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*In compliance with the suggestion of the art teachers,
I have not included the names of any Irish prisoners.

INTRODUCTION

To begin I will try to explain how I came to be interested in art practices in Prison. This will show my concerns and frame of mind at the outset of researching this thesis.

During October 1985, I read a book by Anthony Storr titled, The Dynamics of Creation. In it he examines the complex motivating forces that lie behind creative activity. He describes many very different individuals and how their environment and psychological make-up combined to create situations in which art, sometimes reaches the level of an indispensable need. In some respects an artist reading this book will not be flattered; its terminology contains a lot of words like defense, sublimation, schizoid, aggression, ego-development, instinct, integration, promiscuity and identity. While there are very few words like form, colour, line, pitch, beauty or composition. Of course, the second list of words is used when discussing finished artwork. Storr on the other hand was approaching art from the other direction, instead of discussing the products of artistic activity, he was dealing with the situation before and during that process.

In Chapter four, 'Creativity as Defense', for example, he deals with how one can use creative activity to protect oneself from anxiety. Anxiety either from within the individual himself or from outside, such as by concentrating

so completely on the activity that disturbing thoughts which would prey on one's mind, if it were idle, are blocked out. Or through sublimation, in which strong unconscious urges can be rechannelled into the socially acceptable form of art, rather than overt aggression or whatever.

Although the book often refers to great artists who bordered on being neurotic or schizophrenic, the author repeatedly points out that creativity tends to be a healthy trait. He writes: "perhaps creativity is more closely bound up with what might be called a 'dynamic of the normal' than with psychopathology".¹ He explores how art can be used as a means of establishing and understanding one's identity, of integrating conflicting aspects of one's personality into a whole. In fact he alludes that some artists, whose childhoods could have caused mental disturbances, were sane by virtue of practicing an art that counteracted these tendencies.

Jung makes similar observations, surprisingly in an essay on Picasso, written in 1932. He claims that elements in Picasso's work are similar to the paintings of his schizophrenic patients. However, he explains, in a footnote, that he does not consider Picasso to be mentally ill but a schizoid-type personality, meaning that if he were ever to become ill he would be schizophrenic rather than depressive. Jung also traces, in Picasso's artistic development, a kind of archetypal journey, of which, he states:-

This journey through the psychic history of mankind has as its object the restoration of the whole man.²

In addition, Jung was the first psychologist to encourage his patients to paint. He believed that:-

The therapeutic effect of this is to prevent a dangerous splitting off of the unconscious processes from consciousness.³

I found Storr's book very intriguing, mainly because I had always taken the approach that my own art was only valuable or worthwhile to the extent that it interested and stimulated a viewer. Personal preoccupations seemed indulgent and a little irrelevant. Yet here was Anthony Storr saying, after much research that:-

Ideally, the work itself, should be its own objective; or rather its function as a reconciler of opposites and as a bridge between outer and inner worlds, should be the aim of the artist.⁴

The idea of a person using art as a means of dealing with internal conflict and to a lesser extent with one's position in society seemed to have many implications. This lead me on to look at the field of art therapy. In art therapy, art is seen as having two functions, neither of which have much in common with an art college approach which tends to stress formal values, aesthetics, the genius of particular individuals and so on. The first function is as a diagnostic

tool, in that a disturbed person's preoccupations become evident to a psychotherapist who examines and discusses his drawings with him. The other is that the practice of art is inherently therapeutic. To quote part of the official American definition of art therapy:-

The use of art as therapy implies that the creative process can be a means both of reconciling conflicts and of fostering self-awareness and personal growth.⁵

Again, as with Anthony Storr, the emphasis is placed on the effect on the artist of producing art. The word catharsis is used extensively in art therapy, it is said to have originated with Aristotle who said that "art releases unconscious tensions and purges the soul". According to catharsis theory, one feels relief by expressing a worry or concern, one understands a situation better by objectifying it in a work of art. Of course art therapy is used to treat people who are suffering from some psychological complaint, but at the same time, the processes that it ascribes to art, have relevance in a larger context. In fact Malcolm Ross, who stresses a self-expression based approach in art teaching, believes that the benefits to the character of the person practicing art are a basis for a kind of "art for all" concept. In that, because the important aspect is the effect on the individual, not the competitive comparison of finished work, everyone can view their own efforts as equally valid.

As an example of a person who has benefited tremendously personality-wise as a result of his involvement with art, Jimmy Boyle sprang to mind. Boyle is a controversial character. He first became notorious as the "most violent man in Scotland" who was described by the Governor of Inverness Prison in February 1973 thus:-

I am firmly of the opinion that this man is so dangerous that he should never under any circumstances be liberated from prison....He is liable at any time, if given the slightest opportunity to attack and kill anybody with whom he is liable to come in contact.⁷

Yet less than a year after this was written, Boyle was a changed man, he was no longer considered a danger to those around him, on the contrary he was quickly making a name for himself as a sculptor. In 1974 he exhibited at the Demarco Gallery, during the Edinburgh Festival. The change in Boyle was due to his transferral from the main prison system, which could no longer cope with him, to a small specially designed unit, at Barlinnie Prison, Glasgow. This unit was unique in many ways and it was there that Boyle was introduced to art by an art therapist, Joyce Laing. The role that art played in reconstructing his view on life is described in his autobiography, which he also began in 1974.

The sculpture took on a vital importance, not only in the sense that it was a medium to channel all my aggressions but a medium in which to build up and repair the damage to my inner self. I was developing with each piece and the work I was creating was a strong symbolic statement relevant to my past. I was purging myself of the past.⁸ he wrote.

The concept that Boyle's powerful aggressive energy could be converted into an equally powerful creative drive and that his artistic activities were modifying his character, had immediate implications. I wondered if the violent men in our jails could be like Boyle. There had been exhibitions of prisoners art but what actually went on in prisons? How easy is it to be creative in an environment which is so restricting? On the other hand if art helps one to deal with one's situation and acts as a channel for emotions and aggression, perhaps art is all the more powerful for prisoners because their lives in prison are traumatic? And as many prisoners are from deprived backgrounds with a bad history of previous education, they might be trying art classes for the first time, what would be their preconceptions about it? How would these affect their approach? There were a thousand questions. It seemed that the practice of art in prisons was worth investigation because the conditions in penal institutions form a unique environment for an artist, and perhaps this situation would produce some insights into the nature of creativity in general.

In addition, Boyle's transformation from criminal to artist reinforces the myth that artists and outlaws have something in common. There is surely no archetypal artistic personality, nor criminal for that matter, but in the signification of popular mythology they are often seen as

existing and being similar. This is probably through default, in that as both tend to break accepted rules of behaviour and avoid strict social categorization, they are generalised into compatibility. The generalisation was illustrated by Hitler's simplistic idea of society in which "degenerate" artists were lumped together with gypsies, homosexuals, Jews and criminals.

In the past, few artists seem to have been in trouble with the law. Caravaggio springs to mind as a flamboyant exception and Oscar Wilde was imprisoned but that was more as a punishment for being unconventional than criminal, in the usual sense. Of our contemporaries, the painter Malcolm Morley, who was nominated for the Turner Prize 1985, in Britain, spent some time in jail.

An individual sometimes turns to art after an unusual and overwhelming ordeal. Such as T.E. Lawrence who wrote The Seven Pillars after his part in the Arab uprising during World War I. The experience of prison can be this "initiation-by-ordeal" for a few artists. Mannix Flynn is an example of this, his reputation is based almost entirely on the credibility he gained by spending time in prison.⁹ Likewise in the world of country music, Johnny Cash spent time in prison and this improved his image as a wordly-wise cowboy, no end.

Michael Farrell added fuel to the myth in the form of a large lithograph that seemed to be perennially on show at

the Taylor Galleries in Dublin. It is titled, 'That Little Tent of Blue That Prisoners Call the Sky', which is a quote from Oscar Wilde who died shortly after his imprisonment. The image represents Van Gogh's studio at Arles and appears quite like a prison cell. It is not clear what Farrell had in mind, perhaps he was suggesting that artists are "imprisoned" by their own character traits.

However, Joyce Laing believes that perhaps there is a link between artists and some criminals in regard to motivation. She writes:-

For it seems there may be underlying links in the drive of certain offenders and that of the creative artist. While labelled as deviant, many offenders are inventive, ingenious, quick-witted and have great vitality. It may be that the creative aspects of the criminal have, for reasons of background experience or psychological make-up, been misdirected towards destructive ends.¹⁰

It is curious that the vast majority of prisoners are from a lower class background while most artists are middle class. Perhaps art can fulfil the function of rebellion for middle class individuals, that crime fulfils for the lower class, who have not had exposure to art and so been denied that positive means of dealing with anti-establishment tendencies. This is clearly a huge generalisation but it might hold true for certain individuals such as Jimmy Boyle.

It became evident to me at the outset of researching this thesis that there were many interrelated perspectives on the art produced in Prison. There were psychological and sociological factors which could not be separated from the art. So I decided to examine these and include them as much as possible. In addition, Anthony Storr's approach of discussing the emotional and mental processes that went into making the art seemed more relevant than a critique of the finished artwork itself.

To begin with, it was necessary to gain some understanding of what it was actually like to be in prison. But instead of getting arrested or knocking on the door of the nearest prison and asking for bed and board, I headed in the opposite direction, to Trinity College Library. It was a lot more comfortable reading about the history of prisons, their present conditions and the psychological impact of imprisonment. I realise that this method is open to criticism, in that by relying on books to form an opinion before investigating the actual prisons themselves, I may be forming unrealistic notions which would prejudice an objective perception of the reality.

However, I felt this was necessary because it is the nature of prisons that they are secretive and contain conflicting interest groups. If one is totally naive of the reality one is easily misled and manipulated. The authorities on the one hand play down the harshness of the regime and

go to considerable lengths to prevent prisoners communicating the negative aspects of prison. While prisoners in turn put up a facade and will not talk of the traumatic emotions or the practices that they feel guilty about. Michael Wolff illustrated the difficulty thus:-

It is doubtful if the casual visitor who goes round for a few hours can ever capture the subtly changing undercurrents in a prison's atmosphere; while those who have lived in it for any length of time cannot be relied on to give a dispassionate account of it.¹¹

The authors of research studies may not have actually experienced prison but they are a relatively disinterested group and also go to pains to be scientifically accurate.

In addition, I did visit three jails in Dublin a number of times; Mountjoy, St. Patrick's Institution and the Training Unit. I sat in on classes and had discussions with the art teachers and some prisoners. The teachers were very helpful and filled out a questionnaire (see Appendix). I was also due to visit Arbour Hill prison but at the time there were protests and disturbances among the inmates over a number of AIDS anti-body infected prisoners. Security was tightened for a time and classes cancelled. But Chris Jones, the art teacher there, talked to me and filled out a questionnaire. I had also visited an exhibition of Arbour Hill prisoners' art at the Youth Information Centre, Sackville Place, on November last.

In the first chapter I will outline the conditions of imprisonment here in Ireland and explain some of the psychological influences on inmates that might affect their approach to art.

¹ *See The Artist in Jail, Art and Literature*, p. 140.

² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

³ *Stuart, Anthony, The Psychology of Creativity*, p. 214.

⁴ *Freud, Sigmund and Breuer, The Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p. 29.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶ *See James Joyce's Dublin, The Poets of Surrealism* by Jimmy Doyle, p. 6.

⁷ *Doyle, Jimmy, A History of Ireland*, p. 217.

⁸ *James Joyce was jailed at the age of 21 for 13 months. When he was released he became an actor, and finally with the Players Company, 1904. He has worked as a journalist and written a book, titled *Exiles in Jail*. At present he is collaborating on a television production about life in prison for R.T.V.*

⁹ *See, Joyce, "Art Therapy in Prisoners" Art in Therapy*, ed. Bailey, 1966.

¹⁰ *Wells, Michael, Ireland*, p. 27.

ENDNOTES - INTRODUCTION

- ¹Storr, Anthony, The Dynamics of Creation, p. 13.
- ²Jung, Carl G., The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature, p. 140.
- ³Ibid., p. 136.
- ⁴Storr, Anthony, The Dynamics of Creation p. 274.
- ⁵Feder, Elaine and Bernard, The Expressive Arts Therapies p. 59.
- ⁶Ibid., p. 68.
- ⁷Governor Inverness Prison, The Pain of Confinement by Jimmy Boyle, p. 6.
- ⁸Boyle, Jimmy, A Sense of Freedom p. 252.
- ⁹Mannix Flynn was jailed at the age of fifteen for arson. When he was released he became an actor, initially with the Players Theatre TCD. He has worked as a journalist and written a book, titled Nothing to Say. At present he is collaborating on a television production about life in prison for R.T.E.
- ¹⁰Laing, Joyce, "Art Therapy in Prisons" Art As Therapy, ed. Dalley, Tessa.
- ¹¹Wolff, Michael, Prison p. 23.

CHAPTER I - The Conditions of Imprisonment

Imprisonment as punishment for crime is a relatively recent phenomenon. In fact its use is less than two hundred years old. Previously punishment was focused directly on the offenders body i.e. he was tortured, publicly, whipped or hung etc. Dungeons which might be thought to be the old equivalent of todays prisons, in fact had a different function, they were either places of physical torture or they were used in a political way to effectively eliminate troublesome individuals, often a form of slow execution. The modern penal system developed as a reaction to "inhumane" physical punishment which was embarrassing to ideas of civilization.

However, since this system has been formed it has proved remarkably resistant to further civilized changes, and the routine in most Irish prisons is quite similar to that of a hundred and fifty years ago. The five major closed prisons in Ireland, "Mountjoy, Cork, Portlaoise, Limerick and Arbourhill operate under prison legislation dating back to 1826".¹

An inmate's daily routine is as follows:-

8.00 - 8.15 a.m.

Morning Call, unlock, slop out (a prisoner has no access to toilet facilities during the night and so uses a pot which is emptied first thing each morning).

.../

8.30 a.m.	Breakfast and lock up (all meals are eaten in the prisoner's cell).
9.30 a.m.	Unlock. Work/Education.
12.30 p.m.	Dinner and lock up.
1 2.15 p.m.	Unlock Work/Education.
4.30 p.m.	Tea and lock up.
5.15 p.m.	Unlock and recreation.
7.00 p.m.	Supper.
7.30 - 8.00 p.m.	Lock up.

(This schedule varies a little as in the more relaxed Training Unit where evening lock up is at 10.00 p.m. and inmates can train for eight hours a day, on an AnCO Course for example).

It is clear that the prisoner's day is very regulated - he eats all his meals alone in his cell at the same time everyday, he works or goes to classes for four hours and spends sixteen hours out of every twenty-four locked in his cell. If he is being punished it may be as much as twenty-three hours and curiously prisoners are not allowed watches. Although alone and isolated in his cell, at no time does an inmate have complete privacy, for the warden can use the "Judas hole" in his cell door to check on him. It is explained that this is necessary to prevent a prisoner attempting suicide and there is no shortage of incidents to support this argument.

An inmate may wear his own clothes so long as they are in good condition and not disrespectful. His clothes, including underwear are changed once a week and he can shower twice a week or wash from a basin. He is entitled to one visit,

lasting thirty minutes each week with not more than three people at a time. They may touch unless he is in a special security category. During the visit, there is an officer nearby who can see and hear everything. In addition an inmate is free to send two letters a week, but these are censored with any negative references to prison conditions or staff, deleted. The inmates of "closed" prisons have no access to a telephone but there is no limit on incoming post.

As regards nutrition, prisoners should definitely not be going hungry if the Department of Justice's official diet is being followed. The weights and measures outlined seem to my inexperienced ideas of nutrition to be hefty enough to satisfy much larger mammals than man. But just as routine and bland repetition characterizes prison generally, so it also does with meals.²

During the day a prisoner either works or attends education classes or job training. The work usually consists of cleaning chores, baking and cooking which provide for the needs of the prison itself. (The prisoners who cook can face more than a gentle ribbing, if the soup is burnt). There are also the traditional jobs such as sewing mailbags and repairing boots. The weekly "wage" for this work is £4.60, with this prisoners usually buy tobacco or sweets. Tobacco is a form of currency in prison and it has been found that practically everybody smokes even those who would not normally. This trait is common with other total

institutions such as mental hospitals.

Reading through the above, one might think, well prison is not exactly the Berkeley Court Hotel but one could get by quite well, could take a couple of education courses and contemplate the meaning of life for a while. It might make a change and look at the "street-cred" it gave Mannix Flynn.³

But lists of conditions and regulations are deceptive. There are other factors of prison life which are harder to define but have a more profound effect on one's well-being. In fact Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor in their work on the psychology of prison, point out that prisoners can find themselves in "a situation which disrupted their normal lives so as to make problematic such everyday matters as time, friendship, privacy, identity, self-consciousness, ageing and physical deterioration".⁴

In regard to time, a prisoner as I have mentioned, spends at least sixteen hours a day alone in his cell. Very often the experience of such prolonged periods in isolation is new to the criminal who previously would rarely have been alone at all. This is compounded by a lack of stimulation, both because of bare, monochrome prison surroundings, and the lack of mental distraction. In a situation like this, one's mental processes can undergo changes, as Hans Toch suggests:-

With restricted stimulation, suppressed ideas and feelings from the preconscious break through, and one's consciousness is apt to be invaded by material that is otherwise out of bounds because it can be disturbing or painful.⁶

Some early prison regimes, as in Philadelphia, were based on the principle that a prisoner should be kept in isolation so that he be given time to contemplate the seriousness of his crime. An example of this line of reasoning is quoted by Michel Foucault:-

Alone in his cell, the convict is handed over to himself; in the silence of his passions and of the world that surrounds him, he descends into his conscience, he questions it and feels it awakening within him the moral feeling that never entirely perishes in the heart of man. (Journal de Economistes 11, 1842).⁶

In such a desolate situation, it is not surprising that the prisoner feels remorse, but whether conscience has anything to do with it is another matter. An indication of the tortuous nature of isolation is the fact that today, solitary confinement is used as a punishment. Jimmy Boyle gives us the inmates view of the experience in his prison diaries:-

.....the 'silent scream' - that moment when one is alone in the locked cell facing the full horror of confinement. Those of us who have experienced long periods of confinement immediately recognize the tortuous 'silent scream' but rarely talk about it.⁷

Psychologists have a term for situations in which an individual is isolated in a low-stimulation setting, they call it "Environmental Deprivation". In laboratory experiments, such environments might consist of lying in partial submersion in warm water in a dark, soundproof container. This might not seem that similar to a prison cell but Cohen and Taylor as well as Toch, recognize signs of sensory deprivation in prisoners.

In one experiment Martin Orne carried out he found that a group of people in a setting that was not in fact, sensorily deprived, behaved as though they were, because they perceived that they were. This demonstrates how important a person's perception of his situation is. It is observed that as well as being sensorily deprived, prisoners know that this is how they are meant to be, and so perhaps feel it doubly.⁸

As I have said sensory deprivation works on the mind so as to increase negative thoughts and anxiety. In normal society a person who is experiencing trouble or distress in one area of his life, such as at work, can counteract this by leaning on other fruitful and enjoyable aspects, like his family or sports. In Prison there is very little scope for this, the prisoner is confronted unavoidably with his situation.

The inmate's self-conception is pressurised in a number of ways, firstly he is treated the same as other prisoners who are murderers, thugs and failures of various kinds. (It is interesting that prisoners will not tolerate rapists or child-abusers amongst them, these are threatened and assaulted until segregated. This is probably due as much to prisoners refusing to be treated the same as these people and so being brought down to their level, as to natural animosity to them). In addition inmates must show constant respect to the guards who in outside society would be on their socio-economic level, and who have perhaps been dehumanised by the prison system so much that, they in turn treat prisoners with anything but respect.

Fundamental to a man's identity is his view of his own sexuality and a challenge to this can be deeply disturbing. Needless to say any normal sexual relations in Irish prisons are impossible, though in certain European prisons inmates are allowed to "see" their wives or girlfriends. It may seem unlikely that the "hard men" of our prisons are anything but the epitome of masculinity but in fact homosexuality is widespread. In Ireland, it is much less brutal than in America where freedom of association between inmates during the day, has lead to a very aggressive type of homosexuality. But even though Irish prisoners may joke about it and parody being camp for a laugh, "Most men who come into prison have led a full, almost busy heterosexual sex lives and their first care seems to be to avoid becoming homosexual."⁹

Many prisoners do get caught up in homosexual activities and being from a church-dominated, lower class background this leads to strong adverse emotions. They feel guilt and because they would normally view "gays" as contemptible, to put it mildly, they often feel self-contempt as well. The pervasive atmosphere of homosexuality and the absence of women leads to various anxieties about sex. And there are few absorbing activities or 'passions' in which to channel libidinal energies. As a result it has been found that there is a high incidence of impotency among ex-prisoners.

A general lack of self-esteem and confidence is common amongst those convicted. Being in prison automatically entails a degree of failure. And the stigma of being an ex-prisoner is a life-long handicap, always bringing a measure of discrimination. Confidence relies on a person's initiative being acknowledged, on respect being gained through decisions and actions. It is related to responsibility. Yet in prison an inmate whose confidence is already low, is given no responsibility at all. Practically every decision concerning him is made by the authorities or is already determined by the regime.

The whole nature of prison was misdirected. At the time when prisons were first developed, the previous institutions that the founders could look to for models, were monasteries,

army life or the newly developed factories. These all stressed obedience, subservience and lack of responsibility. Soldiers and workers were viewed not as individuals but as units of power or labour. These served outside interests. They had a productive influence on society and were fashioned so as to best serve that interest. Sociology has shown that work situations can be alienating, but this was justified by the need for production. Here is the contradiction of prisons, they follow the same structure but they produce no products, unless the characters of the men and women who pass through them, could be considered the products. In which case they are being put in an alienating situation, in the hope that this will improve them, it seems odd. The Whitaker Report comments on this curious state of affairs as follows:-

Those who find themselves in Prison because they have acted irresponsibly in one way or another, are at once thrust into a situation where responsibility is removed from them. All prisons are steeped in a prison culture that allows little individual responsibility, and yet without such responsibility, rehabilitation and personal development are impossible.¹⁰

The danger of a person making no decisions is that, like an unused muscle, he can lose the ability to do so and become institutionalised. This is characterised by apathy and listlessness. Curiously, although one might expect that passive, spiritless individuals would be less of a danger to society, Gibbons (1968) found that youngsters who were

submissive and unrealistic were more likely to be-convicted than those who were "aggressive, extroverted and dynamic".¹¹

In prison, as well as the oppressive rules and regulations enforced by the guards, there is also a stringent code of behaviour among the prisoners themselves. They have a value system that emphasises loyalty, not losing one's head, not giving prestige to the wardens, not being a weakling or anybody's fool and being tough and dignified. One need only glance at such a value system to see how negative it is; a product of resentment and fear. There is no room for expressing anxiety or sharing any kind of "nancy-boy" sentiments. It prevents an inmate from being his real self and forces him to adopt a prison persona. In A Sense of Freedom, Boyle mentions this:-

In the general penal system one could be next door to a person for years and think that one knew him, but all one really knows is the superficial "front" that that person wanted one to know. I had known Ben and Larry off and on for fifteen years, in approved school and prisons but I was to find that they were comparative strangers to me....¹²

A prisoner is under constant supervision. He is being spied on through the "Judas hole", being shadowed during his visits and his letters are being read and censored. So he is also under pressure from the authorities to dissimulate. The terrible pressure of constantly guarding one's actions, never

having a free conversation, can affect an inmate even after release. One of the prisoners that Hans Toch interviewed explained how on being released he could not stop behaving aggressively to those around him. While he was in prison, he had had to adopt a very tough appearance to ward off bullies but he could not simply act this role, he had to make himself believe it if it were to be convincing. When he had left prison, he found that even though he was aware that he was behaving as though he were still in prison, it was very difficult to stop.

Supporting the tough behaviour of inmates are feelings of bitterness, resentment and hatred. Even though they have committed crimes they feel no remorse. Because, as Boyle again points out:-

Whenever I was sentenced in the past for something and came into prison, the humiliation and degradation I met with there, made me think of myself as the victim. I hadn't given a shit for the person or deed I was in for, or had any sympathy, as I had been too concerned with my own miseries and misfortunes.¹³

Very often the convict is from a deprived background, like Boyle's in the Gorbals tenements of Glasgow and they know that society has never really treated them fairly so why, they think, should they develop a prickly conscience for reacting violently in return. In the case of Jimmy Boyle,

hate was an incredibly powerful driving force, but it was destructive to himself as well as others. The same kind of resentment is present to a degree in most inmates and as the prison regime polarizes staff and prisoners, dehumanising both, there is no mechanism but time to reduce the tension. Thus simmering hatred stunts any form of personal development.

Distress amongst prisoners is reflected by statistics. In 1983, one hundred and twelve prisoners were transferred to the central mental hospital from Mountjoy prison alone. That is more than two a week of an average population of about four hundred and sixty. The figures for women were much worse. Out of the year's total of one hundred and seventy-six women at Mountjoy, ten were transferred.

There is also strong evidence of a mushrooming of drug abuse. Obviously this reflects the growing number of users in general, at the same time, drugs may offer an irresistible form of escape from the realities of prison life and despite the dangers (Hepatitis, AIDS), their use is high.

This outline of prison life has painted a particularly grim picture. However, despite all the adverse factors, I was struck by the wit and humour of the prisoners when I visited. Clearly many had acclimatised to this harsh environment very well and it is a tribute to their resilience and adaptability that they have. It is possible that some of those who do

find prison life particularly hard, have had some problems before coming into jail. Or they may not fit in, due to background or character. The Whitaker Report states conservatively, that "the chances of a person deteriorating in prison are at least as great as those of improvement". Yet some do break out of the cycle of recidivism and perhaps this is due to the limited positive elements in prison, such as education.

Education represents something of a rainbow in the otherwise ominous landscape of prison life. Firstly it is voluntary. That is a prisoner can choose whether or not to participate, and what subjects to take. This element of choice is significant in a regime that otherwise has few opportunities for decision-making and that seldom respects prisoners' wishes. Any attempt to coerce inmates into classes or therapy as a form of forced "rehabilitation" has been shown by experiments in California, to be futile. Thankfully education in Irish prisons appears to be genuinely constructive and unmanipulative. It shares W.R. Stirling's belief that:-

Prison education has been most successful when it has seen its role as primarily educative and immediate, not inductive and futuristic.¹⁶

Teachers have been innovative and flexible in shaping courses to prisoners' needs, this is recognised and praised by the Whitaker Report. The educational objectives set out by the

Department of Justice are as follows:-

1. To help prisoners cope with their sentences.
2. To widen and strengthen the options prisoners might have open to them on release.
3. To afford opportunities to the prisoners for increased self-development, self-esteem and self-reliance.

In 1984, forty percent of inmates attended at least one class per week, with some even studying full-time . Prisoners' reasons for taking a course can be totally instudious, for instance to get away from the boredom of work routines or to be in a group with friends. However, it was pointed out to me that this does not matter because once in a class, they very often became interested. Or even while claiming to be ambivalent, they can be seen to be making progress.

The person who teaches the classes is seen by some governors to be as important as the subject they teach. Michael Wolff points out in his book Prison, that the influence of some personalities, often women, on the prisoners is quite remarkable, and:-

A fresh face, coming from outside, and not directly associated with authority, is an experience welcomed by most prisoners. They (sometimes) prefer this contact to the more artificial and more intimate contacts of the prison visitor.¹⁷

The relationship with the teacher can be doubly important because very often the inmates past education has left him illiterate (25 to 30%) or very wary of "school".

The sense of stigma and lack of confidence associated with this is hard to overcome. In fact the Education Policy draft of February 1984 acknowledges that because of the lack of privacy many prisoners refuse to show the vulnerability of attending remedial classes.

Improving basic literacy is given top priority in the education programme but there is a wide range of other courses. They vary from prison to prison, in Limerick and Portlaoise, there may only be open University courses and certain third-level subjects, because of their security category. However, in Mountjoy and Arbourhill, both in Dublin, the choice might include, Cookery, Expressive Arts (drama, writing, music and visual art), modern languages, physical education, social studies, computers and traditional subjects such as English, History and Maths.

In this Chapter, I have outlined prison conditions and some of the problems that prisoners face. This is because the art that is produced in prison is, I believe, very much influenced by that environment. To discuss the art without putting it into context would be inviting the reader to assume that art is a kind of self-contained phenomenon that is somehow constant and impervious to the conditions in which it is practiced, instead of being a product of those conditions. Not only would this give a false impression, it would also be avoiding the most interesting issues.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 1

¹Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System (Whitaker Report) p. 241.

²Ibid., p. 268 A Sample of Prison Diet.
Breakfast: 1 pint tea, 2.5 oz sugar, 6 oz. bread, 1 oz. butter, 1 oz. marmalade, $\frac{1}{2}$ pint milk, 1 bowl cornflakes.

Lunch: Monday - Irish Stew consisting 8 oz. mutton, 20 oz. potatoes, 4 oz. onion, 4 oz. carrots or parsnips, $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. flour, 2 oz. bread, rice pudding.
 (other weekdays have similar lunch).

Tea: 1 pint tea, $\frac{3}{4}$ oz sugar, 6 oz. bread, 1 oz. butter, 1 oz. jam, $\frac{1}{2}$ pint milk. Eggs boiled, scrambled or fried with toast, or sausages with beans (or equivalent dishes).

Supper: 1 pint tea, $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. sugar, 4 oz. bread, 1 oz. jam, $\frac{1}{2}$ pint milk, Bun or Brack.

³See Introduction footnote 9.

⁴Cohen, Stanley and Taylor, Laurie, Psychological Survival (The experience of long-term imprisonment), p. 41.

⁵Toch, Hans, Living in Prison p. 23.

⁶Foucault, Michel, Discipline and Punish - The Birth of the Prison p. 238.

⁷Boyle, Jimmy, The Pain of Confinement, Prison Diaries, p. 40.

⁸Cohen, Stanley and Taylor, Laurie, p. 51.

⁹Wolff, Michael, Prison p. 25.

¹⁰Whitaker Report, p. 91.

¹¹Lowenfeld, Viktor, Creative and Mental Growth, p. 324.

- ¹²Boyle, Jimmy, A Sense of Freedom p. 247.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 251.
- ¹⁴Annual Report on Prisons and Places of Detention, 1983.
- ¹⁵Whitaker Report p. 89.
- ¹⁶Stirling, W.R., Role of Education in the Penal System, Progress in Penal Reform ed. Blom-Cooper, Louis, p. 147.
- ¹⁷Wolff Michael, p. 214.

CHAPTER II - The Art of Mountjoy, Arbourhill and
the Training Unit.

Mountjoy, Arbourhill and the Training Unit are all prisons for adult male offenders. They are linked in that prisoners are often transferred from one to the other and in fact, the Training Unit is designed to prepare longer term prisoners for release. They are transferred there for the remaining six months to two years of their sentences. The Unit as a result, is more "open" and relaxed than the other two. But the art practiced in all three has similarities, and they can be discussed together.

When I visited Mountjoy and the Training Unit, the first thing I noticed was that the classrooms were quite similar to those of a secondary school; with small formica topped, iron tube tables, and a tall metal press against the wall, in which was stored the poster paints, pencils and art books. There were none of those free standing easels that make one feel like a "real" artist and want to paint expansively. In fact when the class ends and the materials are put away, the only clue as to the use of the room, is a handful of assorted drawings pinned to the wall.

The teachers are employed directly by the V.E.C. and would otherwise be teaching in secondary schools. So how similar is teaching art in prison to school? Well, as Bernie Masterson of the Training Unit points out, the prisoners come

to classes by choice unlike secondary school pupils, (although alternative interesting activities are definitely thin on the ground). In addition the classes never contain more than eight, for security reasons, so "it is quite easy to work on a one to one level, allowing for personal deviation throughout".¹ But there appears to be the same restriction on materials, with the old school reliables of cartridge paper and pencil being quite dominant.

In the classes that I visited all the prisoners were in one way or another carefully copying from photographs or other artists' work. I was assured by the teachers that this was not as prevalent as it seemed. That at any rate, it was useful both for improving technique and because the prisoners had no first-hand access to normal subject matter. One talented prisoner used this restriction in a way that post-modernists might approve of. He had in his cell a selection of books ranging from monographs on the Old Masters to summaries of Chinese Culture. He composed his drawings by picking out maybe a detail of a buddha from an Indian sculpture in one book, a face from a Rembrandt in another and finishing with a costume from a pre-Raphaelite. However, most students copies a particular picture in its entirety and as accurately as possible. It was strange while visiting a prison in Dublin and being shown inmates' paintings, to come across a "Gauguin", the original of which would have been painted thousands of miles away on a tropical island at the beginning of the century (Fig. 1) or a Mt. St. Victoire (Fig. 2).



1. UNTITLED Poster paint on paper 40" x 30"
Mountjoy Prison.



2.

UNTITLED

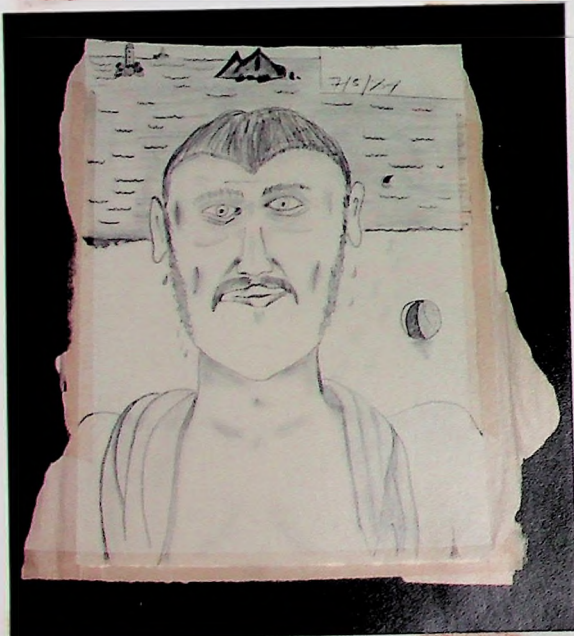
Watercolour 20" x 15"
 Mountjoy Prison.

One prisoner was very carefully copying Millais's "Ophelia", when I visited. He told me that he did art because it passed the time and because it provided something to show for his years "inside". I was told later that when he first began art classes, he could not concentrate even for short periods, he was constantly restless and preoccupied, but now he would often work for the entire day; and had already spent a month on that particular painting. There were clearly reasons why so many of the students put so much effort into copying.

One reason could be due to the stages of development in art that each person goes through. Research has shown that each child goes through a series of identifiable developments and around the age of twelve reaches the "pseudo-naturalistic" phase. This is marked by the child becoming more aware of the actual realistic appearance of what he is trying to depict, and of his inability to capture that. His skill is unable to match his developing perception. At this time many children become self-conscious and demoralised and often stop doing it:-

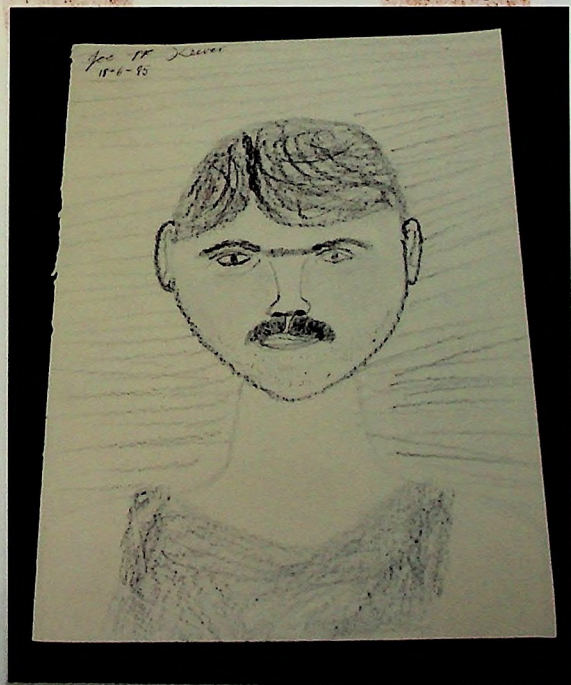
For some, this stage marks the end of their artistic development and we often find that adults when asked to draw something, will make a drawing very typical of the twelve year old.²

The self-portraits (Figs. 3-10) are the first work that Bernie Masterson asks each new student to do. Clearly the



3-10

SELF-PORTRAITS pencil on paper 14" x 10"
Training Unit.



drawing in these does resemble that of the "pseudo-naturalistic" stage. So the prisoners feel the same gap between the perception of the kind of picture they want and their ability to make that picture. Copying is perhaps one solution to bridging that gap. The art teachers vary in their opinions on this practice, ranging from Marcus O' Mahony who teaches at St. Patrick's Institution, he views it as undesirable. But as he believes that one cannot be dogmatic in the prison situation he does not rule it out completely. He replies in the questionnaire:-

My own preference would be for the prisoner to engage in greater self-expression. However, if such methods can stimulate, I consider them valid and of value.³

On the other hand Chris Jones of Arbour Hill has no objection, in his view,

it helps them to mix colours, and secondly when they are copying other artists' work, they learn brushwork.⁴

The key factor here both among teachers and students, is the individual's conception of what art should be. Before the pseudo-naturalistic phase the young child had not developed ideas of what he should be doing, he just did it. However, as one's experience and social sophistication grow, one learns to develop expectations and preconceptions. One learns a concept of art which defines one's taste and regulates what

one produces. Victor Heyfron claims that;

a child can be unsuccessful in acquiring an adequate understanding of the concept of art and this will interfere with his aesthetic development.⁵

The terminology might be paternalistic but the idea holds true. It can be claimed that the prisoners' concept of the nature of art is not as developed as it could be. I discussed this with Sean O Murchu, who taught in Mountjoy and the Training Unit between 1977 and 1981. He observed that:

prisoners are interested in emulating what they perceive A-R-T to be. Not in self-expression. Their perception of art is essentially pictures, not expression.⁶

This perception of art as pictures as opposed to personal expression is not unique to prisons. Street artists have found that the public is more willing to part with its loose change when it is a copy of an Old Master on the pavement. While attempts to put original artwork in the same place earns virtually nothing but the increased attention of the guards. Perhaps this is an indication of the way in which art has been taught in our schools in the past.

O'Murchu tried to explain the thinking behind the majority of prisoners' attitude to art. Firstly art is perceived as

pictures: finished products as opposed to an internal process. In addition the pictures that they choose to copy and emulate tend to be associated with an established middle-class view of art, such as Millais' "Ophelia". They strive to copy works which have no affinity with their background or way of thinking. To quote O'Murchu:-

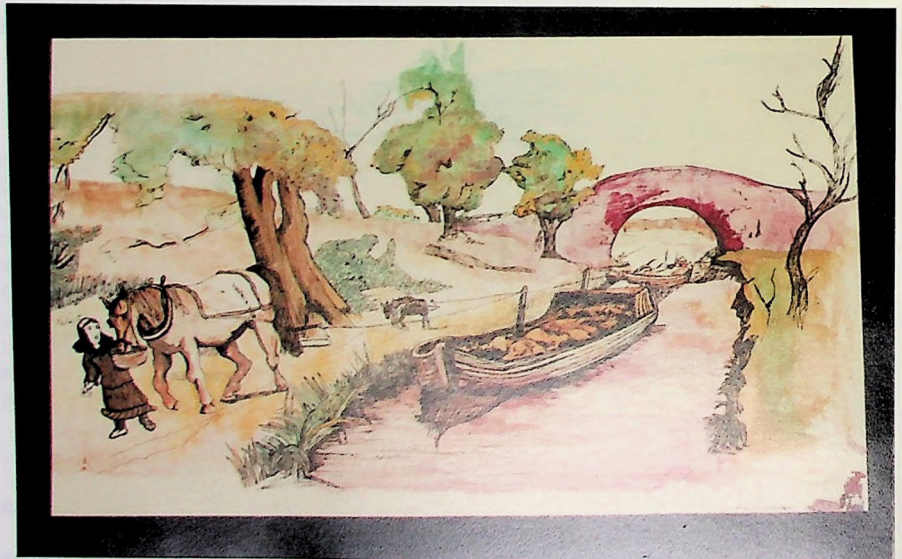
They are interested in what the people they don't like are interested in.....it's like a hall of mirrors. Their actual motivation is bounced off four or five different erroneous perceptions of what art is. And what essentially society is. Because these people are outside society and for them it is a way back in.

Whether or not prisoners consciously see art as a means of social acceptance is open to question. It is clear though, that their concept of the function of art is far from the ideal that Anthony Storr proposed. This must be due considerably to being in prison where there is no creative atmosphere and no contact with other artists. Prison could also be said to be made up of people who are particularly ignorant of art, both wardens and prisoners and it is difficult for an individual to develop a personal approach to his art against this consensus which would value an accurate copy far above any attempt at a personal statement.

However, prison is very complex and one cannot be dogmatic. If we look at the official objectives of prison education again, the first one is "To help prisoners to cope with their

sentences". As I have shown in the last chapter prison produces a lot that an inmate has to cope with. These obstacles can be so formidable that a prisoner's main concern may be simply getting through each day. Clearly art can help in this, but the type of art produced as a result may fall well short of the ideal. The art classes run by Chris Jones at Arbourhill come under this category. Practically all the work done by his students is very similar. It consists of small idyllic landscapes in oil, on board. The surface is always glossy and the brushwork and drawing is uniform. One might have thought that this would bore the students but Jones's classes are very popular and the prisoners produce a lot of work. (Unfortunately I was unable to get photographs of work from Arbourhill but (Fig. 11) from Mountjoy is similar in subject matter. It differs in that it is not painted in oil and the paintings from Arbourhill tend to be claustrophobically crammed with details and highly finished).

How can the popularity of the classes at Arbourhill be explained? Well, firstly the teacher has a concept of art that is similar to that of the prisoners. He never had any formal arts training but developed his painting from a hobby into a full-time concern. So in his classes, there is little confusion about objectives. He lovingly shows them the techniques that are used and from there, they can see a clear gradation of achievement as demonstrated by more advanced members of the class. This explains how Chris Jones replies



11. HORSE DRAWN BARGE

Poster paint on Paper 20" x 12"
Mountjoy Prison.

in the questionnaire to the question of prisoners' pre-conceptions:-

I find them fresh and eager to learn.

The class is also a social gathering. The teacher gets on well with the prisoners and they have a chance to chat among themselves while in relatively warm and pleasant surroundings. These few cosy hours a week may counteract the more depressing times. The prisoners can also feel themselves develop a skill and have tangible objects to show for it. This raises their confidence and that can carry over into other aspects of their lives, even into the outside world, as Sean O Murchu describes:-

(At first) They (the prisoners) literally couldn't draw a cube in perspective. Six months later they could do a very basic still life and in horribly garish colours maybe, but then they go and make a frame and they frame it up and it is a Christmas present to their wife or mother. That is an incredibly poignant thing to see. That is great emotional release for them....it is an assertion of individuality on quite a basic level but nevertheless one, that would not be there if we (the teachers) were not there.⁹

O'Murchu was critical and quite condescending towards Chris Jones's classes, but in the statement above he does recognise the quite useful role that such teachers play. In passing it is worth mentioning that the wife or girlfriend would probably prefer the pretty landscapes on her wall than a more complex work that perhaps expressed harsh emotions. It is

inherent in the prison regime that choice and spontaneity are repressed for twenty-two hours a day. It is difficult then for the individual to sit down for two hours and be creative. After being told what to do for so long, the prisoner expects to be told what to do in class. Chris Jones perhaps through lack of thought, merely gives them what they expect. In O'Murchu's experience very few prisoners are able to overcome the pressure of the twenty-two hour regime and be creative for the two. It is a reflection of human resilience that any can do it at all.

In the questionnaire, Chris Jones states that art helps the prisoners to cope with their sentences because "it's a form of escape". The art practiced in his class could be a form of escape in two ways. Firstly by concentrating on a painting the inmates mind is distracted from anything that might be worrying him. Anthony Storr has noticed the equivalent in his field:- "In psychiatric practice", he writes,

It is common to meet individuals who engage in all kinds of pursuits, not for the sake of the activity itself, but because performing them prevents the experience of mental distress.¹⁰

The student who was copying Millais's "Ophelia" is an example of the successful use of this mechanism. The prisoners, as in this case, often choose the most intricate tasks which will take months to complete and so absorb them for as long as possible. Marquetry and building models out of match sticks

fulfil the same function and characteristically require little creativity, which might entail anxiety.

The second form of escape is through what is called, "wish fulfilment". It is curious that in my visits to Mountjoy and the Training Unit, and of all the work I have seen from Arbourhill, I did not come across a single picture that portrayed any aspect of prison life. And, oddly many of the paintings from Arbourhill depict romantic rural landscapes, even though most of the inmates are from the city.

Bernie Masterson acknowledges in the questionnaire that art "allows them to 'escape' in their imaginations to other worlds and out of the harsh reality of the prison world".

"Wish-fulfilment" is using art to compensate for what is lacking in reality. So the idyllic scenes of rural bliss provide an alternative world that is harmonious and peaceful. Even if clearly unrealistic, this other world reminds one that there is still the possibility of a more pleasant environment and so provides hope. In prison where the present harsh reality is never really confronted, these vague undefined hopes make life bearable.

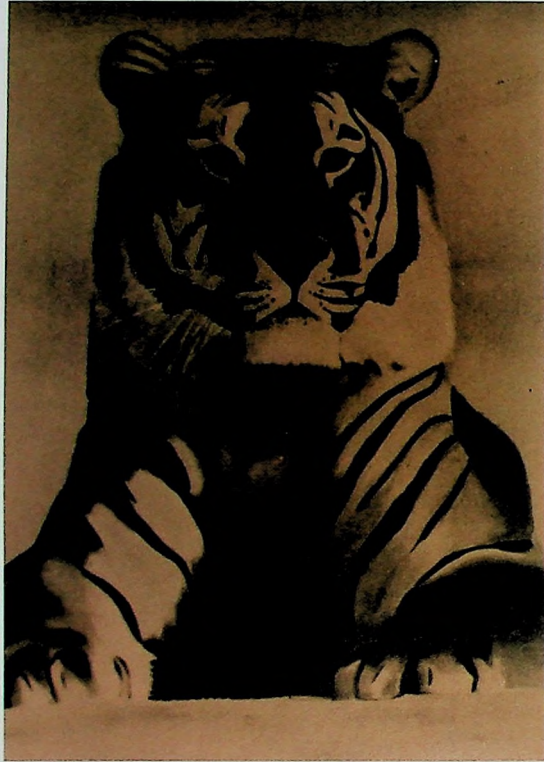
The phenomenon of "wish-fulfilment" in art is not the exclusive domain of prisoners. Anthony Storr provides examples among the affluent and respected. For instance Ian Fleming,

the creator of James Bond. It might be expected that the man behind 007, would love fast cars, gambling, beautiful women, be a connoisseur of food and wine and have a custom-made revolver with gold bullets, strapped under his armpit. But in reality, Fleming knew little about guns, served "appalling" food to his guests, did not gamble and was a timid driver. So the character of James Bond was a kind of compensating alterego.

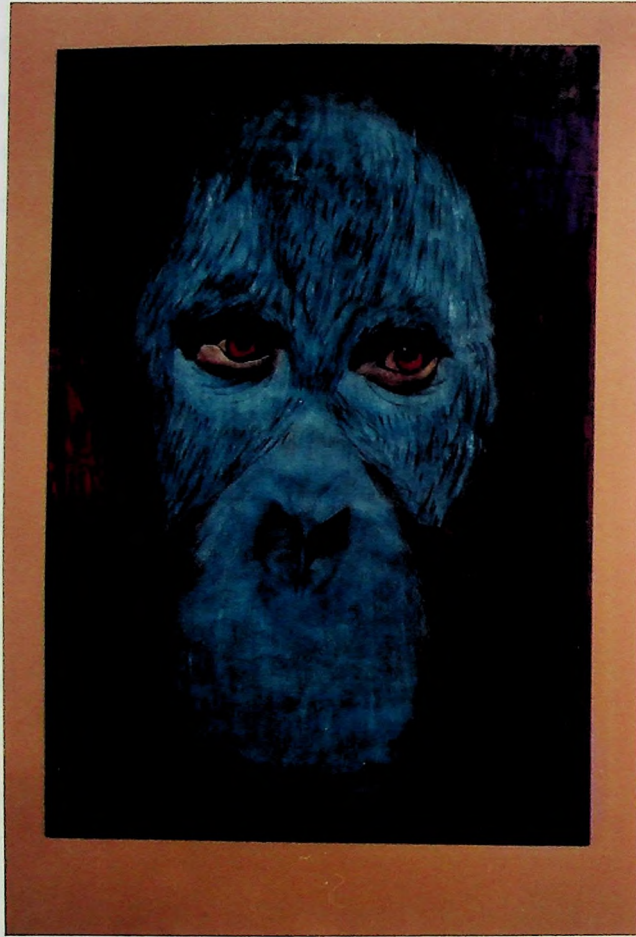
Prisoners quite often portray figures such as Humphry Bogart (Fig. 12) or the Indian (Fig. 13) and they may be trying to assert or remind themselves of the values that these people represent. The Indian could be a kind of self-portrait in that the prisoner feels misunderstood and victimized by society but considers himself to be noble and dignified when judged by the alternative criteria by which he lives. In Fig. 14, the Tiger¹¹ it is the natural dignity and nobility of the animal that is stressed and again this may be an effort to compensate in art, for the lack of dignity in Prison. I found the drawing of an Orang-Utan (Fig. 15) interesting, again the animal is used as a symbol. It reminded me of the Orang-Utans in the Zoo. These primates are particularly intelligent and always seem very bored and degraded by their captivity. I get the impression from seeing them that they are slightly bewildered by their treatment. One can recognise the association between these very human-like apes in the Zoo and prisoners. And as criminals are occasionally



12. HUMPHRY BOGART Pencil on paper, 18" x 15"
Training Unit.
13. INDIAN Pencil on paper, 26" x 18"
Training Unit.



14. TIGER Oil on Board, Special Unit, Barlinnie Prison¹¹



15. ORANG-UTAN

Coloured pencils on paper 22" x 15"
Training Unit.

referred to as a pack of animals or bloody guerrillas, one can appreciate the irony.

The second official objective of prison education is, "To widen and strengthen the options prisoners might have open to them on release". Well, art classes are unlikely to lead to a job directly, especially when one considers that only a fraction of the graduates from the National College of Art and Design actually make a living directly from art. In the entire country there are at most twenty artists who can live on the earnings they make from producing paintings, most, even those who are popular and respected, have to teach or hold down some part-time job. Prisoners might get a false impression of the situation though, as they are exhibiting in a public gallery, such as the Bank of Ireland hall in Baggot Street, Dublin, at least once a year. These exhibitions are given verbose praise by the relevant spokespeople, who are eager to make the most of any positive publicity for the beleaguered prison service. The exhibitions are successful in their own right but the interest groups might blow them out of proportion. And perhaps the art teachers have been so good at boosting the inmates' confidence that the world looks like their oyster. As one American ex-convict said:-

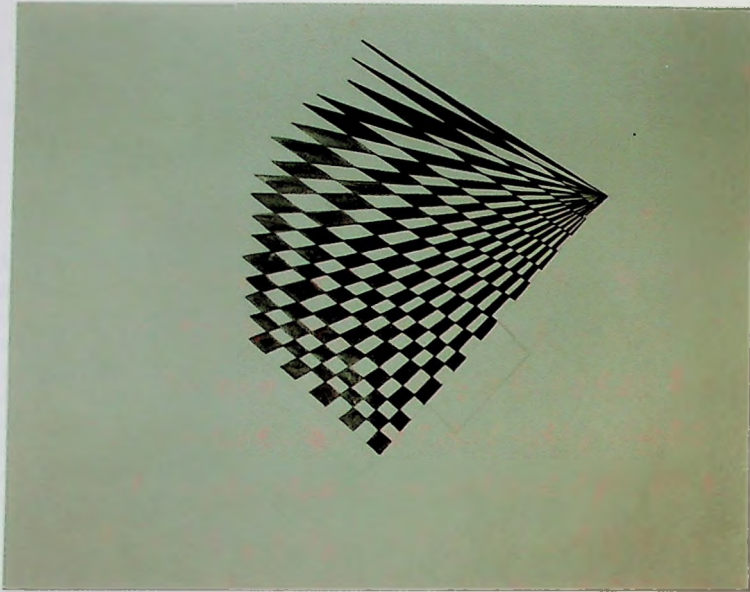
I kept getting A's and A's and A's, I got out there and I was getting my back end stomped on.¹²

On the other hand, it can be argued that the better one's general education, the better one's prospects in the world. A knowledge of art is certainly one aspect of a good education. Even the copying that goes on, helps this, in that the prisoners often develop an impressive knowledge of art history through contact with the various books they use. Further, the art courses increase an understanding of design and colour. For example in the Training Unit, Bernie Masterson runs a course in basic visual communication. It incorporates design exercises (Fig. 16), calligraphy (Fig. 17), drawing techniques and the colour wheel. It is similar to the foundation course in art college though, at a more basic level. It is hard to be specific about the benefits of these courses, one has to generalise and say that they develop visual awareness. Or as Ciaran Benson of the Arts Council optimistically writes:-

An education in the arts can provide one of the best opportunities for training in the skills needed to interpret the complex situations so frequently presented or represented by today's forms of mass communication.¹³

So in summary the art classes have an educational influence and that may be useful to the prisoner in future.

The third objective of prison education is to "afford opportunities for increased self-development, self-esteem and self-reliance", this is described as perhaps its "most important" role.¹³ In relation to this Joyce Laing, who is



Since you Left I cried all night, till
 the early Morning Light,
 And every single drop of dew, are all the
 Tears I shed for you ~
 The tears fell parted the day we parted,
 I know now that I am broken Hearted ~

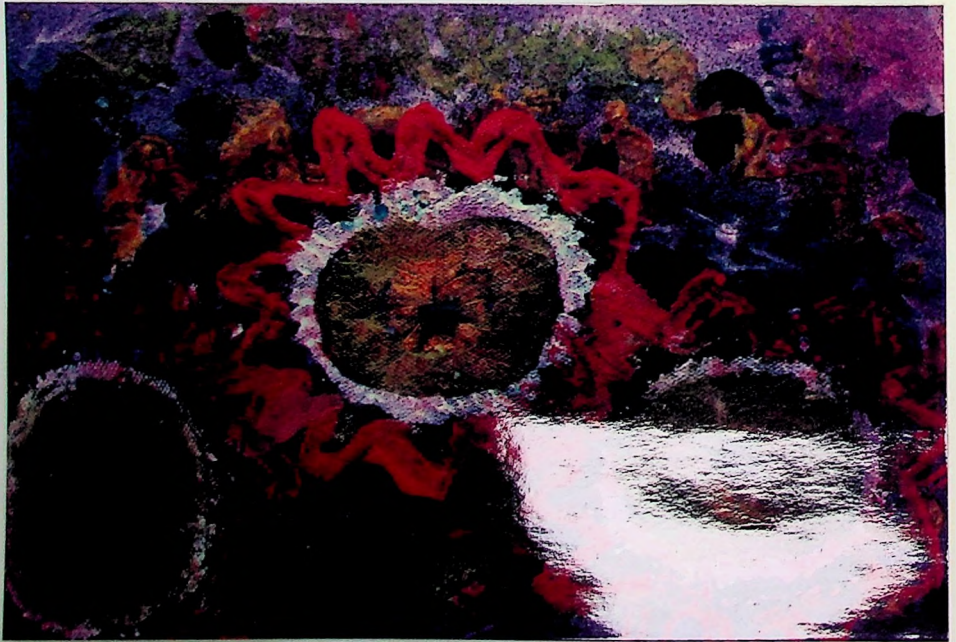
16. DESIGN EXERCISE Pencil and ink on Paper 9" x 7" (image)
Training Unit.
17. CALLIGRAPHY EXERCISE Ink on Paper 13" x 10"
Training Unit.

an art therapist and has taught at the Special Unit, Barlinnie Prison states:-

There are three ways in which the arts can be used in any institutional setting; firstly as a pleasurable, time-filling occupation, secondly as an educational pursuit both in practical and theoretical terms, and thirdly as a living expression of thought, emotion and portrayal of images from the subconscious. The first two ways provide obvious benefits. Yet the arts will not engender change or growth for the individual without the third way.¹⁴

As we have seen art classes already fulfil the first two functions. But the third one is only partially fulfilled. I saw only a few poor examples of individuals attempting to be personal and original in their work, such as Figs. 18-21. However, it could be claimed that I did not see all the work, because many of the most dedicated students keep their paintings in their cells or send them home with visitors. This artwork was not available when I visited or when I took photographs for illustrations. (Cameras are not allowed inside the Prisons, and so when making the illustrations, I had to rely on the art teachers, who brought a selection of work out for me to photograph. I am very much indebted to them for their help). From the work that I did see there was very little evidence of Laing's third function.

There is a danger of my sounding like a zealous reformer, suggesting that the prisoners will be transformed into exemplary citizens merely by painting expressive pictures.

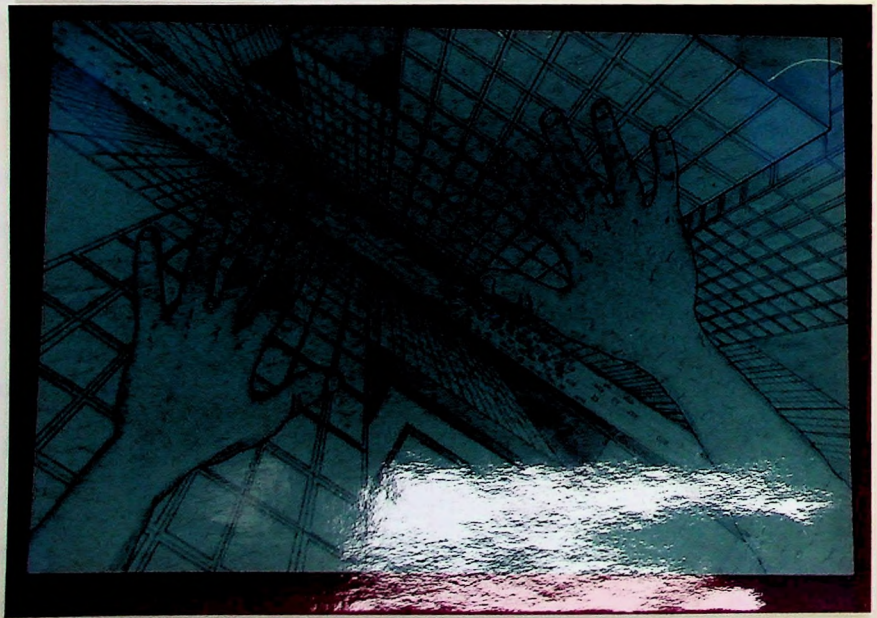


18. BIRD AND BUTTERFLY

Coloured pencil on paper 14" x 9"
Training Unit.

19. SUNFLOWERS

Poster paints on paper 21" x 15"
Training Unit.



20. BOXER Pastel on paper 22" x 16"
Training Unit.

21. SUICIDE Pencil on Paper 20" x 14".
Training Unit.

On the contrary I am not advocating any dogmatic approach and certainly not one of somehow forcing the prisoners to produce personal work. I do believe, however, that the art being made at present is an impoverished version of what it could be. That the students are not benefitting to the extent that they could and that this is largely due to the circumstances of being in Prison.

It should be acknowledged that a large number of prisoners are only serving months rather than years and that in this short time they don't have the space to learn very much. On the other hand there is a number who face a large portion of their lives in prison, but even these are transferred and disrupted to an unexpected degree. And as the teachers work the same year as those in secondary schools, there are long "holidays" when the inmates are left to their own devices.

Clearly the teachers face a formidable task for they have to work to overcome the previous bad associations that most prisoners have of "school". In addition they must counteract the negative forces exerted by the rest of the prison environment. Indeed the prison education policy document acknowledges that, "for nearly all these prisoners, a great part of the teacher's job will be devoted to helping to restore their self-image and boost their confidence".¹⁵ Sean O'Murchu found that only in very few prisoners was he able to develop a strong enough self-confidence that was necessary for them to take art to a really creative level.

This was a slow process. He began by teaching them to draw well enough that they felt technically proficient. From there he began to challenge their pre-conceptions and question them about what they were doing. They had to reach a stage where they were confident enough to be criticised and provoked. The students who reached this level were usually more extrovert and "cocky", though occasionally there would be a quietly self-assured individual. The teacher has to be a considerable judge of character to single out which students can cope with the criticism which is necessary to start him questioning his approach. O'Murchu says the teacher has to build up:-

A structure in which they are confident enough to have opinions and formulate opinions and taste, and then with that structure let them develop to a stage of articulating their own opinions. It's a matter of building up a superego and it is only through superego that you can get creativity.¹⁶

But prison suppresses free will and forces conformity or dissimulation on the individual. It creates anxiety and undermines one's self-perception. It forces one to postpone until release, one's aspirations and hopes and encourages a twilight existence in the meantime. So clearly it is not the ideal seedbed for the growing superego. Hans Toch in his book Living in Prison, the Ecology of Survival, states:-

A superego, when it is young requires nurturing. This presupposes an environment with a value-system that stresses the importance of self-denial and dedication and one that provides encouragement, help and rewards.¹⁷

In prison the rewards are for conforming and producing copied artwork and one is denied enough without self-denial.

In looking at the Self-Portraits (Fig. 3-10) that each prisoner does when he joins Bernie Masterson's class, one is really struck by how diverse they are. They are all done in pencil on similar sized pieces of paper and yet the type of drawing and the use of space in each one is very different. They were drawn without mirrors and yet each prisoner is recognizable by his portrait. The expressive qualities of these drawings which may have been the first attempts at art for many years, suggest that it is possible for each prisoner to have a unique style and viewpoint, if he had the will and freedom to develop it.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER II

- ¹Masterson, Bernie, Questionnaire, Q.2. Appendix.
- ²Lowenfeld, Viktor, Creative and Mental Growth p. 39.
- ³O'Mahony, Marcus, Questionnaire Q.6. Appendix.
- ⁴Jones, Chris, Questionnaire Q.6. Appendix.
- ⁵Heyfron, Victor, The Concept of Art, The Arts and Personal Growth ed. Ross, Malcolm p. 81.
- ⁶O'Murchu, Sean, Tape-recorded interview, Appendix.
- ⁷Ibid.,
- ⁸Jones, Chris, Questionnaire Q.11. Appendix.
- ⁹O'Murchu, Sean, Tape-recorded interview, Appendix.
- ¹⁰Storr, Anthony, The Dynamics of Creation p. 67.
- ¹¹This drawing of a tiger comes from Barlinnie Prison Scotland. I noticed an inmate working on a similar one when I visited the Training Unit.
- ¹²Toch, Hans, Living in Prison p. 79.
- ¹³Benson, Ciaran, The Place of the Arts in Irish Education p. 22.
- ¹⁴Laing, Joyce, The Special Unit, Barlinnie Prison. Its Evolution Through Its Art p. 57.

¹⁵Education policy in Prison and Places of Detention Draft, p. 11.

¹⁶O'Murchu, Sean, Interview.

¹⁷Toch, Hans, p. 77.

CHAPTER III - St. Patrick's Institution

St. Patrick's Institution merits a separate section. It is quite different from the other prisons, firstly because it caters for offenders between the ages of sixteen and twenty only, seventy per cent of whom are serving less than a year. Secondly the art produced there is quite different from that of the adult prisons. It is a large institution though, second in size after Mountjoy and contained two hundred and forty offenders in July 1985.¹ This reflects the high level of juvenile crime. According to the Whitaker report:-

One third of all offences are committed by persons under 17 years of age and it is very rare for an adult to engage in crime who has not already committed an offence before his 17th birthday.²

Today's delinquents tend to become tomorrow's criminals. It is interesting that there is visual evidence of this, if you look at the self-portraits from the Training Unit (Figs. 3,4), the black dot on the left cheek is a self-inflicted tattoo that boys who have been in borstal or its equivalent put on their faces as a sign of belonging to that exclusive minority.

St. Pat's is an old prison built in stone during the last century and is in bad condition. But the educational facilities are housed separately in a bright, one-storey flat roofed building in the yard beside the main gate. The atmosphere inside is relatively bright and pleasant and it is

also less noisy than the main block. The art room is completely different from those of the adult prisons. This room is definitely not used for any other purpose: sculptures and large paintings crowd up much of the limited space and more is taken up by bins of modelling clay and benches for working ceramics on. It is the presence of sculpture and ceramics which immediately marks St. Pat's as different; in the other prisons there is no provision for three-dimensional work at all. But not only is there sculpture but the pieces tend to be energetic, expressive and varied in subject matter.

There is probably no single reason for the marked difference between St. Pat's and the other prisons. It may be because the students are young and energetic and have not become repressed by longer term imprisonment. The wide range of materials is definitely a factor - clay, plaster, wire and papier-mache are used extensively. These materials are malleable and are worked in a constructional way that allow ideas to develop while the piece is in progress. Indeed they can have a kind of rovshach effect, in that the random forms that they accidentally make can give the artist ideas as he goes along. It is interesting that the inmates of the special unit, Barlinnie Prison also found it easiest to begin art through sculpture. In addition the larger supports used to paint on, encourage a more expansive approach to painting (Figs. 22, 23, 24).

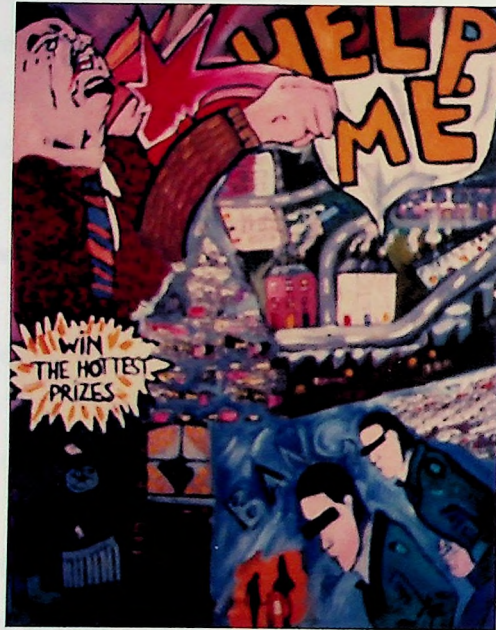


22. STRIPPERS mixed media on board.
St. Patrick's Institution.



23. JOYRIDERS

Mixed media St. Patrick's Institution.



24. HELP ME

Acrylic on board 3' x 4'
St. Patrick's Institution.

Needless to say the teacher is the most important factor in an art class, and the inmates are lucky to have Marcus O'Mahony at St. Pat's. He teaches the more advanced students and believes in taking a very active role in stimulating ideas. He puts ideas into "play" as it were and the class take those up and enrich them from their own experience. Often they work in a group on a large project, or because there is a constant turnover of inmates being released, a project is taken up and expanded by new arrivals. One such project is about housing in Dublin, in large wooden and plaster constructions that represent old Georgian houses or a Ballymun tower block, the various students have added their own particular statements, such as a mock Guinness poster on the gable end of a house or a figure throwing a television out a window on the sixth floor. Ideas tend to beget ideas, and because there is not the restriction of a syllabus and examinations, as in a second-level school, these ideas can be explored and expanded. Like the other prisons the maximum number in a class is eight.

Marcus writes in the questionnaire that it is an "effort to stimulate the prisoners, and the prison environment limits their imaginations".³ But the work he does is significant. It can be argued that creativity is particularly important during adolescence, as there may be a link between vandalism, violence and creativity. I have referred to Joyce Laing's belief that, "there may be underlying links in the drive of certain offenders and that of the creative artist".⁴

Cordelia Oliver describes a case that illustrates this well: In a school for "problem" juveniles, A.S. Neill noticed that many young boys had no respect at all for property and would often throw knives at valuable wooden doors. Neill recognised the boys' natural need to be violent to a certain degree so he provided two derelict train carriages where the boys could throw knives at the walls if they wanted. He believed that children were "primitives" and initially have quite destructive inclinations (inclinations) but these, subsequently develop into more constructive forms if allowed to mature fairly naturally. The boys in Neill's case soon discovered that by diverting this destructive energy into perhaps, building something, they could get as much satisfaction and often praise as well.⁵

Further evidence of a link between delinquency and creativity is provided by Viktor Lowenfeld. He writes:-

It is interesting and rather surprising to note that youngsters who have run into problems with the law and been put into institutions under the label 'delinquents' have apparently not been able to express themselves creatively.⁶

In studies carried out by Anderson and Stoffer (1979), it was found that non-delinquent boys showed higher verbal creativity than delinquents of equal intelligence. Lowenfeld goes on to say that:-

Possibly those who find they cannot create, who found no satisfaction in building or producing, may react in negative ways. Unable to contribute in a positive manner, they destroy or deface what others have built.⁷

It is plausible that some delinquents have never really had access to the creative outlets that most of us take for granted. Perhaps they grew up in an environment that was hostile or merely 'cold' towards creative effort. So the youngster, who might have used a creative medium as an outlet for frustration, never learnt to do this. Take for example Jimmy Boyle. As an example he is almost a caricature because whatever he is doing, he does it far more emphatically than anyone else. So, in his younger days, he was not just violent, he was "Scotland's most violent man". Fighting was something he felt confident doing, in retrospect he views it as a kind of self-expression. He later wrote in 1974/'75: "Violence is no longer my means of communication".⁹ When he began to make sculpture this is how he described the feeling it gave him:-

The only thing I could compare it to was when I won a victory when fighting in the past or beating the system in some way. The difference was that I was using the energy, knowing it was just as aggressive but creating an object that was a physical symbol, yet perfectly acceptable to society.⁹

This quote reads almost like a definition of sublimation, and that is clearly what Boyle had learned to do, to sublimate his aggressive tendencies. The idea of sublimation originated

with Freud who attempted to fit creative activities into his theories of neurosis and sexuality. He did not completely succeed but the theory of sublimation does seem to have some truth in it:-

Sublimation is the process by which energy, originally instinctive, is displaced and discharged in ways which are not obviously instinctual.¹⁰

This may sound as though artists are continually trying to diffuse a raging primate inside them. And looking around for a minute one can see a few examples. For instance, a brief look at the exploits of Mick Mulcahy might prove the case. In his wild days, Mulcahy is known to have lived in a huge card board box, outside the only pub in Dublin that had not barred him. He placed forty odd shoes around it and attempted to seduce any young woman that caught his eye. On one occasion he entered a church during Mass, in Lucan, Co. Dublin and jumping into the raised pulpit proceeded to deliver an alternative sermon to that of the priest. His life was only barely saved by an impressive hundred yard dash.

He was further hunted out of Co. Wicklow by outraged farmers (who were definitely not good at sublimating their violent urges). He, subsequently vanished into the wastes of the Sahara desert before coming to a halt in Germany, and a nervous breakdown. If Freud is right, Mulachy's more settled

lifestyle at the moment, is due to his present occupation of painting huge thinly disguised phalli on six by four foot canvases.

Mulcahy is only one example, and for every one Mulcahy there may be half a dozen characters that would put Freud's theory in question. However, Boyle has a strong belief in the contribution that creative activities can make in helping teenagers see the alternatives to crime. Since leaving prison, he has been running workshops for young people who come from a similar background as himself. Hopefully these teenagers will find the same capacity in art that he has himself. By implication, the art classes at St. Pat's could be particularly beneficial.

The art being produced there is very expressive and rich in ideas. Obviously one cannot point at a specific piece of work and say the artist who did that benefited this much etc. Such a process is an internal thing and very subtle. Looking at the work though, there is evidence of sublimation as in Figs. 25-28. The "Unicorn Man" (Fig. 25), with all its ugliness, aggression and cumbersome horn, I think poignantly captures the adolescent feelings of inadequacy, anger and sexual clumsiness. I like the "Help Me" painting also (Fig. 24). It has an older figure on the left receiving a thump from an anonymous fist, while a scream of 'help me!' comes from a house in the background. The landscape is urban and harsh; inset two threatening young "heads" come "shaping"



25. UNICORN MAN mixed media 5'6" x 4'4"
St. Patrick's Institution.
26. HORSE HEAD WITH BOW TIE mixed media 2'6" x 2'6"
St. Patrick's Institution.



27. PUNK AT A BUS-STOP

mixed media 5' x 2'6"
St. Patrick's Institution.



28. BUG-EYED MONSTER

mixed media

3'6" x 3' x 3'

in from the right. The slogan "win the hottest prizes" and a collaged photograph of a happy family walking into the sunset allude to the promises of advertising, which are stolen, as in "hottest" or unrealistic. The painting has an atmosphere of harshness and danger but excitement as well, which offsets the disillusionment of the false promises. The flying fist which has just hit the older figure, that is wearing a tie, could be interpreted as a cheeky swipe at authority.

The actual depiction of an act like the punch, is a form of catharsis. Catharsis is quite similar to sublimation and may in fact be a form of it. But the difference is that in catharsis the image represents what it specifically on the artist's mind. While sublimation is the rechannelling of instinctive urges, the actual product produced may have no visible link with the emotion that it stems from. The advantage of artwork referring directly to the artist's own concerns is that the depiction of these can clarify his own thoughts on the subject. These images provoke an internal dialogue in the artist and perhaps a dialogue with those who see them also. Works such as "Help Me" (Fig.24), "What's it Like Being a Junkie?" (Fig. 29) and "Joy Riders" (Fig. 25) are all good examples of this. And needless to say the use of visual mediums in this way can help those who are not verbally orientated, in providing an alternative means of being witty and provocative.



29. WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING A JUNKIE?

Coloured pens on
paper 24" x 30"

St. Patrick's Institution.

The spirit and vitality shown in the work is a hopeful sign because as I have mentioned, Gibbons (1968) found that boys who were "aggressive, extroverted and dynamic" were less likely to be found back in prison than "submissive, helpless and unrealistic boys, having an inadequate response to life".¹¹

Marcus O'Mahony acknowledges that feelings of inadequacy are one of the major preconceptions he has to face: "the greatest obstacle is to get over the 'I can't draw', 'I'm no good' syndrome".¹² But overcoming it is an invaluable development for the student. On a more pessimistic note Marcus faces many of the same problems among his students as the teachers in the adult prisons. For example in reply to the question, "Is it difficult for prisoners to be self-expressive?" he replies:-

Yes, many prisoners suffer from a low self-image and this is reinforced within the prison regime which by its nature denies individuality.¹³

Also while acknowledging the beneficial effects that art can have, he replies to the question, "How do you think the prisoner's experience of making art might affect him when he is released?":

the negative forces in the offender's life are so strong that any brief encounter with art is ineffectual, being too little, too late. The most substantial effect of art in prisons must be in helping the offender to cope with his/her sentence.¹⁴

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER III

¹Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System p. 244.

²Ibid., p. 78.

³O'Mahony, Marcus Questionnaire Q.5, Appendix.

⁴Laing, Joyce, Art Therapy in Prisons, Art as Therapy ed. Tessa Dalley, p. 144.

⁵Oliver, Cordelia, Art and the Special Unit, The Special Unit Barlinnie Prison, Its Evolution Through Its Art Carrell, C., and Laing, J., p. 61.

⁶Lowenfeld, Viktor, Creative and Mental Growth p. 304.

⁷Ibid., p. 326.

⁸Boyle, Jimmy A Sense of Freedom p. 252.

⁹Ibid., p. 251.

¹⁰Storr, Anthony The Dynamics of Creation p. 19.

¹¹Lowenfeld, Viktor p. 326.

¹²O'Mahony, Marcus, Questionnaire Q.4 Appendix.

¹³Ibid., Q.7.

¹⁴Ibid., Q.9.

CHAPTER IV - A Discussion of the Creative Environment
at the Special Unit, Barlinnie Prison.

The negative forces in an offender's life are so strong that any brief encounter is ineffectual on release, being too little, too late.¹

states Marcus O'Mahony. It provokes the question, Under What Conditions would Art have a Really Profound Effect on an Offender's Life? Well, Marcus would welcome an extended timetable, into the evenings and "post-release facilities". This idea of having a place where ex-offenders could go to continue their art makes sense. For as most sentences are short, the prisoners do not get the chance to develop their potential as far as they could and then the sudden break at release time, with no more stimulation from the teachers, the ex-prisoners will find it hard to continue their art amidst the renewed distractions of outside life.

However, as I have pointed out, prison routine itself puts most of the restrictive pressure on the creative efforts of the inmates. Marcus has to work with the present structure, over which he has little influence. In addition, any criticism of it, in public would probably cost him his job, as was the case recently with Pat McManus.² So Marcus's aims for the improvement of art activities have to remain inside strict limits.

The question still remains, under what conditions would art have a really profound effect on an offender's life?

Throughout this discussion I have cited Jimmy Boyle, as an example of a criminal who was transformed, mainly through the discovery of his latent artistic ability. So what were the circumstances of his situation and do they have any relevance for the prison system here in Ireland?

In his autobiography A Sense of Freedom, Boyle describes his own history. But one has to be sceptical about a particular individual's viewpoint, for as Hans Toch writes:-

Inmates who write about prison are neither dispassionate nor representative. They are men who have dealt with their experience by drawing meaning from it.

Clearly Boyle's testament alone would be insufficient to take as evidence. However, in a book called The Special Unit, Barlinnie Prison, Its Evolution Through Its Art, a wide range of contributors write about the prison unit where Boyle and half-a-dozen other prisoners were resident. These include penologists, prison officers, a psychologist, art critics, a Church Minister and other prisoners. This unit was an unique penological experiment and its conditions were different from normal prison. But as the exception from the normal rule, it highlights many questions about the general prison system and conditions in which art can be most fruitfully practiced.

The Special Unit in Barlinnie Prison was set up as a result of a crisis in the Scottish penal system, wherein a number of inmates had become so violent that even when subjected to the most severe punishment, they were still uncontrollable. It had reached the point where a number of men were in the "cages" of Inverness prison, following continual assaults on Wardens. These were literally steel cages, inside concrete cells, where the offenders were locked, sometimes without clothes. Even in these cells a group of inmates managed to riot and seriously injure a number of officers. Before 1967, serious murderers were hanged but now there was no longer this option. The most severe punishment was the cages and once there, the offenders could be punished no more. They were immune to the law.

As a result a special unit was set up to take the handful of uncontrollable prisoners out of the main system. The unit catered for about six prisoners and was initially intended to be psychiatrically orientated, where drugs might be used to deal with unmanageable behaviour. However, it developed into a form of creative community and this is where Boyle and the few other prisoners began to make art.

At the outset, there were two fundamental ways that the unit differed from normal prison. Firstly the prisoners were allowed to make whatever use of their time they wanted

and were only locked in their actual cells between 9.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. Secondly through weekly "Community meetings" between staff and prisoners, the inmates were able to discuss the running of the unit. Through these discussions the prisoners were able to make proposals on decisions concerning them. This democratic approach had a number of effects. It broke down the previous stereotyped prisoner and warden roles. The officers were no longer always right and the prisoners in turn, could no longer view them as a homogenous mass, that was untrustworthy, even sadistic. Boyle described the beginning of this process in himself as follows:-

It made it difficult to tell them to fuck off. Something inside of me, in spite of all the pent up hatred, would tell me that there was something genuine within them. I knew I didn't want to recognise this part of the screws. I preferred to see them all as bastards, this would have been so much easier for me.⁴

In the community meetings many of the normally unquestioned restrictions on prison life were discussed. One change that resulted was that the punishment cell was abolished. This is the symbol of the warden's power and its absence demanded a new approach to punishment. The community meetings assumed this function, in that anyone who behaved anti-socially would be given the "hot-seat" treatment. That is, they would have to explain why they behaved as they did and would face questioning and reproach from the rest of the group. This applied to both officers and inmates. In a normal prison this would be ridiculous, at least until the role-stereotypes

had been broken down. Otherwise loyalty to one's own side, either prison officers or inmates, would prevent anything but sniping from opposite trenches. One of the inmates at Barlinnie describes how effective this method was, he sometimes dreaded facing the meetings. He says:-

You're on your own if you're in the wrong. I'd rather face a court than go into that meeting when I know they are all going to turn on me.⁵

On the other hand the meetings had a supportive role, in that if someone was under particular strain or in difficulty, they would offer understanding and advice.

The increased influence that the inmates had, entailed accepting a degree of responsibility. The prisoners' capacity for this had been started by the main system. But

accepting responsibility was the crucial one (step) as that entailed making decisions, having to consider others, and looking at my own life in relation to others. These were things I had to learn as I had come from a world where decision-making was taken out of my hands.⁶

Boyle writes. He goes on to explain that this was very difficult and the demands of interacting maturely with the whole community showed up the deficiencies of his own character. It began a process of self-examination. He writes:-

To understand others I had to find out more about myself. This is what made the special unit such a tough place to live in - the fact that every single one of us had to look at himself, warts and all, probably for the first time in his life.⁷

This facing up to oneself was what made the special unit unique, and yet it was a traumatic process. Three of the five initial prisoners in the unit requested in writing, to be transferred back to the old prison system, even though the conditions in the unit were luxurious by comparison. One inmate says:-

This is the hardest place I've ever been. A lot of prisoners couldn't take this....They'd prefer the (old) prison. In prison you know the rules. You know exactly where you stand. Mostly you mind your own business and don't grass. You don't want to be any different, you just want to get out.⁸

Hans Toch reported a similar preference between two prisons in Norway. The first, Botsfenglet, was very old and dark, with little contact with staff or other inmates, and with lukewarm food pushed through attrap door at mealtimes. The other, Lla, was bright and modern, with small dining rooms and was "well-staffed":-

"No ecologist worth his salt would consider living in Botsfenglet, but inmates prefer it by a heavy margin. They prefer it because it has clear criteria, known rules and an unambiguous (non-rehabilitative) philosophy.⁹

I was told of a similar preference in Dublin, many inmates prefer Mountjoy over the more relaxed training unit. Though there may be concealed reasons for this.

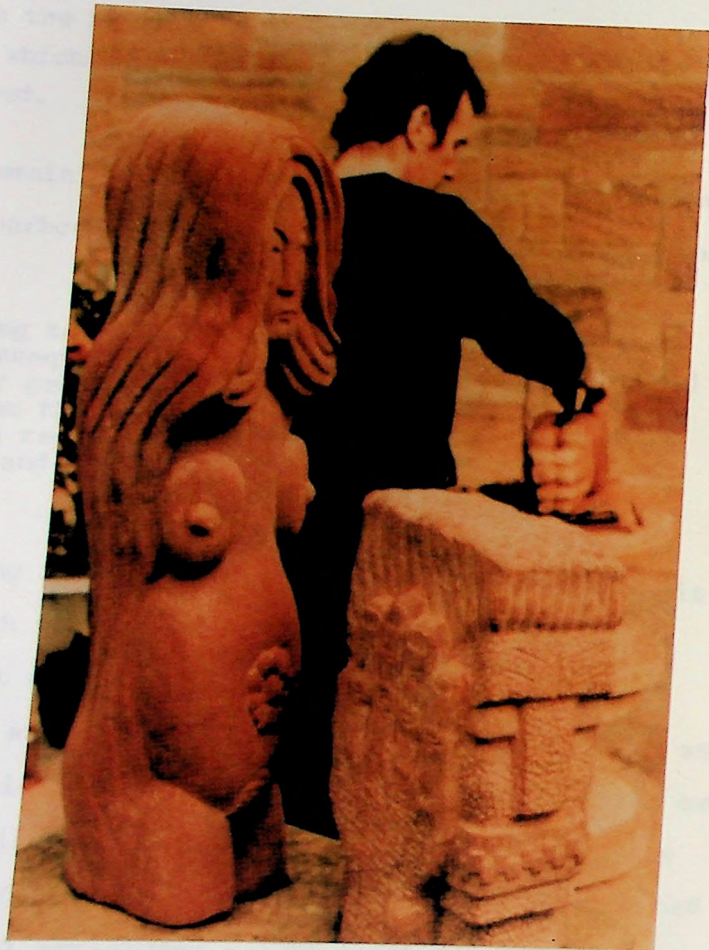
The evidence suggests that prisoners normally want their sentences to pass as quickly as possible with the minimum of confusion. They sleep usually long hours, while locked in their cells for two-thirds of each day. This suits the prison officers as well. However, in the special unit as documented in Boyle's diary,¹⁰ there were frequent crises and swings of mood. To tolerate this both inmates and staff must have commitment and give mutual support. In the Unit there was this support because it was run on a community basis, with constant discussions of the various problems being faced. In addition because what they were doing was unique and if successful would have implications for the wider prison system, there was cohesion and motivation between everybody. Boyle, for instance had suffered terribly in the old system and hated it passionately. The Unit to him, was an opportunity to prove it wrong, to undermine it. The hatred of the old and belief in the new, built up his superego which gave him unusual strength of character.

Boyle's strong motivation rubbed off on the other prisoners from the outset. On Ben Conroy for example, he writes:-

He (Conroy) didn't want to owe them anything as he had been brutalised and totally degraded in every way. At the same time he had tremendous loyalty and knew that the unit was something I was beginning to believe in, so although he was sceptical and dubious he kept going on a superficial level for my sake.¹¹

Sean O'Murchu stressed the necessity of building up a strong superego as a prerequisite of creativity. Well, Boyle was in a unique position, he believed that what he was doing might change the world and there is no stronger superego reinforcement than that.

So the special unit, at Barlinnie created unique conditions (for a prison), where creativity could flourish. To summarise these, firstly prisoners took responsibility for their own routine and actions. Secondly the role system, both of wardens and prisoners was broken down so that each person was treated as an individual. In addition there was a forum for discussion which diffused frustrations and encouraged ideas. There was a real belief in the potential of each prisoner and materials for art were made available almost without restriction, including stone-carving (Fig. 30) metal work, clay modelling and plaster-casting facilities. For security reasons such facilities would normally be out of the question in a prison. The tools involved could be used as lethal weapons and considering the past records of the prisoners in the Unit, a very special degree of trust and courage is evident in that alone. Remember Boyle had been described as, "liable at any time, if given the slightest opportunity, to attack and kill anybody with whom he is liable to come in contact".¹² Further there was no restriction on visitors, any number could visit between 9.00 a.m. and 4.45 p.m. or 6.30 p.m. and 8.45 p.m. Visitors included artists and writers as well as family and friends.



30. BOYLE STONECARVING WITH COMPLETED SCULPTURES IN THE
IN THE FOREGROUND. Circa 1975.

The art therapist Joyce Laing was invited into the Unit on a very informal basis originally. She observed at the time:-

The prisoners were filled with pent-up emotions. Sooner or later they would bubble to the surface and if not negated by other factors, would result in some form of art.¹³

Apart from the restriction on freedom most of the "other factors", which inhibit prisoners, here in Ireland had been removed.

The only remaining factor was the preconceptions that the prisoners harboured about art. Such as the belief of art:-

belonging to the people with education, authority and, consequently power...people, they (the inmates) have for generations regarded as the other class, and often the source of their hardships. There is also the repression of feelings, the denial of emotion and sensitivity.¹⁴

However, Laing introduced art gradually, by discussing it each week with the prisoners. At first they found her attractive but could not find much enthusiasm for art. However, when after a few weeks, she became exasperated and spent the session modelling some clay sculptures of her own instead of trying to persuade them to work, Boyle became interested. When she returned the following week, he had made a few small sculptures. The first one was solitary (Fig. 31). The other prisoners subsequently got involved as well, though some turned to writing instead of sculpture.



31. SOLITARY by Jimmy Boyle plaster, wire and wood.
Special Unit.

Jimmy Boyle has since that day had a number of one-man shows and contributed to group exhibitions internationally.¹⁵ He has also published an autobiography, his prison diaries and co-written a play, The Hard Man which was performed in Edinburgh and London. Boyle's success has tended to overshadow the achievements of the other prisoners. Perhaps unfairly, because Hugh Collins, Tom Galloway and Bob Brodie have all produced interesting work (Figs. 32-34) and this has been exhibited in a touring exhibition throughout Britain.¹⁶ Larry Winters, took up poetry and a selection of his poems called The Silent Scream, was published by Polygon books.

In this paper I have referred to Boyle exhaustively. When I mentioned his name to Sean O Murchu in an interview. O'Murchu thought that:-

Jimmy Boyle is an example of something that is quite rare and should not be put up as an acid test for the prison population in general.¹⁷

I would agree with O'Murchu to the extent that Boyle is far more talented and articulate than most prisoners; very few of whom would have the ability to take art to the level that he has achieved. Boyle also has extraordinary drive and energy. However, the account of his experiences is still useful as an example, because although he had the capacity to develop further than other prisoners, the process he underwent is similar to what all prisoners could undergo but perhaps to a lesser extent.

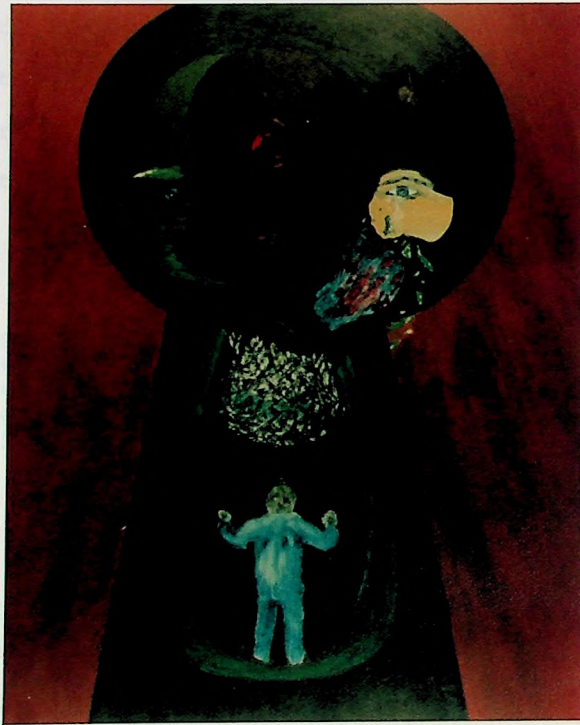


32. EXHAUSTION by Bob Brodie, glazed Ceramic 1980.



33. SOCIAL OUTCAST

by Hugh Collins. Oil on board 1979.
Special Unit.



34. UNTITLED by Tom Galloway, oil on board, 1980.
Special Unit.

What is significant about the special unit is the achievements of all the prisoners. These men were unmanageable or hopeless in the main system but once transferred to the Unit developed into reasonably responsible and capable individuals. The three examples of their work I have illustrated here, are perhaps not attractive as artworks, as the subject matter is "angst-ridden", as they say. But by producing these works these inmates have used art in a way that contributes to their understanding and development. It is integrative. Anthony Storr would approve. And Malcolm Ross, who writes:-

By holding on to the problematic in our feeling experience as distinct from running away from it or merely evacuating the tensions that such problems give rise to we achieve new levels of personal integration.¹⁸

This thesis is an exploration and discussion on some of the questions relating to art in the prison environment. As a subject, it could take a lifetime's work to fully investigate. I have outlined some aspects of it but do not feel in a position to draw conclusions. These would sound like recommendations and I am definitely not a sufficient authority to make recommendations.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER IV

- ¹O'Mahony, Marcus Questionnaire Q.9.
- ²Pat McManus was an education CoOrdinator at Arbour-hill until recently. He was suspended when he criticised the conditions at the prison, following a roof-top protest.
- ³Toch, Hans Living in Prison p. 6.
- ⁴Boyle, Jimmy A Sense of Freedom p. 237.
- ⁵Inmate, quoted by Paterson, Maxwell, H. The Special Unit Barlinnie Prison, Its Evolution Through Its Art ed. Laing, J., Carrell, C., p. 53.
- ⁶Boyle, Jimmy A Sense of Freedom p. 246.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 247.
- ⁸Inmate quoted by Maxwell H. Paterson, The Special Unit, Barlinnie Prison, Its Evolution Through Its Art p. 54.
- ⁹Toch, Hans p. 7.
- ¹⁰Boyle, Jimmy The Pain of Confinement: Prison Diaries.
- ¹¹Boyle, Jimmy A Sense of Freedom p. 244.
- ¹²Governor Inverness Prison The Pain of Confinement Prison Diaries by Jimmy Boyle p. 6.
- ¹³Laing, Joyce, Special Unit Barlinnie Prison, Its Evolution Through Its Art p. 58.

¹⁴Laing, Joyce, Special Unit Barlinnie Prison, Its Evolution Through Its Art p. 56.

¹⁵Exhibitions, Jimmy Boyle.
One-Man: include Third Eye Centre, Glasgow 1976; Hull College of Higher Education 1979; MacRobert Arts Centre Gallery, University of Stirling, 1979
Group Shows: include Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh Festival 1974; 1975; 1980; ICA (London; Pentonville Gallery, London; Whitechapel Gallery London; Venice Biennale.

¹⁶"The Special Unit, Barlinnie Prison : Its Evolution Through Its Art" touring exhibition. Glasgow, Newcastle, Wells, (Norfolk), Carlisle, Orkney, Dumbarton. November 1980 to April 1982.

¹⁷Ross, Malcolm, The Arts and Personal Growth, p. 100.

A P P E N D I X

Questionnaires

1. Bernie Masterson (Training Unit).
2. Christopher Jones (Arbourhill Prison).
3. Marcus O'Mahony (St. Patrick's Institution).

A Cassette of the interview with Seam O Murchu is available on request.

1. The Training Unit. Bernie Masterson.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ART TEACHERS

1. Why do prisoners choose to take art classes? Does anyone advise them?

Prisoners interested in attending classes are offered a wide and varied selection of subjects. The supervising teacher gives a verbal introduction to each of these subjects — and the prisoner makes his mind up depending on his interests.

2. If you have taught in other institutions such as secondary schools, have you found teaching in prison very different?

yes I have. Prisoners attend classes on a voluntary basis — unlike secondary school pupils — and are prepared to put a lot of energy and care into the making of a work of art or a work of Design. Also the class sizes differ greatly. — if a secondary school one could have as many as 30 pupils — in prison the maximum is eight per class. Because the numbers

CEACH PAGE

3. Being in prison is quite an exceptional experience both psychologically and physically. How does art "help prisoners to cope with their sentences"?

Being in prison is very de-humanising. Art instruction helps to humanise prisoners by encouraging free expression of feelings and emotions. It helps in the release of so many "changed emotions that prisoners experience perhaps due to their immediate environment. It raises the level of prisoners self confidence, and satisfaction in work that has been well done, also it promotes constructive use of leisure time activities.

4. What kinds of preconceptions about art do prisoners who are new to your class have? Do you find these an obstacle? Or perhaps, the students because of having had less contact with the "art world" are fresh and more receptive?

Some of the preconceptions are that art is an inborn talent, that its for the well educated etc. These are thoughts that are erased throughout the duration of the art course. Prisoners with no preconception about art are naturally less inhibited and more confident in the practical area of art.

5. Do you think the prison environment affects the kind of art work that prisoners produce? For instance, is art an opportunity for them to "escape" in their imaginations from the realities of prison?

yes certainly it does!
a lot of prison art work involves symbols of freedom, like birds, broken chains, etc. On the other hand some "escape" in their imaginations to their loved ones, girlfriends, children, and to domestic scenes. It's a way of remembering who they are outside of the institution.

6. Some inmates copy from photographs or other artists' work. What is your opinion on this?

This I feel can be a good practice from a technical point of view, it also builds up confidence using different mediums, and teaches prisoners about other artists methods or trade marks. But it is not a practice I would encourage time and time again. I strive for the prisoners personal creative and artistic ability.

7. Is it difficult for prisoners to be "self-expressive"?

It is if they haven't found the right medium to express themselves in. Some use the medium of words, other music or art. On art alone there are so many mediums in which to express oneself. It's a matter of finding the right medium for the right person.

8. What happens to the art that is made in the classes? Who sees it?

Prison art is made available to the general public at least once a year. All works are usually for sale and the response is always good. Having an annual exhibition is a great motivator for prisoners attending art classes.

9. How do you think the prisoners' experience of making art might effect him, when he is released?

Hopefully it will encourage him to use his leisure time constructively and effectively, by making art, or by appreciating it in galleries, or at exhibitions.

10. How does attending art classes help develop "self-esteem or "self-reliance"?

In art classes, prisoners take pride in work that has been well done, this leads to the concept of care and self worth. Also through self expression - self esteem will automatically occur.

11. One teacher was recently quoted in the Irish Times as saying that art classes help to keep the prisoners "sane". Is this an exaggeration?

It does help to keep prisoners sane in so far as it allows them to "escape" in their imaginations to other worlds and out of the harsh reality of the prison world.

12. How would you like art activities in prisons to develop in future?

I would like to see more visiting artists, more in house exhibitions, more contact between outside art and inside art.

- ② are small, it is quite easy to work on a one to one level, allowing for personal deviation throughout.

2. Christopher Jones (Arbour Hill)

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ART TEACHERS

1. Why do prisoners choose to take art classes? Does anyone advise them?

First to help pass the time for some.
Others because they have the ability to do
art. No one advises them.

2. If you have taught in other institutions such as secondary schools, have you found teaching in prison very different?

Not Much

3. Being in prison is quite an exceptional experience both psychologically and physically. How does art "help prisoners to cope with their sentences"?

Its a form of Escape.

4. What kinds of preconceptions about art do prisoners who are new to your class have? Do you find these an obstacle? Or perhaps, the students because of having had less contact with the "art world" are fresh and more receptive?

Inform them very fast and eager
to learn.

5. Do you think the prison environment affects the kind of art work that prisoners produce ? For instance, is art an opportunity for them to "escape" in their imaginations from the realities of prison ?

yes I find that it must be a form of Escape, because most of there work are landscapes and the view outdoors.

6. Some inmates copy from photographs or other artists' work. What is your opinion on this ?

For the first part of the question, it helps them to mix colours, 2nd when they are copying other Art's work, they learn brush work.

7. Is it difficult for prisoners to be "self-expressive" ?

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8. What happens to the art that is made in the classes ? Who sees it ?

The paintings that are done in class, either go into prison Exhibitions, or they are sent home, also some men prefer to keep them themselves.

9. How do you think the prisoners' experience of making art might effect him, when he is released?

quite a few continue to paint afterwards.

10. How does attending art classes help develop "self-esteem or "self-reliance"?

because anything they do in art, no matter how good or bad, is a form of self-expression.

11. One teacher was recently quoted in the Irish Times as saying that art classes help to keep the prisoners "sane". Is this an exaggeration?

No

12. How would you like art activities in prisons to develop in future?

more Exhibitions, more different forms of art, and also displayed in the prisons themselves,

3.

St Patricks Institution, S. Mary.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ART TEACHERS

1. Why do prisoners choose to take art classes? Does anyone advise them?

Art is an integral part of the educational programme. An outline of the course is given by the supervising teacher at the initial interview.

2. If you have taught in other institutions such as secondary schools, have you found teaching in prison very different?

Yes. The emphasis shifts most radically from an examination orientation, to an individual-centred one. The continuity which exists in the secondary school cannot be expected in the Prison Service. Fragmentation and lack of ongoing development is a feature of teaching.

3. Being in prison is quite an exceptional experience both psychologically and physically. How does art "help prisoners to cope with their sentences"?

Art can be a constructive, interesting and fully absorbing activity for the prisoner and once the interest is tapped the prisoner can feel fulfilled.

4. What kinds of preconceptions about art do prisoners who are new to your class have? Do you find these an obstacle? Or perhaps, the students because of having had less contact with the "art world" are fresh and more receptive?

Both parts of this question hold some validity. However the greatest obstacle is to get over the 'I can't draw', 'I'm no good' syndrome.

5. Do you think the prison environment affects the kind of art work that prisoners produce ? For instance, is art an opportunity for them to "escape" in their imaginations from the realities of prison ?

It has always been an effort to stimulate prisoners and the prison environment limits their imagination in my experience.

6. Some inmates copy from photographs or other artists' work. What is your opinion on this ?

My own preference would be for the prisoner to engage in greater self expression. However if such methods can stimulate I consider them valid and of value.

7. Is it difficult for prisoners to be "self-expressive" ?

Yes. Many prisoners suffer from a low self image and this is reinforced within the prison regime which by its nature denies individuality.

8. What happens to the art that is made in the classes ? Who sees it ?

Public exhibitions are a regular feature. A series of internal exhibitions are planned for this summer aimed specifically at the prison population at large.

9. How do you think the prisoners' experience of making art might effect him, when he is released?

The negative forces in the offender's life are so strong that any brief encounter with art is ineffectual, being too little too late, on release. The most substantial effect of art in prisons must be in helping the offender to cope with his/her sentence.

10. How does attending art classes help develop "self-esteem or "self-reliance"?

Art can be a positive experience and therefore can strengthen the ego. It involves many offenders for the first time in group cooperative situations.

11. One teacher was recently quoted in the Irish Times as saying that art classes help to keep the prisoners "sane". Is this an exaggeration?

Providing the interest and motivation is there this could indeed be true.

12. How would you like art activities in prisons to develop in future?

I would like to encourage a wider experience of materials, a more flexible time table i.e. evening classes, post release facilities, visits by practising artists.

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