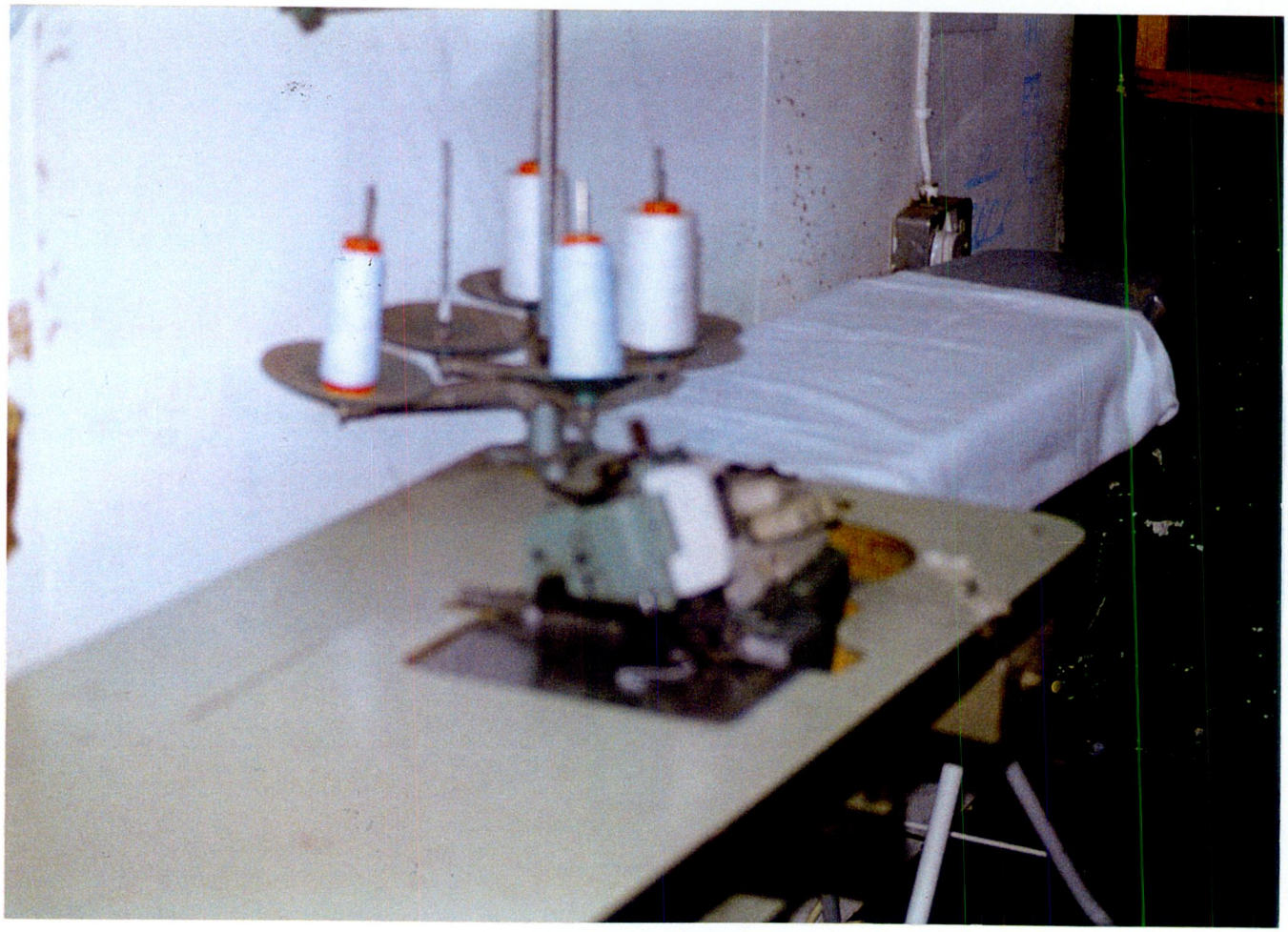
(13) Costume Storage, Macnas Costume Room

(14) Industrial Sewing Machine, Macnas Costume Room

three domestic sewing machines, and an overlocker (see picture 15). The industrial machines have a few advantages over the domestic; they are faster, more durable and sturdier so one can use almost any type of fabric in it with success. The domestic machines are considerably lighter and slower but are also about a third of the price (£1,000 : £300). The overlocker is invaluable for its ability of simultaneously sewing and sealing seams from fraying. It is very difficult to thread however, (there are four threads involved at the same time) and once a thread goes astray, a technician has to be called in from Galway to fix it.

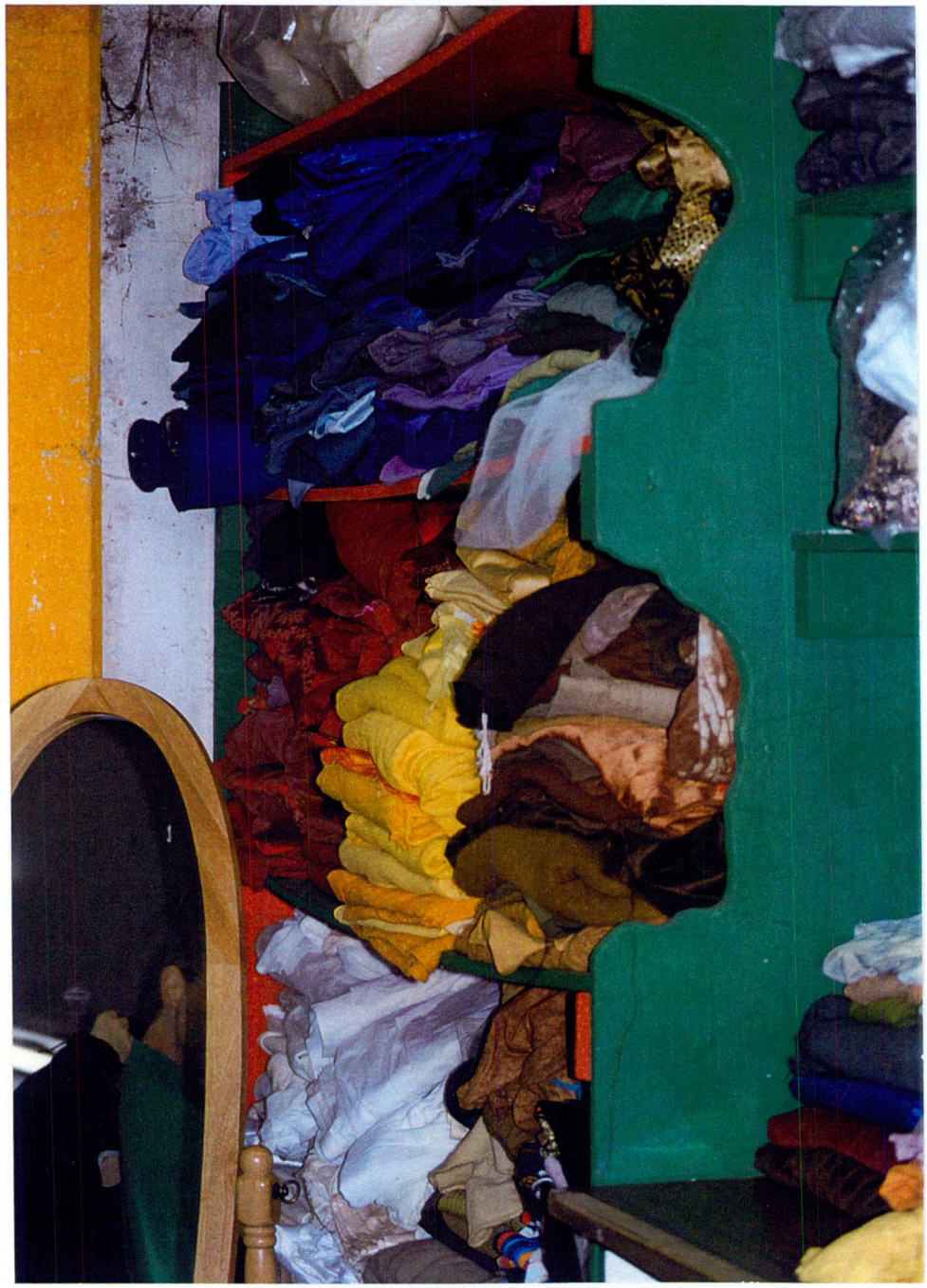
Apart from the obvious heavy machinery, there are the usual sinks, irons, sprays, paints, scissors, threads, glues, trimmings and fabrics available to the Macnas costume team (see picture 16-17). The photographs show the costume room when it is not in use in the middle of a massive production, so understandably everything is quite neat and tidy, even with the remaining, unused fabrics colour-coordinated.

It is worth noting that even though Macnas do quite a bit of fabric dyeing, there is no separate dye-room or dye-area within the costume area. All dyeing of lengths of fabric is done by washing machine using dylon machine dyes. The small sink area is used to rinse out fabric and then it is hung to dry or speeded up in the tumble drier. Because of the cramped dyeing conditions there are often inconsistencies in the evenness of the dyed fabric. But even more important than the final aesthetic qualities of the fabric are the safety issues. Apart from the worrying idea of dye particles being in the air for inhalation, the dyeing is usually done in the exact same area as the coffee and tea preparation. Screen printing is very occasionally tackled on the temporarily-transformed cutting tables in the costume area. Such a hurried and temporary dye and print area in Macnas is the opposite of operations like the dye room of the National Theatre, London (see picture 18), which seems to be the ideal situation.

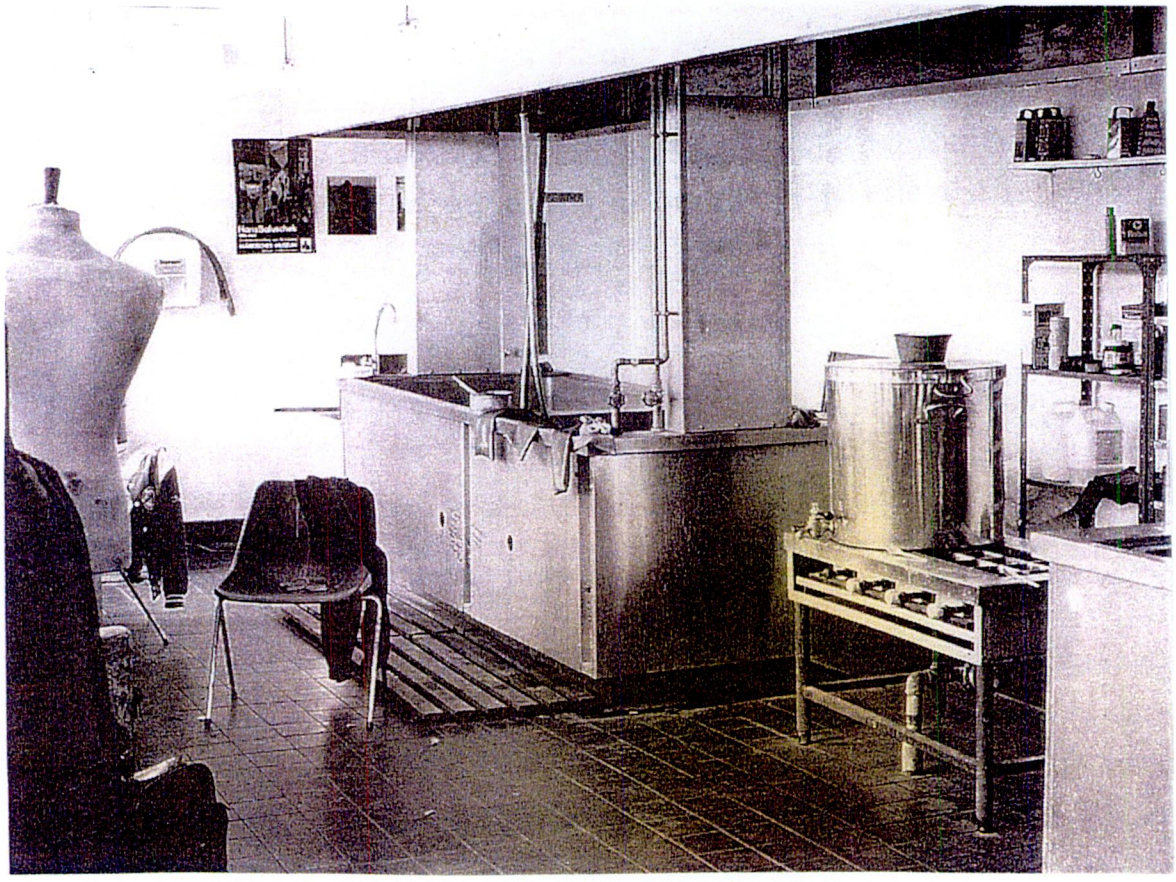


(15) Overlocker, Macnas Costume Room

(16) Materials, Macnas Costume Room



(17) Fabrics, Macnas Costume Room



(18) Dye Room, National Theatre, London

What about the Abbey?

"The wardrobe department is essentially one room, with shelves of fabric and sequins at one end," the Irish Times tells us. [46] The article goes on to say ..."The wardrobe department is full of tailor's dummies wearing half finished dresses and underwear....Outside in a narrow corridor there are racks of cloaks, blouses and rows of shoes and boots; even a cow's head..."[47]

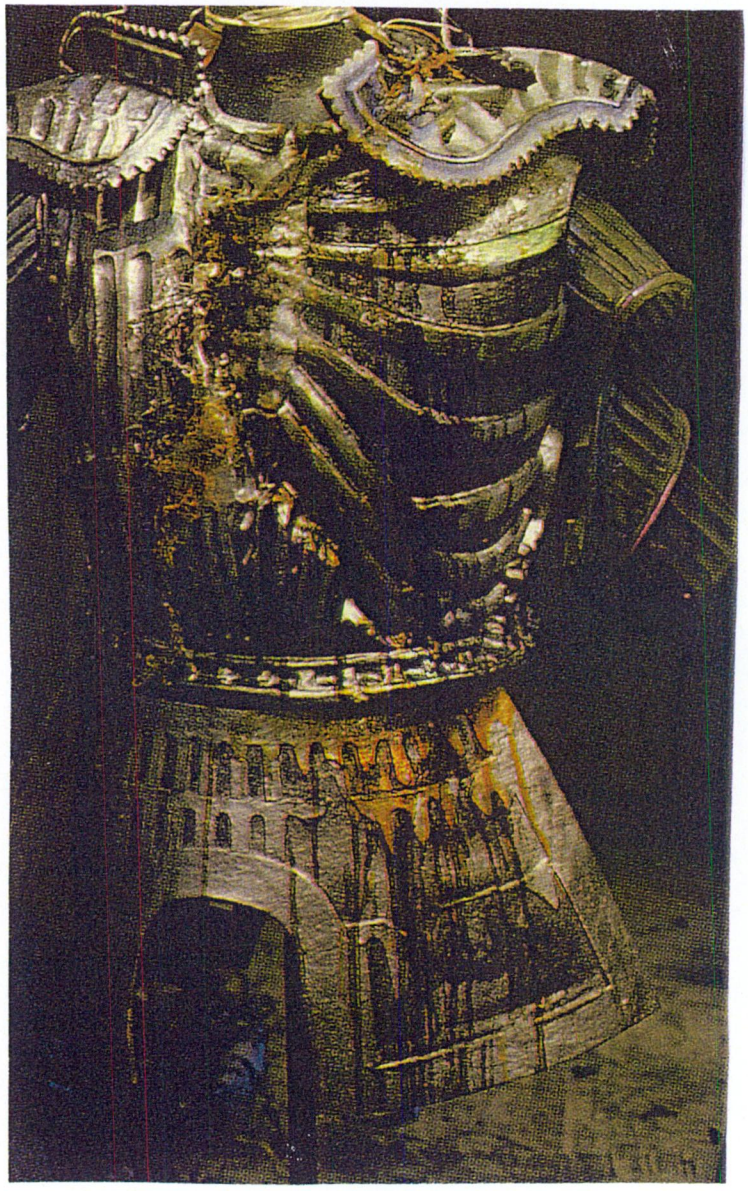
Anne Cave is wardrobe supervisor and she works with a number of cutters and assistants like, Anne O'Halloran (see picture 19). Their job would be to take up production of the costumes from where the designer concludes, and of course they would be under constant scrutiny from the designer. The designer would oversee all the creative decisions and the wardrobe staff bring these decisions to fruition.

There are certainly different responsibilities attached to both the costume designer and the costume maker. The costume designer must provide an inventory with total costs, ideas, sketches, full-colour drawings, advice for costume-maker, movement and posture development for that particular era, as well as assistance at the final "breaking down" ageing stage of the costumes. (see picture 20) On the other hand the costume maker must primarily know how to execute the designs, by analysing the specs, patterning garments, decorating, accessorising, maintaining and of course they must do all this within the timescale and budget provided.

Ultimately, costume is primary to the work of Macnas, and secondary to the work of the Abbey. Hence Macnas have the same person designing and making costumes, whereas the Abbey have the jobs split between a designer and a separate team of makers. This is just one notable point of many, where the Abbey is quite official and regimental in their costume production

[46-47] The Irish Times article "The World's a Stage" by Katie Donovan 12/12/98

(19) Anne O'Halloran, Wardrobe Assistant, Abbey Theatre



(20) Ageing Costumes : Painted Armour with FEV and metallics

and Macnas take the organic approach. The facilities of Macnas may not compare well with that of the Abbey, and it is extremely hard to believe they come up with their hundreds of costumes, but the results are there for all to see.

COSTUME DESIGN, PRODUCTION & FABRICS

CASE STUDIES OF TYPICAL WORK : MACNAS – GALWAY ARTS FESTIVAL ABBEY – BY THE BOG OF CATS

How is costume design and production approached and executed in Ireland?

What are the general criteria and steps followed? Is there any uniformity across the spectrum of theatre in Ireland, or does each company follow its own set of guidelines?

According to one of the many middle-of-the-road costume books, the function of a costume is threefold, that is to characterise, to individualise and to facilitate and enhance the movement of the actor. [48] These type of books usually have every step of costume making described for putting into action meticulously, when in actuality there is so little time that a lot of short cuts are taken. These garments are not for sale in the high street, a lot of them are not even for wearing for a very long time, so they need not necessarily be beautifully made. It is essential that the effect of them is beautiful for the duration of their stage or street performance but they certainly do not have to have hand-sewn hems, or the like. Invisible glue will do.

Macnas certainly subscribe whole-heartedly to this idea of ephemeral theatre depicted mostly with equally transient costumes. Granted their large storeroom is packed tight with their surviving costumes from the past twelve years work, but a lot of the less detailed costumes get taken for pattern making, ripped up for more fabric or simply thrown out.

"Theatrical costuming not only encompasses the entire range of clothing history from the advent of clothing of the present, it also includes for such things as fantasy and other non-realistic plays, the development of styles of clothing the body which have no precedent in clothing history."[49] This kind of fantastical work in the costume area is quite typical of Macnas. Their central ethos, "to have and make fund on a grand scale" never mentions any particular type of theatre, source or indeed costume design. In their wild

[48] "Stage Costume Handbook" Bernice Prisk
[49] "Stage Costume Techniques" Joy Spanabe Emery 1981 New Jersey

enthusiasm, Breathnach and others left themselves very open and able to experiment as long as its fun. Being the "magpies" of theatre, they very often use fantasy imagery, or at the very least, they use real imagery in a fantasy way. Either way the end result is quite the antithesis of realism.

Taking a typical Macnas production, the parade for the 1997 Galway Arts Festival, as a case study, how do Macnas design and produce their shows? The annual Arts Festival Parade is the single biggest event for Macnas, it is even stated in policy as being so! Gary McMahon tells us, "it brings together all the elements that make up Macnas." [50] And there are a lot of elements involved, because as well as being the most important event for Macnas, it is also the largest. Usually about six hundred people take part. This six hundred is made up of professional actors, staff at Macnas, volunteers from the community, and disadvantaged community groups. It is some job to coordinate.

The concentrated production takes place over about six weeks, where contractors, FAS workers, students and volunteers augment the usual staff at Macnas. In the costume room there were mainly six of us working full time for six weeks to make six hundred costumes.

The theme and name of the '97 parade was "Seasons", (se picture 21) and each season was represented by an ancient civilisation. Winter was depicted by Vikings, Spring by Ancient Greeks, Summer by Ancient Egyptians, and Autumn by the South American Myans. There was a lot of scope with imagery because each of the four sections could call on two rich themes each for inspiration.

The design process started with general meetings of all the decision-makers in Macnas to flesh out the theme and come up with some design ideas, which

[50] Interview with Gary McMahon by Aoife Cleary 2/12/98

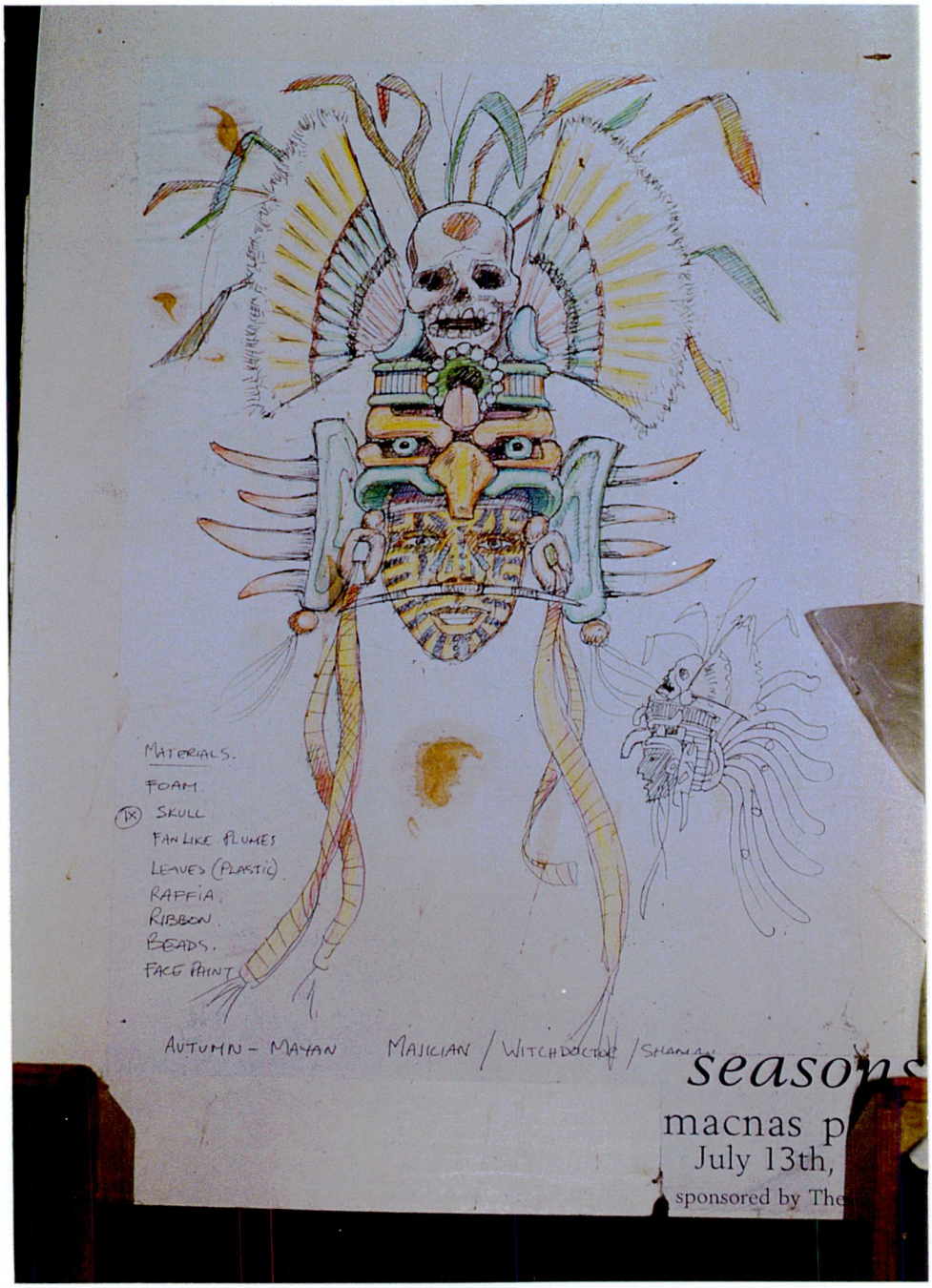
(21) Macnas '97 Parade "Seasons" Finale at Black Box

were then put to a final image by designer, Ger Sweeney. The majority of the designs were simple black-and-white line drawings with sparse notes on details or accessories. The occasional main character piece drawing had colour added (see picture 22), fabric suggestions, but none had fabric swatches. That was where the designers job stopped for now, it was up to the costume-makers, Mags Linnane, and Charmaine Goodall to source fabrics.

Prior to commencing costume production, there was an open evening in the workshops for measuring. About five hundred members of the public descended on Fisheries Field full of enthusiasm to be witchdoctors, Greek Gods, monkeys, rain-dancers, trolls, Eskimos and the lot. We proceeded to fill in sheets with very detailed measurements, (see picture 23) because we didn't know yet who would be in the leading roles. Additional information like personal details, and special abilities were also noted. It is handy to know if someone pencilled in to be a float-pusher is actually a wizard on the drums.

The two makers, who had split up the sections of the parade to work on, went to Dublin to source fabrics. (see picture 24). They spent a day at the very beginning of production there where they sourced and purchased in the one day. Mags who was responsible for the seasons of Spring and Autumn, returned to Galway with metres and metres of fabric, and also some very interesting trimmings and accessories. She advised lateral thinking when buying for costumes, as some of the best items she found were in fishing shops (feathers) and gardening shops (rafia, rope, baskets). For theatre, and especially street theatre, the desired result is visual impact, and if this can be achieved by unconventional methods, so be it.

As I mentioned before, the costume room in Macnas is very organic, and so also are the working methods. Even though we were in charge of producing six hundred costumes in a short amount of time, there was no great overall plan of action. Simply Mags was doing Spring and Autumn and Charmaine



(22) Main Character Drawing by Ger Sweeney for "Seasons"

Name _____

dress size _____
bra size _____
suit size _____
shoe size _____
glove size _____
hat size _____
ring size _____
pierced ears _____
left/right handed _____

height _____
neck to waist _____
neck to floor _____
waist to floor _____
waist to crotch _____
underarm to waist _____
inside leg _____

circumference of:

chest _____
waist _____
hips _____
bicep _____

elbow _____
forearm _____
wrist _____
thigh _____

knee _____
calf _____
ankle _____
head _____

nape of neck to shoulder _____
top of shoulder to underarm _____
top of shoulder to elbow _____
top of shoulder to wrist with arm bent _____
inside arm to elbow _____
inside arm to wrist with arm straight _____
elbow to elbow with arms outstretched _____
wrist to wrist with arms outstretched _____

width across front of shoulders _____
width across back of shoulders _____
width across front of chest _____
width across back of chest _____
point to point of chest _____
top of shoulder to point of chest _____

forehead to nape of neck _____
from ear to ear, over top of head _____

[Trace foot on back of chart]

(23) Detailed Measurements Sheets - Macnas

(24) Fabrics chosen for Design of Main Character in Picture 22

was handling Summer and Winter, both of whom were helped by two of us each. Actually it is important to note that, of the six hundred costumes, probably one hundred were got from the costume store, or were adapted or tailored from existing costumes in store. This is a regular occurrence in Macnas. Not only do they repeatedly use their stock of costumes for their numerous small commercial gigs around the country, but they also reuse them at a more primary level also by alteration.

The production got well underway with dyeing of fabric and trimmings one of the first steps. As mentioned already there is no full dye area in Macnas. The dyeing is simply done in the washing machine with machine dylon dye and dried by hanging or tumble drying.

Fittings took place over the period of productions, with an average of about two fittings per person, which coincided with an informal dress rehearsal of their section of the play.

With no plan there was, unsurprisingly, a final week of stress on everyone's part, culminating in a couple of all-night stints at the end. (see picture 25) However, plan or no plan, this is going to happen anyway. It is human nature to leave everything to the last minute, or at least to expand the work fit the time given. Short cuts or time-saving devices were widespread such as unsewn hems, pinned trimmings, glued beads, sprayed fabric and the list goes on. These did not detract from the visual impact on the day, and may well have been the best solutions employed even given more time.

After research, I found that there are a lot of similarities between Macnas' methods employed by ancient Greed comedies. Around 400BC, these comedies were performed to packed theatres full of men solely.

"The hallmark of the comic mask, male and female, was that it was ugly – all its features were distorted from the ideal, which were typical of the tragic

(25) Final Image of Witchdoctor from Pictures 22 and 24

mask. The body was uglified as well, actors wore gross padding in front and behind ." [51-56] Some of the work for which Macnas is most famous, like the giant padded ugly men called "Fir Bolgs", employ exactly the characteristics described in the Greek comedies. It was clear that the humour in the work of Macnas was so primitive, yet instantly appearing to the senses, that it was likely to have some ancient derivation.

Interestingly the themes and performances of Ancient Greek comedies also have connections with Macnas. These comedies mounted, "unheroic burlesques of well-known myths, ...there would also be a political allegory detectable,"[51-56] as in Macnas '98 parade where they satirise the local government and council officials depicting them as fat cats in relation to planning permission decisions in the area. "In contract to previous years, this year's theme was pointedly political," the Irish times tell us the Greek comic influence on Macnas is clear in themes, performance, and most importantly, costumes.

"By the Bog of Cats" opened in the Abbey for the 1998 Dublin Theatre Festival. It's Greek tragic influences were acutely more deliberate, even appearing in script and programme of the event. Playwright, Marina Carr, took great influence from the Ancient Greek tragedy of Medea. While one cannot generalise when theorising in this area, "almost all tragedies tell stories of suffering, of mental and physical anguish, of the waste of life and prosperity.....they generally deal with conflict, and particularly family conflict, the extreme stresses of blood and marriage relationships."[51-56] This is clearly great subject matter for development in a modern play and would fit perfectly into the Abbey's repetroire. Of the characters, " a remarkable proportion of them are women.....and many of the most powerful Greek tragedies emphasise issues of gender conflict.[51-56]

[51-56] "The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre" John Russell Brown 1997 Oxford Uni. Press

Already, from the description of the general tragedies, we are seeing "By the Bog of Cats" before our eyes. The specifics of "Medea" are even more startling. The Greek playwright Seneca penned "Medea" centred around a woman who, "kills her sons on stage and spills her own blood on an alter at the climax of a scene of witchcraft" [51-56] Hester Swain, the Medea of "By the Bog of Cats" kills her daughter in the final scene, followed by herself to be ushered away by the ghost fancier. She is held by many of the locals to be a type of a witch of a tinker with extra sensory and gifts from her mother.

Throughout the play there is a study of Hester's anger. Why is she driven to such lengths? In fact, by the final scene, we almost empathise with her killing of Josie, because we have lived through that fateful day with her. We have shared the "elemental qualities of her anger"[51-56] Seneca's plays were acknowledged also for being "set in a single day, in a single location, and have a single plot," just like "By the Bog of Cats", which is set on a cold November day in this barren bog in Offaly and follows the plot of Hester's anger. (see picture 26).

The Design of such a monumental play was undertaken by Monica Frawley , an honours graduate of Central St. Martins, who told me that there would normally be six weeks pre-production, when the designer works with the writer and director, which in the cast of "By the Bog of Cats" was Marina Carr and Patrick Mason respectively. Usually then the designer would have to have their model of the set and drawings submitted before rehearsals begin. Four and a half weeks rehearsal would follow, during which slight changes may occur to the original designs. In the case of the Abbey, and undoubtedly any other ensemble theatres, this change could be instigated from any member of the company right from lighting designers, to technicians to actors themselves. Monica says of actors contributions, "obviously if its

[51-56] "The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre" John Russell Brown 1997 Oxford Uni. Press

(26) Hester's Anger in "By the Bog of Cats"

very heavy period stuff, actors don't have great opinions. If it's modern dress they're all mad to do everything." [57]

While Anne Cave and her team are the costume makers, Monica still oversees production right up to and during performances. She therefore can tell me some points of interest about "By the Bog of Cats". Because of the modern day setting of the play, however other-wordly, a lot of the costumes were shop brought items. The central wedding scene, for instance, was basically kitted out by a "Black Tie" store. The stock was slightly out of season or style so the Abbey bought quite an amount for £700. " We got fantastic stuff, all the wedding dresses, the mother-in-laws dress, the guy's suits.....and another seven or eight wedding dresses (that were not used in this play). They were getting rid of them as they were all yellow so that was good for us." [58]

White ceremonial dresses had great symbolism in the play. The first view of a wedding dress is when Carline Cassidy, the young bride-to-be, appears to warn Hester Swane off her groom, with whom Hester has lived with for years. Carline's dress is quite prim and proper. It's lacey, over-decorated and conservative (see picture 27). The standard wedding dress criteria of embroidered bodice leading to full tulle and satin meringue skirt. Carline is every bit the innocent blushing Irish country bride wishing for nothing more than a big unforgettable wedding day.

Well, that's precisely what she got. Firstly, Josie Kilbride, daughter of Hester and the groom, Carthage, attends the wedding in her communion dress. (see picture 28) She is caught up in the excitement of her father getting married and wants to be dressed in white too. There is a sense of foreboding when we hear that the last time Hester had seen her mother she was dressed in

[57-58] Monica Frawley in interview with Aoife cleary 16/11/98

(27) Carline's Dress in "By the Bog of Cats", The Abbey '98

(28) Hester & Josie in "By the Bog of Cats"

her communion dress. Was history going to repeat itself? The answer is yes but with a terrible twist.

Humour in a white dress took the shape of Mrs. Kilbride, Carthage the groom's mother. She is such the domineering battleaxe mother of the groom that she too had to come dressed in a white ensemble.

The fun and frolics took an eerie turn through when Hester crashed the wedding celebrations dressed in a white wedding dress. She was drunk and shouted obsenities of how it should have been her day. There are distinct differences between the design of Carline's dress and Hester's dress. Hester swaggers into the scene in a low-cut shoulderless dress revealing her sinewing strong shoulders and arms. While Carline is quite girlishly feminine, Hester is aggressive in her movements. She nevertheless oozes this very raw attractiveness and sexual prowess.

The final scene which culminates a day of fateful occurrences, sees Hester and daughter Josie, together on the bog, one moment in the loving embrace of life, the next, of death at the hands of Hester. The virignal white dresses add a very eerie quality to the deaths, and bring home to us the unearthly mood of the whole play.

It is evident from my analysis of costumes design and production within the companies, that, just like the costume room, Macnas' attitude to design and production is distinctly organic. They create costumes that are either entirely fantastical or are real phenomenon in a fantastical fashion. The Abbey is renowned for its realist drama and this style continues onto its costume design where they often buy and use ready-made clothes from shops to dress their realist cast.

CASE STUDIES OF NEW WORK :

MACNAS – "DIAMONDS IN THE SOIL"

ABBEY – "RIVALS"

HOW ARE THE TWO COMPANIES DEVELOPING?

What is the situation with costume design in the new work of Macnas and the Abbey?

Also premiering in this year's Dublin Theatre Festival was Macnas "Diamonds in the Soil", a mime and visually based play depicting Van Gogh's life, credited by sculptor patrick O'Reilly and directed by Mikel Murfi. (see picture 29) There were about four main reasons why this was such a highly visual play; firstly Macnas are reknowned for their non-speech based visual productions, secondly first theatre-designer Patrick O'Reilly is from a sculpture background, thirdly, Mikel Murfi, director, studied at the famous Le Coque School of Mime in Paris and fourthly because they were dealing with the life of an artist.

It was a highly experimental show in its use of visuals, sounds, storytelling and more. The space dialogue that was in it was almost incidental. It actually took the form of a voiceover monologue for the most part, with the letters of Van Gogh's brother booking around the auditorium in sync with the visual depiction of his tortured life.

It's experimentalism was very well received with rave reviews from the Irish Times, and RTE Radio's Arts show. Touring with the show was a success everywhere bar Waterford, for reasons unknown to Macnas, "we've played Waterford before and always had trouble there," says PR Officer Gary McMahon. Summating, the Irish Times says, "for something different, creative and shaded with brilliance, this is one to savour."

The speed of the production varies a lot. A firecracker opening scene of chaotic images of Van Gogh's life, leads onto a slow meandering section of Van Gogh's early leaving of home and working as an art dealer. The pace really only picks up again when we sink deep into Van Gogh's madness. His colourful, if perversely furnished (with objects styled from his own paintings) south of France house is used as a metaphor for his mind. He is calm when

(29) Mikel Murfi, Director "Diamonds in the Soil", Macnas

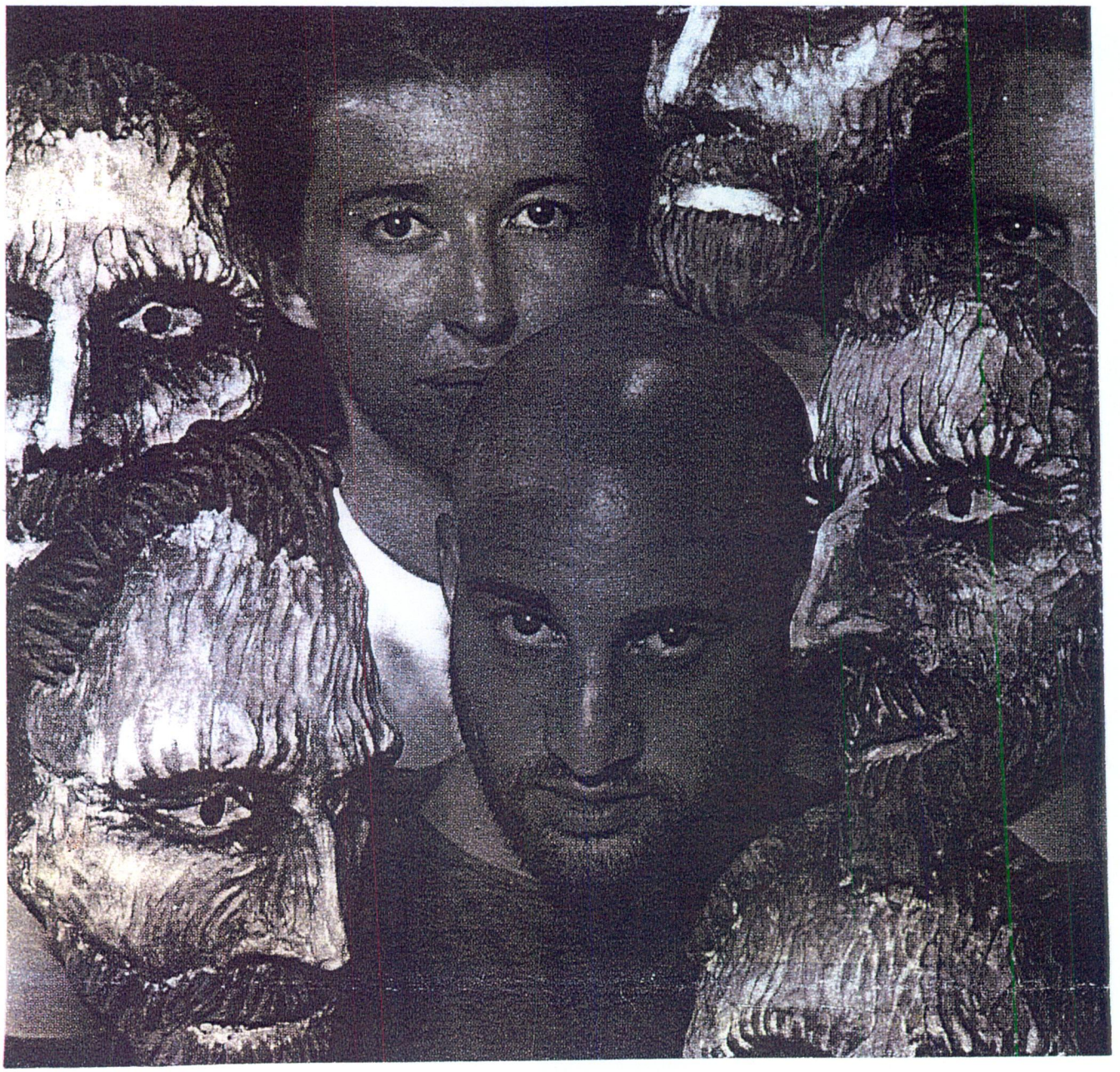
locked up in his dwelling painting but when his little shutters open to allow the outside world to enter Van Gogh is seized by insanity. This insanity is communicated exquisitely by the onslaught of his little items of furniture. We feel his claustrophia in the real world as his table, chair, bed and cabinet all shake towards him, chasing him, crowding him. The pressure of the outside world crushes him and there is no more memorable way of showing this than to induce tormenting powers into his everyday objects.

Even his treasured canvases, til now his only source of escape, torment him. They dance before his eyes, teasing him, eluding him. These well-choreographed sequences of rows of large white canvases intertwining on and off the stage was a beautiful scene and could have been a successful piece of pure dance in a Macnas street parade. Here, however, on the Olympia stage in the 1998 Dublin Theatre Festival, the sequence had the added element of intellect. This wonderful movement of shapes had meaning of madness behind it. It was highly poignant moment as we watched Van Gogh's last refuge escape him.

Another great visual aspect to the play, the masks, are designed by Aine Lawless. (see picture 30) Having worked with Macnas for at least the last six years, first in the costume department, for three years and then three years in the masks department, she now finds herself in a freelance mask designer position, along with Mags Linnane (see picture 9) as the costume designer.

For the "Diamonds in the Soil" production, Aine had to design and produce about thirty Van Gogh masks along with her team. There are three different types of Van Gogh masks, each differing slightly to imply three distinct phases in his life, "the early years, the vigorous phases of literally putting the oil tube onto canvas and sculpting away at it to give the effect of painting in relief, and the period of his depression." [59] Many of the masks are one and a half

[59] "Macnas" Article in IT Magazine by Trish O'Donovan Sept. '98



(30) Aine Lawless' Masks Designs for "Diamonds in the Soil"

times the size of a human face and with thirty of them to make Aine and her team had their work cut out for them. On top of these demands, many of the masks were needed before the rehearsals so that, " the actors feel comfortable and become used to them but also so that they become the character as well." [60] And this practice paid off with the haunting Van Gogh masks being another of the very memorable devices of the play. The masks depicted himself in a carved swirling style borrowed from his own paintings and self portraits. Van Gogh saw everything, including himself, in a swirling heightened state and these masks are another way of allowing the audience inside his mind. The eerieness of numerous projections of himself appearing before him is increased when some of the masks are pivoted and turned upside down so that bodies and heads look disjointed, perverse and deformed. This imagery is perhaps one of the clearest depictions in the play of Van Gogh slowly losing his mind.

While the masks and props were integral to the "Diamonds in the Soil" production, costumes and sets took on a lesser role. For the main part, the set was merely a differently lit bare knarled old tree in the background. Van Gogh's south of France furniture were more props in the depiction of his madness. Overall it could be said that an occasional voiceover of Van Gogh's letters to his brother created the setting along with the unforgettable masks and props.

"The costumes are not going to be making statements. It is the actors and the movement which will do that," says Costume Designer Mags Linanne. [61] Her understated minimal creations echo this statement. It must be difficult to design and produce for an area of a production that is not the most important for that production. Mags had to restrict herself to a subdued colour palette, matt uninspiring fabrics such as cotton muslin, and ragged or loosely fitting clothing shapes. It was extremely clear that the costumes

[60] Interview with Aine lawless in "Macnas" article in IT Magazine by Trish O'Donovan sept. '98
[61] "Macnas"article in IT magazine by Trish O'Donovan Sept '98

would not be making statement with the eleven cast members remaining in almost the same outfits throughout the production. Small comical changes occurred, for example in Paris, the women of the production added hats and fake poodles on leads to their otherwise shabby attire, and walking on barefooted tip-toe implied tongue-in-cheek high-heeled sophistication. It was almost like the creators and director were so frenzied in trying to create a high impact production that they harnessed the power of masks and props to propel the narrative, to the detriment of costume and other elements. Nevertheless with one area in shadow, it only serves to highlight the emphasised areas.

Having costume in shadow is not a regular occurrence for Macnas. Their famous street spectacles seem to centre around colour, fabric size, shape, and detail of costumes. Of course floats, masks and props are equally vital elements, but with up to 600 costumed people in a parade, it seems to stick in the memory.

"Diamonds in the Soil" therefore was a big development for Macnas. Apart from staffing points of view like it being created by sculptor Patrick O'Reilly and directed by Mikel Murfi and it being the first major Macnas theatre show without former artistic director Rod Goodall, it also marked a great development for Macnas. They, as a team that has been through major operational overhaul, succeeded in creating a production that was a hit both in the box office and the critic's columns.

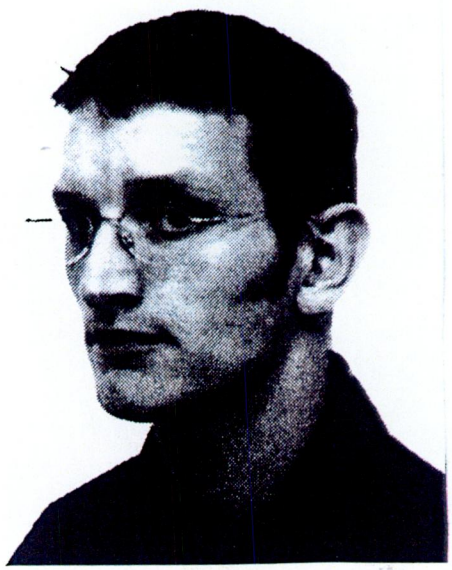
Also although they have done these visually based stage shows before like "Tain" and "Sweeney", "Diamonds in the Soil" takes on a more European or even universal theatre style and would seem to be able to reach an even wider audience. The aforementioned shift in emphasis from costumes to masks and props seems to be a more subtle yet not necessarily permanent change in Macnas repertoire. With "Diamonds in the Soil", a more obvious challenge to your mind is evident along with the usual assault on your eyes

and ears. As Gary McMahon tells us "your intellect is operation as well as your senses."[62]

Funnily enough this quote applies to the Abbey's recent production of "The Rivals" although whereas Macnas are famed for their appeal to the senses and not necessarily the intellect, the Abbey are reknowned for literary-based realist plays that do not necessarily stimulate the senses. "The Rivals", written by Irish born Richard Brinsley Sheridan and first produced at Covent Garden in 1775, is a great quintessentially English comedy with "swooning maidens, good natured country gentlemen, dashing young ensigns, monstrous squires, frightful old harridans and...stage Irishmen."[63] It is possible staging such a historically set play that the audience will not relate to it. Patrick Mason is well aware of this fact and so tries to rethink a play each time it is reperformed at the Abbey. What does it mean to us now. How can we relate this play to our present day society? All these questions are posed with no alteration of the text, it must be said. So if the Abbey forever remains true to the original text, with what can they play around? The production, of course, and this is exactly what they did with "The Rivals" Set design by Conor Murphy (see picture 31) created depth on the Abbey's stage with clever use of perspective with the pillared wings of the stage. Trevor Dawson, the lighting designer, lit the bases of these pillars in a very modern minimalist fashion. Dawson was also responsible for the occasional appearance of a neon matisse-like female figure backdrop. It glowed in the backround like a provocative piece of late twentieth century pop-art.

Brian Brady, director, really went to town on the idea that "The Rivals" is a "play about property, marriage, greed and sex, which are pretty good themes for us in the 1990's."[64] The production opened and closed with the Divine Comedy's 1998 hit song "Generation Sex" . Ian Montague choregraphed the

[62] Gary McMahon in interview with Aoife Cleary 2/12/98
[63] "A Traitors Kiss" biography of Sheridan by Fintan O'Toole
[64] Interview with Patrick Mason by Aoife Cleary 19/10/98



(31) Conor Murphy, Theatre Designer for "The Rivals", The Abbey

production, and for the first time "exploded historical accuracy into a modern comic style."[65]

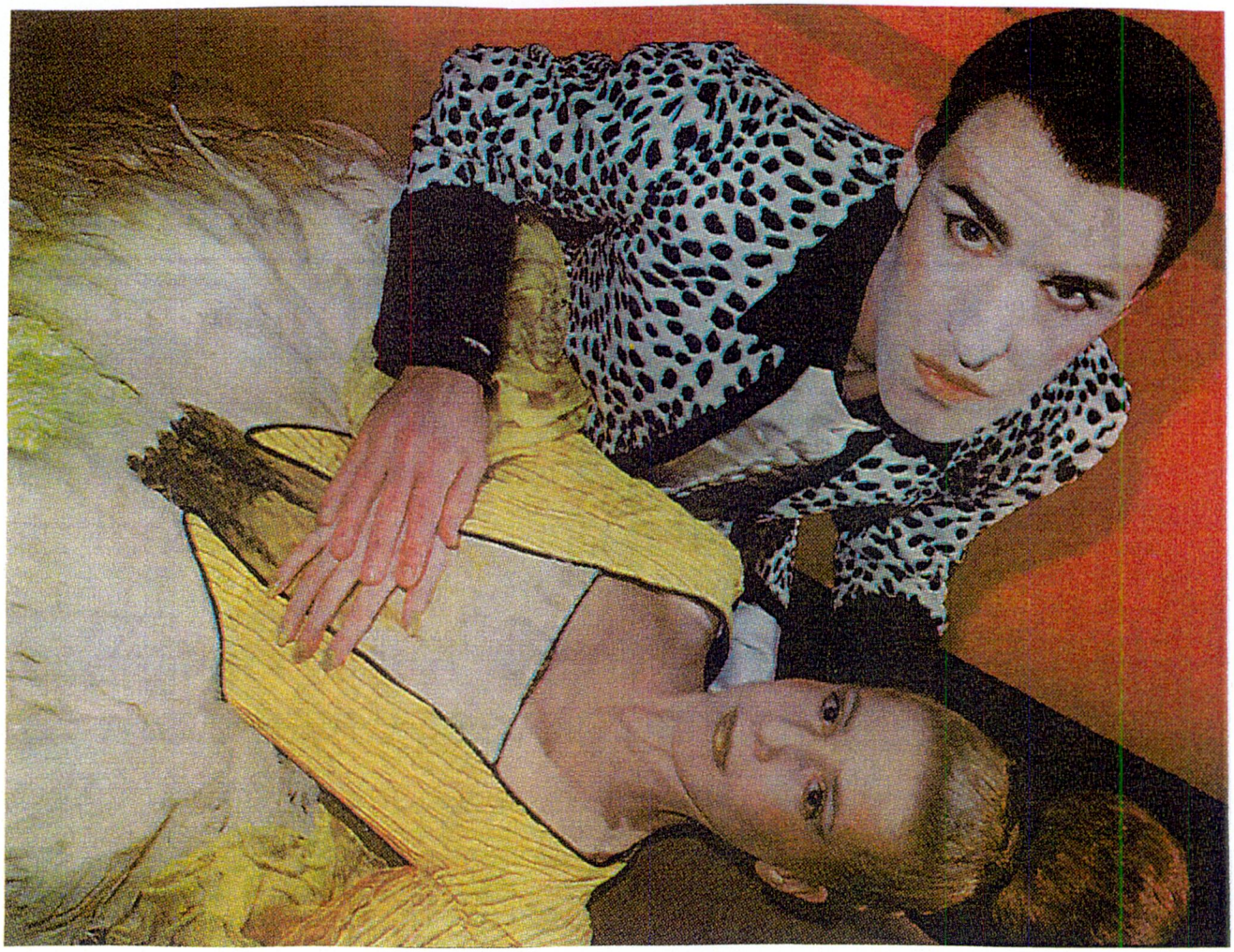
The most striking step into modernity for this historical play was the costume design by Conor Murphy. He took a huge risk, along with the whole production team, in using highly unusual, and in most cases, modern, fabrics and accessories. This is where the similarity with Macnas productions occurs. With Macnas the most memorable aspect tends to be the visuals, as in the case with "The Rivals" a phenomenon quite unusual for an Abbey production.

"Although the costumes are definitely 18th Century (at least in outline), accessories such as shoes and hair are late twentieth century ,"[66] with spice-girl-like trainers accompanying a 1775 style dress. Hairstyles are purposely modern, with women's being short and cropped, or piled high and hanging from crown. Men appear with tight skinheads and bleached 1990's styles. Male ponytails although fashionable at the time of play's original setting, take a modern slant when viewed alongside inventive fabrics.

Plastics and quilted fabrics were strong themes in the fabric selection and production for "The Rivals." It is very important to reiterate that, not only were the fabrics selected and purchased in their raw state, but they were also produced and worked into the lines of sewing to create the quilted aprons and jackets (see picture 32) were done in the Abbey costume workshop. One of the most striking costumes of the production was that of Lydia Languish (see picture 33), whose full skirt is made up of rows and rows of six inch feathers that appear dip-dyed (with dylon cold wash) and graduate from dark brown at the feet through shades of yellow to almost white at the waist. The boned bodice also features feathers and yellow lining silk stitched into ribbed bands.

[65] "The Rivals" programme for Abbey 1998
[66] The Irish Times Article "Praise the Curtain" by Robert O'Byrne

(32) Selection of Costume Designs, "The Rivals", The Abbey



(33) Selection of Costume Designs, "The Rivals", The Abbey

A comical and also memorable costume is work by Mrs. Malaprop, who makes a huge entrance, literally dressed in an enormous pannier gown of black plastic net, over silver tissue. Although it looks ridiculous and the audience erupts with laughter at the preposterousness of wearing such an outfit, its scale is actually not so far from gowns worn at one stage of fashion history. Incidentally where whalebone would have once been used, copper piping now created the Abbey's gravity defying skirt.

There was a drastic different between the colouring of men's costumes and women's costumes. While the women paraded around in exquisitely coloured creations, men were restricted on the whole to black and white. The symbolic reason for this was explained by Conor Murphy, designer, "in this play, the women are clued in and the men are the silly ones, I wanted to make that clear."[67] Black and white male dress is across the board apart from with David, the male servant who is probably the only male conspirator with the women in the play. David is given an accent red apron with a clear plastic spikey cover.

Although all the other men wear black and white, there are a lot of interesting aspects to their costumes. A black velvet coat , white corduroy trousers and a black PVC waistcoat make up one of Jack Absolute's costumes. One of his later coats is made of fake ponyskin. Acres (see picture 33) wears a coat in dalmation spotted faux fur along with coordinating spotted trainers, white tights and black kneebreeches, in one of the funniest sequences where the former countryman with little taste in clothes gets a makeover and becomes a fashion victim.

The dalmnation faux fur used in Acres outfit also covers Lydia languish's sofa, and so we observe a fabric that can similtaneously be fashion and furnishing.

[67] The Irish Times Article "Praise the Curtain" by Robert o'Byrne

The daring use of fabrics in "The Rivals" and yet strict adherence to the original text has strong similarities to the fantastic modern film production of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet". Here the text is not altered at all, yet combined with pop music, modern filming techniques, and probably most noticeably, modern clothes and accessories, such as Hawaiian shirts, and drag queen outfits. Conor Murphy must have taken some inspiration, conscious or not, from this production. If not, he has certainly drawn from popular culture for his fabrics and accessories to put a clever fresh slant on an otherwise typical historical play.

Overall, this recent production of "The Rivals" by the Abbey is a fresh new step. The team has acknowledged popular culture in it music, dress, choreography and general treatment of the play. It is a welcome move for directors and designers, and if marketed correctly, a whole new potential audience for the Abbey's production.

With this new work from both companies we seem to be observing a crossover. Macnas is assuming sobriety and intellect stimuli by going indoors to the stage, and the Abbey are seizing on the idea of colour, scale, and most of all exaggeration in their costumes. Whether or not this is a conscious new path on both parts, there is certainly some vital new theatre being produced in Ireland.

CONCLUSION

At first glance, the Abbey and Macnas seem poles apart, but after more indepth analysis their similarities have been demonstrated.

The commitment of the Abbey and Macnas to all things Celtic is probably the most apparent common thread. However they choose to exhibit this love of their heritage in opposing manners; the former subscribing to realism, the latter to fantasy.

Both companies have had staff and structural problems and called in a consultant to advise on the grey areas of job description. A current fundamental difference is the existence of a permanent artistic director at the Abbey and the absence of such at Macnas. With the mention of the word funding, the similarities between the two companies. The Abbey receives a substantial £3M. plus, and Macnas survives on under £300,000. Both agree that wages are their largest spending output, which, incidentally, is not even enough as the theatre practitioners of Ireland are renowned as the "hidden subsidy" of the business.

The role, methods, and uses of Costume Design are different in both companies. Visual tools, especially costume, are integral to the work of Macnas. Their productions could not survive without them and often even pivot around them. At the Abbey, costumes and all visuals are devices to communicate the text. They serve a function but never stand alone to form theatre. As can be expected from the respective funding levels for both companies, the costume rooms and facilities differ considerably. This fact, however, does not seem to affect the standards of costume design.

Rather the style of costume design differs, with Macnas creations growing organically with the production and the Abbey following a serious of steps. Also, as we can see with the case studies of the "Galway Arts Festival" and "By the Bog of Cats", the Abbey regularly buys clothes to use as costumes in

their realist dramas, whereas, Macnas very rarely use an item off the peg to illustrate their fantasy.

Probably the most interesting conclusion formed from this piece of writing is the implications of the new work of both companies. With the Abbey's recent production "The Rivals" the most memorable aspect was the colour, fabric and exaggeration of the costumes. The text has been around for two centuries, but we look at it in a new way with Conor Murphy's modern costuming twist. Equally memorable was Macnas recent "Diamonds in the Soil" where the typecast creators of Galway carnival re-assumed their occasional guise of stage theatre producers to new fresh acclaim. Mags Linnane's costumes are subtler, and more understated than usual with masks and props taking centre stage. The restraint and sobriety of this production has widened the repetoire of Macnas' already gaping production accolades.

Although the Abbey and Macnas have never collaborated, they seem, however accidentally, to be borrowing styles from each other; the Abbey with its embrace of flamboyant costumes and sets, and Macnas with its more restrained yet highly effective treatment of a sombre stage theme.

It is clear that a collaboration of the two groups would lead to an exposive combination of history and text on one side and modernity and visuals on the other . The time is right.

APPENDICES

Patrick Mason, Director, Abbey Theatre
In interview with Aoife Cleary
19th October 1998

AC: Taking the Bog of Cats as my main focus point.....I would like to say congratulations and I really enjoyed it

PM: Good

AC Has it been a success for the Dublin Theatre Festival?

PM Yes it has. It found a very sizeable audience. We'll see how it runs after the festival. The indications are good so it has been very successful.

AC Marina Carr, is this her first play in the Abbey? She has had a number of in the Peacock, is this her first in the Abbey.

PM Well the Abbey and the Peacock are run by the National Theatre Society and are both stages for the National Theatre and we don't particularly look at them as a Main Stage and a Little Stage. There are many reasons for putting plays on in one theatre or the other both artistic and financial and the artistic things are about the type of play it is the kind of space it needs, the optimum space it needs. Financially obviously it's about box office exposure, trying to second-guess the size of audience interest. So Marina was a writer in association with us a couple of years ago and we've done three of plays of hers in the Peacock through the 80s and 90s and this is the first of her plays we've put on on the Abbey stage.

AC: Is this the first time you've worked together, did you direct her other plays?

PM: I have not directed her plays before, this is the first time I've directed one of her plays, but I've known Marina over the years obviously.

AC: Monica Frawley designed both the sets and the costumes, is that normal, usually would there be separate designers?

PM: No, no, it's more normal actually to have sets and costumes designed by the same person. You do get like "Colleen Bawn" where Francis O'Connor designed the set Joan O'Cleary did the costumes, but Francis equally does costume designs as well. I mean it very much depends on all kinds of things. Sometimes a theatre designer is more interested in doing a set or hasn't time to do the costumes or likes to work with someone else, it's open..it's variable.

AC: I read an article about Monica and she explained that you were a "very visually aware" director so do you have a lot of input into the visuals as well as the direction?

PM: Absolutely, you know production is a very interesting thing because it is the sum of all the parts.and one of the difficulties I think about being a theatre director is you do have to be able to talk to designers, composers, writers and actors you have to be able to empathise with, and understand the nature of that work so I am actually very visually aware, I am not a designer, but I know about design and I know what designers are at and what they are doing. Why I work with designers is because you know I may be visually aware, but my eye is not as good as their eye. A good designer has a better eye than I have, I work with a writer because although I can write, they can write a damn sight better, you know . The idea of this is that you are bringing together a whole lot of expert skilled, extremely talented people in their own field but what you are trying to do is bring all this individual talent into the same place at the same time in the same play, so that is quite an art in itself.

AC: In the article she said that you met; yourself, Maria and Monica met quite early on and you put all your ideas together, is that the way it always works?

PM: Absolutely, there has to be coherence, there has to be a very big open exchange of ideas, but from what we work from, and I think this is a point here, we are very much a traditional theatre in our approach in that we work from text, from the playscript, that is our constant reference point, we work away from it, we work back towards it. The world of the play that is described in abstract in that text everyone works in, through and around that text, you know there are other forms of theatre that take on the starting points that may take a theme, that may take an object, that may take a sound, but we work with the text and that's very important.

AC: When it was founded by Yeats....dramatic literature was the basis ... is that still the case.

PM: Yes, it's an acknowledgement that the playwright, the good playwright, the expert playwright is if you like a primary act of theatre, not to say that the others are secondary, but it is an initiating act. There can be other acts that initiate but this theatre has always had language, text, a story, narrative at its heart.

AC: So, would the visuals maybe be slightly secondary or...

PM: Not in terms of production importance, the visuals are just as important as the text, I'm talking about starting points, where we start from. There is you know, this thing of closure or openness, a text is both closure and openness, this is where we start and this is where we finish but in terms of production the performance, the design, the sound, the presentation is just as important as the text itself. None of those elements are secondary but in terms of where we start and where we finish.....the text...the text....the text.

AC: I have been reading the reviews in the paper and it has been described as a woman's play or a female orientated play, the designer, the playwright were female, the cast and the issues were women orientated, how did it work being a director of the play?

PM: A play is a play is a ...theatre is theatre is theatre. Obviously, and you can see it in the theatre audiences, obviously there are emotional and physiological concerns in the play that seem to have a deeper effect on women than on men. That is very clear in the responses to a play but you know, it still has to work as a play, it still has to hold up as theatre, so yes I am aware of areas, maybe emotional areas which I don't relate to maybe as immediately as say Monica or Alwyn playing that role, but I work with a team of people which includes men and women and they lead me just as I can lead them in some areas they lead me in other areas, and one of the things that this theatre is based on, and is talked a lot about and not really understood much and this is 'ensemble', and that is a view that again whatever the primacy of text as an initiating force in the act of theatre, the contribution in the making of a performance, the contribution of Director, Actor, Designer is of equal importance and 'ensemble' is about everyone working from their own expertise but all working towards the same end.

AC: Is that a particular ethos in the Abbey?

PM: Oh yes, I mean it's an approach that was championed by Moscow Arts Theatre toward the end of the century. It's to be found in a lot of Continental companies, it's to be found here, indeed the Royal Shakespeare Company was founded along those lines, so these are the sort of ethos that gives value to work. So you get a good mix, gender mix and talent and so on.

AC: What about the symbolism in the play? I thought the sets were really minimal and effective and all the detail and impact came with the costumes, in my opinion...you know the communion dress, the wedding dress.

PM: All these basic elements are contained in the text in the way I've described (not sure about this word?) the realisation of them and how you throw an emphasis on them, how you focus on them and so on, that is the art of the designer, the director and the lighting designer, and of course LIGHTING is a crucial element in this and Mick Chelton is a lighting designer I've worked with a lot and Mick at a very early stage was brought in on the discussion, because we saw the shifting pattern of light in the way he paints with light and the very emotive force of light he uses was kind of absolutely crucial too. So we were working with all those visual elements from very early on. And again I emphasise you're describing a world, you're creating a world and someone once said "what's a production" it's about everyone being in the same play at the same time in the same place, that no one element is saying no I think this play is about this totality. Tthat we realise this extraordinary word of this play, that it hangs together, it has a coherence, that's the crucial thing.

AC: Yes, that everybody has to work together, that brings up the idea of you know the relationship within the theatre, like everyone is trying to come up with this production and sometimes people forget about the dynamics.

PM: Absolutely, well I mean the theatre is its intensely practical. Theatre has to be built, moved, picked up, put down , carried around, and you're coordinating not only of course the creative team but you're cordinating workshops, I mean the Abbey is the only theatre in the country, as the National theatre, which builds its own sets, makes its own costumes, has workshops, technicians. We have you know a large staff, team coordinated by our production office here, so there's immense coordination involved in that , not only just the build, the finishing, the fit-ups and production weeks and the lighting and the visuals.

AC: You have a team working all year round, you have a permanent staff all year round?

PM: Yes, well we're a rep theatre between our two theatres, between the Abbey and Peacock we do 14 productions a year, that is an awful lot. We are open 12 months a year, a lot of Continental theatres of this scale close in the summer but the summer for us is one of our busiest periods. We don't close, we stay open and that is a hell of a lot of work to put through.

AC: Do you have part-time staff or seasonal staff?

PM: We have a core staff to kind of run the whole operation and depending on the demands of the season or a particular play, say one which is very costume intensive like Colleen Bawn was very costume intensive, it had something like over a hundred costumes, we would supplement the core staff, be it with cutters or seamstresses or both, so we do that as well.

AC: Was it intentional in By the Bog of Cats that, well I presume everything is intentional, I noticed that it was meant to be set in Offaly but it was really kind of timeless and really anonymous sort of feeling that you got from it and there was never a direct reference to a place apart from this mysterious....

PM: It was partly because the play obviously very deep roots in Greek Mythology and in the story of Media and we wanted to give that room to breath, we wanted those roots to show through. The other is that the bog is a metaphor, everything in theatre is a metaphor as well as a reality, the bog is this strange isolated world, it's also a middle ground , it's midlands, it's middle ground, it's where the dead and the living mix together so everything suggested a rather strange, eerie, icebound, extracted, quite austere world and that's what we went for.

AC: It really came through and was really effective, like it could have been anywhere or it didn't even have a time, that's how it struck me.

PM: I'm glad you said that because that's what we were working for, is to just give it space. When you 're designing for theatre and producing for theatre, this is very interesting about giving ....performance is about energies both physical and imaginal energies and you want to give them space, it is not literal, theatre is never literal, is there such a thing as reality in a theatre, that you can summon up a sense of reality, you can speak language that gives the illusion of reality, but of course it's never reality. It's the nature of theatre itself.

AC: Were you pleased with the general reviews in the papers?

PM: The reviews are the reviews, I'm much more pleased about the audiences' response. Absolutely from the first preview right the way through there's been this tremendous sort of recognition of what's going on on stage. Theatre is about that connection between the performer and the audience and some plays help that connection and some plays hinder that connection. This play seems to really enable that connection to take place. There is some energy in the play that is relating very very directly to audiences.

AC: This is the response you get while the play is taking place. I would like to ask you some facts about the play. How long was it in production?

PM: Well, in terms of design process I suppose we were over 3 / 4 months talking about it , actual rehearsal time was within 5 weeks, actual stage time is very limited because we don't get in to the theatre till basically 10/12 days before it opens. You have to fit out, do the technical rehearsals and preview, and of course why we have previews it's a way of enabling us to actually work on the production and take in some income. So you're fine tuning the production right the way through the previews. Then the commissioning of the play goes back 2 years, and the writing of the play is over a 2-year period. So you can see there's a long... and over that 2 years there would be one draft of the script and we'd talk about it and discuss it, then Marina would go away and maybe three or four months later another draft would come in and we'd do more work, so it's not continuous work, it is for Marina but it's not continuous for all of us but at the same time it's over a long time span.

AC: This goes on with plays that are happening all the time?

PM: Yes..

AC: I have the programme but would you have a rough idea of how many people it took to actually make the play happen?

PM: In the development of a play the first thing is the literary department and the artistic director. Then at a certain point you're involving the director, the designer, the lighting designer and then it opens out to the production team, workshops, technicians, all the rest, so you get a pretty good idea. Now around about that you'd also have areas say the swan which was a specialist prop. We can make basic props but we don't have skills and what we tend to do is bring in our freelance prop maker so you would be bringing in one/two people for a prop like that and there would other areas as the physical production made its demands, there was an extra scenic artist/painter employed as there was so much texture involved. We have of course staff of 3 in our workshop but we brought on an extra painter/texturist to help in that. So the thing spreads down, but more or less what you're looking at the programme is the core but you could add around that say a group of 15/20 people all in different areas of activity.

AC: And it's running into the middle of November ?

PM: Yes it going till the middle of November, in its initial run anyhow.

AC: Can I just ask a few general questions about the Abbey. I was reading about your Press Conference when you first came in '94 and you were speaking about drawing from the past to go into the future. Is that still your main policy?

PM: Oh yea, I'll give you our latest policy document. National theatres are very peculiar organisations, almost by definition they are because they have a responsibilities placed upon them. One of them is that we are the theatre that mediates between past and present. We have for instance in this year alone done seven

new Irish plays between the Peacock and the Abbey at the same time so you're including a production of Cois Ceim Dance Company, so at one level you've got absolutely contemporary, you're making new work, you're deeply involved with young writers, young actors, young directors, bring in new talent and all the rest. At the same time you're looking at what's coming up, we really should go back to a show on George Bernard Shaw, we haven't done it for 20 years or Juno and the Peacock we haven't done it for 15 years. You're looking back saying these are also real important plays, these are BIG pieces of theatre, they belong in this theatre, need to be animated for audience, 20 years since this play was seen. The next we're doing is 'The Rivals' Sheridan, there's a kind of connection because of 1798 and Sheridan's political involvement in the American Revolution which led to the Irish Revolution. You're saying "let's do The Rivals, it's actually 25 years since we did this play, Sheridan as an Anglo-Irish writer is a major part of the Irish Repertoire, so it's time we took another look at that play. So can you see the sort of pattern that says well yes we're involved with the present but if we don't know, if our audiences and actors don't know about the past, they haven't experienced Sheridan, Shaw, Wilde, O'Casey then we've lost what has been that achievement. But the idea is not to go back uncritically, these plays last because they have tremendous special energy to them and have particular theatrical imagination and then when you go back to them you've got to relate back to them from where you are, you can't just say Oh put everyone in powdered wigs and that's it. You say so what is The Rivals saying to us now.

AC: So you change it to be compemtorary?

PM: Yea, you revise it to make it compemporary. Absolutely, you must, otherwise the play is dead. It so happens that The Rivals is a play about property, marriage, greed and sex, which are pretty good themes for us in the 1990s. And it's also about women and marriage and women and society, it's a very sharp, quite cynical play about the way men treat women and the way women cope with that, and indeed how women relate to men in the play. So, it's a timely play to look at.

AC: So when you look at it can the changes be quite drastic in the way you make ..

PM: Sometimes it can be. In 'St. Joan' I brought the whole setting of the play to the period when it was written which was 1922. It was actually written, which was the very extraordinary thing about the play, just after the War of Independence, with Bernard Shaw sitting down in Kerry with the Garda Stations burnt out by the Black and Tans and just on the verge of the Civil War. So I put the whole play into that period, we're not looking at people in pointy hats and pointy shoes. And when you're looking at the Inquisition you're looking at bishops who you recognise, you're looking at priests who are recognisable priests and bishops of the Catholic Church, and they're saying all these incredible things about burning people, and certainly the play it isn't just a pretty picture, what emerged was this incredibly political play.

AC: And you can relate to it.....

PM: You can relate to it, and what came absolutely and the people said that they never realised that the play was so political, as you'd expect from Shaw, but it's an incredibly political play about Nationalism, about Internationalism, about the Real Politique contrasted with idealism and how mucky politics is and how violent it is, and suddenly there was this extraordinary play. If you say he set it in 1430 and you say no, that's not good enough. The risk you've got to take is you got to look at this play, you got to respect it but you got to see what it's really about. You got to get to the core or it and say if this is the core of it and if I write about this then this changes everything. We can no longer look at this play in this way, we have to look at this play in this way. The thing is not to be trapped by the past, that 'e deadly, and not to ignore the past because the past is full of extraordinary achievements, and wonderful insights.

AC: About the National Theatre? On a National level, I was reading that you 're relating and working with other theatres around the country, artistically and financially. So which particular theatres?

PM: Well, we have contact with most theatre companies in terms of flow of information and technical advise and help indeed and wherever possible, resources. Artistically, we have focused very much on groups who are working in areas of theatre that are not duplicating what we do but are in some sense complimentary to or in parallel to, for instance, Bickerstaff Theater Co., we did a co-production with Cois Ceim, a Dance Co. , and our next major co-production is Barabos. All of these companies have not only very talented people leading the companies, but also have another approach, it isn't a text based approach, it's approach has other starting points within theatre and we're very aware like we have our core work, which is as I explained to you text work but that there are other theatre approaches and that we can help these companies at a stage in their development and also make them part of our development, and by sharing resources or by giving them a facility to work towards a bigger stage or with more physical resources, they can achieve more than they can on their own. So in brief, there always has to be an artistic imperative, these are never just political alliances, never just financial alliances, the starting point is always an artistic imperative, that between us we can create a performance, an act of theatre that could not exist before, so it's a new venture for both parties.

AC: Have you ever worked with Macnas?

PM: No. I have not and I think it's because the time may well come when we find a project which does bring us together naturally, but at the moment we are working with very different disciplines. I think it's interesting that you choose the two because there are, it's remarkably contrasting. I mean here you have

a building based, text based, performance discipline which very much is about high levels of trained, skilled performers, technicians etc., and in Macnas I think you have a wonderfully kind of energetic broad community-based and very public to work in the open air to work in the city environment or wherever, you have a whole new range of possibilities. If you like, our work is not only traditional, but it's more formal, there's a whole range of activity that you can describe validly as theatre and one end of that spectrum is very formal, it's a bit like classical music, where you've a handling of language, the intricacies of design etc.etc. , there's a n incredible amount of training and experience that has to go into those formalities. On the other end you have a less formal, a far more maybe spontaneous and with huge energy, which can work with a completely different approach and bring in a whole lot of people. I see, I don't judge whether one is high or low or one is better or worse, I simply say look, both are aspects of theatre, both are aspects of performance, however, both require very different disciplines. There are rigours and disciplines in the work of Macnas and in creating and controlling those huge productions they do so well, there are rigours and disciplines in doing what we do. What I think is unfortunate sometimes in trying to say, while not being higherarchyal about it, people say they're the same and they're not the same. They are different, but you have to learn a different approach, a different language, and different disciplines in both cases. You have to work in both..

AC: Did you get a chance to see "Diamonds in the Soil"?

PM: I haven't got out of this building in two weeks. I haven't seen a single thing.

AC: I was going to look a that (play) as well, because they've moved into a building .

PM: It's very different.

AC: In the sense of the money they put into it there's not much too it but they've come up with some interesting visual effects.

AC: As you know there were six directors between '85 and '94 and now you're lasting...

PM: It depends how you count. Nothing is quite what it seems when you read about the Abbey. There were indeed, if you take from Joe Dowling's departure to the appointment of Noel Pearson 6, 2 or whom only took 1-year contracts as caretaker, they were caretaker artistic directors while appointments were being made. So only just to warn you that everything you read about the Abbey you have to just be aware that there are a lot of agendas running. I am now in my second term of office, and I will be here till the end of next year 1999 which will be 6 years. Usually the appointment of an artistic director is for 3 years. So now you're going to ask me how have I lasted!

AC: Was it that you made a lot of changes, improvements and expanding the Literary Department and appointing directors, and the archivist was that a move by you, Marread Delaney. Would I be able to speak to her.

PM: Absolutely, of course.

AC: What does the archive have.

PM: We have a huge amount of material, written material, artifacts, photographs, letters, production history, going back to 1904 and before and we have no proper kind of memory and it was the script editor in 1995 she suggested looking at this because we were loosing material to universities, American Universities and we've stuff up in the National Library and we've got to start colating and cataloguing and conserving and that's what we're doing, so we have a proper memory. And already it saw 30 specialist students who came to use it last year to research, and hopefully in time we will be able to make it more public and also have exhibitions and also in terms of as I was talking about our function as a National theatre, we can produce the text, we can textulise them, we can show from the past how certain things were done then, how it's done now. It's all about building up knowledge and I don't think you can ever have too much.

AC: Do you know about the Visual Arts Library in NCAD? I've been getting some information on the Abbey there.

PM: Hopefully, we'll have link-ups with all those libraries and of course with the National Library and the National Museum indeed the more we can network and we can link up the more this information becomes accessible.

AC: You fused the Design and Production Department, was that recently?

PM: Yes, that was last year, Joe Vanek was here and we were at various ways of dealing with this. The realities were that we had a group of maybe 10 designers, all freelance designers, all who wished to remain freelance designers and is very much the way now, the same in the acting co. I can't get actors to stay in the co., longterm...they want to come in and out and do contracts and at the Gate, do films and do movies. What we said is what we really need is a continuity with the building but we also need to have flexibility to deal with people coming in. What we decided to do was amalgamate production and design and within the Production Department we would have a Design Coordinator, someone who basically liaised

with all the designers and liaised between them and the Production Manager and the workshops, and also design assistants who actually gave practical assistance to all the designers in terms of technical drawings and backup and all the rest. So far it seems to work well. One of the things in an Organisation of this size is keeping a constant flow of information between the departments, making sure the production team, designer, lighting designer, director all the feedback coming out of rehearsal is passing down through. So the production office is enormously important and we felt that by putting the permanent design element immediately into that office, it meant there was a natural interface and flow of information. So far, and we've been monitoring it all year, as it's only been put in place this year, apart from a few teething problems it seems to be working very well.

AC: So now you have that department and you have ....

PM: Yes, and what I'll be looking at over the next 18 months is the way in which we can, just as I brought a group of directors in as associate and staff directors, I want to see if I can do the same thing with designers. It's harder with designers because designers move around a lot more and like to have freedom to go to do jobs in London or where ever but I'm looking to see if I can formalise some of the relationships we have with designers and say well look you can become an Associate Designer which means you did 3 shows a year for us and that you also had input in advising us on staffing and training and development etc. So that's what we're looking at at the moment.

AC: Briefly, are you happy with your funding from the Arts Council?

PM: We had long battles, which I only came in on the tail end of in '94. Basically, from '83 to '96 the Arts Council cut the funding, deliberately cut the funding and it had disastrous results. It destabilised the whole organisation, and in some ways contributed to that period of high turnover of artistic directors. In '96 we eventually, we won a new threshold of funding from the Arts Council, which took us back funnily enough to the situation we were in before '83.

AC: In the sense of funding?

PM: In the sense of proportionate funding. The key thing is that the balance between subsidy and earned income. We earn roughly over M£1.5 at the box office. That figure is augmented by £200,000 worth of sponsorship in cash and kind and other sources of income. Our grant is just under M£3. Now it's roughly 60% subsidy 40% income, and what the Council tried to do in '83 is push it towards 50/50 and it just destabilised the whole thing. And that is just because of the nature of who we are you cannot have a National Theatre which supports workshops, which supports core staff, which has an archive, which has an outreach department, has education work and does plays as well, and say that it should earn more money. We can only earn so much because we have all these other responsibilities because we are a National Theatre, and what we argued was is not that we need everything subsidised but we need a prudent level of subsidy. We did have that initially and that was destroyed by the Arts Council from '83 onwards and now has been put pack and we have stabilised the finances, we're out of deficit and we are moving forward. The only trouble is that they will do it again and there is nothing to say they won't.

Ac: So you keep applying every year?

PM: So we've got a new threshold of funding in '96 which has proved very successful for '97 and '98 , it was given to us for three years, and next year the whole thing comes up for review but I am hopeful that they will see that it has worked very well, it has enabled the theatre not only to stabilise itself financially but to do the work it should be doing as a National Theatre, which makes everyone happy.

AC: How are the plans for the new building coming along?

PM: That's a less happy thing. We do have a very very serious problem on our hands and its one I'm afraid we're finding a kind of political problem. It's a political will to face up to this problem, this building is now 30 years old, it was built by the State and given to the Society, but given without any sinking fund, without any budget for maintenance or renewal and the Arts Council, which is our funding body has no such money, so we now have a big problem on our hands, when I came in in '94, I commissioned a structural and mechanical survey of the building , the first that has been done since it was built and I'm afraid the news is very alarming, it's not going to fall down but it is going to seize up. The plant is already past its best, the airconditioning etc. and being a 60s building it's a very mechanical building, every part of the mechanism is now 10 years past its sellby date, and there is no programme in place, simply because we haven't got the money. So if that wasn't bad enough, we are only too familiar with the drawbacks of the building itself, in terms of the Abbey auditorium which is a very undynamic building , a cold auditorium, and the lack of public space, the lack of disabled access, the lack of everything, you know and so in '95 on the foot of this when we put together the proposals which we have, which is really for a M£20 project over 4 years to completely rejuvinate the building, to remodel the Abbey auditorium, to open up the public spaces, get proper access, backstage and front of house, we cannot employ disabled people because there's absolutely no access to anything, and this is not acceptable in the National theatre. These things were not considerations in the 60s when the building was designed, but 30 years on we now know a lot more about theatre, about how it operates and how a National theatre should operate. Therefore, we want to put forward a plan fundraising, Government support but we're basically still at the stage won't say

whether they'll support it or not, and we can't go fundraising because the corporate sector is waiting to see if the Government will support it.

AC: So it's still at the early stages.

PM: Yes, hopefully we can get some movement. The minute you take on a theatre building, you take on a huge responsibility, and huge financial burdens, and all buildings are financial burdens.

AC: How do you go touring? You're going to Australia, aren't you?

PM: We keep up our level of international touring, this year we're going to Australia. We've been to London with Tarry Flynn, next year we're going to Edinburgh again and the U.S. and of course in '96 we did a big European tour with "Sons of Ulster", but we also have regular annual national touring, on average about 14 weeks a year around the country, north and south. This year we did a Gaeltacht tour with an Irish language show and Kevin's Bed is going out, so we would have done 14 weeks which is quite a lot of venues, nearly 30 venues – one night here and one night there. Last year we did 12 weeks touring with two english language shows, so we're very aware of that commitment and every year we would do a minimum of 12 weeks touring. It would vary, next year we may have another Irish language show, I'm not sure, we're just planning it.

AC: Lastly, could I ask you which Department would be the most costly and how does the funding break down?

PM: It's hard to say, but obviously the biggest single cost is production. I mean take all the production departments, wardrobe, workshops, lighting so when you put the production department together that's where most of the money goes, although I have to tell you that an awful lot of money goes on PR and marketing, that's the biggest growing area.

Monica Frawley, Freelance Theatre Designer,
in interview with Aoife Cleary,
16th November 1998

AC: By the Bog of Cats is the kind of case study that I am going to take. Do you design both sets and costumes?

MF: I like to do that. There are costume designers, but I tend to do both, so in the Film Union I do costumes, because you can't do both.

AC: So, would costumes be your preference?

MF: No, No, I like to do both.

AC: As well as designing the costumes, do you also make them?

MF: Absolutely not, I can't thread a needle. I have a fair idea of cutting, period and fabrics etc. but generally would always have worked with wardrobe people.

AC: So you would have worked with a number of wardrobe people in the Abbey?

MF: Yes, like in the Costume Room it varies, this time last year I was working in the Royal National Theatre in London and it was extraordinary because they had 8 men's cutters, 10 women's cutters, specialists in shoes, specialists in armour, it had everything and I also had a particular Supervisor who worked just with me. So what happens in the Abbey is a bit similar to that, you get a Supervisor, and in terms of costumes, I draw everything and then I do detailed specs. , and I would go through it and then you know somebody who would go out swatching for fabric, I would do a certain amount myself but obviously I can't do everything.

AC: Would you go around Dublin looking for the fabric?

MF: It depends. If you were doing a period thing, I'd go to London – it's cheaper in the end. In Dublin the fabric is awful – you know that. There is no fabric here. For instance, in The Bog of Cats we made very little – we just found stuff.

AC: How long would it take you to design the stage for the Bog of Cats?

MF: Well, something like that hugely changes and it's up to the individual. I suppose normally I would be something like 6 weeks pre production, you know when you're working with the writer and director, if they are alive and then you go into rehearsal so you have 4 and a half weeks rehearsal. Usually you have to have your model and drawings in before rehearsals begin, and very often that can be difficult, as things maybe change in rehearsal, you need to be able to move a little bit, be a little bit fluid. Obviously if it's very heavy period stuff actors don't have great opinions. If it's modern dress stuff they're all mad to do everything but when it's period stuff you need the time to start making corsets just get in and do the stuff , and also I tend to like painting costumes, so it just takes time, and usually you have the model in 4 weeks before rehearsal, and you have rough model in before that again just to give them an idea of costs and where you're going.

AC: You know the wedding dresses in the play - did you find them?

MF: We found one and one was made – the one that got burnt, copied from the other one. We went to Black Tie – the wedding people – and we got fantastic stuff, we got everything, all the wedding dresses, the mother-in-law's dress, the guys' suits, we got the whole lot for £700 which is amazing really., and we have another 7 or 8 wedding dresses in the Abbey now. They were getting rid of them as they were old and yellow so that was good for us.

AC: I read the article about you in the Irish Times and they said that you went around the bogs in Offaly in September - do you always go to these lengths in your plays?

MF: Yes, I do. When I did the show in the National in London, it set in the middle ages – Ireland in Elizabeth's reign and it was set in a castle and I drove around the West of Ireland photographing castles. You just need somewhere to start from. I sometimes go further into the play – for example in Marina's case – it was meant to be a caravan in the original - I went to look at caravans everywhere, old wrecked caravans everywhere. Slowly you get a feeling and build up your own landscape really.

AC: You had loads of space in the play.

MF: I t's the idea of getting space. Also there's a feeling in the play..that it should work at a lot of levels, and I think that people sometimes unconsciously pick things up. So there's a feeling in the play really that it's neither heaven or hell – a sort of limbo quality about it. There are ghosts – is she living – is she dead – does she imagine all this? So there was this feeling again when I was on the bog that it went on for ever, there was extraordinary light, it was a very wet day, there were puddles were reflecting...it was just very eerrie, it reminded me of Paris, Texas...this feeling of vastness.

AC: Definitely, when one figure was standing on one side in foreground and one figure was standing at the back, they looked really far apart.

MF: Yes, yes, you would just love to push the back wall of the Abbey out, it's a very shallow stage.

AC: Have you worked a lot with Patrick Mason? He's a very visually aware director..

MF: Yes I've worked with Patrick a lot. Very often you would find, particularly with films, it's rare that you meet people who have a mental visual reference. A lot of them will have other films they will refer to but they won't know anything about painting or sculpture or conceptual art , so it's very hard saying 'a bit like so-and-so'. Like in The Bog of Cats I wanted the figures like Brueghal's "Hunter in the Snow", kind of black figures on a white landscape. So yes Patrick Mason would pick up on that, which is helpful.

AC: You know how the Abbey is the National Theatre and the National Literary Society, when I interviewed Patrick Mason he told me how they treat imagery. Is it secondary to the text?

MF: Well, I think the text in Irish theatre is enormous, it is hugely valued and it has an enormous tradition I suppose. I think that you can uphold that tradition without really lessening the strength of the visual, and I think it has to be both and I think that particularly now when people are so visually aware, so visually educated that you can no longer put something on in a visual vacuum. And, of course, I understand that the text is the thing that everybody has in common – actors, designers, directors – but it is ...that's what it is..that's what you're responding to and it has to be more than that. Some of the writers would write very visual pieces and wouldn't be visually aware. You say, for instance that I was doing a Tom Murphy play, I think he's an extraordinary playwright, I think he writes very visually. I brought him in some Francis Bacon paintings, I just thought felt the mood was similar to what he was writing , and he said WHAT.....that's nothing like the play...Jesus they're awful... It's like very often you're the one propelling the visuals, you have to kind of help him along but what I'm saying you're the one who's designing it, you can't start working everybody else's designs, ideas you have to be the centre of visual propeller if you like.

AC: It must be hard to collaborate with everybody?

MF: Yea, that can be wearying , but it also can be stimulating. I mean if it's a good team. On Marina's thing it was fantastic...I don't know if you have a copy of the script but the descriptions at the beginning of the set are fantastic, there are so many images throughout and she certainly was very willing to go along with anything...she sort of kept out of everything really.

AC: Do you think a male designer would have done as well?

MF: Because it's a women's play? It's hard to say...in terms of costumes maybe ....I suppose with wedding dresses etc. women would get more fun out of it. I certainly got fun of going around looking at those dresses I can tell you. We should get a man to design it to see what they come up with.

AC: You know how the set was quite anonymous, very eerie and kind of between two worlds, was this all in the script? How much did you have to go on?

MG: That would come out through discussion . In fact, I started..I spent some of the year in France and I started on my own in France, so I didn't have anyone saying that, but it's kind of apparent and I would fax drawings to Patrick and I could go a long way on my own, and I like that, I hate being told immediately how to think, I prefer to be left on my own. I mean I had a meeting with Marina and Patrick before I left for France and we talked about the whole grief thing and I went down to the bogs and said this if the kind of thing I'm looking at..just expanse and space.

AC: Did you take pictures?

MF: I had a few awful photographs. So it was as loose as that really.

AC: You spoke in the article in the Irish Times about culture in Ireland; do you think it's the lack of funding?

MF: It's one of my hobby horses really, I think that there is a terrible confusion and I think that MACNAS are in great danger of slipping into that kind of area. Where a culture is an expression of the people and maybe that's an exportable thing at times. But when you have corporate bodies giving out money for the Arts, when the Arts are forced to go to the corporate sector more and more. I was in France for the World Cup and I found it absolutely fascinating that they started it with a fashion show and I find that so

French. They are so confident, there is nothing less about fashion, it's a massive industry, it's so much an aspect of being French, they're so proud of it. In Ireland you're really only proud when somebody in England or America says its good. It's interesting I've done Bog of Cats – it hasn't done well at the box office. I did a play called "Well of Saints" by Synge two years ago which did kind of mediumly here and then went and did fantastically well in Edinburgh, it got the theatre award there - and when it came back it packed, it had been given the stamp of approval in Edinburgh. So those are the kind of things ...money goes to obviously sellable things...the Riverdances, being an aspect of Irish culture I find appalling, terrifying.

AC: You spoke about experimental theatres like Macnas, which ones have you worked with?

MF: I've worked with most theatres really, whether MACNAS is experimental or not is questionable I think. I think its street theatre, I don't think that's particularly experimental, it happens in Spain, in America and in South America, it's just newish here. I think in terms of actually experimenting in theatre, I don't think it exists in this country, I don't think there is any experimental theatre.

AC: How do you think that should come about?

MF: I think if you subsidise someone like Tom Mc Intyre, a writer who I think is quite interesting in the way he works with the script and visual things together and I think nobody goes to his shows, there's no interest in his work... you probably never heard of Tom MacIntyre and you're going to NCAD. It needs to be an education I suppose what people are. When I was at college in London we went to everything , everybody goes to everything, nobody goes here...I couldn't believe that everybody went to everything in London. When I was in college here we weren't encouraged to go to things, and theatre is completely separate, old fashioned ..whatever

AC: Young people don't go to the theatre really here.

MF: Yes, and I think that's the fault of the theatres as well, and whereas I really like what MACNAS do I question the finances for all of that, but I don't think its experimental and I think it's awful that we might think it is.

AC: I think they may have started off with that intention and ..

MF: No, I think they wanted to do street theatre, and they do street theatre at a very good level, I just wonder about employing FAS people all the time, I just think that's another aspect of how we see ourselves, are we serious about it or not. There's nothing wrong at all with FAS people but there's a lot of theatre people who can't get work here who go away to England, to the Continent, that MACNAS can't afford to pay, so when I was working with MACNAS about 8 years ago I had about 30 people with me making costumes, and they were all FAS and they were all very enthusiastic but I'm not a teacher, and I found it a nuisance having to say what copydex was or maybe how do you do that? Education is a very important part of it but they should be working with people who are more experienced whatever...not doing all of the work. I was in a company called Smock Alley where I worked as a director, everyone directed, everyone did everything. We got a small amount of money from the Arts Council but I was in my 20s and that was fine but when people can't go on having that kind of money. And I worked with MACNAS on the same level and people like Breathnach and various people who were working there at the time were happy to take home very little money, but when kids come along you can't and it seems to me that the money never goes beyond. You've got Rough Magic people can't afford to work with them so people that have committed themselves over a period of time, there's nowhere else to go. It does make me cross.

AC: Can I just ask you a couple of questions about NCAD? What did you do there? You invented your own theatre degree?

MF: We went into the Abbey, Frank Conway and I and asked them to come in and lecture us, we didn't have anyone. Frank Conway is another set designer. He used to work in theatre he now works in films, a very good designer of sets.

Ac: Did you enjoy you time in NCAD?

MF: No, it drove me around the bend, it was dreadful ...a long time ago.

AC: Then you went on to St. Martin's, I'm going to compare what the designers for the Abbey have done, and what the designers for Macnas have done.

MF: In Ireland most designers have to do a bit of everything, there simply isn't enough money from just the Abbey. I'm freelance.

AC: Do you do work for the films?

MF: I did set decoration for Michael Collins with Josie Mc Evan. It's just funny in terms of films..I really enjoyed that but now I've just recently got my costume ticket so you have to be specific. I'd do anything really even commercial things. That's why you need to work in London, and it tends to be easier for

English designers to come here than Irish designers to go to London to make a name. It's part of that thing , that English designers have to be better, like they make a joke that we don't get a job in the Gate because we all carry the wrong passport. The politics are strange.

AC: When you design, are your designs your own when production is finished?

MF: Yes you lease your design for the duration. They have first call on it. What happens is The Bog of Cats is going to Australia and I will probably get a third of my fee again.

AC: Theatre design in Ireland is a small sort of thing. Is it getting more stable or is it still volatile?

MF: It's not....do you mean financially??

AC: In terms of knowing in advance what work is available?

MF: That's what worries me, getting into middle age and still be no better off. My boyfriend' is in Galway with the Druid. He's the same. It's so all over the place really.

AC: The costume designer in MACNAS – Mags Linanne – says that all the time – she never knows what work she'll have in advance.

MF: That's what's worrying. My niece is just finished in Trinity, she wants to direct, she's in Germany and she really wants to work with the English language and I said just don't come back. It's depressing and limited. I find it depressing really. I find it extraordinary disappointing that 65% attended the Bog of Cats. That's apparently good. A friend of mine from Munich went to see Famine by Tom Murphy, and she said you would have to book 6 months in advance to get to see it in Germany. We also went to see a German Jazz concert in the NCH and he couldn't believe it there were only about 100 people in the audience. People are interested in film, but in general there isn't an energy generated in schools and colleges towards theatre etc. so people rush out to see them, not only to those trendy little bars in Temple Bar. It is changing slowly, but too slow for me.

Gary McMahon, PR Officer with Macnas
In interview with Aoife Cleary
2nd December 1998

AC: Starting with "Diamonds in the Soil" , was it a success in the Theatre Festival?

GMcM Yes, it was. There were a lot of expectations about the show in a way from the Theatre Festival. With Balour, which was the first show that the festival brought in rather than Macnas promoting it and with Tain & Sweeney Macnas promoted the shows – it was in the festival but it was a Macnas promotion, and then with "Diamonds in the Soil" the festival itself brought it in and this was the first show that we actually premiered at the Theatre Festival.

AC: You hadn't toured with it.

GMcM It hadn't gone anywhere, the only life it had prior to 6th Oct. was 2 previews in Galway. So there was a lot riding on it in terms of creatively, artistically and organisationally as well because it was the first major theatre show that Macnas had done since Rod left Machas. It was definitely a success in terms of the reviews it got. Rave from the IT, rave from the Art show on RTE and the rest of the reviews not so good. The word of mouth in Dublin was really good and the advance sales for the show were very good and it was a combination of different things, (1) Macnas has built up an audience in Dublin so now there is an expectation for Macnas shows, and (2) the subject matter, some people were interested in Van Gogh so after the reviews it really booked up. Then we went on tour and that was considered very successful. It started in Waterford, which wasn't very successful but the tour went Ballyshannon, Sligo, Tralee and Skibereen, Galway and Cork. It was successful everywhere bar Waterford.

AC: That's strange, why was that?

GMcM Don't know, we've played Waterford before and always had trouble there. So much for it being the Arts Council designated Centre of Excellence for Theatre, the audience there is very hard to get out. It was hard work selling the show but it was generally very successful.

AC: Mickel Murfi directed and Patrick O'Reilly designed it – was that P. O'Reilly's first time designing?

GMcM Yes it was his first show to direct, he's a sculptor essentially.

AC: Would he do it again....

GMcM You'd want to ask him himself, but I'd say he would. I think he was intrigued by how it worked. An artist is working on their own, what their vision is basically realised or not realised and if it's successful it's there success and if it's not successful it's their loss. Well....it's a cliché that theatre is a collaborate of art. The thing about Patrick is that he was extremely open. It was his idea to do the show based on Van Gogh, he developed the initial treatment with Mickell and then with everyone else, including the cast, Spud Murphy on lighting design, Mags on costume design. I think he was very happy with what came out at the end of it. I think we would be very interested in working with Mickel and Patrick again.

AC: Was it a big risk taking somebody who never designed for theatre before?

GMcM It is a risk in a way but when Patrick was approached about this we'd seen his work as a sculpture. This first exhibition in the Arts Centre in '96 and we were blown away by it. There were some very strong theatrical elements in it anyway. I think from a production point of view, John Ashton , Macnas's Production Manager, would talk to you more about that, and Mags would probably confirm this for you as well, a lot of it was hit and miss, what they wanted to do was try out stuff and if it didn't work out they'd pull back from it. But in terms of a set design, in both terms of the word, a set design, it was never completely and totally tied down, this is what the costumes will look like, this is what the sets will look like. This is my understanding of it anyway, they really wanted to be able to change it as they worked on it as it went through rehearsal because as Patrick himself acknowledged and as Mickel acknowledged and insisted that it went into the programme, the show was developed in rehearsal by the cast and was also developed by the other people who worked on the production and the creative end of things, the lighting design, the costume design, masks, props whatever.

AC: It was a very visual play, mime based with very little speech..is that taken from your style of street theatre or what do you look to to get that style?

GMcM It fitted into the tradition, if you want to call it that, of previous Macnas shows like Tain & Sweeney in the style of it is a visual style of theatre. It's not text based, it's not based on dialogue, although there was dialogue in it, to an extent was incidental, it's strongest elements of the spoken word in it were the narrative bits which were drawn from Van Gogh's letters to his brother. If you're talking about the voiceover, they were there largely as a framing device, they did move the narrative of the show along to an extent but that's not necessarily why they were there. It was a strongly visual show, but it was basically a coming together of a couple of different things: – the style of previous Macnas shows, – Mikel Murphy's grounding in the visual style of theatre, which is the Lock and Le Coque style??? The Lecoque

connection was in Macnas anyway with Rod because he was a Lecoque graduate and then Patrick being the deviser of the show, not just the designer of the show but the deviser, a visual artist, and then of course you're dealing with the life of an Artist. So all those things were going to combine to make it a very strongly visual show.

AC: Do you think Macnas would do shows that are more text based?

GMcM Well we have done. We did this year with the co-production with the Arts Festival of the Dead School by Pat McCabe. It's the closest that Macnas has ever come to as a straight play.

AC: Which does the whole group prefer working on stage or on the street?

GMcM Ohhh dodgey territory there. Different people have different preferences and different emphasises on what they do. I think in general terms it really is both, but they're two different media in a way.

AC: I think it's interesting as I'm looking at the Abbey, which only works on stage and then you do both and what is the difference between working in both?

GMcM Doing stuff on the street is generally much broader, you can try nearly anything on the street, you can be creating a picture with 50, 100 or 200 people or you can have 1 individual as part of that whole thing, basically performing to 1, 6 or 12 people talking to them. What happens in the development of indoor theatre is that it's much more focused and the audience is much more focused. Sometimes the audience in street theatre doesn't even realise it is an audience. They're just on the street, observing, they may or may not know that there is a Macnas parade happening. You don't have to go through that conscious decision of booking a ticket , going to the theatre, sitting down. In theatre the audience knows its an audience and is focused on what is happening within the four walls that they are in. There is also an expectation that there is a plot and a narrative, there isn't a great expectation that there is narrative or plot or characters in street theatre, there may just be objects or sounds. So that's the difference, in creating the show you have to be aware of those expectations and when, or at times lack of expectation.

AC: Does street theatre leave you a bit freer to do something a bit more abstract?

GMcM Not always because in theatre you know you have the audience attention that you can try things and bring the audience with you . For instance, the final sequence of "Diamonds in the Soil" with the 10 paintings; if that was on the street that would look like a piece of choerograph movement, not a million miles away from majorettes but within the context of the theatre show that theatre show, it's a beautifully abstracted image in a way but as a member of an audience your intellect is operational as well as your senses in that these are Van Gogh's paintins, his life, basically what are left behind.

AC: In that situation you can appreciate that as opposed to on the street.

GMcM On the street things happen very quickly as well, there isn't time for reflection but when you're watching a theatre show which is quite fast moving there is time for reflection , you have a tendency to reflect on it. On the street things happen so quickly, particularly if it's a parade, it's moving past you with an image or a section it's gone in a minute or 2 mins. And is replaced by another one. That happens sequentially on the stage over the course of time, what happens in a parade contact happens over time and space. It is moving past you.

AC: When you're working, designing for theatre on the street and stage do they apply different criteria, like scale would be one ?

GMcM Detail? Mags may dispute this. Basically on street shows you may have 40 of the same costume and also because the audience is only looking at them for 2/3 mins. You don't need to have the same detail in costumes as you would have in a theatre show. But sometimes in a theatre show you would not need the same detail as you would need in film, where you really need to have the detail, depending on what the costume is, on the period is. Having said that, the costumes that Mags designed for the Tour de France in Galway this summer were really intricate.

AC: What was the theme of that parade?

GMcM The years of the French, taken from 4 different periods of French history. There were all these very elaborate Court de Versaille costumes , beautiful stuff.

AC: Throughout one year, how much work is spent on Street Theatre and on Stage ?

GMcM In terms of creating new hows? By and large we create a new theatre show once a year maybe once every 18 months. This year was an exception with 2 new theatre shows, The Dead School and Diamonds in the Soil. In terms of street shows, obviously the biggest street show we do is the Macnas parade in the Arts Festival but we also do stuff for the St. Pat's Day parade in Dublin, and the Tour de France as well. They're large scale stuff, then there's small scale stuff that are once off things with maybe 4 or 5 characters coming together for a show like a conference. A lot of that stuff tends to be repeat stuff. Our monks and demons get a lot of outings. Even this weekend they're out for a Christmas party in Limerick

and again on Tuesday to Killarney. This is basically creating an effect or atmosphere. And quite often is ad libbed. There could be anything from 8 to 20 people on a Monks gig, depending on the size of the venue.

AC: Do you collaborate with other theatre groups at all ever?

GMcM We're just about to do a collaboration with Els Commedients for St. Patrick's Festival in Dublin next year. We're doing a show based on the Oddessy , Ullyses - with Els Commedients – that's a really big production. It's an outdoor nightime street show with a cast of 20, approximately 13 from Macnas and 7 Els Comm. + musicians, directed by Els Commedients and probably designed by Macnas. Really a true collaboration between us. We'll probably do more collaborations in the future. It makes sense as you're opening up to other influences and you're also pooling resources. For this Els Comm. Show it's quite likely that we may not end up making a huge amount of stuff for it, like costumes etc. we may actually pull from our resources and Els Comm. Resources.

AC: How do you work with a group which is based in Spain?

GMcM They've been over here already for a 3 day thing . This weekend John Ashton and John Crumlish are going to Barcelona. The production will kick in after Christmas, rehearsals begin at the end of January and the show will be rehearsed by the Spanish cast in Spain and Irish cast in Galway and then the Spanish cast will come to Ireland about a week before the show. There will be an assistant director here working under the main director in Spain. The Dead School was a co-production of Macnas and the Arts Festival. We pooled production resources and finances on that one. We're looking at the possibility of doing a co-production with a French "Group 5" company for next year's Macnas parade. Macnas devise, design, build and run the parade which will lead to a finale which they will run, design etc. It will be a convergence of themes on it. That makes sense in terms that it's a parade in Galway and we're working with the best pyro technic co. in the world. It's more that the sum of its parts. That the two together will be spectacular show.

AC: Where does the name Macnas come from?

GMcM Macnas came together in 1986. It grew out of the Galway Arts Festival. It was a convergence of people who had been working in the Arts in Galway largely with the Arts Festival. The Festival brought in a variety of different companies and saw the potential for creating a similar sort of company in Galway. It started off as a community Arts company with the aim of having fun on a grand scale and it developed from there. We still are a community arts company that does street theatre, indoor theatre, training , community arts. We do outreach programme, we work in schools, we do commercial work through a range of different areas, some of them through design some of them through accident some of them as a reflection of individual interests from people working in Macnas over the years. The word "Macnas" means joyful, exhuberent and it's an Irish word used in Connemara to describe when a calf is born and it gets up on its legs for the first time and is jumping around the paddock. That's Macnas.

AC: You do get inspiration from Celtic mythology?

GMcM Sometimes. In a way, Macnas has a name for doing all this Celtic sort of stuff . Diamonds in the Soil was almost a conscious decision not to do something based on Celtic mythology. A large part of that whole Celtic thing was a reflection of the influence of Padraig Breathnach in the company. He had a huge store of those stories rattling around in his head . Shows like Tain & Balour had a strong element of Celtic stories and would be researched back to the basic text or literature that was based on those legents. Celtic influences now are not as strong , we are as likely to be influenced by anything, we're complete magpies. That was part of the reason for the success of Macnas it wasn't this Celtic twilight expression of these stories. They'd as much to do with rock 'n roll as they had to do with Celtic mythology. The style of performance had more to do with European tradition than Irish tradition.

AC: Theatre in Ireland before had been literary just a spoken, how did the visual thing work?

GMcM Yes, particularly when Tain opened in '92 and at the Dublin Theatre Festival later that year, it was a very surprising show to a lot of the audience in Galway and Dublin and on tour. It was surprising because people's expectation of what Macnas was. Macnas was this good time- have fun on the street company, that was the perception of Macnas and the perception that theatre involves talking.

AC: The Galway Arts Festival is the biggest event for you.

GMcM Yes it is the single biggest event that we do in a year because basically what it does is it brings together all the elements that make up Macnas. It is stated policy of Macnas that this parade is the most important event of the year, it overrides everything that we do. Our major funding from the Arts Council is under the community arts budget and what the parade does is provide a focus and an end product to the year's work in community arts – a combination of all the people who work with schools and the very strong theatrical production elements that go on in Macnas. In a way the parade has often been a testing ground for ideas, for scenarios and people. People get an opportunity to try things out . At the moment

we're going through the process of actually seriously evaluating the parade – in general terms what the parade means, what it means to Macnas and see where its going.

AC: Are you thinking of changing it?

GMcM Yes, possibly changing it One of the strongest things that is coming out at the moment is, in terms of doing the parade in Galway for the last 12 years that our most critical audience is also our most supportive audience. They are also the audience with the height of expectation, and there is an element of bigger, brighter. Every year it has to surpass itself. We have to figure out ways of actually making the parade continually interesting from our point of view in creating the parade and probably more importantly from the audience's point of view, and also making it interesting for the different areas of the community that were involved in making of it. Next year were thinking of doing a night-time parade. By doing this it will change people's perception of what the parade is.

AC: I read interviews in the Irish Times with P Breathnach some years ago with and he spoke about the process being as important as the product. Is this still the way?

GMcM Oh yes, that in a way is the essence of community arts no matter whose definition you are going to take. Every community arts company has their own definition of what community arts is, but the mental thing that people are agreed on in Community Arts is that the process of the community working in an art context, the way they organise themselves, the way they relate to eachother – that is as important as the finished product. The difference between Macnas and other Community Arts is that Macnas has always placed very strong emphasis basically on access but it's also about excellence, it's not just about people taking part, it's taking part in a meaningful way, and that what they create has a sense of excellence about it.

AC: Not just taking part....

GMcM To create to take part. There are standards of professionalism, and professionalism applies to people taking part as volunteers, as amateurs and as community participants as much as people who are getting paid for it.

AC: Do you achieve that through training. How do you manage a group of children. How do you get them to achieve excellence?

GMcM Part of it is actually having a sense of making a meaningful contribution to, of having a sense of ownership. Whatever that thing is, whether it is workshop in a school or coming down the street in the Arts Festival, that that is theirs, that they are not just extras in a picture that someone else has devised. What they bring to it has value and is valued, therefore they have some sense of ownership of the parade. The people of Galway feel the own the Macnas parade and they have every right to express an opinion on it. It's not just the people who created, its not just the people who participated in it , the people who go out to watch it have a sense of pride and ownership about it.

AC: I'm comparing the situation of the two theatre companies as well, the Abbey and Macnas, so I would like some information on staff numbers etc.

GMcM We have 10 full time staff, we have 2 different FAS schemes, community employment programmes, which accounts for another 24 people. And depending on what's going on at the time, we have up to 50 people on contract doing different things.

AC: That would be seasonal.

GMcM Yes, it would depend on what's going on , for instance during the summer we did the Dead School and the parade at the same time and we were all getting ready for the Tour de France in Cork, we had 120 people working for us at that time, getting a cheque on a Thursday.

AC: So summer is your busiest time?

GMcM We're busy all year round at this stage, but Summer is our busiest. We've just now finished touring with Diamonds in the Soil but all the community stuff is still ongoing, and in a way what the full time staff is doing at the moment is a planning stage for next year. Nov., Dec. is kind of regrouping, refiguring what you're going to do for next year.

AC: Do you still take on the students in summer?

GMcM Yes we do. The student scheme works to everyone's advantage with a few dodgy exceptions, we take on 20 people and not all 20 are going to be great in terms of their commitment, or sometimes they don't even show up. Macnas gets the benefit of their work and their ideas. I think from the students points there is a very sharp learning curve in terms of the practicalities, particularly for art students.

AC: Do the people you employ like the FAS students etc. have to have previous training or experience?

GMcM Not necessarily, to an extent there is an interview process for the student scheme and the Fas scheme, but interest and amiability ususally wins our over any lack of experience. A lot of people coming on Fas schemes are at that situation for a variety of reasons. To get on the Fas scheme you must be unemployed for a year, and there are lots of different reasons why people are unemployed, maybe they are attempting to work as artists or musicians or they may have come through other circumstances. With the student scheme an engineering student is as likely to be taken on as an art student, but the majority of students who apply are art students, as they are the people with the most knowledge of Macnas.

AC: Which Department takes the most time or staff?

GMcM In "Diamonds" there was a huge amount of masks and a huge amount of work in that and there was a full masks team on that. The masks and props team was very big on that show. But it varies from show to show. Mags ran the costume dept. with just Steve helping her. Some of the costumes were bought which was unusual.

AC: Do you have a permanent Artistic Director?

GMcM No. At the moment that's just the way it is. It is very difficult of a company like Macnas to have one single visionary person running the whole creative end of the company. If we were a straight theatre company it would be a lot easier to get an artistic director. Also because of the nature of the way we work, we work very much in the nature of a team. It's not necessarily an antipathy towards the notion of one single vision of what the co. should be doing creatively and artistically, it's just that there's no one there at the moment who seems to be the person to do it. Breathnach was it for a long time and Breathnach left, this pointed out a lot of gaps in the company and caused us to actually seriously look at what Macnas was and what Macnas was doing, why Macnas existed.

Ac: How important are the costumes? Are they more important that masks?

If you're Mags they're more important. I don't know if any one area gets priority over the other. You can't really separate them , in a parade context, costumes have a very strong focus but also there can be a strong emphasis on floats. At times it comes down to budgets, the costliest one is the one that gets the most attention. Creatively I don't know if one is more important than the other. In "Diamonds" there was a stronger emphasis on the lighting, props and the masks than there was on the costumes. In the Cork parade the costumes were the single most important thing in the design element. ...

AC: Funding? How does the amount of funding you get compare with the amount you generate?

GMcM I'm not a 100% sure, this might be better addressed to Declan. I think it works out about ¼ of our total turnover. We get £160,000 from the Arts Council for community arts and £80,000 for community theatre.

AC: I spoke to the Director in the Abbey. Would Macnas ever collaborate with the Abbey?

GMcM In 1980 I was in college in Galway with Patrick Mason and all the girls were mad about his cheekbones.

GMcM It might... it just hasn't arisen. That would be interesting. The Barabos project was terrific. The Abbey tradition would seem to be in opposition to Macnas, but it's not really. The Abbey last year did Tarry Flynn and a few people here saw it and was basically a piece of physical theatre which was built on a literary text. It isn't all Brian Friel and Yeats plays. We're not in opposition. We're not even in competition.

AC: Spending? Which department would require the most money?

GMcM The wages department. I really don't know. Ask Declan. It probably depends on the production.

AC: Finally, what things are going on at the moment, what are your future plans?

GMcM Els commedients. St. Pat's day. We're trying to sell "Diamonds in the Soil" internationally. The Macnas parade in the Arts Festival. We're looking at the possibility of a fairly serious outdoor workshop for the Arts Festival next year. We also have all the community arts projects with the various groups and the Taylor project - a training project for 12 local community arts projects, after which there will be some large scale final event. Either a theatre show or parade. Then they go back trained as community art workers.

AC: Are you doing anything for the millenium?

GMcM Not yet. There isn't any great enthusiasm for producing something for 31/12/99. Probably during the year we'll do something. There is a vague idea of doing a very large event during that year.

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