

"The Irish Artists' response to
the built environment"

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
History of Art N.C.A.D.

by

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INTRODUCTION

In Ireland most of us now spend our lives in urban environments but on the whole we are not visually sensitive to them, we are not emotionally involved with them, nor are we very aware of our needs in relation to them. This lack of response from the public has affected the work of decision makers and the form makers of our society, the town planners, the architects, the designers and advertisers to name a few. They seem to be saying, if no one is looking, why worry about the way it looks. Financial and political considerations are a large concern here but the influence of the consumers eye and mind are underestimated.

Visual education is the answer here, education being the most effective and widespread cultural channel which can be used as an instrument of social change.

It seems to me that the Irish Artists response to the urban environment is a reflection of how the public at large respond to it. The Irish Artists response to urbanisation and its by products - mass production, consumerism, advertising, urban decay and urban waste, etc., is very small. Many of our mature artists who have concerned themselves with the urban environment have seen it as a subject to be romanticised e.g. Basil Blackshaw, or an aesthetic problem e.g. Nora McGuinness or endowed with symbolic presences e.g. Nano Reid and Camille Souter or yet again with the eye of a landscape painter.

In this section of my thesis I have tried to find out the extent and nature of the response of Irish Artists to the urban environment and also to put forward some reasons why the Irish response is as it is.

This is not an exhaustive study, since to do so would require much more time when one considers the difficulties that exist in tracking down artists or in getting to see enough of the artists work in order to come to conclusions. Nevertheless the study for me was very rewarding in bringing me in contact with such a variety of artists work.

Initially I had decided to limit my study to artists who were concerned only with the fabric of the city but it became difficult to know where to draw lines and I felt that I might be treating the subject in a superficial way. After all artists do not treat their subjects in such a narrow way, their responses are often subtle and complex. Many artists who concern themselves with the fabric of the city are interested in its wider implications too: social concerns, the lives of the people in their environment as found in H. Kernoff and G. Campbell, the effects of technology as communicated by Wade and Ballagh.

I am also aware that because I have widened the scope of my thesis, I have not been able to do as exhaustive a study as I would have liked because of a time limitation.

I have decided not to include certain categories since I wanted my study to be fairly specific namely to deal with Irish Artists whose work is a response to the urban environment.

I have not included art works for environments like Edward Delaney's "Wolfe Tone" on Stephens Green or Michael Warren's magnificent granite sculpture at R.T.E. These works are usually commissioned designed for a very specific place to relate to a building or buildings but the content of the work may be concerned with something quite different.

I have not included much of the townscapes which still form a large part of the R.H.A. and R.U.A. exhibitions, the reason being that there often exists a lack of progression or involvement with the subject which provokes no sense of extended experience in the viewer. There is very little sense of probing or experiment and in many cases facility in painting becomes the stimulus for the work.

I have also not included work, which is totally abstract since it is difficult to see where the artists concern lies. I have considered artists who have produced work during the last 50 years, I feel this would give an adequate picture of what was happening.

CHAPTER 2

Why Irish Artists Have Not Been Influenced

Much By Urbanisation

Why are Irish Artists Not Much Interested In The City.

Art must reflect the society from which it springs, therefore a look at Irish society and its recent history reveals some of the answers.

Conservatism

The power of the church over the people to preserve the traditional norms had a profound effect. A puritanism existed as a result of alliance between church and the new business men and the politicians, which is still with us. Literary censorship was an outcome of this which had a lasting influence.

Conservatism in Ireland is rooted in and reinforced by the family structure which goes back a very long way. In rural Ireland the family tended to be more dominant and self contained than in urban areas. A group responsibility prevailed and a patriarchal type of family existed imposing a greater degree of control over its members. A commonly shared system of values as existed in these families and still exists, operates as an effective social pressure to conform. This preserves conservative attitudes very forcibly. In urban areas, a multiplicity of social codes exists and deviations from the norms can go unnoticed and unchecked in a more impersonal world.

Irish people are on the whole reluctant to let go of the values of the past, seeing it as a betrayal of the inheritance of their own people. This conservative attitude has its roots in the past when the people clung tenaciously to their values when their spiritual survival was threatened. Even now when materialism is rife we are paying lip service to spirituality.

Agricultural Roots

Being an agricultural country, Irish artists seem to be more sensitive to organic forms of the countryside than to the hard edges of machines and buildings. Rural images and feelings seem to predominate even when the subject matter is not landscape.

There is a pre-occupation with things of the earth, the light, the sky and the weather, and since art must reflect what people feel and think, then this is to be expected.

Agricultural Roots Cont'd

The land has always been a major concern with Irish people, it has always been revered in song, story and poem.

Effects of 19th Century Romanticism

The effects of 19th century Romanticism is important, we are still being affected by it. To those who are believed to have been the patrons of the arts then, the occupants of the Big House, Yeats's "hard-riding country gentlemen" it was the pastoral situation that appealed, they ignored the cities and towns as an evil necessity. It could be said that up to the 20's or 30's of this century the English Royal Academy and its Annual exhibition were the focal centre of every artist in these islands.

It would be difficult to imagine a work which tried to present a full and true depiction of conditions of the times in Ireland, being accepted.

Even in England romanticism was so strong that the Industrial Revolution was hardly reflected at all in art. The more the countryside was threatened by the Industrial cities, the more fervently it was painted. The more intolerable life in the machine age became, the more readily artists retreated into imaginary worlds, ancient Greece, the Middle Ages, Fairyland. This of course reflected one aspect of the age - the revulsion against the conditions created by the machine. This reinforced the rural-fundamentalist view of life which treats the city as an object of hostility and criticism, sinfulness and decadence and the countryside as virtuous and beautiful.

The Romantic period has influenced our perception of our environment, our perception being coloured by how people saw things in the past. We know from the study of visual perception that what we see depends on what we expect to see. Perceptual processes are not structured to record data but rather to organize meaning (Gestalt Psychology), in short this means that we see things not as they are but as our minds think they ought to be.

Effects of 19th Century Romanticism - Cont'd

Landscape has in the past and sometimes still is defined in terms appropriate to Romanticism or Fin de siecle academic art as we see from use and abuse of descriptions such as "picturesqueness". These attitudes have played a part in the forming of taste and awareness of visual form, which becomes basic to a persons consciousness.

Neglect of Visual Education

The neglect of visual education in Irish schools has served to perpetuate the myth that the process of seeing is essentially objective and unlearned.

If a work does not strike a familiar chord we tend to dismiss it, very often we don't allow a work of art to cause an extension of human consciousness in us by subverting our dominant consciousness. We seem to want it to confirm what we already know and feel. Good art should change our perception in some way e.g. when I look at the heavy Industrialized area of Clondalkin and consider Jonathan Wade's visual statements about what is happening, I feel very uneasy, therefore my apathy towards the area and what is happening there has been changed to a concern.

Literary tradition

One of the most remarkable traits of Gaelic Literature is that it deals with a continuous historic present - the same life, the same mode of thought appear in the 18th century as in the 8th. Gaelic literature is not a literature of change but of rest and of intensive cultivation. It is the image of a civilization, half pastoral, half heroic, that continues down to the present day, that never has accepted industrialism and the city.

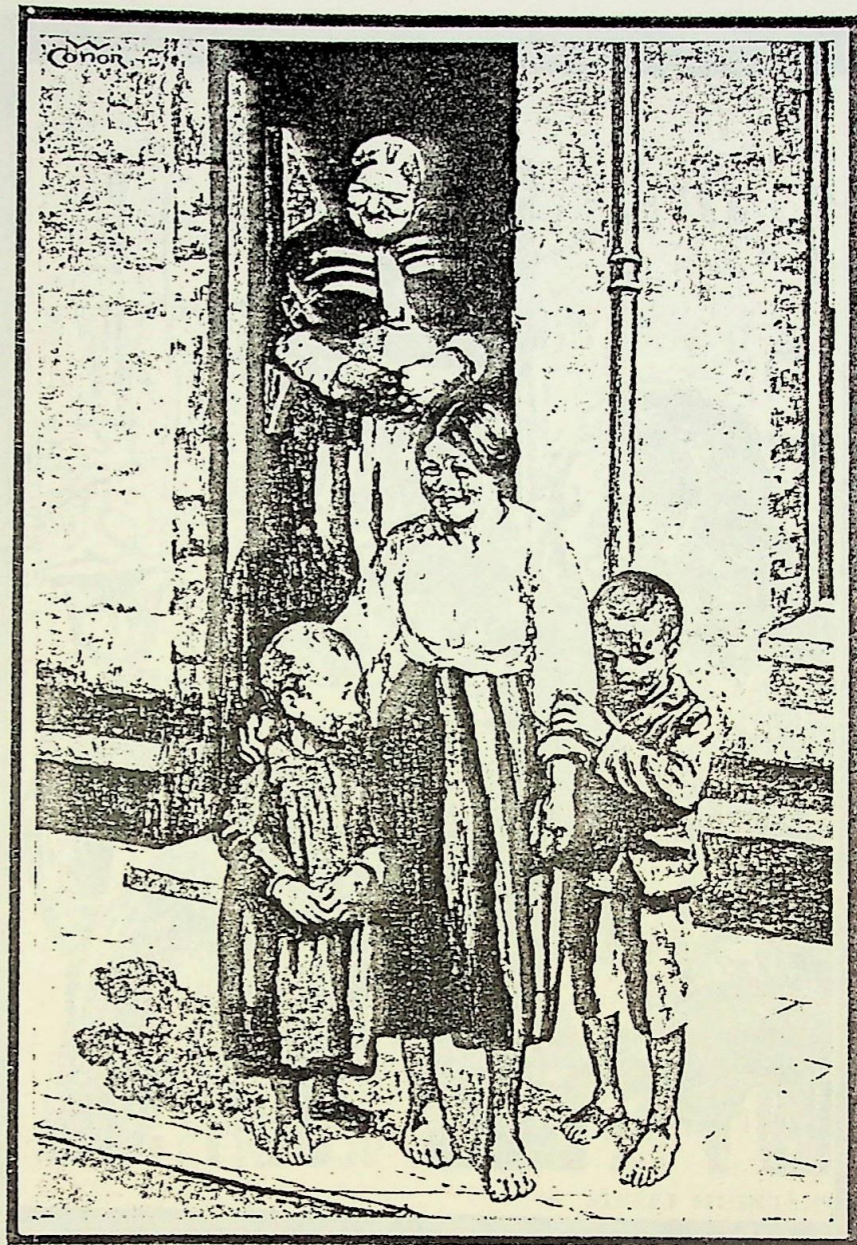
The Irish mind has traditionally a feel for introspection rather than for breaking new ground.

The Artists

William Conor 1881 - 1968 the painter of Belfast

William Conor depicted the Industrial life of Belfast, the labour meetings, the shipyards, a slum child hanging over a half door, a back street. He said "I have found most of my best subjects as I wandered round the streets". Later, Colin Middleton as a young artist growing up in his early naturalistic style in the industrial areas of Belfast. As a more developed artist later on he responded better and with more feeling to nature. As he said himself he is concerned with "two basic concerns of the painter: with the moods and qualities evoked in him by certain places... and with the essential nature of the material" which he uses. His work has reflected many of the major movements in modern art.

Conor believed that if art is to live, it must grow out of its' environment, however sordid that may appear to superficial observers, and not camouflage itself in cosmopolitan traditions. In "Children of Ulster" illustration No. 1 and "Street Musicians" illustration No. 2 Conor shows what was his greatest attribute, the human content of his vision. Conor did for Belfast what Kernoff did for Dublin, they both had something to say about life as well as art. Like Kernoff the great bulk of his work was concerned with the working life of the city. He loved the city for its own sake, he did not romanticize or make pretty, on the contrary, what is crude and repulsive remains, with love, humour and tragedy. He never yielded to fashionable demands but with great honesty shows his city as a human and warm place despite its poverty and rough exterior.



1 Children of Ulster.



Colin Middleton, R.H.A., M.B.E.



Mary Street
50 x 60 cm
Oil on canvas
1941

Jack B. Yeats 1871 - 1957

Jack Yeats used the city as a backdrop for his events and happenings illustration No. 4, nevertheless it was obviously important to him. In "In Memory" illustration No. 5 he shows a strong feeling for the fabric of the city but the root of his art was the expression of the spirit of his age, life fully experienced, life in freedom. He was essentially a story teller like the Seanchai of long ago.

Jack B. Yeats |



"The Liffey Swim"



5 "In Memoriam"

Harry Kernoff 1900 - 1962

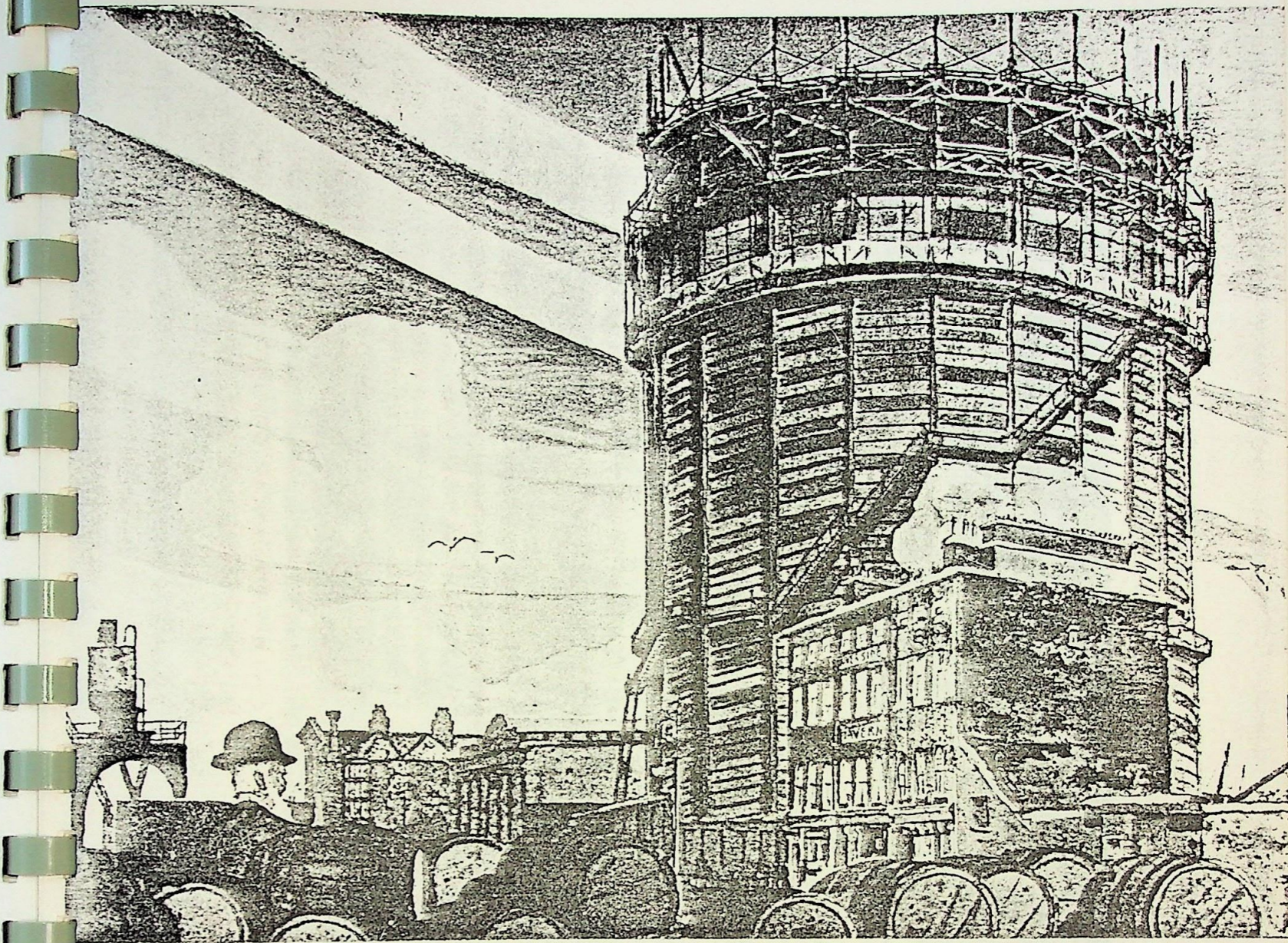
Harry Kernoff's concern and compassionate feeling for the quality of life live in an urban environment comes across very strongly indeed. It was the Dublin working class that interested him most of all. He painted some of their buildings in their true unflattering condition. He painted their faces, their work, their play, their homes and their streets. He did not romanticize the Irish way of life as Yeats did. He knew where to find the heart of Dublin and he painted it, warts and all: the crumbling buildings, the backs of once elegant Georgian houses, the washing hanging out to dry on poles projecting from windows. He painted them with a personal and compassionate style that reflected his sympathies and his gentle approach to them.

He seems to have chosen his subjects more by conviction than by chance. He was a member of the radical club and his political convictions are evident. A painting of the Dublin Docks with a poster saying "Vote Larkin" and another of Dublin Docks with a poster saying "Vote Labour". His "New Dublin Gasometer" illustration No. 6, on the South quays present a huge and inescapable industrial presence, dominant and foreboding but yet I think he accepts it as part of the life of the city. He shows a respect for the new aspects of urban life e.g. factories, electricity pylons etc.

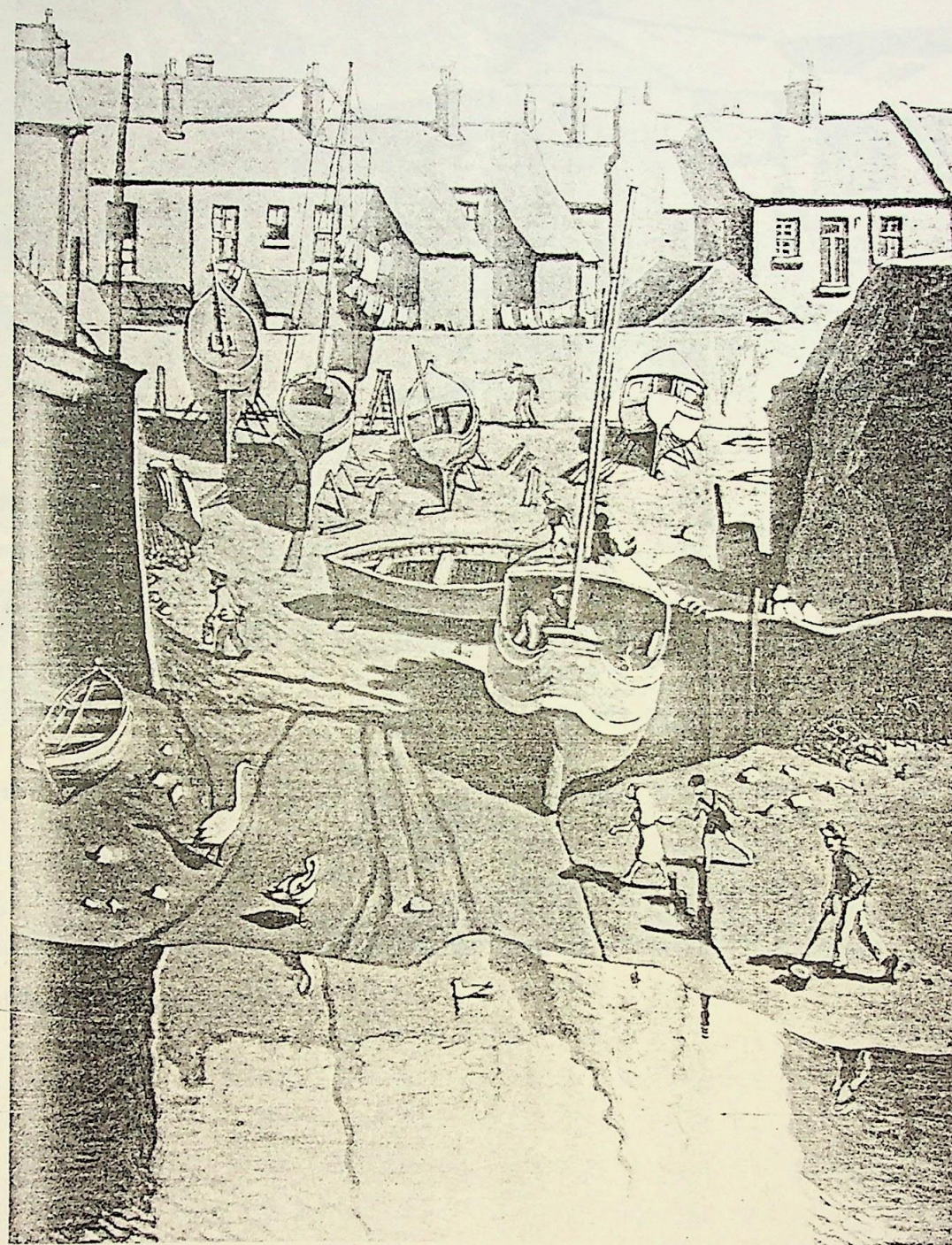
He sees life in its' totality. His sources are his own city, his own people and his experiences with them. He makes them come alive with his affection and concern, his honesty and fresh approach without displaying any aloofness, "Murphy's Boatyard, Ringsend" illustration No. 7 is an obvious example. His urban environment has obviously affected him deeply, when we look at his landscapes we can see that he doesn't have the same eye for the life in it, - they are empty by comparison.

He was a confirmed Dubliner despite the fact that he was born in London to Jewish parents. The family came to live in Dublin when Harry was age 14. He studied in the Metropolitan school of art under Patrick Tuohy and Sean Keating who must have influenced him. It is not clear to what extent he was influenced by his families religion, if at all. Kernoff's work is humanistic in its' imagery where Judaism is basically abstract and literary in its eccliastical art forms.

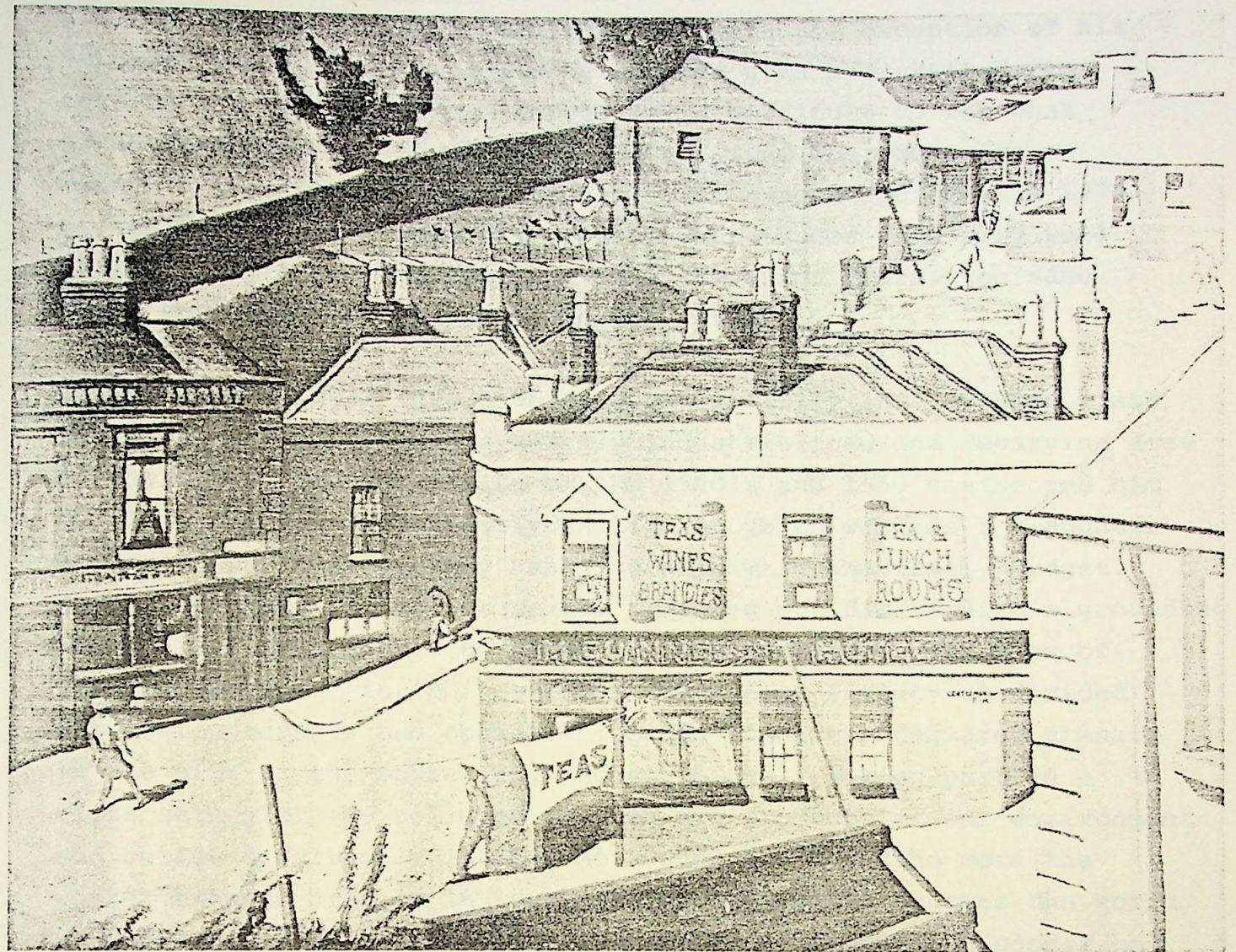
Harry Kernoff I think must be ranked with Joyce and O Casey in his characterization and portrayal of Dublin. His work reminds me of W. S. Lowery in terms of the human feeling he portrays of the urban environment in which so many of us live.



New Dublin Gasometer, watercolour, Harry Kernoff



7 Murphy's Boatyard Ringsend. (Oil)



8 Ballybrack Killiney Co. Dublin. (Oil)

Jonathan Wade (1941 - 1973)

The work of Jonathan Wade shows an almost total commitment to his response to the urban environment, with the exception of his very early work which was also concerned with his attitude to society and to life. Even though it is difficult to say what directions he might have taken, had he lived, he was quite a mature artist when he died tragically in a road accident in 1973 at age 32. By that time his views and attitudes were very well defined, expressed and upheld over a number of years, the same theme occupied him during his entire career.

He was born in 1941 into a working class family in a working class district, Thomas Street, a heavily industrialized and decaying area of the city. The oppression of the 1940's and 1950's affected him deeply. He left school early in life to go to work as a slaughter house man and as a factory hand, to help with the family budget. He did not have formal art school training but did receive a grounding in several techniques. He had a militant working class view of society, with Marxist philosophies and seeing society as divided between oppressors and oppressed, he passionately declared himself on the side of the oppressed, and saw himself taking part in a class struggle. He believed that we are products of our environment and believed fervently in Karl Marx when he says "the more the worker expends himself in work, the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, and the poorer he himself becomes in his inner life, the less he belongs to himself.. "The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, takes on its own existence, but that it exists outside him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force."....

Karl Marx "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts 1844". Wade considered that it was his business as an artist to make visible certain political truths but he never allowed his work to degenerate into propaganda.

It is alienation, the violence of an industrial society, reflected in the environment which I feel that Jonathan Wade is depicting in his work. His nightmarish industrial cities, sprawling shanty towns, threatening to collapse or to engulf us, steel structures

blotting out life. The message here is clear: the world we are creating for ourselves is horribly unstable, wasteful, overwhelming, life diminishing. There is no warmth or comfort or sympathy which we found in Kernoff's Dublin in fact human survival is in question. To me they are like doomsday warnings. The origins of these urban scenes are clearly to be found in the Thomas St., area where Wade was reared, the docks etc., but they are transformed by the artists imagination to make a universal comment about human environments. These works are painted in what I would see as the second phase of his development, the first phase doesn't concern my study directly so I won't deal with it here.

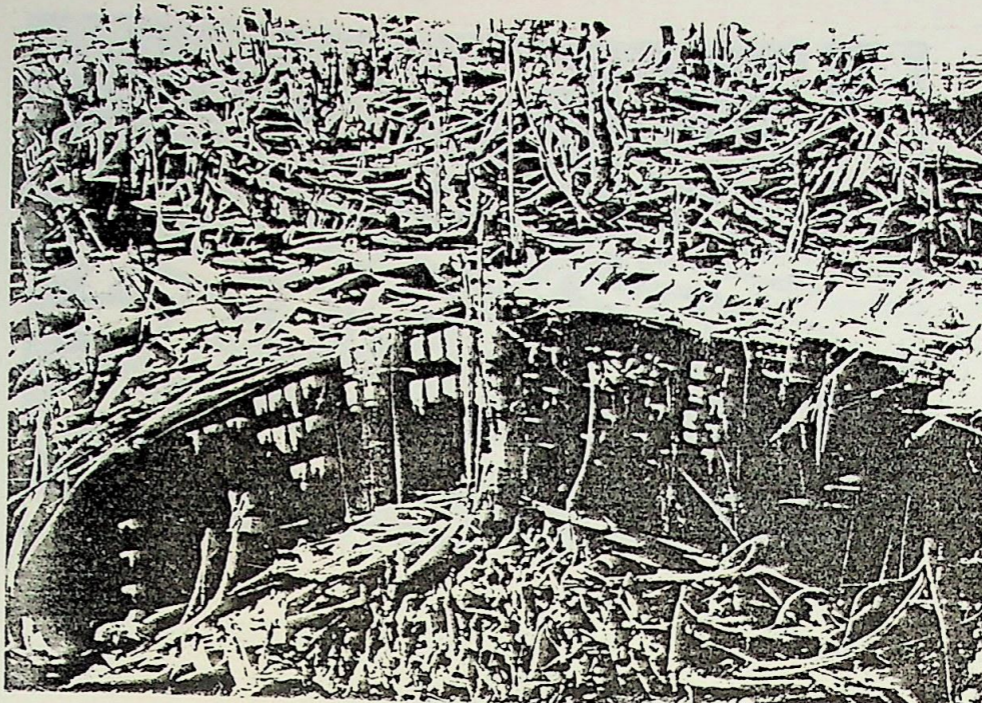
A mastering of technique and a deepening vision being brought together here makes this phase very significant. He uses a technique of painting the metallic surfaces which is extremely effective and not gimmicky at all. The method entailed working the paint on the surface of the panel with a squeegee of rubber or card. This resulted in very thin deposits of paint and gave maximum luminosity and a metallic feel. Also the three dimensional effects achieved by the squeegee tracks was remarkably skilful. These paintings are oil on canvas, illustrations 9 - 11 are representative of this second phase. The human image is almost entirely forsaken for the industrial sprawl. These works show a greater sense of control than his first phase which were intended to shock and were more like letting off steam. These are more controlled but more devastating as a result. Wade had no desire to please or to reassure. Bruce Arnold wrote in the "Irish Independent at the time "His paintings are pregnant with catastrophe... and while man has been either reduced to a tiny spec in the landscape or removed altogether, the feeling of humanity being crushed by a sterile and pitiless fate is there, strong as ever"...."one cannot, therefore enjoy his work. It has none of the cosy introspection of so much modern Irish Painting".

In his last years Wade turned his attention to the rapid industrialization of the Clondalkin suburbs where he was then living. These paintings were to be the third phase in his development. They are still full of foreboding, vistas of tangled pipes overrun the landscape. Again these are an imaginative response to visual stimuli: he was surrounded by tracts of land used for storing logs, concrete pipes and machinery of all kinds. Again human habitation

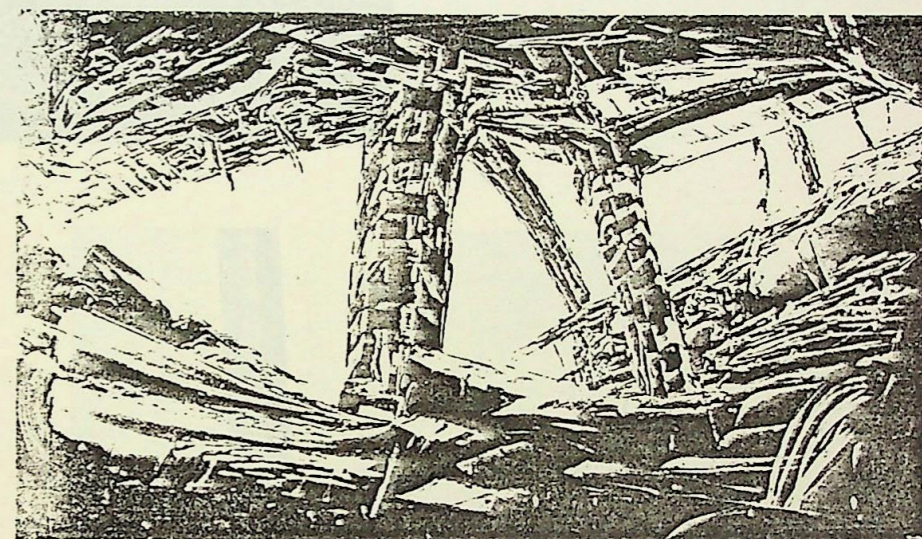
is reduced to a motorway flyover or a jet streak across the sky. This third phase is represented by illustrations Nos. 13 and 14. These urban landscapes possess a beauty which the others do not have, they are calmer, perhaps more resigned. They seem to express a sense of loss rather than outrage, of unease rather than outright violence. These are acrylic paintings on canvas, gone completely is the insistence upon rust and decay, everything here is new and polished. He is still preoccupied with alienation and this newer, gleaming world is just as daunting as the old. Before he died it appears that Wade was being influenced by current trends in hard edge but how he might have developed from there we shall never now know, it is our loss. Henry Sharpe in his booklet "Jonathan Wade - Life and Art" has stated;

"I believe that he was the most significant Irish painter of his generation and possibly one of the finest Irish visual artists of the century. This is necessarily a subjective judgement, and whether or not it is upheld by the passage of time few will deny the very real quality and consistency of his art"

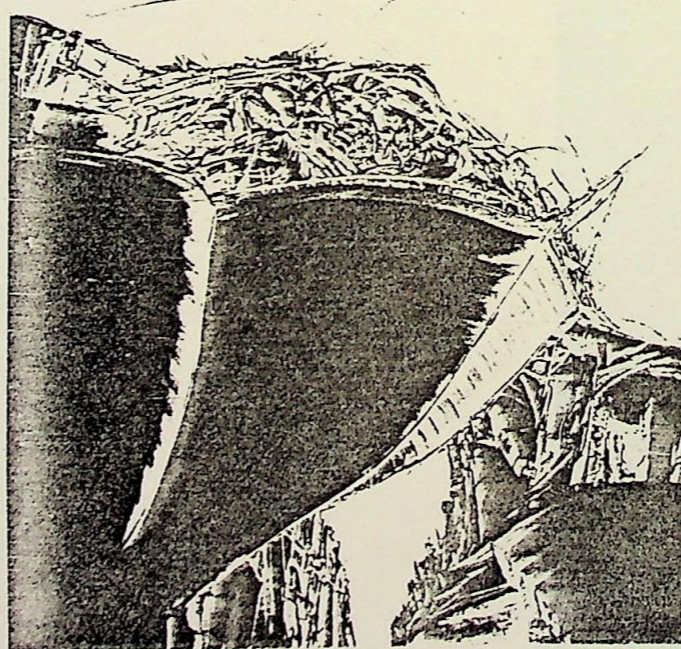
Like Conor and Kernoff before him, Wade shows a tremendous social concern, but in a very different way. Conor and Kernoff see their cities and its' people in a very loving and compassionate way but Wade is distraught by the alienation caused by the industrial city and the dehumanising of the landscape. His work is full of foreboding, catastrophe and rejection whereas Conor and Kernoff accepted their cities as they were despite their drawbacks, but then, times have changed.



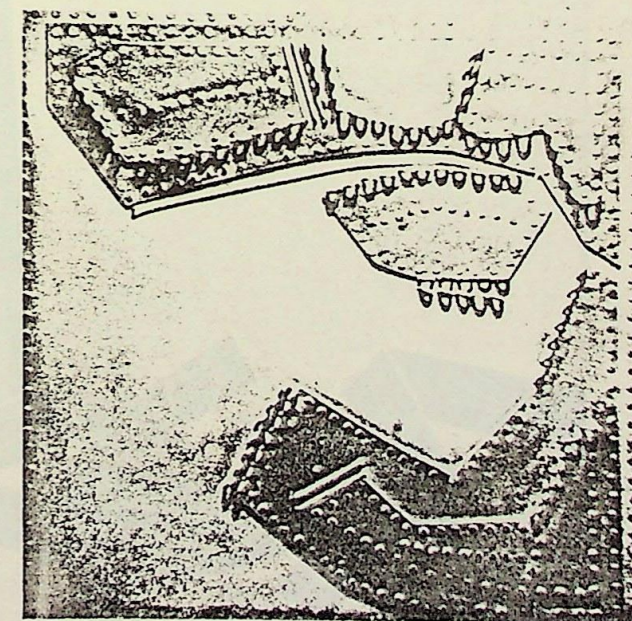
9 Habitat IV |



10 Avenue



11 Wharf Miscellany |

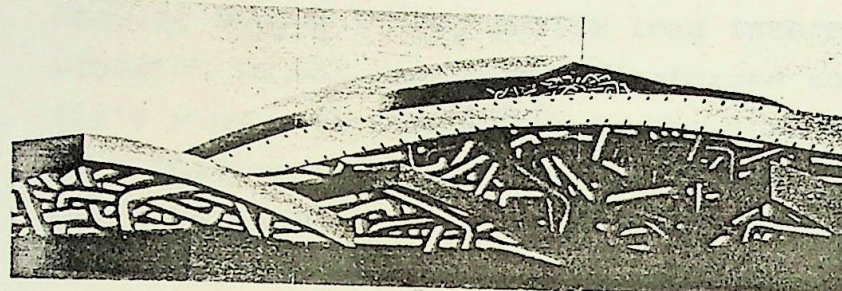


12 Assemblage |

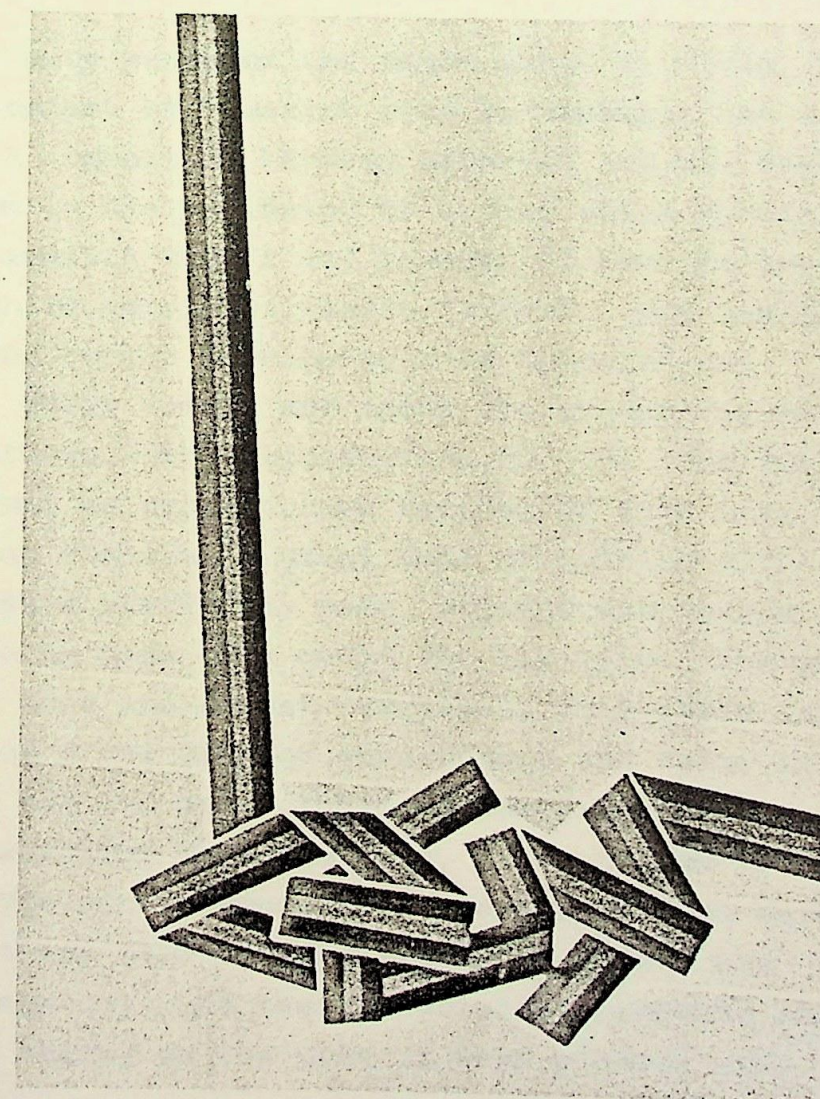


13

Urban Landscape II



14 Urban Landscape



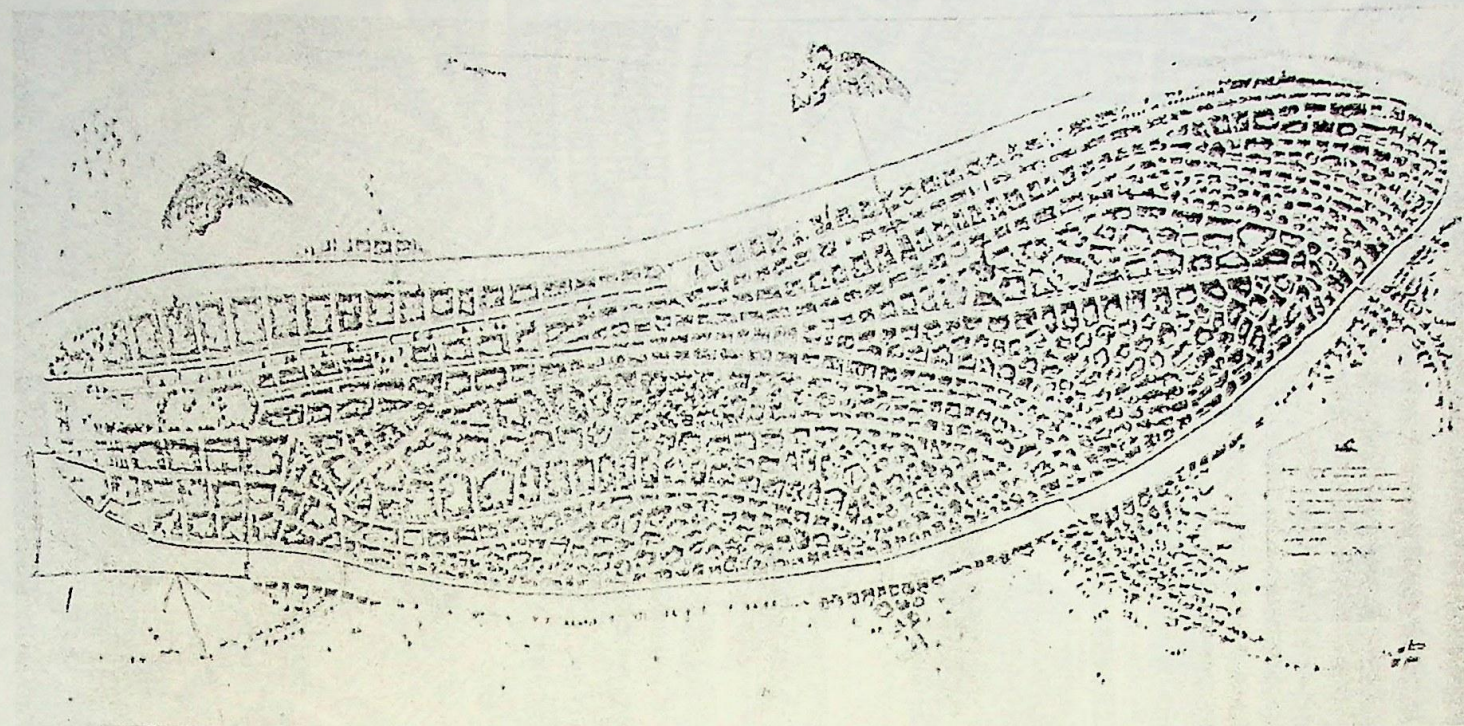
15 Untitled

Michael O Neill born Limerick c. 1952

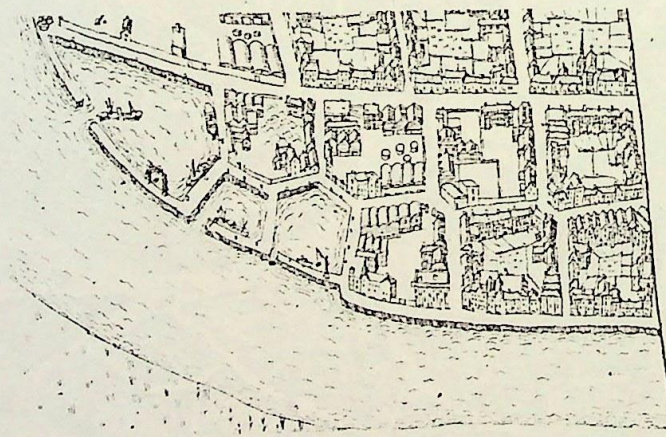
During my search I came across a young artist called Michael O Neill whose work portrays an intense concern with the shapes of cities and urban forms and particularly with the city of Limerick which is where the artist lives. He looks at the city in terms of its' infinite possibilities, the ineptness of architectural planning and its good points and how people's lives are affected by the environment they live in. Imaginative and practical alternatives are presented that are exciting and amusing. In one of his first etchings he likens the living organism of the city to the functional organism, the vein of a dragon fly's wing. The idea came to him as a result of drawing dragon flies, a life long interest. He had the shape of Limerick in his head and it conformed to the shape of the dragon fly's wing. He found that in the structure of dragon flies wings is a regular and irregular layout between forefront and hindpart which matched the structure of the old part of Limerick. The idea of the city as a living organism was realized. That particular etching was called "Metropolis" illustration No. 16.

Michael O Neill is very much aware of the place where he lives, he believes that the development of Limerick city is somewhat out of control and drawing on a comparison between Limerick and New York he says "the grid system is the beginning of a city which should have grown bigger but Limerick didn't and because of that it has a provincial atmosphere which people criticize it for". His feelings on present structures and recent developments in Limerick are expressed in his work. These themes and ideas are evident in his drawing called "Urbs Antiqua Fuit" illustration No. 17. The full impact of his work is lost in reproduction because of it's size and detail. This drawing contains a great deal of opinion with regard to planning, peoples attitudes, past, present and future layout of Limerick which he uses as a model for any city. The more one looks, the more one sees and almost everything imaginable is included. He has created a new city of skyscrapers and there is a marvellous link between old and new. There is fantastic energy, meticulous detail and excellent craftsmanship. His medium is etching and aquatint. The social concern is clearly evident here but again in a different way from Conor, Kernoff or Wade. His concern for the way things are, and that he actually proposes what way it could be, almost taking on the role of town planner and

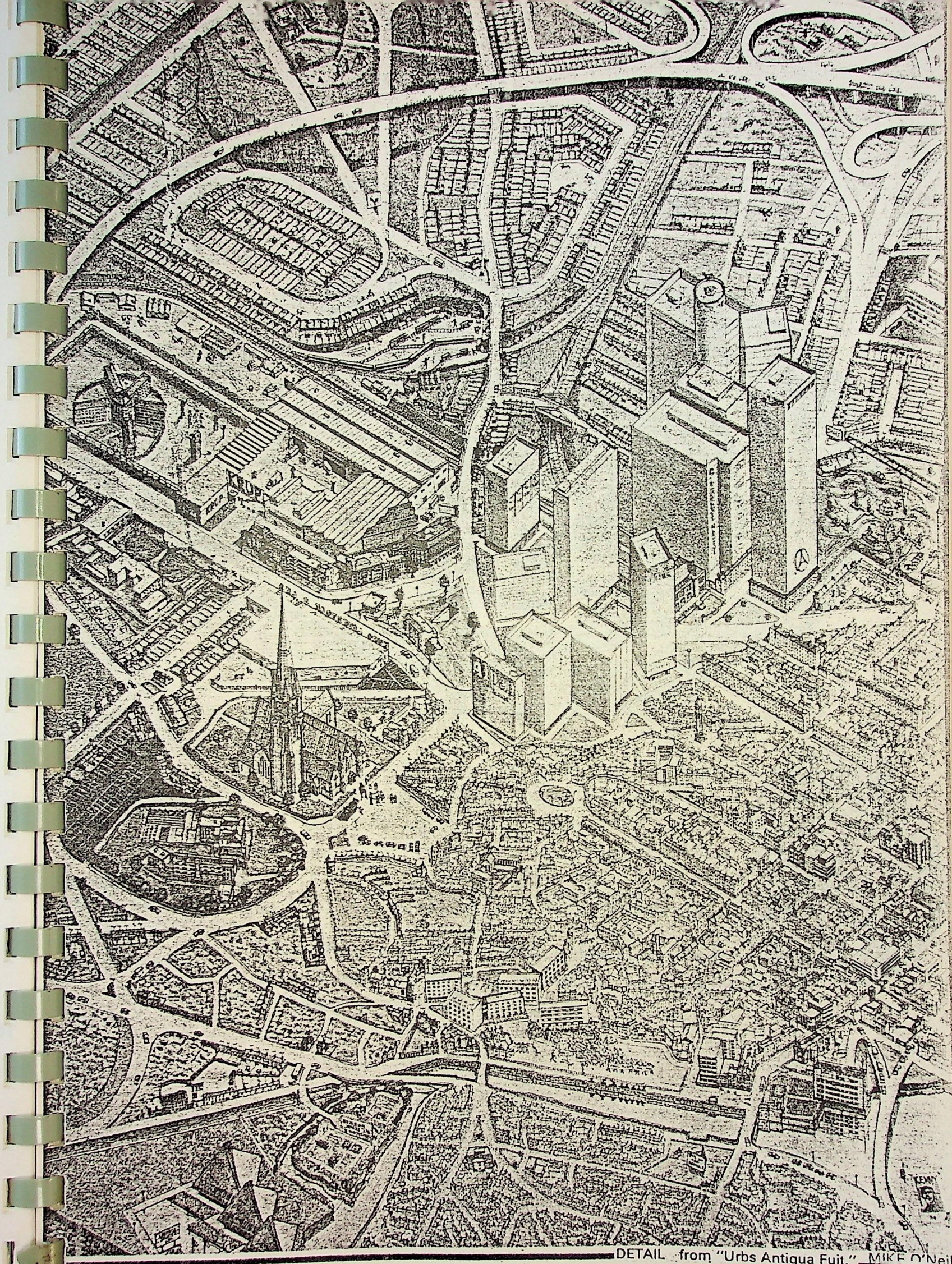
architect seems a very courageous undertaking. Jonathan Wade makes a bigger, bolder and more aggressive statement whereas Michael O Neill's work has amazing detail but is so small that it could be overlooked, but once discovered is magical and keeps bringing me back to find something else. I can't wait to see some more of his work.

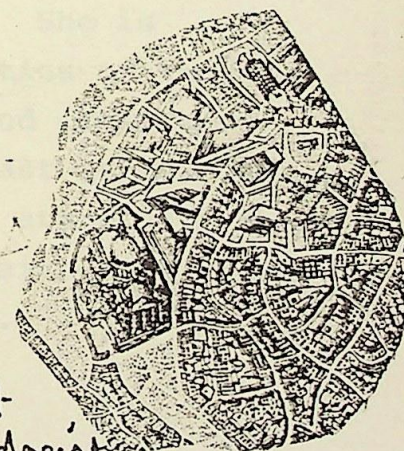
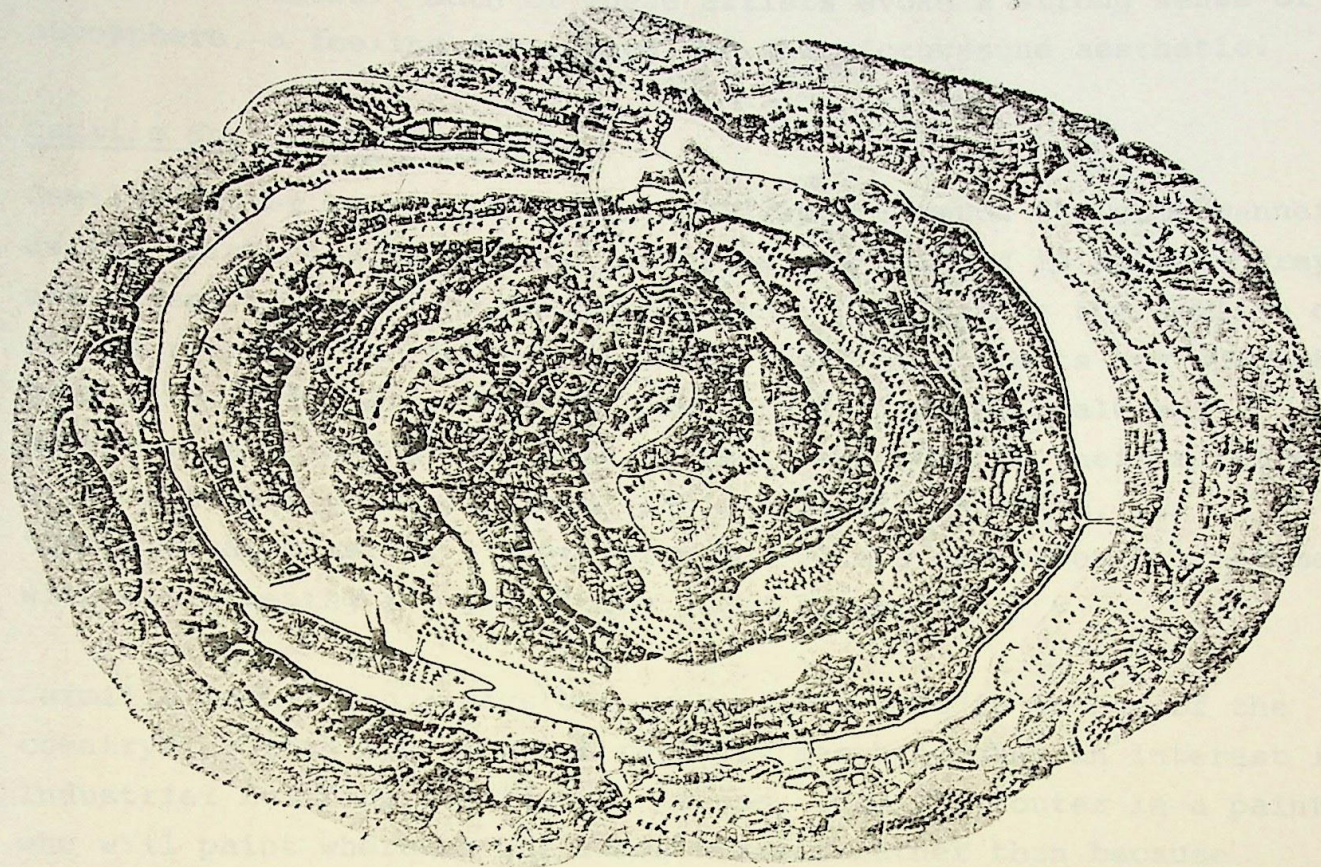


Honourable Mention
Michael O'Neill
"Metropolis"



177
Cata





MICHAEL O'NEILL
 'Great Oval City'
 Etching/Aquatint
 32 x 47.5
 £54 (unframed)

*This sketch is a detail from a damaged print -
 to give you an idea of the type of work since it doesn't
 reproduce very well.*

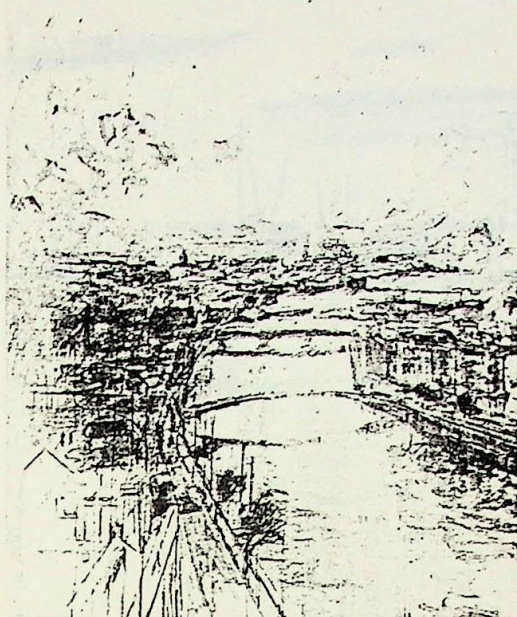
Nora McGuinness, born Derry and, Basil Blackshaw, born Belfast 1932

Both of these artists are in the romantic tradition, they paint buildings and man made objects as if they were part of the natural environment, e.g. "The Liffey" 1979 illustration No. 19 by Basil Blackshaw and "Dublin Docks" 1965 illustration No. 20 by Nora McGuinness. Both of these artists evoke a strong sense of atmosphere, a feeling for nature and the picturesque aesthetic.

Camille Souter and Nano Reid

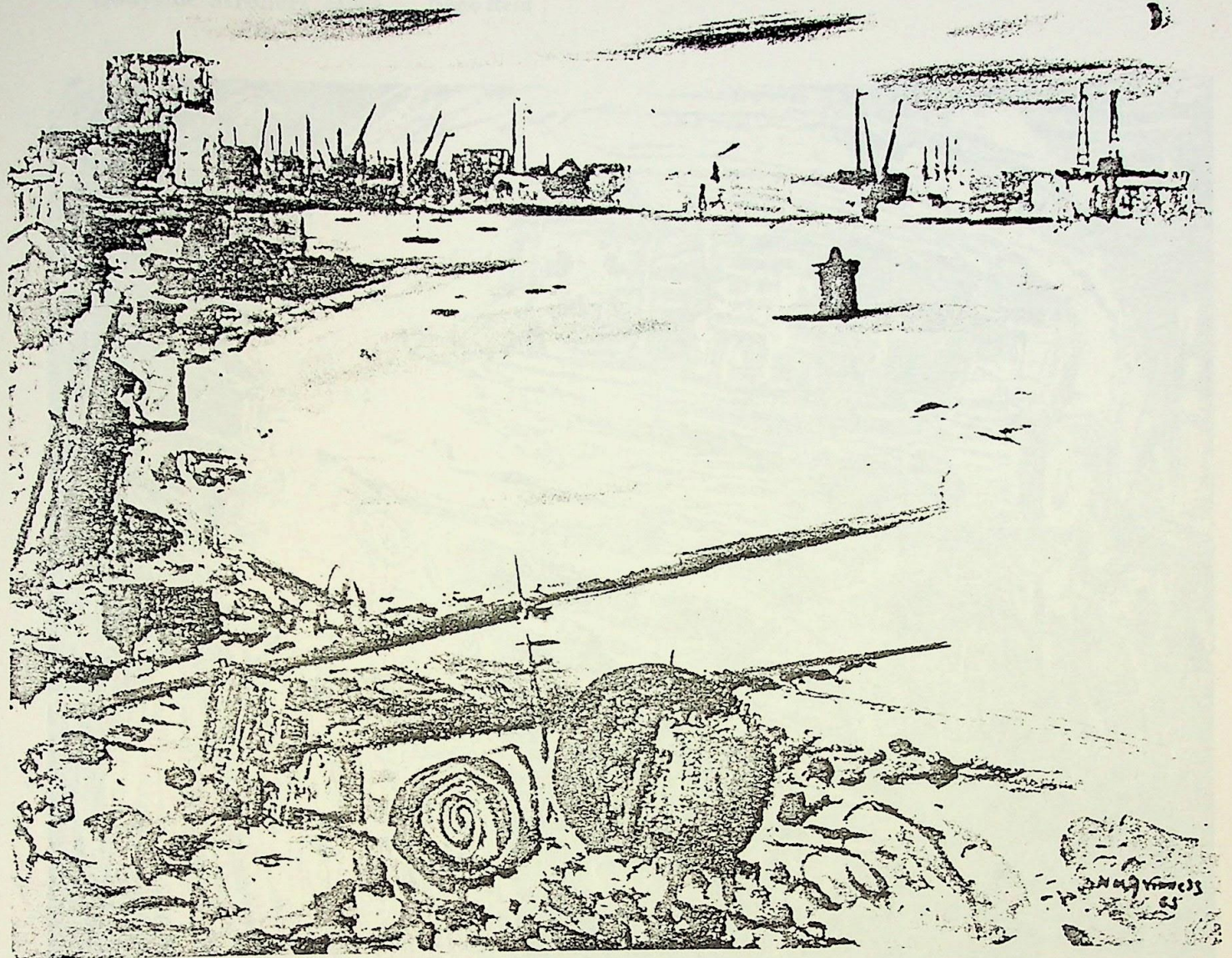
Camille Souter paints industrial buildings in much the same manner as she paints landscape, her factories are painted in subdued greys and greens but she is never picturesque. She paints the feeling of things rather than the look of them. Nano Reid treats her subjects in a rather similar manner but she totally ignores scale and perspective. They do not look at their subjects in their material state but seem to shroud them with a symbolic presence. In "Quayside Strollers", illustration No. 22 she expresses the movement with the sweeping rhythms of her brush strokes.

Camille Souter has always been more interested in things of the countryside than the city but recently she has taken an interest in Industrial Buildings, railways, planes. Camille Souter is a painter who will paint wherever she finds herself rather than because of any deliberate decision to paint rural or urban. She is essentially a painter who is involved with the beauties of the texture of paint, tissue paper, newspaper, poetry and presence. In "Red Brick and it's not a game" part of her Belfast series one can see that she is obviously very sensitive to the atmosphere there, also "Belfast " 73 has a suffocating atmosphere. Neither of these artists have become involved with changing fashions.

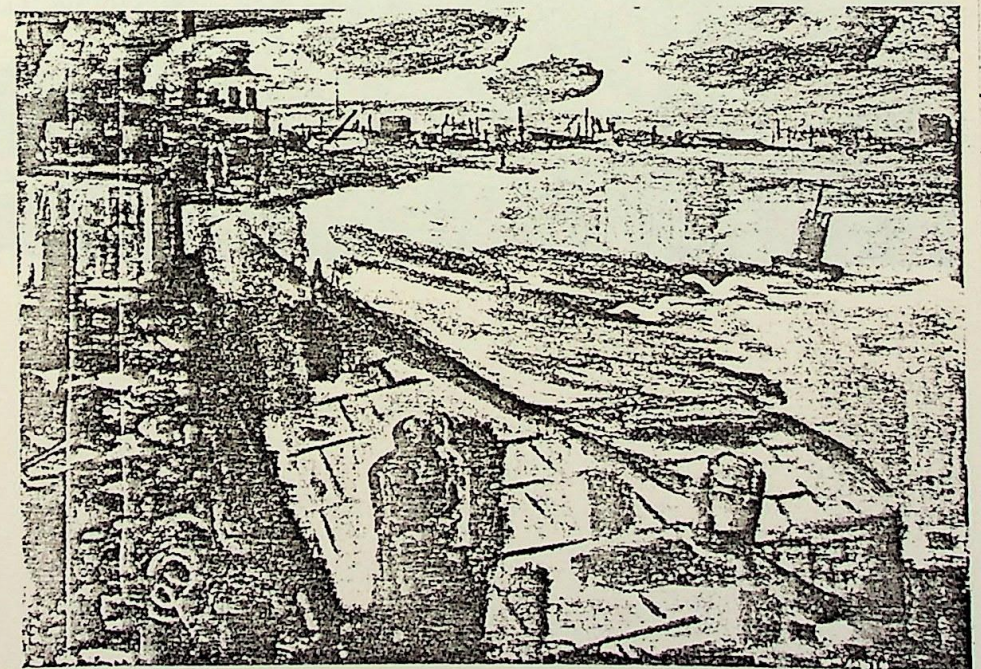


19

Basil Blackshaw.
The Liffey 1979
Acrylic on paper.



20 Dublin Docks



21 DUBLIN BAY

Quayside Strollers c1969 Nano Reid

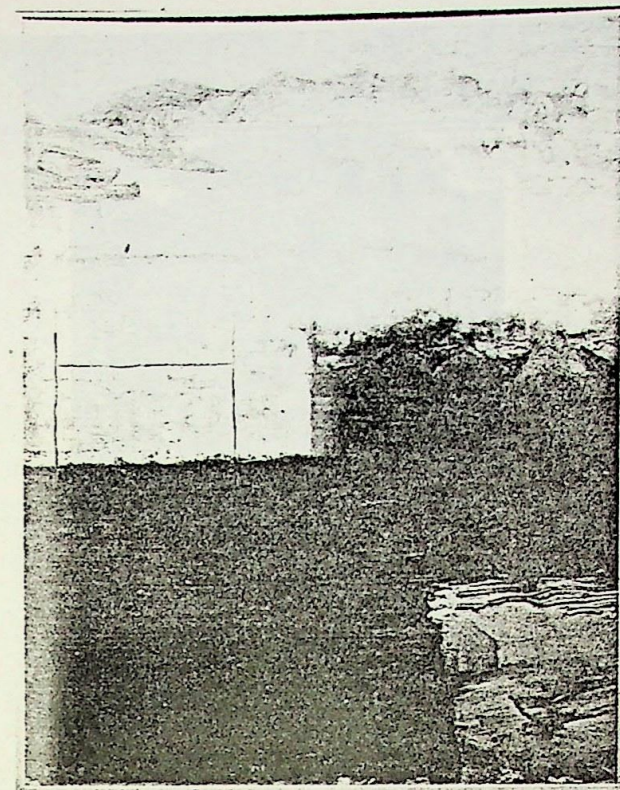




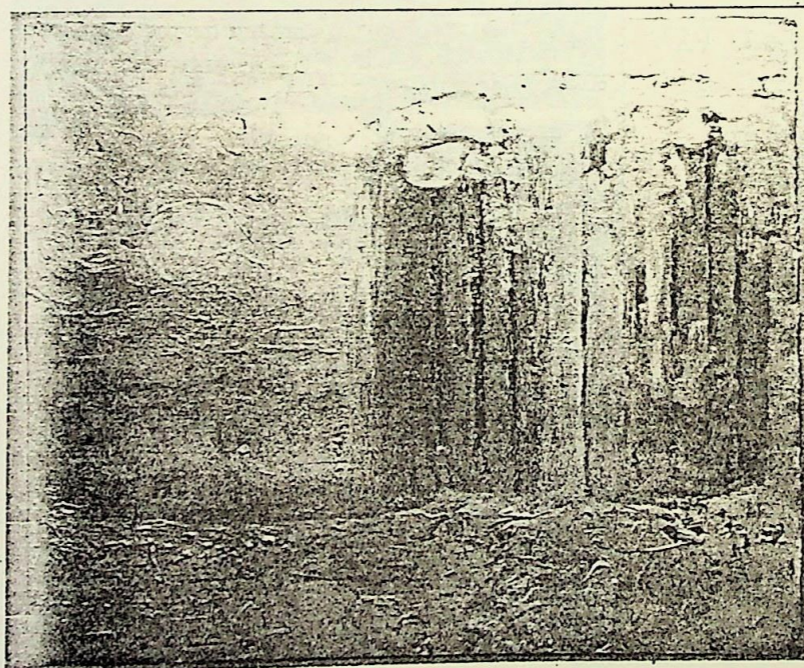
23 Old Stables c1964



24 Basil's Fertilizer Plant



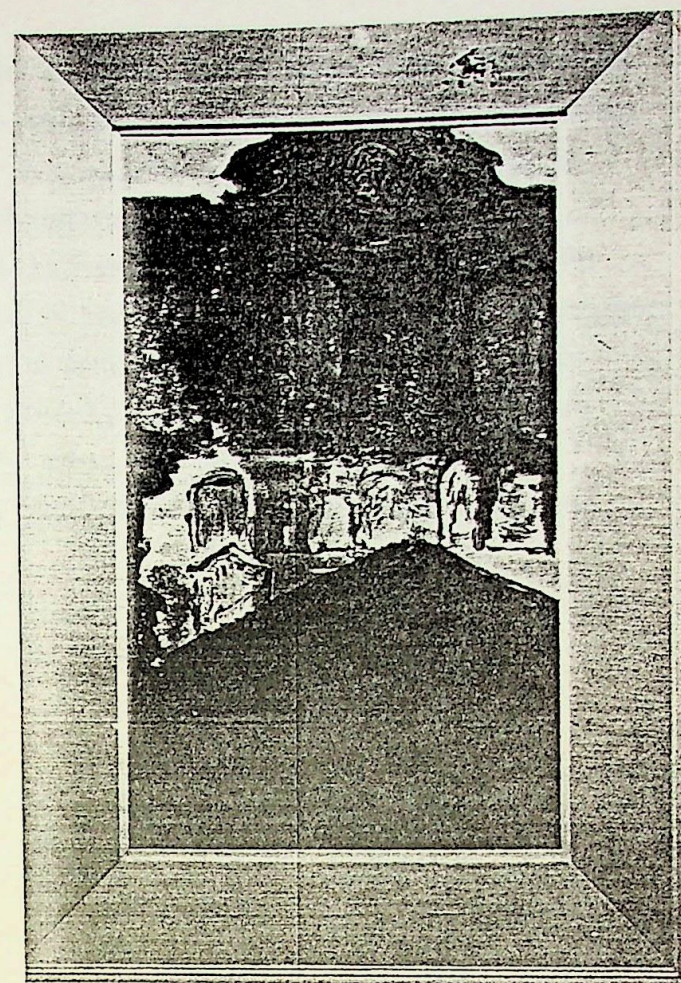
25 Red brick and it's not a game



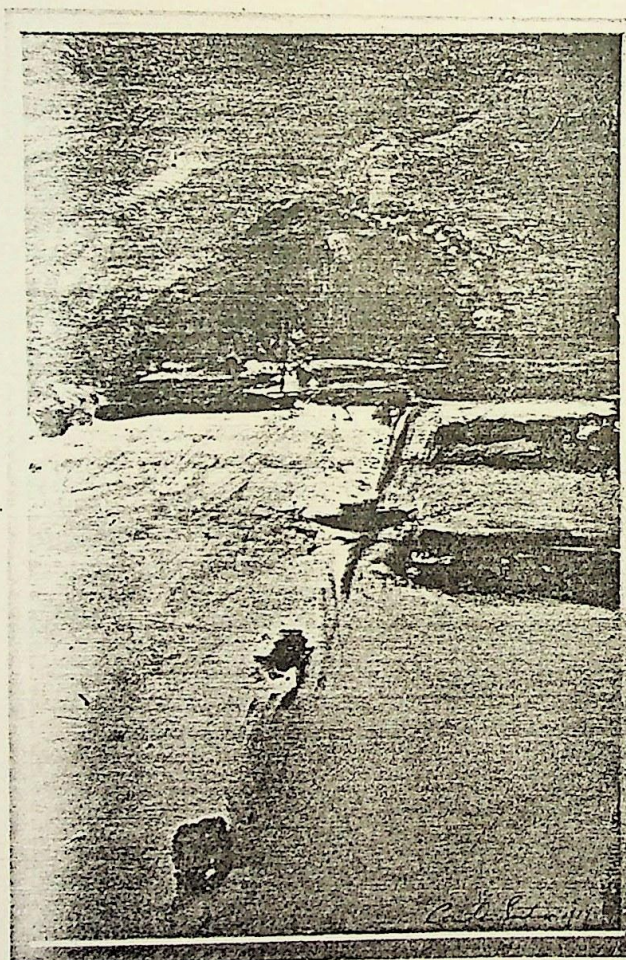
26 Odulums Mills

Camille Souter

Camille Souter



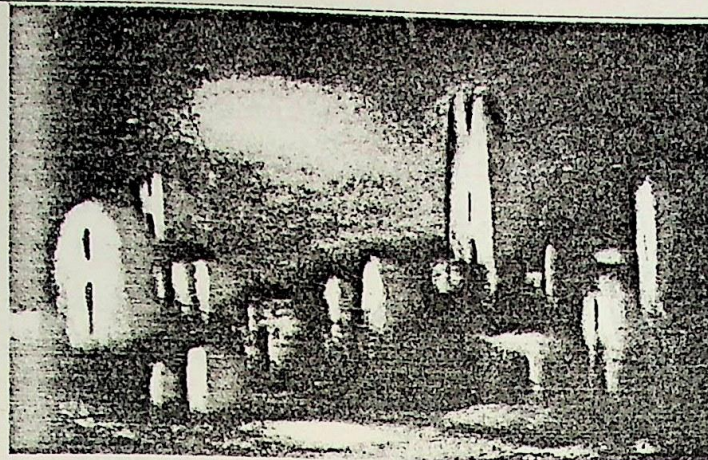
27 Belfast 1973



28 Runway 06 |

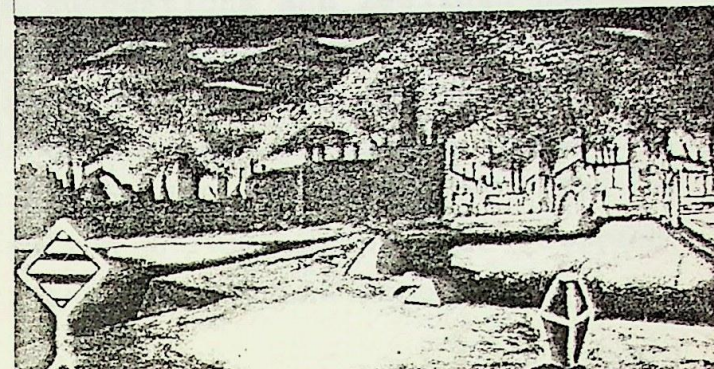
Cecil King born 1921 Co. Wiclow

Cecil King's work began in the 1950's with paintings like "Towards Ringsend" 1955 illustration No. 30 which have an eerie, mysterious quality devoid of human presence. He gives the impression of a stage set with the silhouette of chimneys against the sky and his more romantic "Time past" 1960 illustration No. 29, there is just a suggestion of buildings like a mirage. In his "Baggot Street Series" 1969 illustration No. 31 his paintings have turned into tensions and space expressed in a purely abstract way for their own sake. I think his work is very stylish and technically sophisticated but once I've seen a few the rest leave me unmoved.

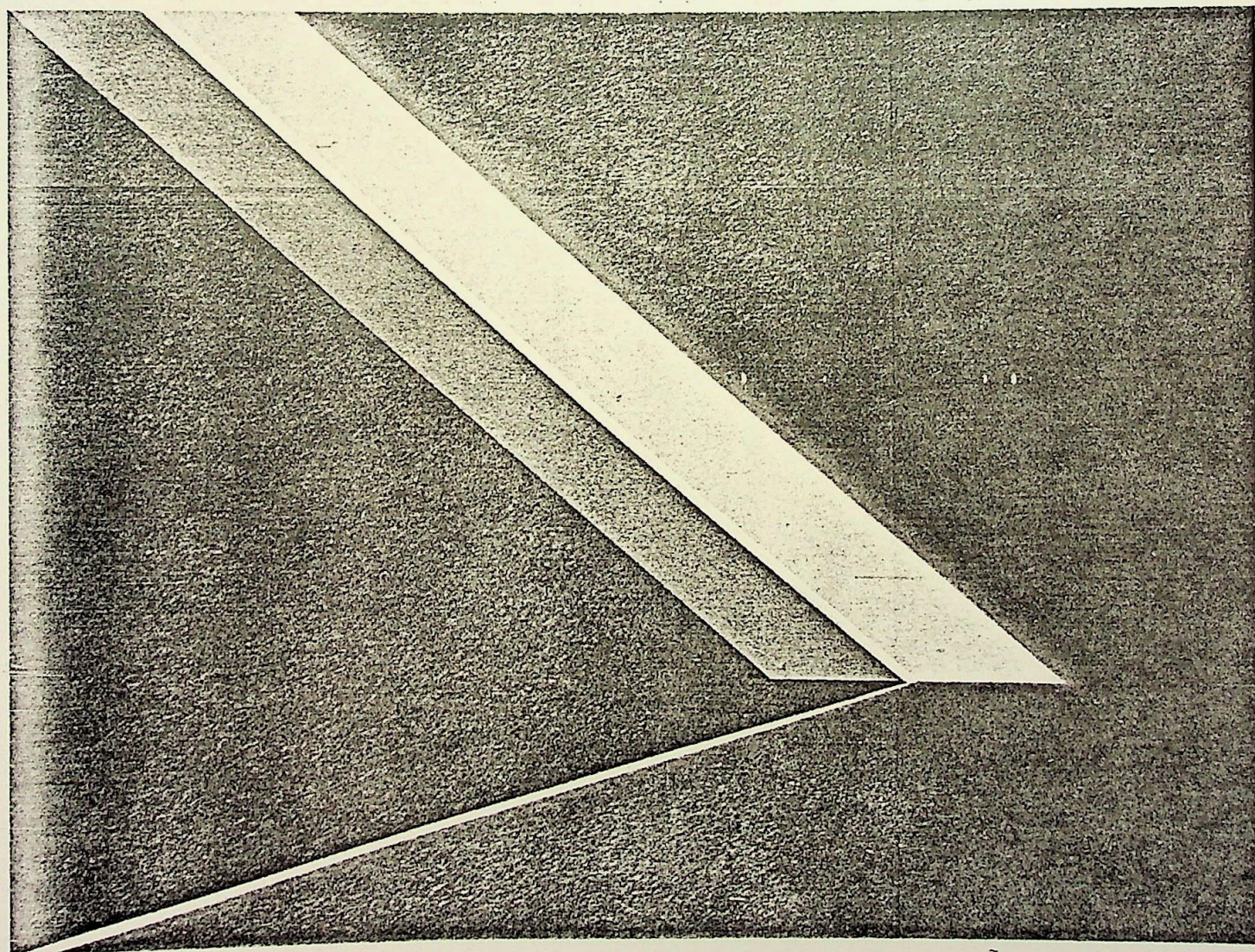


29

Time Past, 1960, 27" x 40"



30 *Toward Ringsend, 1955, 18" x 26"*

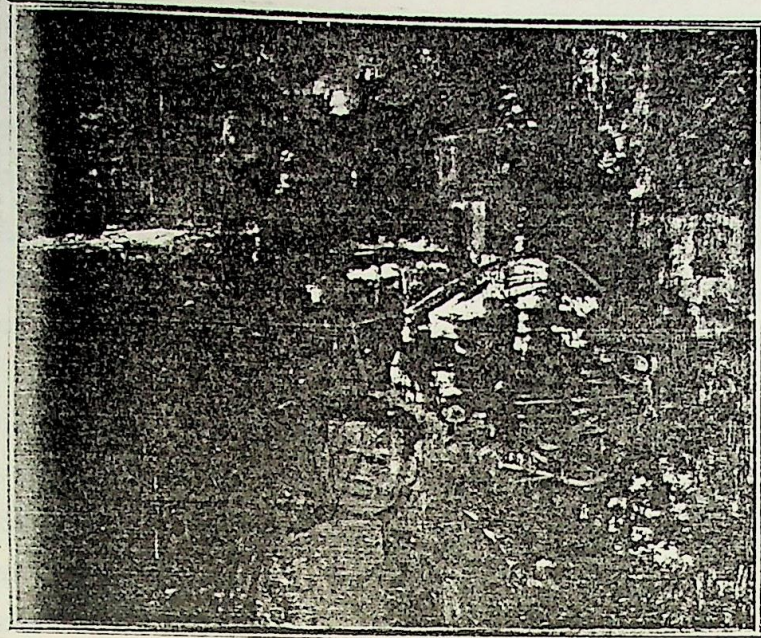


31

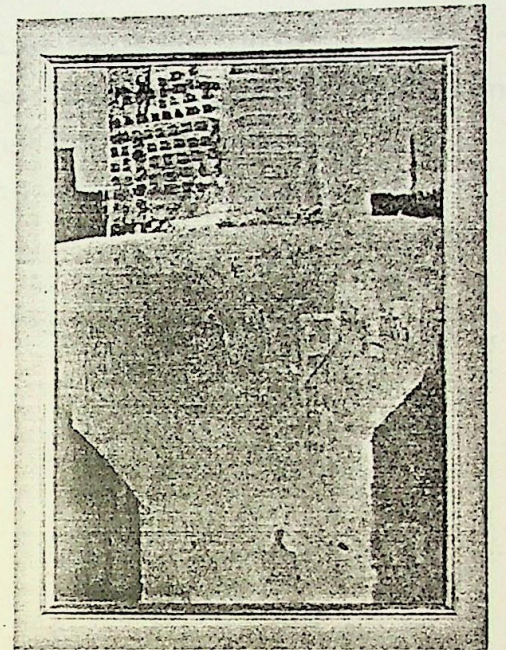
Baggot Street Series, 1969, 30" x 40"
Collection of Mrs. M. Kinley.

George Campbell born Co. Wicklow 1917 - 1979

George Campbell has always been concerned with the human condition since his early paintings of back streets of Belfast in the aftermath of the war, rundown buildings, some bombed entitled "Homes fit for heroes", and now in his Belfast series "Burnt out car" illustration No. 32. We find suggestions and feelings hinted at beneath the surface. These suggestions are communicated by colour, highlights, shadows and the layering of shapes behind shapes. His paintings are capable of complex and subtle expression. His involvement with people and with the fullest living of life provided the sources of his inspiration and concerns. His response was to the totality of life rather than to any one aspect.



32 Burnt out car



33 Flats and playground

Hector McDonnell born 1947 Belfast son of Lord Antrim

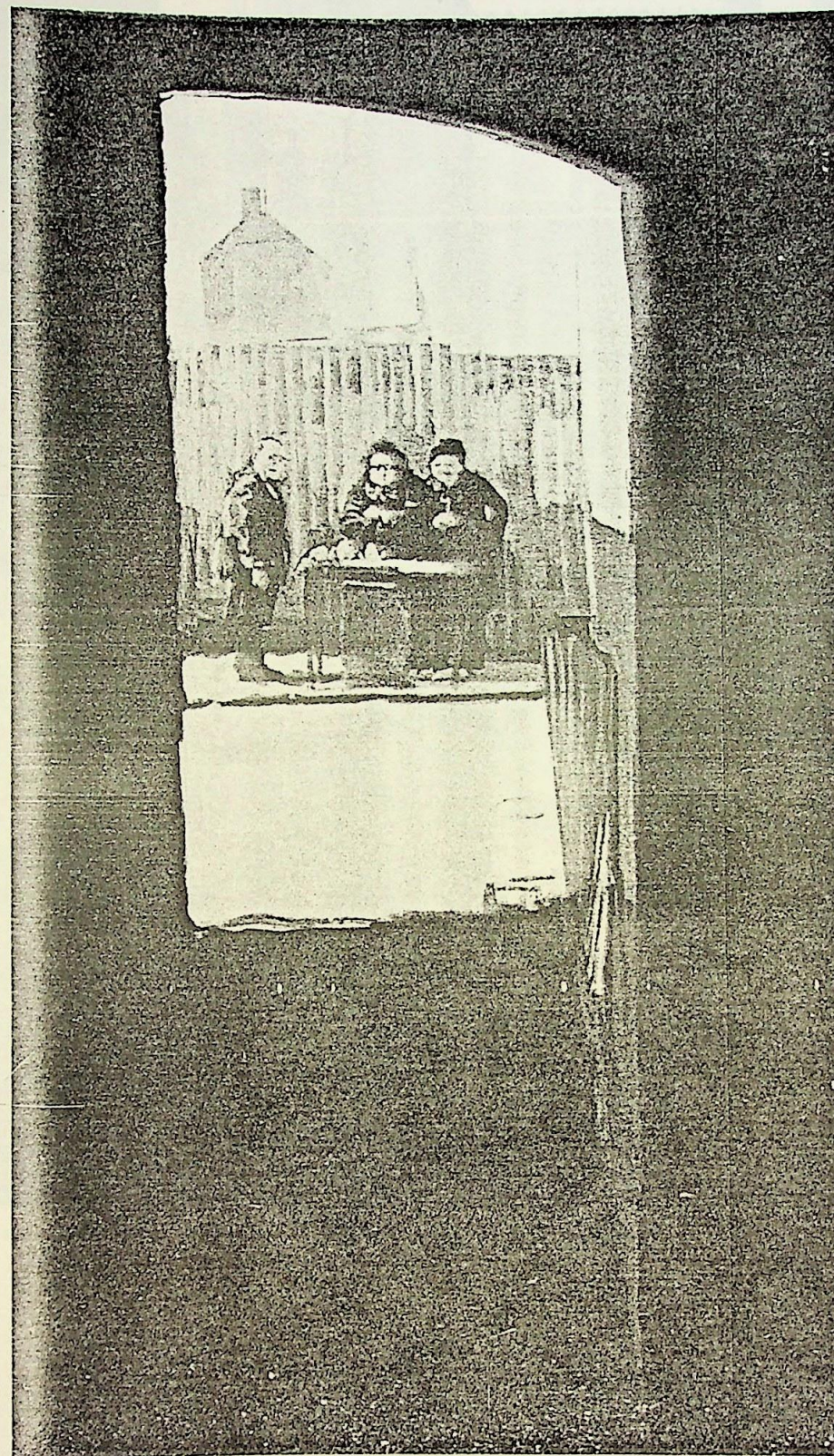
Hector McDonnell now working in London but brought up in Co. Antrim does most of his painting in the working class environments. One of his main interests has been with shops and markets. Of them he says, "they represent for me many things...unselfconscious aesthetic qualities... people at work and their work clothes and tools ... people in action ...normal desires like greed and something akin to violence". About 80% of his work comes from urban environments.

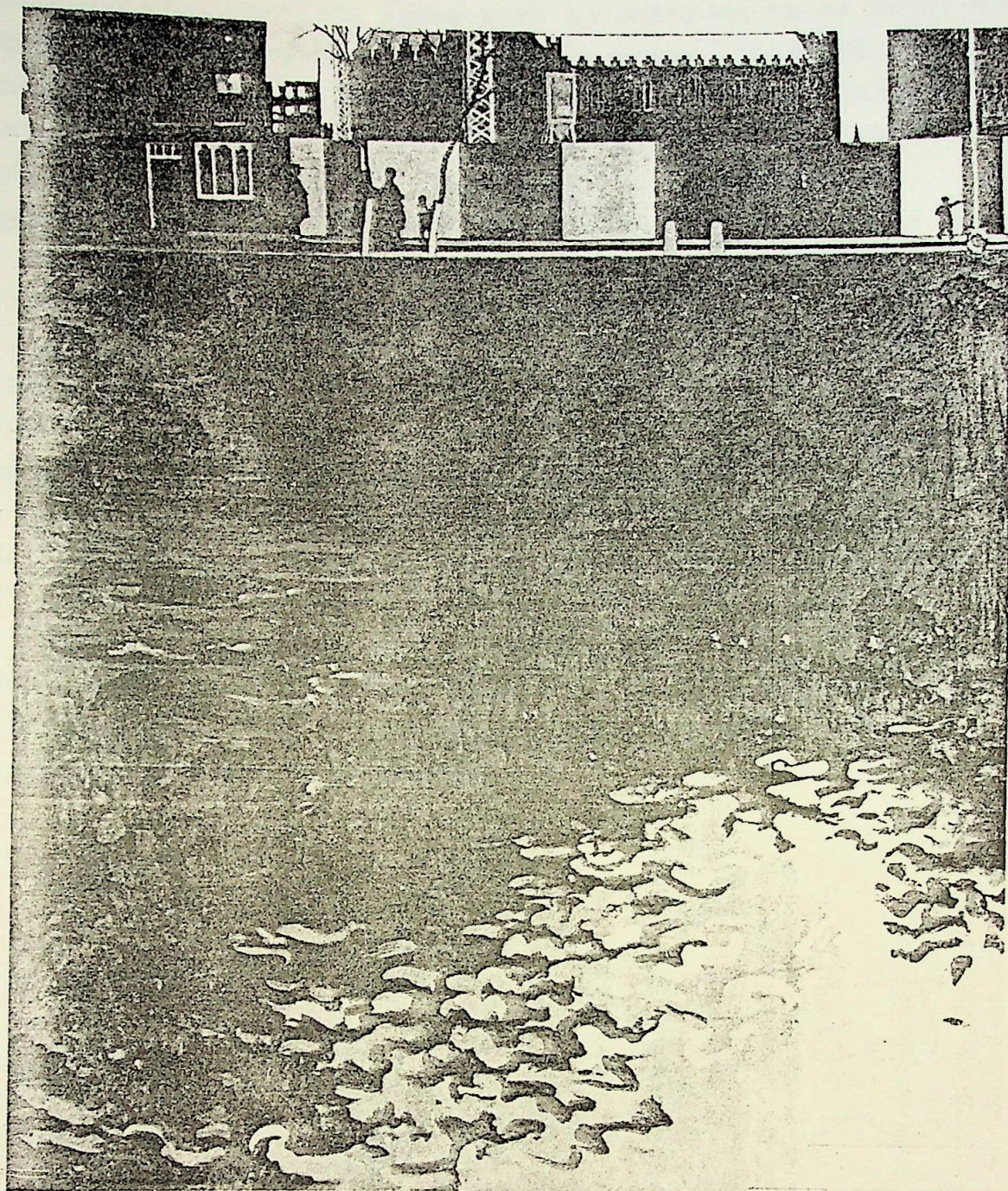
Walshes bar illustration No. 34 has something expressionistic and very evocative and passionate about it. The strong contrast between the lower and upper part of the picture, the loose brushwork and the hard edge shapes of the building and also the colour reinforce the passion.



34

Walsh's Bar 1980
Oil on panel
12 x 6 in / 30.5 x 15.2 cm





36

Quays near Christ Church

John Doherty, Brian Palm and Eric Van der Grijn

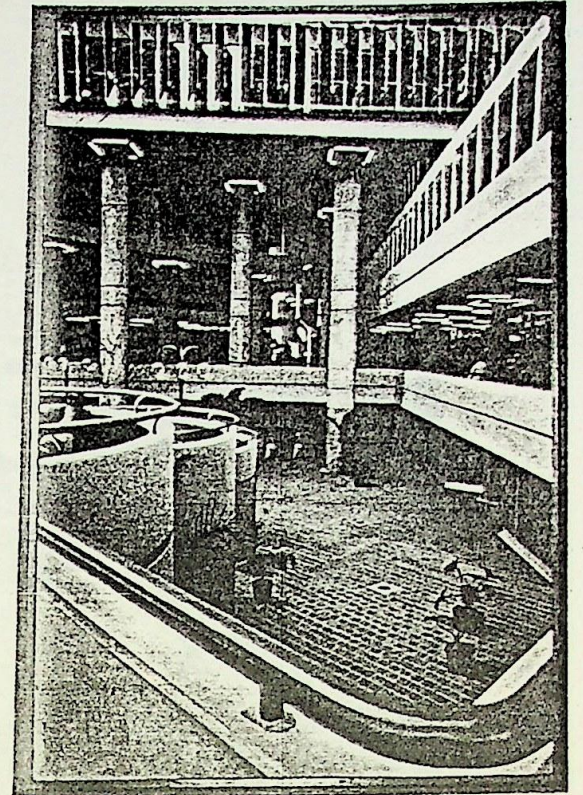
There are other artists whose work is relevant to my study but whose work is a response to the urban scene elsewhere like John Doherty. Also two artists Brian Palm and Eric Van der Grijn who spent their developing years in other countries but whose present work is a response to the urban scene in Dublin.

John Doherty born and reared in Ireland and worked for a while as an architect is a super realist painter. He now lives and works in Australia. Most of his work is urban and is strongly influenced by his architectural training e.g. "King George's Towers", illustration No. 37 and "A.M.P. Building" illustration No. 38 in Sydney, Australia.

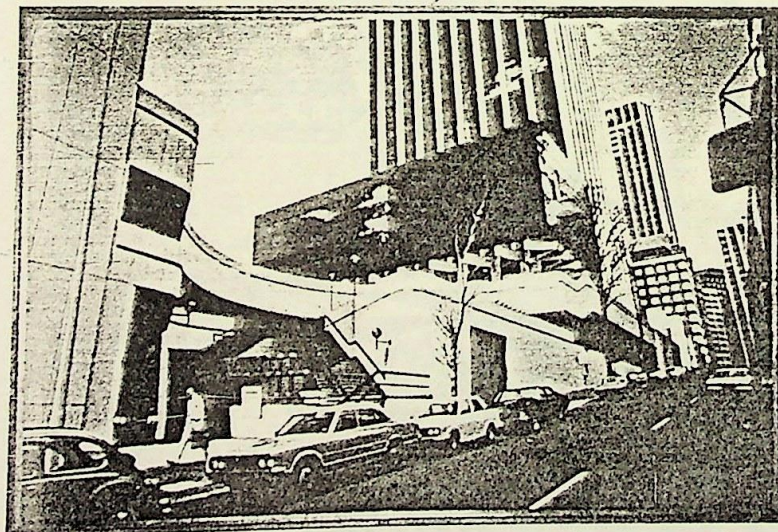
Brian Palm is a young american artist whose present realist work is based on hoardings in Dublin. He has been working in Ireland for the past 4 or 5 years, but is bound to have been influenced by his american upbringing.

Eric Van der Grijn who is a dutch artist living in Ireland since 1964. He has worked as a graphic designer. His present paintings and screenprints are based on Road signs, traffic signs etc., in the style of hard edge realism.

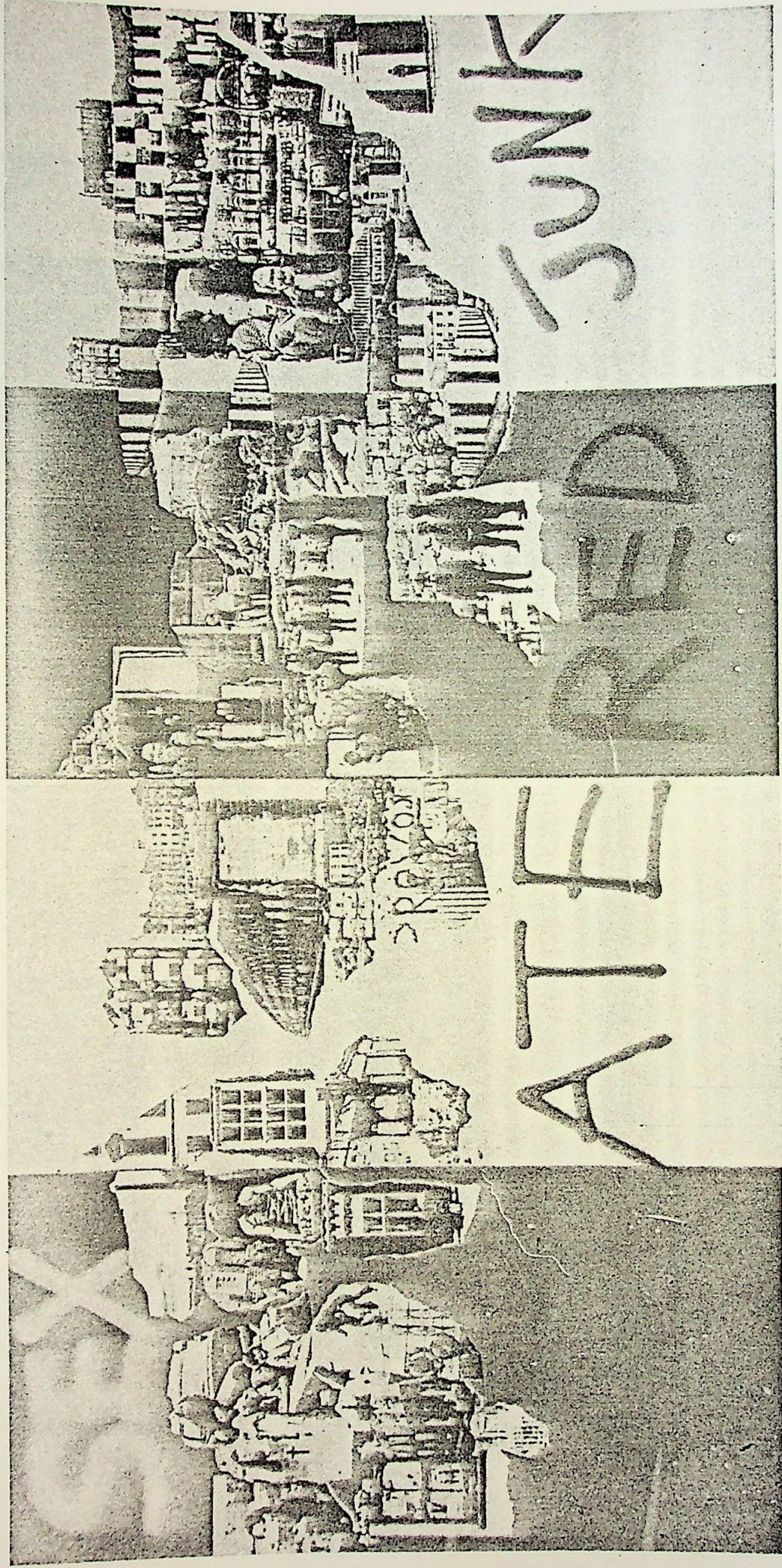
John Doherty |



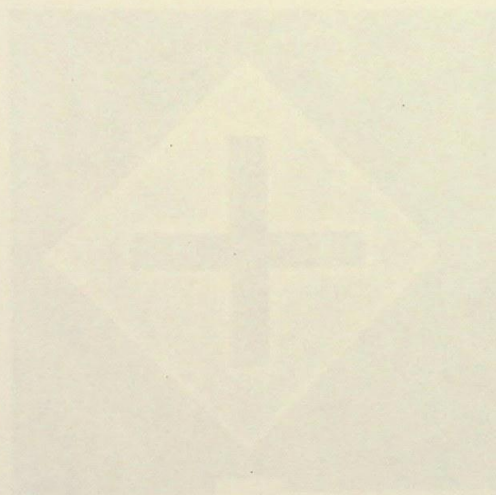
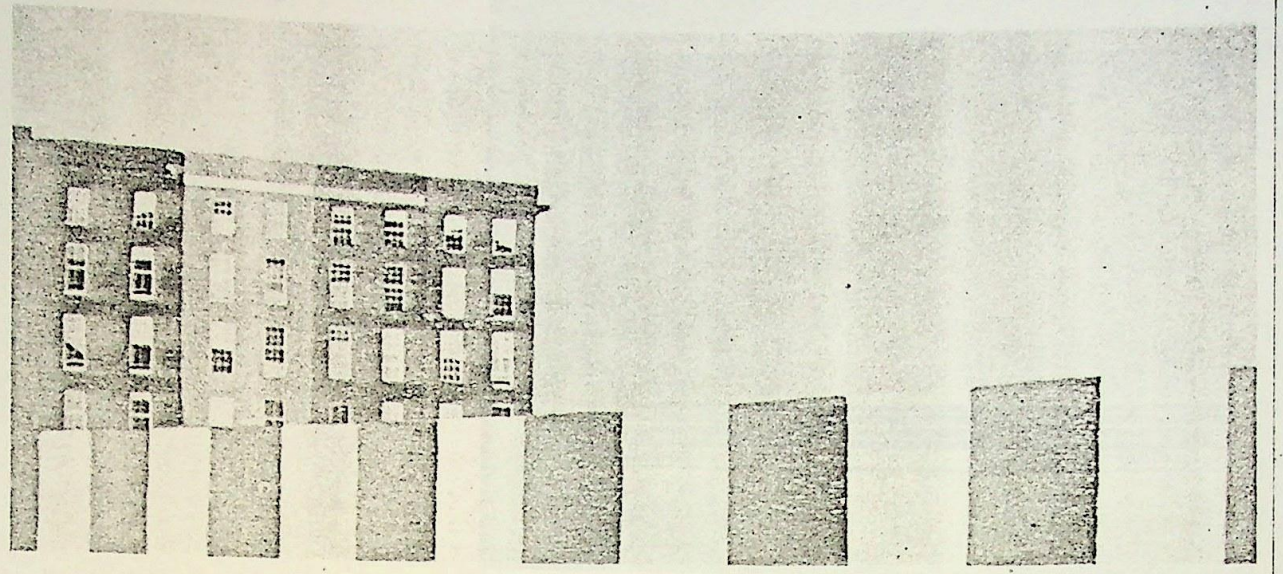
37 King Georges Towers |



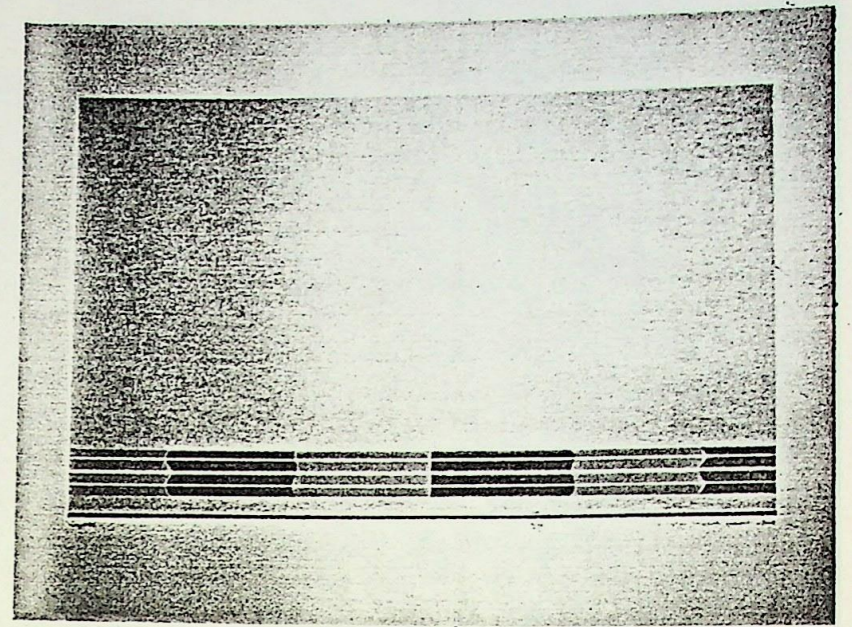
38 A.M.P. Building |



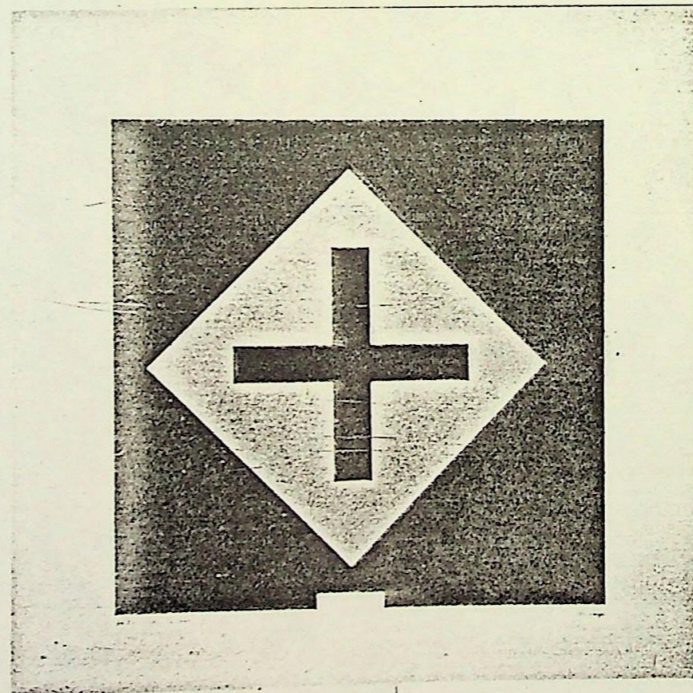
40 "Molesworth Street" - Brian Palm



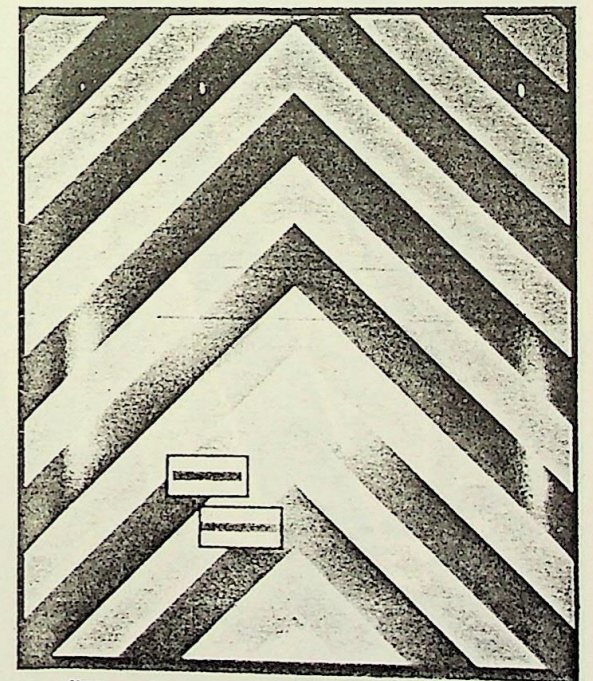
Eric Van der Grijn |



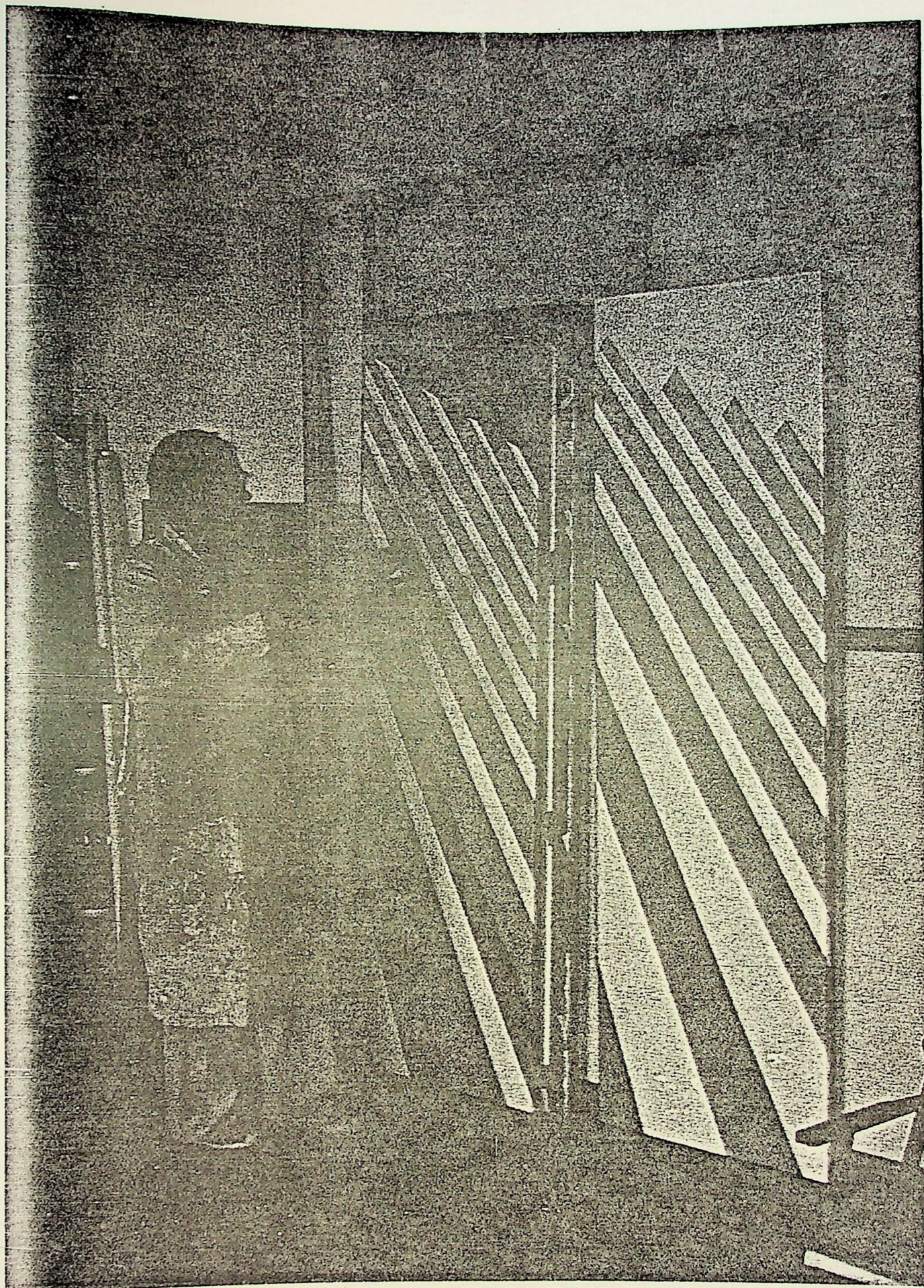
"Railway, Oakport" |



"Cross, Kilcock" |



"Train - depot doors" |

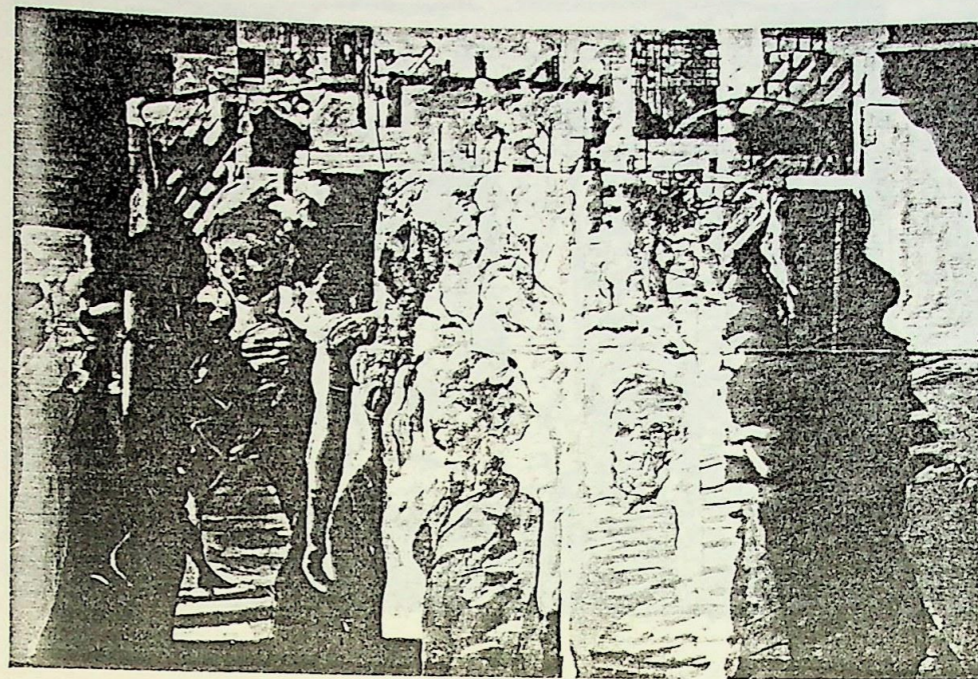


"Yellow Preserve 1974"

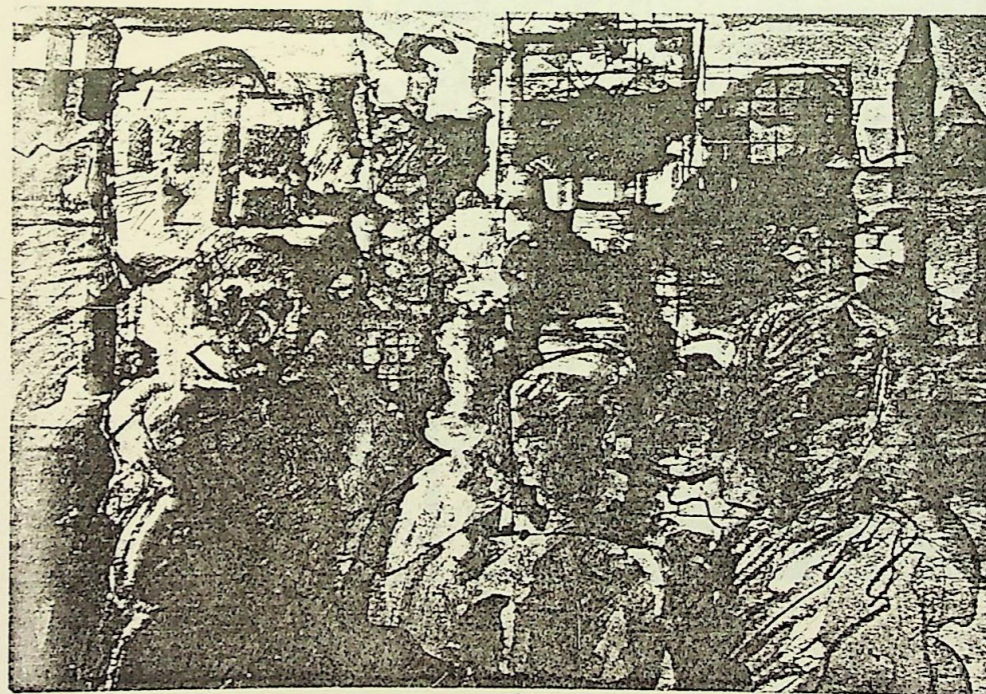
David Crone, born Belfast

David Crone's work depicts what it means to live and work in Belfast. The source of his work is the city which he travels through each day, through battered and barricaded streets. It is the life of the city reflected in its changing face that interest him. The changing face of Belfast with large areas being demolished or redeveloped fascinate him, he says "Belfast is unfamiliar every day. The sites of bombing and burning leave buildings where the structures - skeletons perhaps are the dominating feature - other things, - security gates, barbed wire, blind watch towers, posters - the patching up which takes place - breeze blocks in a brick built window, hardboard, corrugated iron etc. - sometimes this takes place even before curtains are removed - sometimes the glass gets broken afterwards". His response to the changing face of Belfast as a result of the violent happenings there, is one that is sensitive poetic and reflective. Rather than turning away in disgust he is making it possible for us to reflect on the troubles, the terrible destruction and the hopes for a better future reflected in the "new forms, clean and shiny glass which reflects the destruction as well as revealing within, dreams of comfort, happiness and new aspirations". All this is depicted in "Shop Window" illustration No. 41.

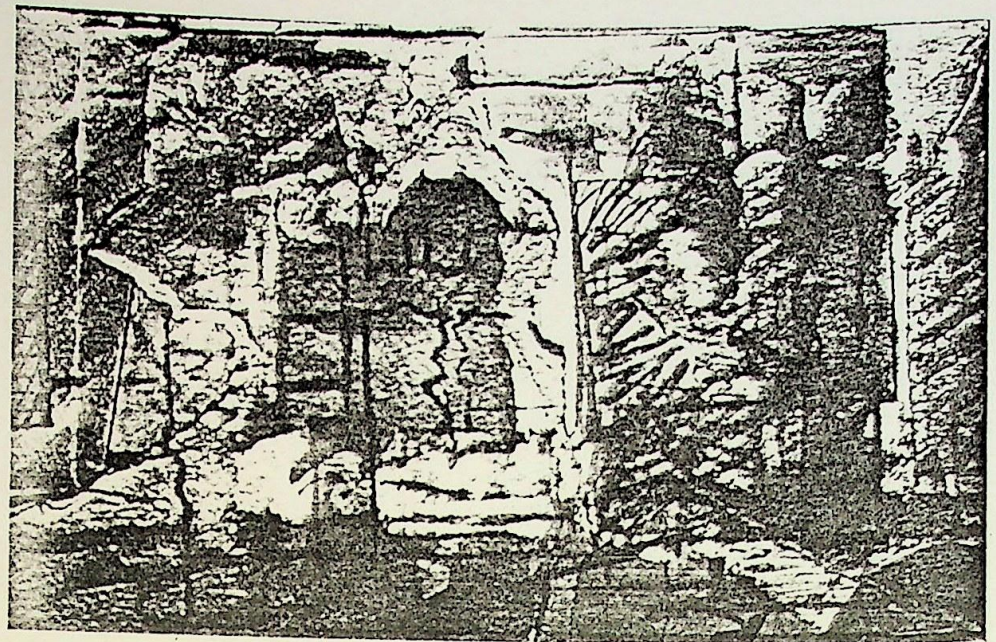
David Crone |



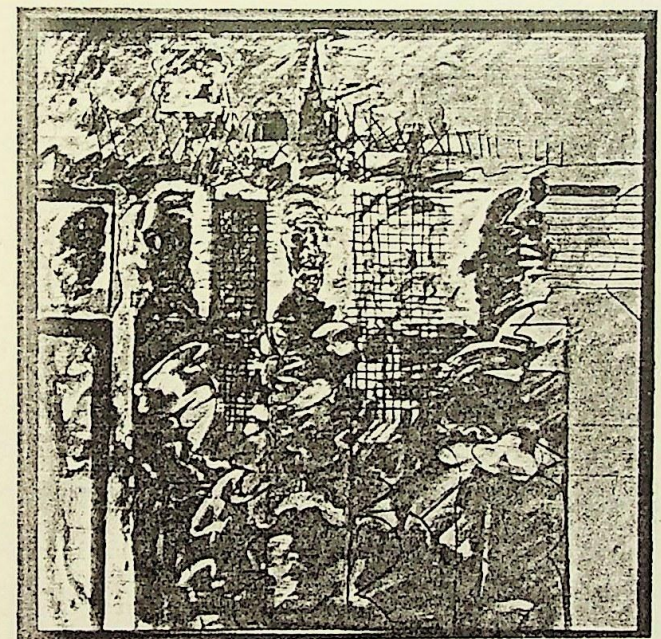
41 "Shop Window" |



42 "Figures in Landscape" |



43 "Buildings"



44 "Demolished Building"

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Conclusion

Emphasis and Directions of the Past 50 years.

Looking at the development of Irish art over the last 50 years and especially at 3 significant exhibitions of Irish art, one in 1963 one in 1972 and the other in '74 all of which were shown in the U.S.A. one can see clearly the emphasis and directions of art in Ireland.

Of the 1963 exhibition R.R. Figgis of the Arts Council wrote "the love of the Irish countryside, it's mystery and it's magic is seldom absent even from the art of the least figurative of them".

In the catalogue introduction to the 1972 exhibition "The Irish Imagination 1959 - '71", Brian O'Doherty, art critic, referred to the development of a form of Irish painting during the 40's and 50's with a particular atmospheric complexion ... "the landscape and the Irish light - with its' long twilights - affected this art deeply "I think my study has shown these statements to be true. It seemed as if we had rejected technology, urbanism and its by products or had not noticed them.

It was in the 60's that a group of artists broke decisively with older more romantic traditions to give Irish art an energetic boost in the 70's.

In the "Irish Directions" exhibition 1974 we see that the innovations and ideas of the 60's had reached maturity with artists like Michael Farrell, Robert Ballagh, Brian King, Brian Henderson, Roy Johnston amongst others represented. They epitomized the new confidence and directions of art in Ireland, as a reflection of the new Ireland getting to grips with the modern world economically and socially.

The International Scene

In Italy the futurists movement as early as 1909, inaugurated by the manifesto of Marinetti, were extatic about the machine age. In France 1919, Leger saw beauty in the sharp precision of machines and painted it. His work was influenced by modern posters, bill board advertisements, the harsh flashing of the electric lights,

The International Scene Cont'd

the noise of the city and the robot like movements of the mechanized people. He presented the mechanical commotion of the contemporary city.

As we have seen, it seems as if the Irish response to technology is to totally ignore it or to totally reject it, as is communicated by Jonathan Wade. When we consider the American artists response to the urban scene, although one cannot compare urbanism in Ireland with that in America, even so the lack of response in Ireland is striking but not surprising. Consider the powerful urban realism of Edward Hopper in the 20's and 30's or the great profusion of urban art of the 50's and 60's. Consider Chamberlain's "urban litter heap" or Estes's "Auto graveyard," or Jasper Johns bronze casted beer cans and Wesselman's "food products". Consider Andy Warhol's commercial brand symbols "I want to be a machine to print, to repeat" and Rosenquists "Bilboards" or Robert Cottingham's "Candy Store" among others. The Kinetic art, Pop art and Junk art of America is almost non existent in Ireland.

The emergence of an all American art in the 20's and 30's is interesting to examine since in the early decades of the 20th century the contact of American painters with European Art was a superficial one. However in the 20's and 30's a far more coherent national school emerged, which later blossomed into a true reflection of American Society and where it was going, simply because American painters realized that they could not hope to produce an American art of international significance unless they came to terms with their own environment. This I feel is the artists dilemma in Ireland now - whether to be Irish or International or can we be both at the same time. Surely what is a priority is our response to the life that we live, in the place that we live at the time that we live.

Over 50% of the population of Ireland today live in urban environments, also it is the youngest population in Europe, over 50% being under 25 years of age. Public and private morality are changing rapidly and whether we like it or not we are losing our

old identity. No longer can we be seen as a contented rural people immersed in a folk culture and living in beautiful landscapes. If Irish artists can respond to the changing situation, they can play an important role in helping us to recognize ourselves for what we are and what we can become.

Illustration/No.

1	"Children of Ulster"	William Conor
2	"Street Musicians"	" "
3	"Mary St.,"	Colin Middleton
4	"Liffey Swim"	Jack B Yeats
5	"In Memory"	" "
6	"New Dublin Gasometer"	Harry Kernoff
7	"Murphy's Boatyard, Ringsend"	" "
8	"Ballybrack, Killiney, Co. Dublin"	" "
9	"Habitat IV"	Jonathan Wade
10	"Avenue"	" "
11	"Wharf Miscellany"	" "
12	"Assemblage"	" "
13	"Urban Landscape 11"	" "
14	"Urban Landscape"	" "
15	"Untitled"	" "
16	"Metropolis"	Michael O Neill
17	"Urbs Antiqua Fuit"	" "
18	"Great Oval City"	" "
19	"The Liffey"	Basil Blackshaw
20	"Dublin Docks"	Nora McGuinness
21	"Dublin Bay"	" "
22	"Quayside Strollers"	Nano Reid
23	"Old Stables"	" "
24	"Basils Fertilizer Plant"	Camille Souter
25	"Red Brick and it's not a game"	" "
26	"Odlum's Mills"	" "
27	"Belfast '73"	" "
28	"Runway 06"	" "
29	"Time past"	Cecil King
30	"Towards Ringsend"	" "
31	"Baggot St. Series"	" "
32	"Burnt out car"	George Campbell
33	"Flats and playground"	" "
34	"Walshes Bar"	Hector McDonnell
35	"Street market in Dublin"	" "
36	"Quays near Christ Church"	" "

37	"King Georges Towers"	John Doherty
38	"A.M.P. Building"	" "
39	"Billboard Hoard"	Brian Palm
40	"Molesworth St"	" "
41	"Shop Window"	David Crone
42	"Figures in Landscape"	" "
43	"Buildings"	" "
44	"Demolished Building"	" "

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Cork ROSC Catalogue
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" " Michael O'Neill : interview
" " Hector McDonnell: interview
" " Charles Brady : interview
" " Patrick Hall : interview
" " Michael Mc William : interview
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"Art about Ireland" : "Jonathan Wade" by Henry Sharpe
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"Conor - the children of Ulster" by George McClelland
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