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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

Design in Ireland

Report of the Scandinavian Design Group in Ireland .

April 1961

Kaj Franck, Erik Herløw, Åke Hultdt

Gunnar Büllmann Petersen,

Erik Chr. Sørensen.

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The part played by commercial firms in providing facilities for the Group to examine their plants and design departments requires special acknowledgement, particularly as they cannot be mentioned by name. It is also noteworthy that of the many firms which were approached none demurred at full inspection even with the knowledge that their present design performance in many cases fell short by European standards.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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Head of the design department at Arabia ceramic factory and Notsjö glass works, Finland. Art Director at the Finnish School of Industrial Art. Awarded the Fullbright Scholarship 1955, the Lunning prize 1955; Triennale Milan, Diplome d'Honneur, 1954, Grand Prix, 1957. Compasso d'Oro, Milan 1957. Member of the jury for the Compasso d'Oro, 1960, Kaufmann International prize award 1961.

ERIK HERLOW

Architect. Professor of Industrial Design, Royal Academy of Copenhagen, member of the Academie Architects' Society, Vice President Danish Association of Industrial Design. Chief instructor at the Goldsmiths High School, Copenhagen, 1952-54. Artistic Director of the Royal Copenhagen Porcelain Factory since 1955. Architect for National Danish Exhibitions in Italy, England, United States, France, Sweden, etc. Holder of International design awards including: Grand Prix, Triennale Milan 1951, Gold and Silver medal, Triennale 1954, Gold medal Triennale 1957. Eckersberg Medal, U.S. Member of the jury for the Kaufmann International Prize award 1960.

ÅKE HULDT

Architect, Designer and Educationalist. Manager of Svensk-Form, the Swedish Design Centre. Instructor at the School of Arts and Crafts in Stockholm. 1957, Chalmers Technical High School, Gothenburg, 1945-49, Svenska Sløjdföreningen, Gothenburg, 1941-50. Has exhibited extensively in Europe and elsewhere. Author of many publications on industrial design and visual education.

GUNNAR BILLMANN PETERSEN

Professor of Industrial Graphics and Typography at the Royal Academy of Copenhagen since 1951. Instructor at the Royal Academy in the School of Graphics and later the department of Sculpture, 1923-45. Head of Tegnekunstindustri-skolen for Kvinder, 1924-29. Head of the metal work-shop of the Technical School, 1924-25. Designer of electrical equipment, city transportation (buses), posters, labels, furniture, neon light letters, glass-work, lamps, bottles, clocks, etc. Has published studies of pottery and china.

ERIK CHR. SORENSEN

Architect, Department Head at Royal Academy of Copenhagen. Teacher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, U.S.A. 1948-49. Royal Academy Eckersberg medallist 1957. Has published extensively in Europe and America.

In October 1960 Córas Tráchtála was given responsibility by the Government for the improvement of standards of industrial design. Good design is an undeniable necessity to the growth of our export trade, but standards cannot be raised for export goods only. The factors which determine the quality, good or bad, of the designs we produce are deeply rooted in our homes, our schools, our shops, our historical traditions, our whole way of living.

In confronting this many-headed assignment we felt that the first need was for an audit of the existing situation, an authoritative and impartial assessment of where we now stand. Lacking such an assessment any measures we might attempt could be no better than random poultices applied with more hope than conviction.

It was natural in the situation to turn to the Scandinavians. Their achievements in design are enviable and, interestingly, of fairly recent origin; the scale of their industry, their raw materials, the patterns of their society, are similar in many aspects to ours; their successes in export markets impressive.

The response to our request for assistance was most heartening. Six industrial designers and teachers of design, of international reputation—three from Denmark, two from Finland and one from Sweden—were approached to make the survey we required. All accepted, the Scandinavian Design Group was formed and arrangements made for

the visit to Ireland to take place in April 1961, with the preparation of a report to follow as quickly as possible thereafter.

During the period of a two-week stay the members of the Group visited a representative cross-section of factories and workshops in Dublin and throughout the country. They examined the range of Irish-manufactured goods displayed in our shops; they studied the source material for design which exists in our libraries, art galleries and museums. Visits were made and discussions took place with Principals, members of the staffs and students at the National College of Art, the School of Architecture in U.C.D., the Colleges of Technology in Bolton Street and Rathmines, and the Schools of Art in Cork and Waterford.* Meetings were arranged with the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland and with other groups and individuals professionally concerned. At the conclusion of their visit the Group conducted a series of five seminars for those engaged in different aspects of industrial design.

In order to avoid the rigidity imposed by terms of reference the Group were asked to select for inclusion in the report those matters which from their own observation it seemed most pertinent to examine.

This report does not purport to be a comprehensive review of industrial design in Ireland; more time than was available on this occasion would be needed for such an undertaking. It is rather the synthesis of views of five eminent practitioners and educationalists from three countries who made a brief, but very intensive, survey of our situation. Their findings are here presented.

* *Pressure of time prevented the Limerick School of Art from being included in the Group's itinerary.*

One of the Finns, Timo Sarpaneva, had subsequently to withdraw his name as the time eventually fixed for the visit coincided with a commission from the Finnish Government which he had earlier accepted.

No professional fees were accepted by the members of the Group on the grounds that they wished the assignment to be regarded as a contribution to the furtherance of improvement in design and as a gesture of their goodwill towards our undertaking.

INTRODUCTION

Our stay in Ireland was a brief one. Despite this, however, we were able to form quite specific impressions on the situation of design in Ireland, and the degree of importance which your society attaches to it. We were assisted in this by having received a most comprehensive briefing preparatory to our arrival, and also by the fact that we were working in our own fields and were able to bring our professional experience to bear on the problems we encountered. We also received invaluable aid from many distinguished educationalists, designers and manufacturers who collaborated with Córas Tráchtála by giving us detailed information and opening the doors of their schools and factories. A countrywide tour of Ireland took us to schools, museums and factories in Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kildare and Waterford.

A remarkable feature of Irish life which we noted, even after a few days, is the manner in which today's Irish culture has developed a distinct leaning towards literature, theatre, the spoken word and abstract thinking, rather than creation by hand or machine and the visual arts—the other side of human activity in civilisation.

While understanding something of the historical circumstances which contribute to this situation, we feel that the lack of creative and visual activity is paralleled by the fact that the Irish school child is exposed in a much lesser degree to drawing and the manipulation of materials than

his Scandinavian counterpart. Without our being able to gauge exactly the significance of general art education at an early age for the artist or artisan, it is quite natural to believe that the interest and appreciation of the layman are stimulated by such early personal experience. In fact it would probably be true to say that without some reasonably developed form of art education in the various levels of schools in Ireland, it will be impossible to produce the informed and appreciative public so necessary as a background to the creative artist.

We would emphasise at this stage that it was not our mission in Ireland to recommend the 'adoption' of Scandinavian design, indeed we would strongly advise against the unqualified transplantation of features from Scandinavian countries to Ireland, even if such action would have passing economic benefits. We feel that the result of such an approach would be to kill what can be saved and what still exists of the original Irish values and culture, and stifle the development of true Irish tradition and the great opportunities which the present situation seems to offer.

Scandinavian production in the realm of arts and crafts and industrial design is largely based on the development of traditional crafts and abilities. We believe that one of the great factors in the success of Scandinavian design abroad is that the production is based on what has already been established and on local demand rather than on export requirements. The Scandinavians designed and manufactured work for Scandinavians and the ultimate export success depended on this outlook.

In general, the best-designed products we found in Ireland were those based on traditional craft industries successfully interpreting the Irish tradition. Outstanding examples were

the Donegal tweeds and the handknitted sweaters of traditional design. At the other end of the scale, we found many products which were badly designed and executed, and which, in our view, would not have the slightest chance of competing successfully on the world market. We understand that many of the industries we visited have been established only relatively recently and, taking this into consideration, their accomplishments have been remarkable.

Nevertheless the successful development of these industries will depend on their placing much greater emphasis on design than heretofore. We gained a strong impression in many of the factories we studied that product design was not considered with the serious attention it demands, and that the designer, when he existed, was regarded as a somewhat frivolous addition to the staff, rather than having the status of a key member of the management team.

The question of education of designers will be explored in the succeeding pages, and at this stage we shall only say that we encountered in Ireland the extraordinary situation of a multiplicity of art, architectural and craft schools, not one of which appeared to us capable of adequately satisfying the needs of the country in regard to design.

We have in the following pages reviewed various institutions and industries and have tried to do so frankly and in a constructive manner, keeping very much in mind the fact that Irish products contribute fundamentally to the picture of Ireland presented to the outside world, and that Irish export trade and the tourist industry depend heavily on design.

Some of our proposals may seem far-reaching, but we would stress that isolated attacks on the problem will have very little impact. A designer here or a seminar there will

not appreciably alter the situation. A co-ordinated scheme for raising the standards in schools, buildings, factories, in education and in industry should be aimed at.

This, in our opinion, can best be accomplished by the creation of an Irish institute devoted to the promotion of the visual arts. This recommendation is dealt with fully in a later section of the report.

In carrying out the recommended programme all the elements of Irish society will have a part to play—the Government, educationalists, manufacturers, architects and designers, department stores and the organs of publicity, the press, radio and television. In particular the departments of the Government have a most significant contribution to make towards raising the level of design by reviewing the design of public buildings, office furnishings, publications, stamps, etc. and taking positive steps to remove those features which are bad and ugly and reflect no credit on Ireland. It is obvious that the Churches also can be of particular help by raising their standards of architecture and decoration.

In our view, Ireland, by virtue of her lack of sophistication in matters of design, has a unique opportunity, denied by circumstances to many more developed countries, of making a great contribution, not alone to her own prosperity and culture, but to the culture of Western Europe. We believe that with courage and foresight, the possibilities can be realised.

I. DESIGN IN IRELAND

When in the introduction to this report we warn against Irish acquisition of Scandinavian features, it is due to our knowledge that modern Scandinavian production is the result of a cultivation of special local conditions. Up to the time when exports began to increase, the bulk of Scandinavian-designed products were created for an appreciative home market and what led to a wider interest abroad was a sense of quality in regard to materials and craftsmanship, and, to a considerable extent, the application of traditional forms to modern conditions.

The use of borrowed forms of decoration is common enough in modern production, but shallow utilisation of old or foreign models has never led to the creation of anything of value. In our passage through Irish production, therefore, we have constantly paid attention to what valuable national characteristics we could find, which would enable Ireland to put on the market something out of the ordinary with a distinct Irish quality.

We have searched after good Irish design tradition and we have been asked what we meant by 'Irish tradition'. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, tradition is opinion or custom handed down from ancestors to posterity . . . artistic principles based on accumulated experience or continuous usage. What has been handed down in Ireland and what has been accumulated from experience has today in Ireland two or three different manifestations.

The most perceptible are the rural handicraft, the Georgian tradition, and the early Christian culture.

In tweed weaving, knitting, etc., the rural handicraft is still alive and so is even the Georgian tradition but in so attenuated a form as to be difficult of application. As to the early Christian culture, its artistic manifestations had lapsed long before the Georgian period and thus today's use of the early ornaments is scarcely more of a tradition in Ireland than elsewhere. However, Ireland has abundant sources of inspiration in the high crosses and ornamental objects and they have been utilised for the past 75 years. It deserves notice that the designers have almost invariably turned to the queerest and most complex motifs, the inter-laced animals, etc., which are apt to lose their proper character when reproduced in modern processes and will rarely harmonise with the surroundings of our time. On the other hand there is an unemployed treasure of Irish patterns fit for design usage; the simple granite carvings and the small ornaments scattered over the pages of the illuminated manuscripts. We would not, however, like to see designers turning to these sources merely to bring something new on to the market. This ancient culture is worthy of artists who will understand and respect the simple strength and organic rhythm of the antiquities.

The Georgian tradition we regard as English, not Irish, in its origins, even if the considerable supply of Georgianism in Ireland is modified to give it some especial characteristics. In England, its natural home, it is barely alive and at the last extremity.

This reminds us of a parallel with Denmark. Both Ireland and Denmark have a large overpowering neighbour, and as Ireland has been influenced by England, so Denmark has been influenced by Germany. For many years the Danish

kings and nobility were German or almost entirely so, and furthermore, since the Reformation, Denmark adopted German Lutheranism. Ireland never adopted the English form of worship, but it has had an English Government and English-minded ruling class. It has had materials and products from England, and for unnumbered years the handicraft and architectural culture of the country has been influenced by England. But it has seemed to us that the Irish when confronting the English market have frequently adopted the most common and hackneyed features of English production.

Of course every country must be influenced by its neighbours and it can be said straight away that the particular forms of Danish furniture, silver, ceramics, etc., which led to economic success in later years, were based to a large extent on what came from Germany. But the core of Danish style derives from the work of a series of Danish artists, architects, painters and sculptors who through generations were aware of the essential qualities of materials. They animated each other in their common sympathy for exquisite material and its properties, for treatments which paid regard to proportions, problems of production and use, and finally, to the normal human scale. This to an extent which makes ornamentation almost superfluous and which at any rate is not unduly influenced by passing fashions.

To illustrate this spirit, it should be mentioned that for many years Scandinavian artists have avoided staining and high glossy polishing of wood. Similarly in many cases they have refrained from ornamenting silver or ceramics and concentrated instead on cultivating the relationship between form, clay and glazing, a development which is now accepted as an art in its own right.

A very close relation to this respect for the structure of materials is to be found in the Scandinavian comprehension of colour. In some countries one often finds rooms with nearly the same colour on walls, ceilings, windows, doors and upholstery, as if the entire room had been soaked in a dyer's vat. We find a modern cult which attempts to make exactly the same shades of colour on wool, silk, paper, plastics, paints, etc. In Scandinavia, for instance, such efforts would not be popular as Scandinavian designers believe that different materials with differing functions claim different colours. To the Scandinavians, moreover, there is a perceptive relation between colour and material which is dictated by the very nature of the latter. Kaare Klint, the furniture designer who had the greatest influence on Danish production, always preferred unstained leather for upholstery. He tolerated neither de-greasing or levelling of colour but wanted to have the natural dark line along the backbone in the middle of the chairs, etc. The same artist felt the impracticality of clear or violent colours for carpets, just as he found it against the order of nature to make roses to walk on. He developed a production of carpets geometrical in design and made from Icelandic wool unaltered in colour—unbleached white, different shades of buff and black—in fact just as it grew on the sheep.

The original tweeds and a great many other Irish products derive their effect from a similar connection with nature and, bearing in mind the above examples, we must advise you to take care of this line of production and pay attention to good materials, careful craftsmanship and practical form, as attractive design in our case has developed from an acquaintance with materials, methods of production and the main human requirements.

In common with other nations, Ireland must of course pay attention to passing fashions, but as competition from countries with very big populations is too strong in the field of cheap goods, quality of craftsmanship and design becomes absolutely essential. Here is where the study and understanding of the original Irish culture is of great value, for the penetration of this distinctively Irish spirit into Irish production will develop abilities in the appraisal of forms which will be useful even when leaving the national traditions.

Textiles

The field of textiles is one of the most interesting as far as Ireland is concerned and is of course a wonderful field for designers. On the same loom the same material can produce at the same price a wonderful fabric or a dull uninteresting cloth. The manufacturer himself may sometimes lose sight of this, preoccupied as he must be with prices, production and tradition. At the same time it is worth while to note that the textile field is more influenced by fashion than most of the other commodities we shall discuss. Textiles are one of the big items on the world market, but the successful selling product seems to be unpredictable. It follows that the textile designer must, besides the technical knowledge and feeling for the material, have a flair not only for the rapidly changing fashions as manifested in this year's taste, but also for the more profound transition in the way of life taking place in the world today. However, the designer who takes a trip to London or Paris to try and pick up the colours and patterns which will be in vogue next season, will do his manufacturer a disservice and leave him still only competing in price. What the designer should be able to do is to help set the

policy of the firm. Textiles are world-wide and the businessman can buy from Hong Kong as well as Milan. A firm in this field must set its goal, have a clear and well defined aim, and with good production it will surely find its true customers.

In Ireland the industry seems to be divided between firms basing their production on traditional handicrafts and more recently established firms set up to replace imported textile goods and protected against their competition. We feel that many of the faults to be found in Irish textiles spring from this cause. Because they are attempting to replace the foreign-manufactured article they have tried to imitate it and manufacture a great many lines with a mixture of foreign styles and production techniques. Instead of being Irish, their textile goods are French, English or Japanese, and we know from our experience that this is a disastrous approach. A preferable policy would be to strike out and experiment with new ideas and production methods, to concentrate on a few lines of excellent quality rather than copying the production of other countries, and endeavour to produce something of unique design and quality. We believe that ultimately this would be a more economic policy. These remarks do not, of course, apply to all Irish textile mills. Some of the factories we visited were working on the lines outlined above, but they were exceptions.

Textile Printing

In this field, as in others, we shall have to generalise as it is not our intention to single out individual firms for either praise or adverse comment. Textile printing in Ireland is a very young industry and technically has made good progress. The workshops are equipped with the best

machinery and are producing technically good work. They have, in our opinion, definite possibilities of manufacturing first-class printed cloths. Two of the firms we visited had their own design studios but too often the work was based on casually chosen designs of foreign origin purchased from the "pattern parasites" of Europe. These "pattern factories" produce designs which are today distributed all over the world. The patterns are superficial, made by routine, and with no particular person in mind.

A fabric, like a dress or a piece of jewellery, has to be designed for a certain person. This somebody is very often the artist himself. What makes the creation appreciated by other people is the natural wish of the artist to evolve something desirable which somehow "charges" the creation and gives it a stronger meaning. To design a pattern for a fabric is to create a surface that holds together. The motif or figure has to be subordinated to the rhythm, shades, and colours. From the very beginning the pattern has to be specially designed for a particular fabric and related to its thickness, transparency and other qualities. Too often the managements of printing factories fail to understand this and instead of employing qualified designers have some copyists who re-work and simplify the Continental cartoons on the advice of the firms' salesmen. The result is that the already inferior patterns lose the last of their charm. The copyists are not supposed to create anything themselves and this is the weak point of the system. The designer of the pattern should develop it himself, choose the material to be printed and the colour schemes, be involved in new articles, fashion and display. It is possible to expand this field of work even further.

Textile Design

In the studios we visited there seemed to be a lack of artistic understanding of the medium, which is probably due to the absence of proper educational facilities for designers. The lack of a qualified designer at management level was particularly apparent in the choice of materials. Very often the wrong materials are utilised and it is evident in many of the designs that there is not an awareness of such fundamentals as the ultimate function of the material.

The Finnish printing industry provides a good example for Ireland, for up to five or six years ago Finnish patterns were merely developments of European-purchased designs. Then a small daring team of textile designers took over a printing workshop in Helsinki. After some experiments they put on the market a collection of patterns that they unreservedly liked themselves. These patterns had a limited success; some people liked them but they disappeared in the flood of international patterns overflowing the shops. Some stores would not even take the fabrics. The result was of course grave economic difficulties. The designers next opened a boutique and successfully sold dresses made of simple cotton with the new gay Finnish patterns. The new designs gradually became accepted. Originally the designs were made for the founders themselves and their Finnish countrywomen whose figures and colouring differ somewhat from other Scandinavians. In this way a distinctively Finnish fashion was developed, a style that partly follows the fashions of the Continent but whose patterns and colours have their own laws. Because of their originality these fabrics have become a successful Finnish export. The large textile factories who had been closely watching these advances, gradually appreciated that here was an

idea which could achieve positive results. Consultants, colour experts and designers were employed by the big firms and were allowed to design patterns following their own ideas and not based on imported patterns or customer's calculations. Good results have been achieved but it must be stressed that only by great determination and dedication was success possible.

In Ireland something of the same spirit is needed. The bulk of Irish production is in fashion fabrics and consequently the different firms should establish qualified contacts in this field abroad. Furnishing fabrics are not developed but could be if the industry encourages young gifted designers who would have to be trained abroad. We should like to see the industry bringing in qualified consultant designers at board-room level and at the same time sending their young apprentice designers abroad for training.

Linen

Irish linen needs no praise. The quality still seems to be the very best. Among the damask patterns we found designs with a somewhat roughly composed naturalism (shamrock and other plant motifs) which hardly did justice to the material. Both flower motifs and geometric patterns can undoubtedly be cultivated to a higher artistic perfection and the quality of Irish linen deserves the very best of damask drawing.

Woollen and other woven cloths

Influence from abroad is nowhere more evident than in this section of the textile industry, and our earlier remarks in this section apply especially to it (see p. 10). The cloths for suitings, etc., are largely derivative and the necessity for the development of new ideas and designs is apparent.

Poplin

As far as we know Irish poplin is woven by only one firm. Materials, colouring and weaving seem to be of the highest quality. The colours are to a rather large extent dictated by tartans, regiment and club stripes, but many of the independent colours and patterns are excellent. We were saddened to hear that because the number of apprentices in hand weaving is so small one of the main problems is to secure the maintenance of this old trade which throws such a lustre on Irish production. In our view, because of the distinct and unique nature of the material it has great opportunities on the world market, and strenuous efforts should be made to keep it alive by encouraging apprentices to the trade.

Donegal tweeds

Probably the most valuable and brilliant facet of Ireland's textile industry. We can have nothing but praise for the production and one of the firms we visited could stand as a model to all others. It occurs to us that the traditional patterns and colours seem immediately more valuable than where the designs are more or less dependent on changing fashion claims. Therefore we propose the establishment of a tweed museum which would illustrate the history of the craft/industry and show the various stages of growth and development and the techniques used in production. All the old colour recipes, directions on colouring methods, samples of the original ways of spinning and weaving, etc., could be collected and preserved so that fading and other changes are avoided. On the basis of this element a production could be started, the patterns and quality of which would remain unchanged from the ancient ones. The goods produced by the industry in

catering for changing fashion would thus maintain the high standards acquired through generations. It could be that the collecting of the old materials would result in a revival of the colours and cloths in which people have lost interest and it would be possible for designers, given the opportunity to study the collection, to create variants with influence on the fashion-centres.

Hand knitwear

Again an excellent industry. The production is based on Irish traditional patterns of great beauty and the quality of the yarn is superb. It would probably be of great benefit if the white wool could be supplemented with natural black or brown and experiments could be undertaken in spinning together the wools of different colours. (We did not see any black sheep on our travels, but could not somebody breed them?) We do not approve of the tendency, which we noted, to descend to the dyeing of the yarn into fashion colours. In the traditional patterns, rope, diamond, cable, moss, you have a treasure which is capable of further development, but which at the same time must be safeguarded.

Handmade carpets

The production of tied carpets is of a very high quality but artistic standards need to be raised and could be by the choice of better patterns and designs, and by attention to the finish of the carpets which we consider too shiny at present. A collection of carpet drawings showed that the work of the designer's office was skilful but dull. We were told that the only patterns utilised were dictated by the customers or their architects, so that the entire production is concentrated on supplies for certain places existing or

being built. As for goods for stock, nothing is made except a few pieces for exhibition purposes. These latter surpassed in no way the articles made to order. In our view, the industry would be well advised to make their samples works of art in order to animate their customers into buying better drawings than those they usually produce for themselves.

A fine Irish rug ought to be one of the items at the next major international fair or exhibition. The industry should experiment with natural earth colours in conjunction with natural wools which we think would be suitable for the technique. It could also be recommended that a foreign consultant be employed during the period of transition.

Machine-made carpets

We saw two different types of carpeting, the normal machine-made carpet and sisal carpeting. In regard to the former we found all the faults we have mentioned when referring to textile printing—imitations of foreign carpets, attempts to anticipate next year's fashions, resulting in shallow and worthless designs, and a general lack of understanding of the medium by all concerned with production. It is difficult to generalise, for in one firm we visited we were conscious of efforts to improve the production, while in another there was clearly no attempt being made to make an individual contribution to the industry. In one factory we were told that monochrome carpets sold best. This is not surprising as the correct conception of the carpet is as a surface to stand on, a ground which perfectly reflects the materials, wood, brick-work, metal and wall coverings which are used in interior decorating.

A firm cannot hope to get the best from its designers if they are, so to speak, placed at a drawing board with blinkers on their eyes, the noise of the looms in their ears, and wool dust in their noses. The artists should have an opportunity to see the latest developments in architecture and interior design in Ireland and abroad and picture the carpets in the surroundings of homes, hotels or public buildings.

The patterns we saw were not good. Those based on oriental or antique models were violent, as the pattern detail had been torn out of the composition of a complete carpet and then this detail had been endlessly repeated. We missed anything in the line of discreetly patterned carpets (striped, stippled, checked and so on), which catch the marks and flecks without creating any impression of depth or glinting pile. The "modern" patterns, whether they had been cooked up from cubist or informalist paintings, were extremely irritating to look at. We cannot believe that a carpet is composed simply as a little colourful decoration designed to catch the eye in a catalogue or shop window. We do not think that the tension of a non-figurative painting, or the charm of the tachist's whimsical brushwork can be forced into the formula of the Jacquard card, or that rapid changes in fashion should influence the designing of carpet patterns. The Axminster and Wilton type carpets appear to be of good quality and not very different from their British models. So far, however, in these young industries, we do not find that genuine feeling for textiles which distinguishes so many Irish wool products.

Sisal carpets

From a qualitative point of view the Irish sisal weaving maintains a very high level of production. It is an interest-

ing type of fabrication in that it depends on native skill applied to a foreign product and for this reason assumes an especial importance. The patterns we saw had a casual joviality which was not to our taste. The design problem is to produce something which is a practical floor covering and at the same time retains the natural character of the rough and stiff sisal, which with careless design or colouring can easily be made to look like an artificial product. Where this conflict exists a firm must give the most careful thought to its choice of designer.

Glass

Everyone who sees the Irish glass must initially be impressed. It is a magnificent achievement to develop an industry based on skilled craftsmanship in such a short space of years. The idea of reviving the old trade name and basing the production on models from the museum seems good at first sight. What then is wrong? First, the chosen originals are in many cases not good enough, and in any event the industry has moved away from the prototypes as the demand is not covered by them. Today the production can best be described as playing on the layman's sentiments. The glass is excellent and the industry is to be complemented on getting top-class assistance in order to bring the technique to such a high level. Unfortunately the shapes are often not artistically satisfactory and even the copies are not true to the cultivated eye. The relationship between the shape and the decoration is sometimes an unhappy one. Maybe the diamonds are placed a couple of millimetres too low on the glass for example. It seems perhaps a small point, but details of this sort distinguish the first from the second class product. In our view while technique and craftsmanship have been developed in the

industry, the keen eye has been neglected and the natural sensitivity of the artist has not been employed. This means that the industry will not only be unable to advance with new shapes, but will fail to set the standards of performance necessary to keep a tradition alive. We would consider it desirable that the industry which is doing so outstandingly well commercially and technically, make a radical re-orientation in its outlook by retaining the services of a top design consultant, to help evaluate the existing situation, and by regular consultation at management level, develop a new and more inspiring policy for the future.

Ceramics

The technical equipment and other facilities in the china and pottery works which we visited are quite satisfactory and sufficient to give a much higher standard of production. In their present state of development these factories could not hope for success in competition with, let us say, the German factories. What is now produced is mainly based on bad English production, both as regards design and form, decorated with transfers which have been imported from England and elsewhere. It follows that the relation between the shape and decoration is haphazard and meaningless. No one can expect an artistic result from having Dutch transfers of an English scene with no specific purpose, put on a cup in an Irish factory. These designs are difficult to change, partly because they are customary and partly because the patterns are so much in use that even the replacements for the broken sets demand a considerable production. It is unlikely that the form of decoration could be changed in the near future, for it would be difficult to find or train hand painters. Where patterns of

Irish origin have been employed they have been treated wrongly and do not fulfil their purpose of being expressions of Irish tradition. Much of the pottery industry's production consists of sets for restaurants and cafés and many of the models are so ordinary that they could be improved by quite small alterations in shape and decoration. The function of the decoration on a shape is what matters and while the identification mark on hotel or restaurant ware probably does not call for a creative artist, it still needs a man with professional insight.

If a draughtsman could be trained to a certain sensitivity to be able to judge how light or how heavy a print should be in relation to a shape and how it should follow the form, it would be quite reasonable for an Irish printer to take up the manufacture of transfers. The demand for advertisement articles alone should keep a printing machine busy.

The managements of the china and pottery factories should consider setting aside money for development work, e.g. for training casters. The casting at present is poor and unsatisfactory and it would be very easy to raise this standard by sending men to study in Denmark where casting techniques are more highly developed than in England. Better glazes and chemicals should be used, which means a more qualified selection and contact with the manufacturers of glazes abroad. At the same time it might be worth while to try to interest Irish sculptors and craft potters, who from their professional background have many of the qualities needed to spur an improvement in shape and design. One Irish pottery is producing work of a very high quality through having had the foresight to introduce a technical adviser from abroad. Their problem is one of marketing and design policy rather than the need of any outside help.

A genuine overhaul of the china and pottery industries cannot be carried through, however, if just a printer or a draughtsman supplements the model shop. Original-thinking artists with a complete knowledge of production must be put to work—ceramists who will select the clay, the glaze, the form of decoration. It is clear that without some radical change in design policy it will be impossible to produce anything but the commonplace.

The smaller potteries

The small pottery is a most valuable adjunct to the ceramics industry and there are many cases in Scandinavia where prototypes and techniques developed by individual potters were subsequently put into large-scale economic production by the bigger works. Also the small pottery acts as a stimulus to the industry and as an innovator in new design concepts and developments. Consequently we were very interested in the small potteries in Ireland and visited two of them. Once again it is difficult to generalise, for one was an instance of love and care lavished on a craft and was an example to all connected with the industry. The other had spirit and courage but we felt lacked professional inspiration and education in artistic fundamentals.

Metalwork

We found very few examples of worthwhile design in metal. In cutlery, kitchenware, tools and appliances, the designs seemed to be all derivative and without understanding of the materials. As with glass or clay, a real appreciation of the material and its possibilities is necessary for the designer in metal. The absence of the small workshops and individual craftsmen is possibly responsible for the low standard. In the National Museum, we saw excellent examples of metal

handicrafts, cooking pots, forks and oil lamps, simply designed with the emphasis on human requirements and the limitations of the manufacturing processes.

There is no reason why the quality should not be raised, but designers, who must be given the opportunity to study the functional requirements of the various products, must be introduced into the steel and aluminium factories. Electric heaters we are told were developed in Ireland and, after satisfying technical requirements, their shape was entrusted to a foreign designer. This is altogether an incorrect approach. The designer must work with the technical staff from the beginning and their talents should complement each other. This is particularly so in regard to tableware, where the copies produced reveal no understanding of the originals and have moved far away from practical requirements. To raise the standard an experienced designer should be engaged, who would supplement the technicians, analyse the elements of these articles and produce a consistent functional form. The remarkable success of Danish tableware is based on a detailed study of day-to-day requirements allied with craftsmanship of a very high order. We noted one attractive production of cast iron kitchen-ware, but most of the pots and pans, aluminium and otherwise, were completely non-competitive in design and function. The possibility of co-operation with Irish sculptors who are working in metal and have a feeling for shape and form, should be explored and might result in new ideas.

It is common knowledge that the commercial success of certain machines, radios and industrial appliances has owed a great deal to talented industrial designers who have not merely been able to make the appearance of the products attractive but have redesigned their complex machinery. We

do not know the extent or status of the light engineering industry in Ireland, but if it is intended to develop original products foreign design talent will be necessary.

Furniture and articles of wood

From an Irish point of view this is justly taken as one of the most difficult problems. In the stores, we are told, it is more difficult to sell contemporary furniture than period furniture, despite the fact that the reproduction of the old forms is without any understanding of the original work. The modern furniture is nearly all based on "Continental models". Usually plagiarism in furniture degrades the original because there is very little confidence in the joinery and Irish plagiarism lacks all the advantages of the originals. From our point of view it has continually been emphasised that design essentially rests on knowledge of materials and the ways in which they may be treated. The different techniques and ways of manufacture which are the basis of furniture production have been neglected in Ireland.

We are able to find a parallel case in Denmark in the middle of the 18th century. At that time Danish joinery was so bad that all furniture of a better kind was imported from England or Hamburg. This situation was remedied by Government intervention. Promising craftsmen were sent to England and after a period of education there, returned with experience and drawings, and an institution "De Kongelige Meubel Magasiner", was established. This institution helped the joiners with technical information and furniture was sold under a label of guaranty. When the organisation was disbanded the standard remained high and a distinctive Danish style had developed on English foundations.

A similar action is necessary in Ireland, but it must be so extensive that great sacrifices will have to be made, while at the same time it will not give immediate results. One approach would be to send craftsmen abroad for further training, but our Scandinavian respect for the spirit of the workshop, makes us suggest the establishment of an Irish workshop under the direction of excellent foreign designers and craftsmen, where it would be possible to make furniture of the highest quality. The apprentice could, after finishing at the Irish workshop, then be sent to the "Teknologisk Institut" in Copenhagen to join the class which is attended by the best young Danish journeymen, working with modern machines and surface treatments.

In the stores and tourist shops we saw some thrown bowls of wood. Their quality was acceptable but not as good as the Danish which in turn is inferior to the Japanese. The answer must lie in the fine Japanese wood which lends itself to more slender and elegantly designed throwing.

At the National Museum in Dublin, we saw some drinking cups of wood, semi-squared, with either two or four handles carved from a single piece of wood except for the fitted bottoms. These "methers" are a characteristically 16th-century Irish form, which correctly reproduced, would match modern surroundings very well, and could form the basis of a valuable handicraft activity. If the carving of wooden objects should be entrusted to home workers, it would cost very little to perform a rather close rawform in machine-work, but here also the woods play an essential part. Furniture, thrown articles and carving demand fine wood. We suggested to one of the leading joiners in Dublin that the trade should agree to stockpile timber until matured, supplementing the store as it was consumed. In

reply we were told that there were insufficient trees to fell in the country. It may well be that we have touched on a task for the Government, because in studying ancient Irish work we have gained the impression that Ireland should be able to supply itself with beech, oak, elm and yew of fine quality.

Souvenirs

The slogan "the customer is always right" when applied to product design is not alone incorrect, but, in relation to the production of such a commodity as souvenirs, highly dangerous. And yet this we found was the reply when we gave it as our opinion that the bulk of Irish souvenirs are of a very low quality. As very often the country is represented by the small things which visitors to Ireland place in their homes, or give to their friends as "something Irish", we feel that it is of great importance to have a high standard in the production of souvenirs. The aim should be to give the tourist the type of souvenir he needs rather than that which he merely wants. After all, it need cost no more to produce something worthwhile than to produce a tasteless thing.

We are not dealing here with Irish goods which may be sold as souvenirs, such as a length of tweed, but rather with the souvenir proper; the purely decorative object, or the usable article with an inscription referring to Ireland. These latter fall into two categories, the handicraft souvenir and the factory products. Among good handicraft souvenirs are to be mentioned St. Brigid's crosses, the most simple of the rush baskets and a wooden model of a primitive Irish boat. Clumsy reproductions of Irish rustic houses made of painted peat, landscapes produced from

tweed stubs—and worthless as landscapes—and similar rough and artless products should not be encouraged.

Some factory-made souvenirs are to be noted because they are often of a better design than others, e.g. cuff-links and simple objects of green marble. The leather goods are too rough and heavy and the copper products seem more scamped than primitive. The earthenware and china are on an average of a common and insignificant shape which is not improved by the fact that the tourist factor has been introduced by transfers of poor drawings. In these transfers, and on copper and leather also, the motifs from the Celtic and early Christian times are very dominating. It is regrettable that the oddest of the old ornaments have been utilised, the interlaced animals, etc. They are indeed conspicuous, but at the same time their character is difficult to read. So as we have already mentioned, the modern adaptations of this distinguished art are always depressingly incorrect and ugly and generally seem strange when placed in modern surroundings. If people wish to draw inspiration from the past, they should study the Book of Kells, the stones of Clonmacnoise, etc., where they will find sources of simple drawings and colour compositions which would be quite natural to use, because they are almost modern, and because the reproduction of their character is a practical proposition.

We feel that Irish souvenirs could reach a much higher standard both artistically and technically but the producers are obviously in need of guidance and assistance. For more than fifty years the handicraft people in Denmark have had an association directed by first-class architects and artists, the Handarbejdets Fremme. Special models have been drawn, old handicrafts have been revived and, through a magazine, drawings and working instructions

have been sent out all over the country. Additionally, local agents have worked to raise the production to a high standard. In Ireland we noted that these techniques are being employed most successfully in the handknitting industry, and during our tour we met people who with training would be capable advisers to the souvenir producing industries and the individual craft workers. We would recommend that such talented people should be sent abroad to study production and promotion methods.

As an additional method of raising the standard, an annual selection could be made of the best souvenirs. The designers and manufacturers would receive a special award and the winning souvenirs could be shown at airports, hotels, and in special show-cases in the department stores. They would have to be given special publicity in order to bring them to the notice of the general public as well as the retailers.

Graphics

The practising graphic artist in Ireland is facilitated by the existence of a highly developed printing industry, which we learned is capable of producing technically good work. Gravure printing is of the highest standard but we observed a definite lack of quality in Irish blocks and blockmaking. There are more artists employed in commercial art work in Ireland than in any other field. Many of them are foreigners and this was to us surprising until we studied the educational facilities and found that an up-to-date education for graphic artists is not available. Despite this, however, we saw some good work but generally speaking the standard was poor.

All branches of graphic art, packaging, posters, advertisement, design, typography, etc., suffer from a lack of trained designers, and perhaps also an unwillingness to utilise the talent available. Nevertheless, we noted some well-designed posters and show cards but they seemed to be exceptions to the general run of production and it is clear that without the provision of suitable educational facilities no great improvements can be hoped for.

We notice that Ireland has a fine tradition in sign writing and shop-front lettering, better examples occurring in the country rather than in Dublin, and it was good to see this tradition being preserved and developed in Bolton Street school, where we saw students trying to reproduce the old-style lettering.

Irish printed books are generally of a low standard, which we find strange, as we have seen examples where the production was as good as anywhere else. But in the "make ready" stage there is an apparent lack of care and finish.

Packaging

Packaging design has assumed great importance in the past few years and the packaging designer fulfils a vital role in modern industry. His art is the meeting-point of graphic and functional design. The successful packaging designer is a man who has a broad enough training to enable him to tackle a variety of problems and has the background necessary to appreciate engineering and technological considerations.

The lack of adequate training for the designer was emphasised by the fact that many of the successful Irish packages have been designed abroad. A piece of packaging design which very readily strikes the eye are designs for

match and cigarette cartons. The labels on the Irish match boxes are, we feel, better than most, but on the other hand, we find certain Irish cigarette packs too sweet in colour, with a femininity more suited to a perfume sachet and with crude lettering and ornamentation.

Lack of character and of a strong motif, bad lettering and ornamentation; these faults are to be found in profusion in Irish packaging. While we give it as our opinion that Irish packaging is generally bad, we must add that the same applies to nearly every other country. This springs from lack of interest in the subject, and in many Irish packages it was apparent that no research had been made into the design, disposition of colour or shape.

We would like to see Irish packages being produced free from unnecessary detail and with a balance between the different parts, colour, lettering, and decoration, to make a whole and absolutely clean thing, in which elements foreign to the motif have not been introduced. Far too often modern packs are spoiled by competition between the different parts of the composition. In the designs for beverage labels, we found the same careless, often pointless, design. As many of these bottles are for use in the home, their labels are too forceful. For instance, the overstressing of a large single word can be very unpleasant, yet we found just such an approach in Ireland. To derive the full force from a certain scheme the design need not be heavy and coarse, but it should be absolutely clear and true to its own style. In this way it will have a greater impact without being offensive.

The difference between packages one throws away immediately and those which one retains should be recognised. A package should never be an intruder on the person or in the home, and this must govern the design

as much as functional considerations. Good examples of packages whose character is correctly related to their use are rare in Ireland.

Again and again we saw cases where it had been decided to use three colours on a job and they had been slapped on indiscriminately, all competing with one another. The result was to disturb the balance of the design without achieving the desired result which was to produce something with impact. There is a classical principle that if one prints in three colours, one should predominate, another should be firm and the third just a slight complement to the other two. Use contrast indeed but use it with cunning.

On the cheaper level of production we noted bread wrappers and other mass-produced throwaway packages. These were produced in runs of thousands and yet clearly no artists had been employed. Why?

Stamps

We have decided to include in this report a detailed examination of the Irish postage stamp for we feel that the inclusion of a demonstration of the study and evaluation of such a design problem may be of value. Quite apart from this we are aware of good reasons for such an inclusion. First, because postage stamps are the first Irish-manufactured products that many people see and in this way are capable of conveying a good or bad impression of Ireland. Secondly, as a commodity handled by nearly all the people in the State, they are a profound factor in the moulding of public taste. Thirdly, they are a case in point where the Government by direct intervention can set standards for public design. The Irish coinage is an admirable example of such intervention. Finally, although

not so important as the other points, we understand that many countries derive considerable revenue from the sale of attractive postage stamps.

The stamps presented here are a random selection from some one hundred and fifty stamps covering the whole production from the foundation of the State. They are divided into three categories:

- A: Stamps with portraits, (1-17)
- B: Stamps with figures, landscapes, buildings, etc. (18-33)
- C: Stamps with symbols, coat of arms, etc (34-41)

They have been divided in this way to make comparisons easier, because every stamp design should be judged according to the problem presented or the demand it should satisfy.

What is important for a stamp is, in priority :

- (1) Clear indication of value
- (2) The name of the country clearly visible
- (3) An easy and balanced composition or lay-out
- (4) Being a paper of value it should not be easy to counterfeit and it will be if this is not inherent in the design
- (5) If possible the subject or eventual picture on the stamp should appeal to the public.

On (1) Indication of value : In many cases very bad. It has almost vanished among the other parts of the picture in nos. 2, 5, 7, 13, 21, 25, 26, 34, 39 and is difficult to read in nos. 6, 9, 27 and 28.

On (2) The name of the country : Poor in nos. 2, 7, 8, 23, 33, 36 and 41.

On (3) The composition or layout: It is far easier to have an unobstructed layout in stamps with portraits or

coats of arms than to have it in category B. A head or a symbol is in itself a well defined thing and the illusion of depth is a simple statement which permits the whole picture to take on a controlled appearance related to the surface of the paper. How destroying for the total impression of a stamp the lines of perspective can be is to be seen in nos. 21 and 28. There are very few stamps in category B where design seems to fit the stamp. Unrestricted lines, apparently uncontrolled, are going everywhere but to support the size and proportion of the stamp, although no. 27 comes very close to being a wholesome modern composition. The reproduction of the classic works (nos. 19 and 23) are more convincing and preferable, however, even if St. Peter had to suffer from too many surplus details and the Madonna makes less impact because of a completely unnecessary noisy background. With a stable symmetry, no. 33 has a better unity than most of the others, but the proportions are bad: the four coats of arms are dominating the building. The symmetry of no. 32 does not hold the stamp enough together to create a fixed balance, and a portrait, an eagle and a harp are three unrelated things just pinned up together.

Not even all the stamps with portraits and arms have a united composition. In nos. 2, 5 and 6 the design is too split-up and nos. 13 and 14 are only half stamps. The childish and insignificant asymmetric placing of elements in the background of no. 34 misses a correlation of the details which could have marked the design. The motif of the diagonals in no. 36 is so timid and transparent that it is killed by the pedantic and boringly executed ornament next to it.

On (4) The idea of a bondpaper: A paper of value is more easily conveyed by copperplate, but the original for the

engraving is of such importance that some of the xylographed stamps are more pleasant than the poor engravings. Artistic and technical quality is what gives the atmosphere of value and should be stressed. It has already been pointed out that the fine originals for nos. 19 and 23 made them the best in category B, but still the craftsmanship is not very select and technically nos 4, 12 and 16 are much better. Of the xylographed stamps nos. 8, 40 and 41 are of a high standard placing them superior to most of the engraved. What low-class print can do together with deplorable layout on a stamp can be viewed on no. 26.

On (5) The popularity of the subject: Possibly no. 26 and with it no. 21 are what some people might find interesting. But it seems to be an exception if the small size of a stamp can cope with the dramatic. The braveness of the armed man is but an attitude, and the way in which the building, rendered in perspective, bites him in the stomach seems vulgar to those not prepared to accept the strangeness and dishonesty of some of the lower branches of advertisement design.

On the basis of the above evaluation the following rank highest:

In category A: Nos. 4, 17, 12, 8, 9, 16, 15 and 11.

„ „ B: „ 23, 19, 27 and 33.

„ „ C: „ 40, 35, 41, and 39.

and the lowest:

In category A: Nos. 5, 6, 1 and 2.

„ „ B: „ 26, 21, 22, 18, 20, 28 and 24.

„ „ C: „ 34, 36 and 37.

As a brief summary it can be said: The most important thing is concentration or singlemindedness of purpose. The chosen subject has, even where delicate details are involved, to be rendered with authority so that its features are

immediately perceptible. The primary text must be clear. The design of the stamp shall form a unity natural within the size.

No. 4 is the best in all the collection. A clear and well executed subject in balance within the surface, and with a distinct text not harmful to the picture, and a secondary text that is subordinated to the rest. The old paintings in nos. 19 and 23 also support the subject and are well related to the size. When no. 1 is placed among the bad ones it is because of the needless light effect behind the portraited head. When 15 and 16 are also rated low, it is because of the "art-photo" manner, hostile to the fine engraving and destroying the unity without adding anything of value. Cf. also nos. 3, 13, 14, 21 and 22.

To give a further illustration of what is meant by single-mindedness, we shall add that we rate no. 35 as a good stamp despite its lack of bond character. It is readily perceptible and the design is very well disposed in relation to the size. No. 37 is rather poor because not enough attention has been paid to the subject. A geographical map is an amorphous figure and to be discernible it has to be made as big as possible and isolated. In this case the arch and ornament ought to have been omitted, being incongruous to the subject. Furthermore the proportion plays an important part in the total impression. Note two well made xylographic stamps, nos. 8 and 11, both of which are artistic failures. It is not the size of the stamp or head that spoils them, but the absence of a correct artistic relationship between the different parts—here, the head and shape in which it is placed.

C



34



39



40



35



41



36

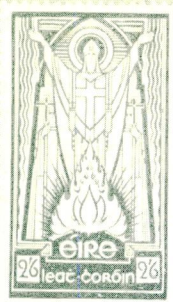


37



38

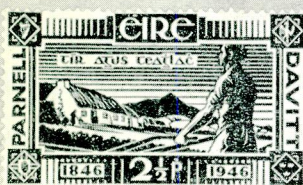
B



18



19



20



21



22



23



24



25



26



27



28



29



30



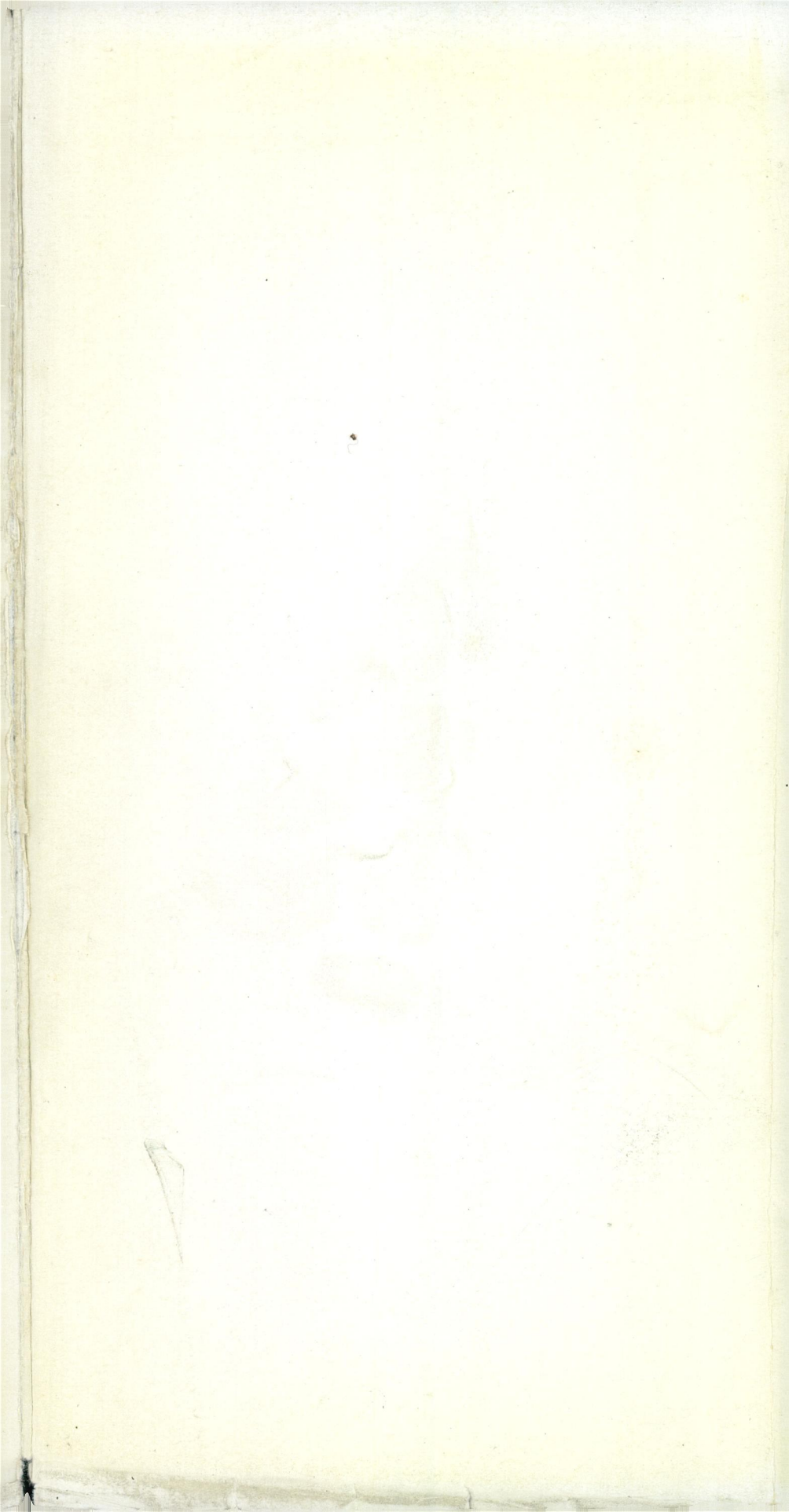
31



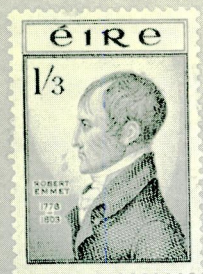
32



33



A



1



6



12



2



7



13



3



8



14



4



9



15



10



16



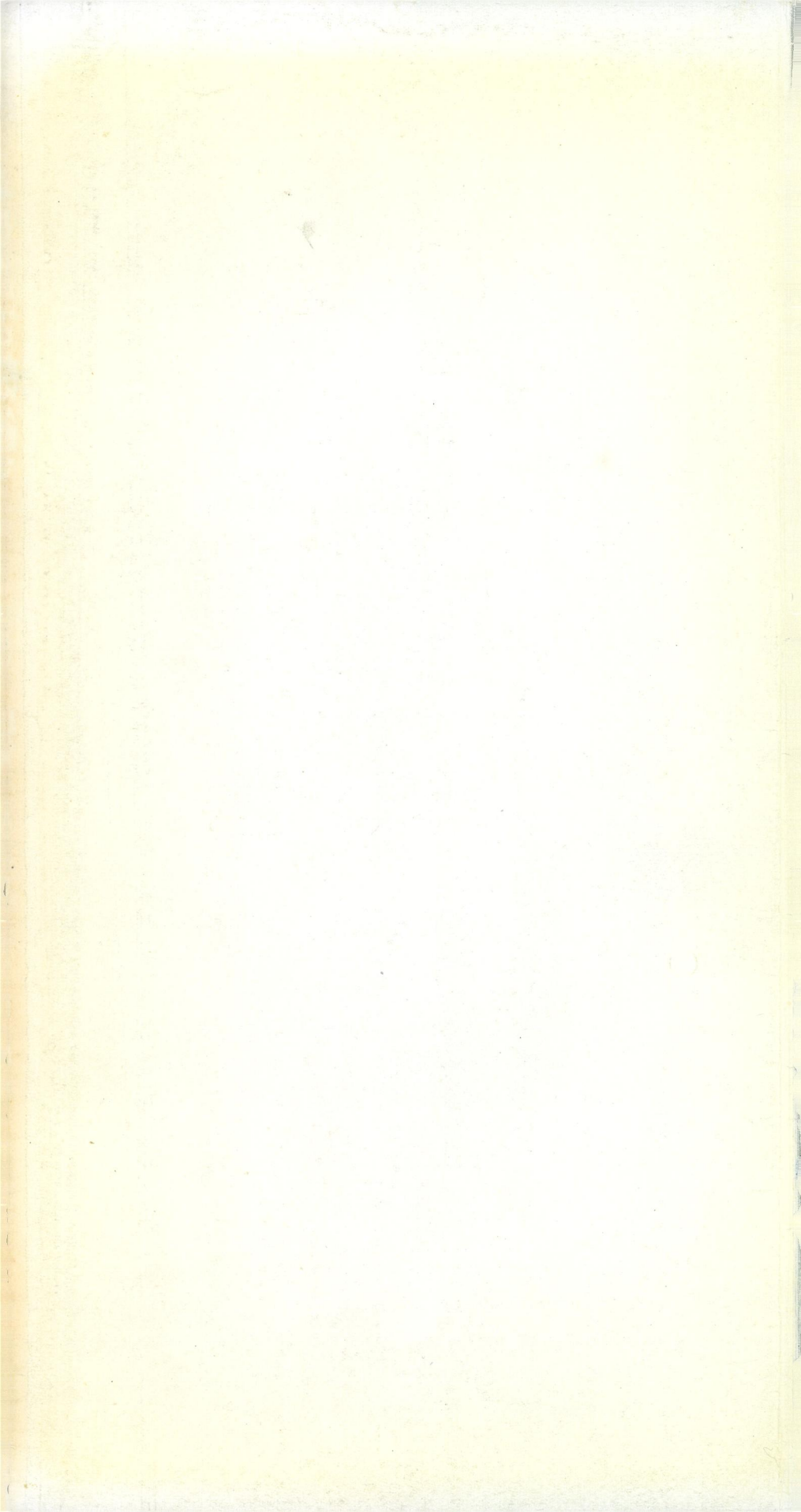
5



11



17



II. CREATING INTEREST

Having discussed various aspects of Irish design, we now come to the all-important question of raising the standard of design in the country as a whole. One cannot expect to alter the standard of Irish product design if, at the same time, a home market is not created for the new quality products. We readily appreciate the problem of Irish manufacturers who, while perhaps willing to experiment with new products, are deterred from doing so by the existence of an unresponsive public.

To raise the public interest in design it would be quite natural to use the ordinary channels of information: newspapers, magazines, radio, television, exhibitions in stores and museums, visiting exhibitions from abroad, etc. Specialists could be called in from other countries to give courses, make broadcasts, etc., and the newspapers could, in addition to featuring the various activities, publish weekly pages on different aspects of design. It would be a simple matter to arrange for an exchange of articles on design between the Irish and Scandinavian press. We also want to suggest the use of many films on design subjects produced in Scandinavia, the United States and other countries. A design library could be formed and the systematic translation of articles on design could be a service of great value to designers and to industry. As a backer of more continuous interest, we are suggesting the formation of a body one of whose aims should be to promote public interest in matters of design.

This body could also act as a stimulus to designers by forming the groups for discussion and study which are so necessary to the ordinary creative mind. The lack of encouragement from some such group was very evident when we visited two small potteries. One with young people, full of drive and good spirit, but with a considerable lack of educational background, the other composed of older people who had turned from amateurs to professionals but were finding themselves lonely hunters.

Each Scandinavian country has a national Society for Arts, Crafts and Industrial Design which exercises considerable influence. They operate on a national scale and include representatives of manufacturers, designers and retailers. These organisations act as a sort of exchange for all the channels of communication in design, thus working for the benefit of all parties. They serve as a forum for artists and manufacturers, for private individuals and institutions, for industry and Government, and it is these organisations who, by promoting exhibitions in different parts of the world, have immeasurably helped the success of Scandinavian exports.

Several museums in different parts of the world hold instructive exhibitions periodically, or have permanent exhibitions concerning the problems of design and art. We feel that as far as the Irish museums are concerned it would probably be better to wait for a couple of years before involving them in the responsibility of organising design exhibitions, etc., as in our view the best place to commence such action is in the department stores. At a later date contact between the European and Irish museums could be established, with exchange of exhibitions between the two i.e. European exhibitions in Ireland and vice versa.

The department stores have a very important part to play in this work of arousing general design consciousness. We feel that it is their function to act as publicists of good design and, from what we have seen of your stores, they are quite capable of fulfilling this function. Together with a conscious effort to point out good examples of design, they should be encouraged to make special design displays and notes on the articles on display could be circulated for press and broadcasting. Generally speaking, the lines on which we envisage the department stores participating in a design programme are these: the managements should first keep themselves informed on current methods of stimulating design in other countries, e.g. La Rinascente in Milan, which every year awards the Compasso d'Oro for design. A prize like this could be established by the department stores and a qualified jury named to award the prize, to be followed by a scholarship. Good design competitions could be arranged for different products and it is important that these competitions should receive maximum publicity and the results be shown to the public at exhibitions. If the department stores sponsored design competitions, it would be desirable that they should undertake to put the winning designs into production on their own account, and also established their own design policy by commissioning articles from various industries. Additionally, the department stores could have a number of exhibitions during the year showing the best Irish designs in specially equipped exhibition space.

They could also present small exhibitions from abroad which would have an educational value for the general public and would be an inspiration to Irish industry. These exhibitions, we would suggest, should not be very large, but care must be taken to ensure that only products of

the highest quality are shown. We would recommend that exhibitions of this nature are concentrated on special subjects, e.g. tableware, furnishing fabrics or industrial products. A most important facet of the department stores' work would be to educate their salesmen and buyers to a greater appreciation of quality and design.

The Federation of Irish Industries would seem to be an appropriate body to undertake the organisation of an exhibition of the best Irish-designed products, although we feel that such an exhibition, like the other proposals concerning the promotion of Irish design, should not be inaugurated until the programme is well under way and there is an appreciable improvement in Irish design standards.

All these activities, exhibitions, courses, competitions, etc., should culminate in an Irish Design Year, with a national exhibition in Dublin and shows all over the country. The best of the exhibits could ultimately form a travelling exhibition for America and Europe. We heard talk when we were in Ireland of the desirability of establishing an Irish Design Centre, and our view on this is the same as our view on an Irish exhibition of design. Both are good ideas, but must wait until the programme has begun to show results and a certain number of designers have been trained.

We feel that a valuable initial activity might be to present in Ireland an exhibition of European design with the best products being selected by a competent jury. Such an exhibition would set a standard for future design activity.

The departments of Government can play their part by running competitions for the design, decoration and furnishing of Government buildings, etc. A percentage of the

cost of public building projects might be devoted to the encouragement of Irish design and architecture.

A further activity which we have not explored in any detail is the idea of making a survey of all "man-made Ireland". This survey when completed could be the basis of an exhibition which, with the right comments on the items, would provide an ideal background or fund of information from which discussions, education and explanations of thought could be extracted. Other purposes served by such a survey would be to establish the origin of what is good in Irish design and give a new meaning to the subject for those connected with it. The collection of information on tweed weaving, already referred to, could be part of the same project, and not alone information on textiles but details of all the traditional skills, knitting, dyeing, carving, building techniques, etc., could be collected and filed. Knowledge of such a retrospective technology would be of invaluable help in formulating educational policy and deciding the direction in which Irish design should develop. By holding an exhibition, the concepts of design would be carried to a much greater audience. It would enable Irish men and women to gain a better understanding of their own traditions and form a point of contact for creative minds in Ireland. The survey would clarify the situation in Ireland for people like ourselves, and we also feel for many Irish people who have never evaluated their cultural resources or sought how best to interpret their own visual traditions. We feel that, if undertaken, this very large project would not only have immense beneficial effects on the country itself but would be a noteworthy contribution from Ireland to West European culture.

III. EDUCATION

The immediate need

We have now discussed various Irish industries and how their interests may be served by raising the general level of design consciousness. Lasting results, however, cannot be hoped for unless the vital matter of design education is tackled with energy and foresight.

We think that it is impossible for Ireland to make progress in design without a radical change in the existing educational institutions and a new approach to the problems involved. Based on our experience and what we have seen during our visit, we have set down the broad outlines of the type of design education which we think is needed and is suitable for Ireland today.

In our view there are two problems:—

1. The problem of the reorganisation of the schools, and other long-term measures.
2. The problem of how Ireland is to get the industrial designers she needs now.

An immediate need for qualified designers exists, as we learned again and again during discussions and at the seminars in Dublin, and we shall deal with this problem first. Not very much has been done to train designers for industry but it might well be possible to train selected craftsmen, trades people and artists to be useful designers who could fill the gap for the next few years before any school activities could bear fruit.

We have found that in many cases painters and sculptors cannot easily adapt themselves to working with industry or industry with them, for while many artists have all the personal qualities and sensitivity needed to turn themselves into good designers, their attitude towards society and the traditional media or means of expression of the artist are of a kind alien to successful co-operation with craft and industry. We have seen some outstanding commercial work executed by Irish artists, but we learned that they were exceptions, as they would be anywhere.

We think that if industry turns towards architects and craftsmen more positive results are likely. The architect from his professional experience is familiar with co-ordination and economic considerations and many talented architects possess the kind of artistic sensitivity and enjoyment of form, colour and texture that is necessary to produce good design work. Furthermore it was among Irish architects that the group met the best and most intelligent attitude towards design problems. We met fewer Irish artists than architects, so the above opinion is based more on general feelings for the problem at home than observations from our tour. Ideally the first products from the educational schemes, if they are initiated promptly and wholeheartedly, should be becoming available to industry well before 1967. In the meantime we recommend that Irish industry turn towards firms of talented architect/designers who could supplement their staffs by the addition of specialists in various fields from Scandinavia and elsewhere. Another piece of advice for the immediate situation, is to point out that many Scandinavian industries have derived great profit from co-operation with skilled craftsmen who have started their own workshops and been able

to transfer their experience and ideas over to the greater production of a factory.

Undoubtedly many Irish industries could achieve fruitful results by employing foreign designers and technologists. It must be stressed, on the other hand, that the success of such action would depend on the designs being executed in an Irish milieu. The machinery for such a scheme could very easily be brought into being as an extension of the work already being done by Córas Tráchtála.

If an industry wants to employ designers, whether Irish or foreign, it is of the greatest importance to attract qualified personnel who will work at management level and become part and parcel of the whole running of the firm. The designer who is caged into a small room, divorced from management and production alike, will achieve nothing of value. In an Irish pottery we noted that the designer regarded his work on the shape and his work on the decoration as being separate problems. In the course of the seminars it was pointed out that the shape and the decoration were one problem, not two things which could be dealt with separately. Such evident lack of understanding of design problems, we feel, is possible only where the designer is discouraged and isolated. Nobody from the group would argue for a moment over the role of the designer in industry in relation to the invested money; industry pays the piper and must have the selection of the tune, but it is plain bad business to let unguided commercialism take the leading role.

We recommend that young craftsmen from Irish industry should be sent on study trips to some of the outstanding workshops which are to be found so abundantly in Scandinavia and elsewhere. They could study production methods and techniques in a short visit, or remain for a

longer period if they had talent capable of development. Such a scheme could be related to the one outlined above. We would hope that students whom you send to our countries to be trained, would on their return be available to Irish industry as a whole, or as teachers, and their work not confined to one specific factory.

However, it must be remembered that the Scandinavian situation between the arts and crafts and industry is very special and this should be taken into consideration when planning co-operation and making comparisons. We must stress that to make education available on even the short-term lines we are discussing here, not to mention the more far-reaching recommendations we intend to make here in the report, your State must make available funds to a far greater degree for design and art education than it has done in the past. We recommend that the authorities concerned should study the way this problem has been handled in Denmark by the foundation of the Statens Uddannelsesfond, which provides funds for the higher education of students. In addition to State funds, private bodies, firms and industrial associations could raise money for the education of students. We discussed this with some three or four firms in Ireland during our stay and found them receptive to the idea.

As a suggestion for the immediate stimulus of Irish designers, we feel that before regular school courses are established, it would be possible to hold summer courses of from two to three weeks. A group of designers, educators and craftsmen could be gathered and a series of lectures and discussions arranged. We can refer to the summer school held in Oslo in 1954 with participants from the Scandinavian countries and teachers from the Institute of Design in Chicago. We can here point out that lecturers

from foreign schools such as the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm might be available to conduct such a school in Ireland, and we could suggest suitable people from our own countries also.

In addition to summer courses for Irish designers, seminars lasting a shorter period could be held for people engaged in actual production in the craft industries, glass, ceramics, textiles, etc., aimed at giving a better appreciation of design and the functions of the designer. A third type of seminar would be for top management and deal with productivity, product design, etc. Also, as in Sweden, week-end meetings could be arranged between manufacturers and designers in order to establish basic understanding. Seminars like these can be self-supporting through the entrance fees of the participants.

It is of the greatest importance to secure the understanding and collaboration of salespeople and retailers in order to create a higher standard of design. Special courses could be arranged in the larger cities for information about materials, production methods, design policy, etc.

Schools

We have already mentioned the emphasis in present-day Irish culture on the spoken word and the theatre. This becomes very apparent when one comes to discuss education in design and the visual arts in Ireland.

As has already been said, none of the institutions which we saw or heard of provided an education for designers or architects which we consider adequate. An ideal or perfect education furthermore is not as far as we know to be found any place; so we cannot include a recommendation to look to any particular school in existence. The replanning of schools can only take place after serious consideration and

study of other institutions and their curricula. To our minds the importance of programme planning and the reconciliation of it with particular Irish problems cannot be overemphasised.

We feel that Ireland must be prepared to call in foreign teachers to the new design schools. The best teachers that can be found should be invited to come and plan the curricula and help organise the new institutions.

It would be unrealistic to expect such eminent men as we envisage to sever connection with their own countries, but they could stay long enough in Ireland to evaluate the situation, choose their assistants, and lay down the lines for future development.

At the National College of Art in Dublin, we found facilities and space which at first sight appeared to be sufficient and offer possibilities for development. However, the final impression which we took away from this school was that the methods of education were completely out of date and it is our opinion that the National College of Art as presently constituted cannot be the starting point for the education of people in the different crafts or indeed for the education of painters, sculptors or designers.

The College of Technology in Bolton Street is a big school with excellent technical equipment. Almost all the activities of this school as it is set up at the moment are outside our terms of reference, but we feel strongly that education in design ought not to be carried on there despite the fact that we found a well-run school. In principle we are opposed to the education of the designer allied with that of the engineer or technician. As regards education in the craft-based industries in Bolton Street, study time is far too short for anyone to get a satisfactory grasp of design problems.

While the education of architects was not directly within the scope of our visit, architectural education is so closely allied to the education of the designer that it is impossible not to take it into consideration. Again, being professionals ourselves and teachers in our professions, we were keenly interested in the Irish situation. The unsatisfactory state of affairs in Ireland is not a specifically Irish problem but it is common to all Europe. In very few places, at least to our knowledge, exists a healthy up-to-date architectural education.

In Ireland, the problem can be simply described as having all the inherent defects of association with the Royal Institute of British Architects. The course prepared by the British Institute, and the general educational policy as followed in Ireland, does not even reach the standard of the better English schools and it is quite impossible to expect a new generation of Irish architects brought up in this way to compete with their better-trained European colleagues. This they will not be able to do under the system followed at the moment and the prospects of their contributing to a new Irish movement are extremely poor. In thinking of the educational part of the programme we are all agreed on the close relationship between architectural and industrial design training. Furthermore, it is evident from our experience that schools where architects are studying with artists have a more stimulating atmosphere than where the designers form part of an engineering school. In Denmark and Sweden it is believed that the designer who is most able and who possesses the best foundation of knowledge is turned out in a school where he is brought up with architects, or who has made a post-graduate study following his architectural course.

We are all agreed on the desirability of concentration of education for designers and craft artists and we would

strongly recommend that a completely new school be established freed from unhelpful tradition. We would hope that a new school would be set up for architecture and design together.

Considering the total population of the country, it appears reasonable to us that there should be only one school where all activities and research should be concentrated. We think that the provincial colleges at Cork, Waterford and Limerick are up against too many odds. Concentration of architects, painters, designers and sculptors into one school is, apart from being highly desirable, a logical step for a country of Ireland's size and resources.

The length of the education of designers in the new school, hereafter referred to as the Irish Design School, would in all probability be the same length as the existing course for architects, plus an additional year for the industrial designer, subject to the condition that industrial design is included in the curriculum for the last two years of the architect's course and that students are orientated towards the subject from an early stage. We should also mention that any proposed school of this kind should work in close co-operation with industry.

We think it of the greatest importance to have a board for the Irish Design School who can clarify the basic concepts and keep the professional aim unhampered by the tendency of trade schools to produce visible and quick results. It is a very common phenomenon in architectural/design schools today to find that the enlarged field of professional activity seems to tempt the school to cover as much ground as possible, with the unavoidable result of superficiality. For example, not only in the architectural school of University College, Dublin, but also in the Scandinavian schools, we see students making designs and drawings of

what they think architect's work looks like instead of doing architectural work. Imagine the situation of having fourth-year students working in a few weeks on a complex problem like a civic centre or hospital which would take a fully equipped professional office with all consulting help years to produce!

In establishing an Irish Design School it would be advisable to expose the student in the very beginning to the study of the professional basis of ideas, i.e. the theory of the art. This early presentation of the totality of the subject will (i) give immediate nourishment to talent, (ii) discourage those without ability before valuable years are wasted and (iii) provide a core around which further study can have a natural growth. At the same time this approach to some extent solves a conflict that exists in art education. Because art has to be viewed in a comprehensive way, there is in teaching a natural wish to convey a vision of unity while on the other hand the practical training of the student demands a step-by-step progression. Similarly the desire to let all the development be rooted in the student's personality is not always easy to respect when one has certain absolute standards of performance. An art school has to train its students in a practical working method in order to give them a basis on which to tackle their professional problems. As a school cannot provide the guidance and support that the professional can draw from society, it must make principles intelligible through simple examples. This is why we feel that it is more important to ensure that the student has practical experience outside the school than to have fine tools and workshops.

We have dealt in some detail with the Irish Design School and our recommendation that the education of architects, designers, painters and sculptors should be concentrated

in one institution. This is partly because it is so important and also because it is a radical departure from what exists at present. The Irish Design School would thus incorporate a number of departments: the Crafts, Industrial Design, Architecture and Fine Arts. The Craft department would cater for the requirements of industries such as textiles, ceramics, metalwork and those activities generally referred to as handicrafts. At the same time divisions between departments should be sufficiently flexible to permit free interchange between the different departments for we regard it as of the utmost importance that all branches of the visual arts should have opportunity to learn from each other. Such a form of organisation we believe would best stimulate the intellectual and artistic activity which is so necessary for any creative endeavour.

This school should also be the training ground for teachers for the primary and secondary schools. We have already referred to the importance of drawing or the manipulation of materials, a neglected aspect of education in the Irish schools. We should stress that by drawing we do not mean merely the production of finished art work or watercolours but the study of the means of visual communication in the widest sense, from abstract geometric forms to the qualities of the different handicrafts. This training of the perception and awareness of a child to his surroundings seems to us as important as the teaching of the mother tongue. In any event, to set up a new school of design and at the same time ignore the fact that the Irish school-child is visually and artistically among the most under-educated in Europe, would appear to us unwise.

It is important that all sections of the projected school, painters, crafts students, student teachers, etc., should be governed in the same spirit and be under one and the

same authority which would be an Irish Institute of the Visual Arts. We feel that under the system of organisation which we have outlined above, the Design department should produce from five to ten students annually with an especial knowledge of industrial design. To meet the demand for craft designers, the number of graduates from the Craft Department would be much larger, and the study period would be relatively shorter. These would be the designers in, for instance, the glass, ceramic, textile and furniture industries, advertising and the various commercial art fields.

If this programme were followed (and we as outsiders cannot adequately weigh the many practical, organisational and personal difficulties involved) we feel that it should be possible to aim at 1964 for the complete reorganisation of the existing system and the setting up of the new school. In the meantime teachers could be sent to Scandinavia for training, where it could be arranged that they work as assistants in the schools and academies there, and we would suggest as a practical possibility that the Royal Academy of Copenhagen act as the co-ordinator for this part of the programme.

With regard to design education at the College of Commerce in Rathmines, we feel that here again is a department which is up against too many odds and that the isolated art and advertising training should be transferred to the new school. The function of the College of Commerce within the programme we would see as a centre for design appreciation courses for buyers and sales personnel and we recommend that this important work be entrusted to the College.

For the physical location of the new school we recommend that it should be situated in Dublin or on the outskirts of that city. It is very important that such a school gives its students possibilities to draw on the many activities of modern society which in Ireland only the capital will give them.

We know well that there may be great difficulties in setting up the school on the lines suggested and it might be that one would have to start in a small way and let the enterprise expand according to the successes achieved by the teachers and students. The question of how should the school be started is answered by saying that a school should draw its students from those most ready to work there.

If it is the architects, start the school with an architect's course, and if it is, for example, people from the textile industry who are most ready to work for the development of Irish tradition and ideas, let the Craft department commence with a textile course. However, regardless of the scale on which the work commences, it must be with the clear understanding by all concerned that it is the ultimate aim of the new school to assimilate and supplant all existing institutions for education in the visual arts.

On two points we are quite definite: that however it is done a new design school must be brought into being in Ireland, and that this school will only be successful if authorities, qualified teachers and a body of students are found who have faith in the new school and are prepared to support it and work for it.

IRISH INSTITUTE OF VISUAL ARTS

EDUCATION FOR FINE AND APPLIED ARTS

Irish School of Design

*training of
teachers*

Craft Department

*Designers in
metal
wood
plastics
textiles
glass
ceramics, etc.*

Industrial Design

Architecture

*town planning
landscaping, etc.*

Free Arts

*painting
sculpture
graphics*

PROPAGANDA AND ADMINISTRATION

Special Education

*seminars
special courses
summer schools*

*education of
executives
buyers
salesmen
general public*

Liaison with
manufacturers
and designers

Exhibitions
Competitions
Publications

IV. THE IRISH INSTITUTE OF VISUAL ARTS

While we consider the setting up of a New Irish Art School to be of paramount importance, we would emphasise that mere physical changes and regrouping of facilities will be insufficient if unaccompanied by a new outlook. It must be ensured that the new attitudes towards art and design which have developed in our time make their way into the new schools, while at the same time preserving what remains of the Irish visual tradition. There is also the problem of personnel, the recruitment of new teachers and the employment of existing teachers to the best advantage. The solution to these and many other problems depends, in our opinion, on the formation of an Irish Institute of Visual Arts, which we feel would be the logical forerunner for the setting up of the new art school. It would be practically impossible to set up a new school without preliminary activity on the lines outlined in the section on "Creating Interest".

The Institute should be formed as a core around which present-day thinking in art and design can grow. The difficulties involved in the development of worthwhile design today, and the problem of relating the particular Irish situation to modern trends is what we as a group feel is of real importance for the professional activity of our colleagues in the future Ireland. An Institute of this type would be able to guide the first steps in the establishment of new schools and to evolve a policy by which seminars, exhibitions and courses could be directed.

We are hampered by our lack of detailed local knowledge when we come to describe the precise functions of the suggested Institute. As we see it, it should be an autonomous body, with its administrative powers directly responsible to the Government. It should be entrusted with the sole responsibility for education in the fields of art, architecture and design. Rather than setting up a separate organisation for the promotion of design on the lines of the Scandinavian Arts and Crafts Societies, we would recommend that these duties be carried out by committees of the Institute of Visual Arts. The advantages of such centralisation are evident and need not be pointed out.

At the same time we must seriously warn against the danger of such an Institute developing into a group of persons representative of only a single viewpoint who might exclude others from being represented. The development of academies in some countries shows that rules must be carefully drawn which will ensure a fair representation of the various forces and outlooks alive in Ireland at any given period.

Pending the formation of the Institute, which may take some time, we would venture to suggest the setting up of a small working committee. This forerunner committee could act on behalf of the not yet formed Institute in initiating study programmes and teaching policy and recruiting suitable designers for industry. It is clear that one of the prime purposes of the committee would be to collect on behalf of the Government the data and information necessary to set up the Institute of Visual Arts. We also feel that the Committee, and ultimately the Institute, should have a home and premises of their own, ideally

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situated on the outskirts of Dublin, and including facilities for summer schools, lecture theatres, accommodation for visiting designers, etc.

We would finally note that we have considered the possibility of adapting existing bodies to this purpose, but it is our opinion that no existing organisation or association in Ireland could cope with the problems involved in the development of design in Ireland, and consequently a new body must be brought into existence.

