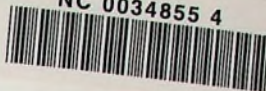


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A Discussion of Paperworks by Five Irish Artists.

The National College of Art and Design.

A Thesis submitted to :

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by Louise Nolan

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Thanks is also due to the Taylor Gallery, Dublin, for assistance in setting up an interview with Helen Comerford.

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Also thanks to Brid and Veronica at the Riverrun Gallery, Dublin, for information on the work of Vivienne Bogan and Eilish O Connell.

Finally, thanks to my tutor, Frances Ruane, for all her suggestions and assistance.

Introduction.

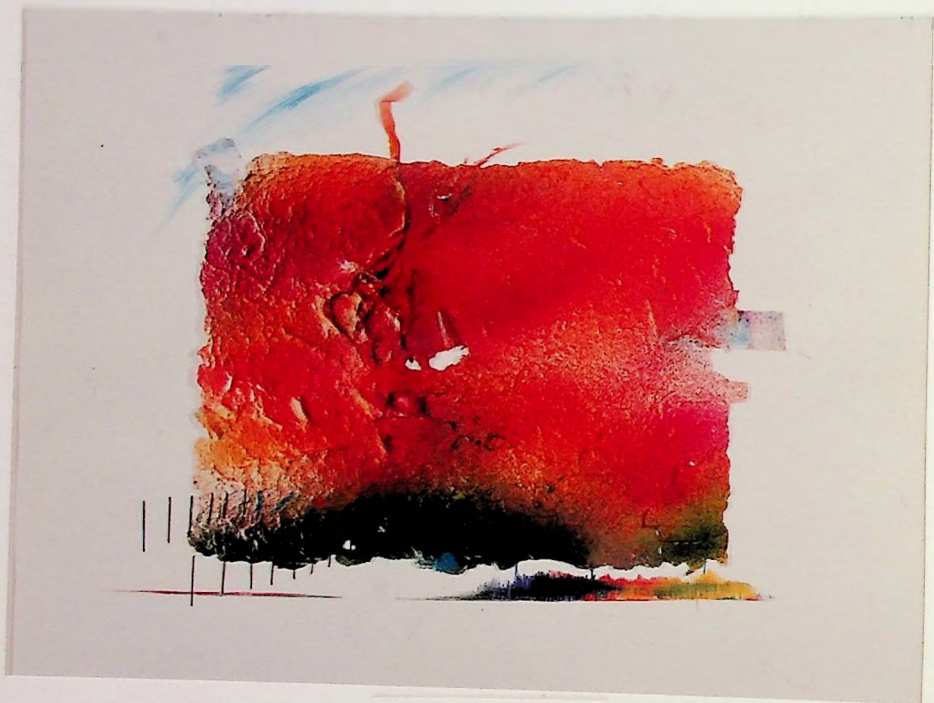
Paper as a medium is a relatively young and unexplored concept. In terms of western art it seems to have been initiated in the late 1950's and 1960's alongside the revival of paper-making by hand. In post-World War II America there was a renaissance of Fine Art Printmaking. Highly acclaimed artists such as Jackson Pollock and Leonard Baskin, were devoting a large amount of attention to print as a medium for expressing their ideas. Demands for various specific types of surface on which to print, encouraged the revival of handmade paper mills; where specific demands for qualities of surface made by artists could be achieved.

With this investigation of surface came an inevitable investigation of the paper itself. Many of the handmade paper mills in existence in the USA today, are owned and run by artists who work with experimental print making and also paper pulp itself. These mills generally offer a service of collaboration for other artists who wish to make a specific type of paper in sheet form or who wish to experiment with pulp. Unfortunately, the facilities offered by handmade paper mills in America do not exist in Ireland, however this is not because of lack of awareness or interest in the area.

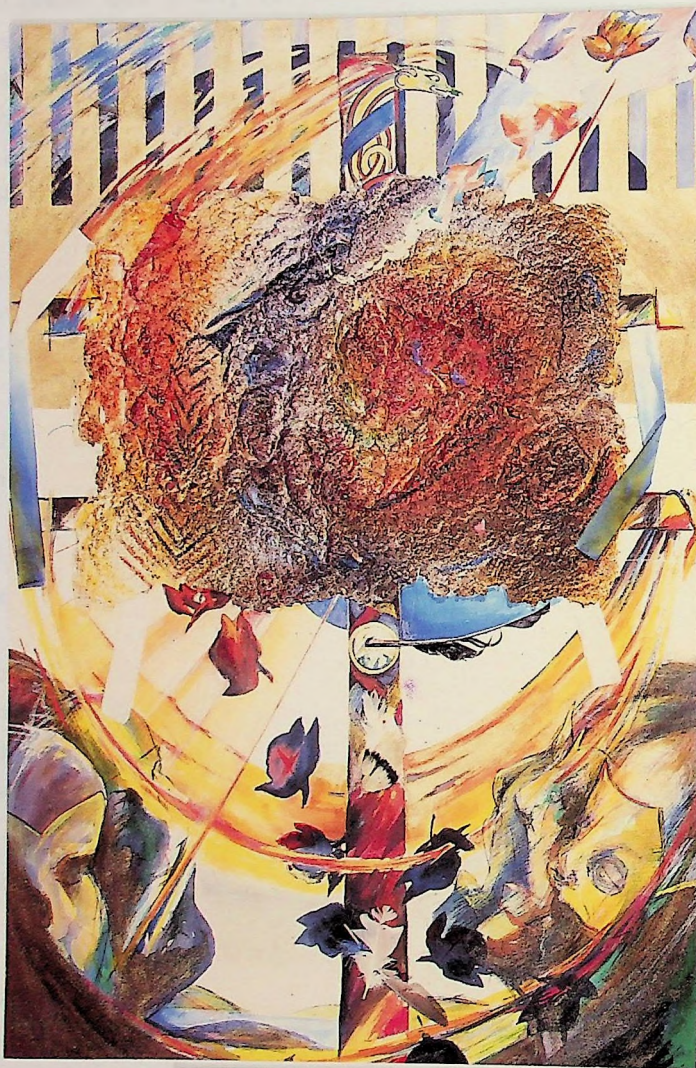
Vivienne Bogan and the late Steve Barraclough are two Irish artists who have taken a specific interest in working with pulp. Steve Barraclough's interest in paper would have most probably been influenced by experimental work done by American artists, such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauchenberg, under the encouragement of Fine Art printer Kenneth Tyler. According to Art critic David Brett,

"...Steve Barraclough made some exquisite prints both on and with cotton linters." (ref. 1p5).

which would indicate, by his approach, that he was following closely the experimental work being done in America by other print artists. Vivienne Bogan's early work involved using handmade, hand coloured sheets of paper pulp as a base in which, to embed images, and stick on top of, in a manner that would indicate influences from American Experimentation. Examples of this work are hanging in the Allied Irish Bank



1 -untitled.1984



2 - "Burning Bush" series, 1988

collection at the headquarters in Ballsbridge and in the Restaurant of the Riverrun Gallery on Dame Street, Dublin 2. The piece in the AIB Collection is reminiscent of patchwork of fields using stitching and colour in a manner that is very sympathetic to the delicacy of the paper. "Kiss Kiss Mr. Joyce", the piece in the Riverrun gallery is done in a manner similar to the cast paper prints of artists such as Jasper Johns and Kenneth Noland (ref.5 p.67).

However, in her more recent work she seems to have dropped her sensitivity towards the paper pulp and is exploiting its qualities for other reasons. The way paper pulp changes and distorts the qualities of what is embedded in it seems to be her present fascination. Illustration 1 is a good example of this, it shows the start of a transitional period in her work which seems to be still going on. In her most recent work the mass of paper pulp has become an abstract representation for an element that she cannot express in the drawings that collect around it (see ill.2). As yet her efforts to combine two dimensional drawing and three dimensional manipulation of paper pulp seem clumsy and unresolved. There doesn't seem to be adequate integration between the drafted imagery and the mass of pulp. The use of stitching and inclusion of foreign material, embedded in, and protruding from the pulp, is no longer a strong enough method to connect the pulp with the illustrated backing sheet. Eilish O'Connell and Romy Gray have also used paper in its pulp form but in a manner that is much more resolved with the ideology behind their work. This will be considered further in the chapters that relate specifically to their work.

In approaching a discussion of work by Irish artists working in paper it became apparent that it would be futile to attempt to view their work in a group context. This is because of the diversity of their respective influences and approaches. So each artist will be discussed separately in relation to the circumstances and influences surrounding the development of their work in paper, including a discussion of their paper

works themselves. However there are some issues that have a significance for all the artists and these will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

It cannot go without notice that all the artists doing work of any significance in paper, in Ireland, are women. The existence of this fact has led to a number of theories about the medium itself and the supposed creative attitudes of the artists using it. One example of this is evident from an article written by David Brett reviewing work exhibited by Romy Gray, Teresa McKenna and Pamela Hardesty in a group exhibition at the Craft Council H.Q. gallery in Dublin. (ref.1,p5). His opening passage drew attention to a much argued issue about definition of artifacts as either art or craft origin. He then continuously implied that the work was craft and even more specifically women's craft and so deduced that

"One related to paper in the way one related to 'feminine' materials"...(ref.1,p.6).

It is possible to see similarities between some methods of manipulation of paper used by Irish artists and sewing simply because thread is often used as an aid in the construction of the piece.[?] But to limit the medium to an exclusively feminine gender is ridiculous because it excludes consideration with the paper medium. As previously mentioned the consideration of paper as a medium in itself evolved out of a series of experiments done by artists who were involved in the revival of American print. This fact immediately puts paper as a medium into a fine art perspective. It has remained as a particularly fine art medium and has been used by a number of highly respected fine artists such as, Robert Rauchenberg, David Hockney, Kenneth Nolan, Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, Batuz and Robert Motherwell. It seems strange that what is considered a feminine medium in Ireland would be investigated by such a large contingent of highly acclaimed artists in the U.S.A. It possibly reflects a tendency of conservative attitudes, regarding what is a viable medium or method for creating fine art, within the Irish art scene. Incidentally,

both Robert Rauchenbergs major paper projects involved the use of cloth within the pieces themselves, and there was no mention of using particularly feminine techniques in the documentation of the work processes. (ref. 8, p123). All the artists discussed in the following chapters are adamant in their description of their work as "Fine Art" and refuse to accept that the craft associations of some of the techniques they use would be possible grounds on which to refute that description. (ref. all interviews). The connection between their paper pieces and the revival of handmade paper as a craft would be possible grounds on which to consider the work as craft. However, this connection does not exist in Ireland as none of the artists are involved in production of handmade paper, for any reasons, other than experimentation with surface to solve particular ideological problems (see chapters on Romy Gray and Eilish O'Connell).

Other possible contributing factors for interpreting Irish paperworks as craft would be the educational histories of the artists involved in using it, along with the fact that the first major group exhibition was held in the Crafts Council H.Q. Gallery. With the exception of Eilish O'Connell all the artists discussed in the following chapters have had some training in areas that are traditionally considered craft. Romy Gray studied ceramics but has always used her technical knowledge for the construction of sculptural reliefs in clay. She has since stopped all her personal creative work in clay in favour of a medium with less "fetishisation of the means" (ref. 1, p6). Helen Comerford originally trained in ceramics but has long since established herself as a fine art sculptor. All through the 1970's she was working in fibre-glass. Since around 1982 she has been working in paper for reasons that will be discussed in greater depth in the chapter on her work. Pamela Hardesty trained in textiles although she has always used her technical knowledge for more fine art sculptures than craft associated wall hangings. The discovery of paper as a medium was a freedom from all the technical lore that had been inhibiting a thorough ideological resolve in her

sculptures. Teresa McKenna had an ambiguous education being a sculpture student working in tapestry. Her work has been a consistent evolution of tactile approaches to surface. Presently her interests lie in sensuous qualities that can be built between layers of paper.

David Brett has considered the defensive arguments, put to him by Gray, Hardesty and McKenna in support of their work as fine art, as "sociological phenomenon". (ref.1,p.6). One would presume that what he means here refers to possible influences, of feminist justification of womens craft as art, upon their work. However none of these artists are using their techniques to make any feminist statements in their work in the first place. So to reason their defences, of their work as fine art, as the sociological products of feminist thought on the fine art significance of womens craft, seems irrelevant. It also seemed irrelevant that he raised the point that a large number of people working in the area "between the acknowledged fine arts and the utilitarian crafts" are female; considering that in many places paper as a medium is already acknowledged as a viable medium for fine art investigations.

One could continue to debate the significance of works in paper as either fine art or craft in relation to many other issues of significance regarding contemporary Irish art. However it seems that until paper, as a medium, becomes recognised in relation to the visual distinctions of Irish mainstream art, that this issue will not be resolved.

"...The organising compulsions of art criticism ..." (ref 3,p11). have a lot to answer for in shaping perceptions towards Irish paper works into what they are today. The following chapters are an examination of some of this work, in relation to the highly individual circumstances that have shaped it in the minds of the artists themselves. Drawing a concluding statement on the work of these artists as a group would be impossible and futile because of the diversity of their work. Any similarities in theme such as the influence of landscape on

their work are merely coincidental and probably the result of having the same environment in which to work. What is important here is the individual interpretation, by each artist, of these influences in relation to their common choice of medium which is paper.

Chapter 1
Early Days

Chapter 1.

Romy Gray.

Romy Gray started working in paper as a result of a miniature book of recycled and handmade oriental papers, that was sent to her as a present from a friend. At the time she received the book between 1982 and 1983, she was working for a year in Holland. She was making large ceramic sculptures at the Keramisch Workcentrum in Heusden. Ceramics is the field that she studied in N.C.A.D., from which she graduated with honours in 1978. She hasn't worked in clay since she returned to Ireland in 1983 other than when teaching ceramics on a part-time basis in 1985-86 at Dun Laoghaire School of Art and Design and since 1989 at the College of Catering and Design.

Her final ceramic work in Holland used clay in techniques very similar to those used in paper. (see ill.3). She was tearing flattened pieces of porcelain clay and then overlaying them in a collage-type construction, a feature that is very prominent in her later paper works. (see ill. (9/6). This technique was used for constructing a series of independent hollow cubes which were strongly influenced by the Horn Head cliff face in Donegal, that has an incredibly geometric cubic quality about it, the surfaces of the cubes were atmospherically painted with oxides in an effort to simulate the bands and swirls of colour in the rock. This attention to surface is very significant in relation to her later approaches to paper surfaces. (see ill. s 11/12). The individual ceramic cubes were then intended to be stacked and positioned in a similar manner to the naturally existing rock face (ref. interview). Without knowing the intention of the artists these pieces could easily be mistaken for an abstract representation of a shanty town, or a group of cardboard boxes dumped after a market. This is an interesting analogy considering that "Horn Head Cliff Face" was one of the last major pieces that Romy made in clay.

Her final piece in clay of which, unfortunately, there is no record available, is a thick flattened slab of porcelain "raku", that has a texture very similar, whether deliberate or not, to some of the papers she has created for her later work (see ill. 8). She is also fascinated by the strong

rythmic surface cracks, created by the raku technique in the clay, for their own abstract qualities. She describes them as some, as yet unintelligible written language (ref. interview). Romy is fascinated by calligraphy and markings and uses them quite frequently in her work. She sees writing as symbolic of her work, (ref. interview) but its use could be interpreted as representative of a level of understanding she feels she has reached relating to the idea behind the piece she has completed.

Romy's explorations of imagery and of ideas are done almost on two different wavelengths, the physical and the intellectual (ref. interview). The physical is hand and eye observation of things that fascinate her. These are landscapes, feathers, tassles, calligraphy, ritual talismans, flowers, the list is ongoing. The intellectual is her constant toying with an idea whether it be a sentence, a piece of music, or a myth. At the point where both wave lengths meet, an image or series of images are formed. This point is also illustrated in the way she works with paper itself. The actual feel of paper and its various qualities resulting from the raw material used in its making, is very important in her work. She sees the actual papermaking itself almost as a separate unit from the making of a piece. She claims she often waits for weeks until the right mood strikes her to actually compile the images as finished pieces and decide what they are actually about. Romy does not dwell on one particular theme or source for her imagery while seeking a visual resolve for an idea. The visual answer seems to be an instinctive response to that particular thought, although there is a constant mood in her work. This mood varies slightly depending on her personal emotions combined with the materials she is using at the time (ref. interview).

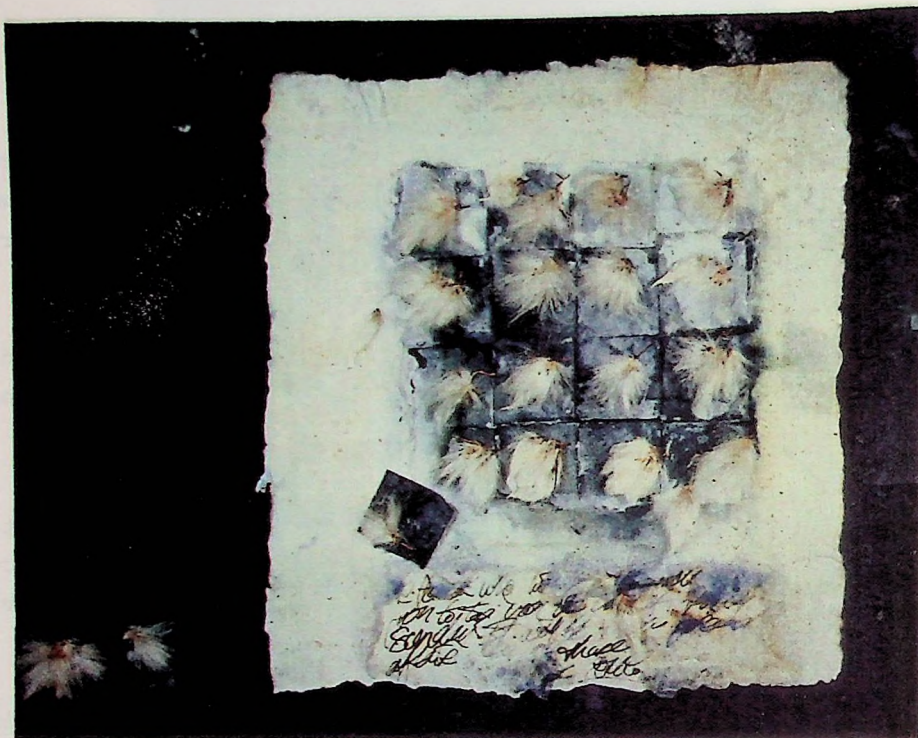
The main reason that actually started Romy working in paper is that when she returned to Ireland in 1983, she had no access to a kiln. So she started experimenting with the medium to which she had been so unexpectedly yet pleasantly introduced. She uses a lot of bought, mainly oriental, papers



4 -"Bundles of Thoughts."1985



5 -"Bundles of Feathers for Mozart."1986



6 - "Flying Bog Cotton II." 1987



7 - "Tribute to Muriel Gann" 1987/88

in her work because she feels they have qualities that she wants to communicate in her pieces (ref. interview). For example, in "Fragrance for the Journey" (see ill.12) the white paper in the top right hand section of the piece is possibly symbolic of a cloud of scent given off by the flowers. Only an oriental long fibred paper would be able to communicate the pleasant sense of softness and that is necessary to convey the feeling of relief; created by having a soothing fragrance for the duration of a long hot train journey through China. This memory is essentially what "Fragrance for the Journey" is about (ref. interview).

The preciousness of the oriental papers, resulting from the high level of skilled craftsmanship intertwined with traditionally eastern respect for natural materials is another feature of these papers that would encourage the artist to use them. She has a high respect for cultural systems including her Celtic heritage and feels that people have a lot to learn from them. She does not distinguish one culture in particular as having greater relevance over another in her work. Although she is particularly fascinated by China at present as a result of having travelled there during 1988 and 1989. This was made possible as a result of winning the "Millenium Presentation Piece" bursary granted by the Lord Mayor of Dublin. This winning piece was a book of ten loose leaf views and maps of Dublin at various stages over the thousand years.(ref. interview). After Romy returned from China there is a marked difference in her work. The reasons are probably a combination of the inevitable oriental influences she picked up in China and effects of dealing with her father's death on her return. Some of the first pieces she did when she returned were tributes to him and they have the greatest sense of calm of all her work. (ref. interview).

Romy's unbiased respect for different cultures is quite well illustrated in "Crane Bag II" (see ill.9). Romy has combined her own personal interpretation of the Irish myth of the Crane Bag with traditionally eastern materials, such as the

translucent white Nepalese paper in the centre of the Chinese calligraphic monogram of her name in the bottom left hand corner. Her monogram is also combined in the gold coloured piece laid on top of the white sheet, which seems to be symbolic of both Aoife and the Crane Bag itself. In including her monogram within this piece she seems to be suggesting a self-affiliation with Aoife in her desire for knowledge. The Crane Bag myth recounts how Manannan, god of the sea, punished his wife Aoife for stealing the sacred knowledge with which one could understand the meaning of the letters made in the sky by cranes as they fly. In essence, the Crane Bag story is about the first Irish alphabet. Manannan punished Aoife by first, magically transforming her into a Crane and then skinning her to make the Crane Bag itself which contained everything that Manannan held precious.

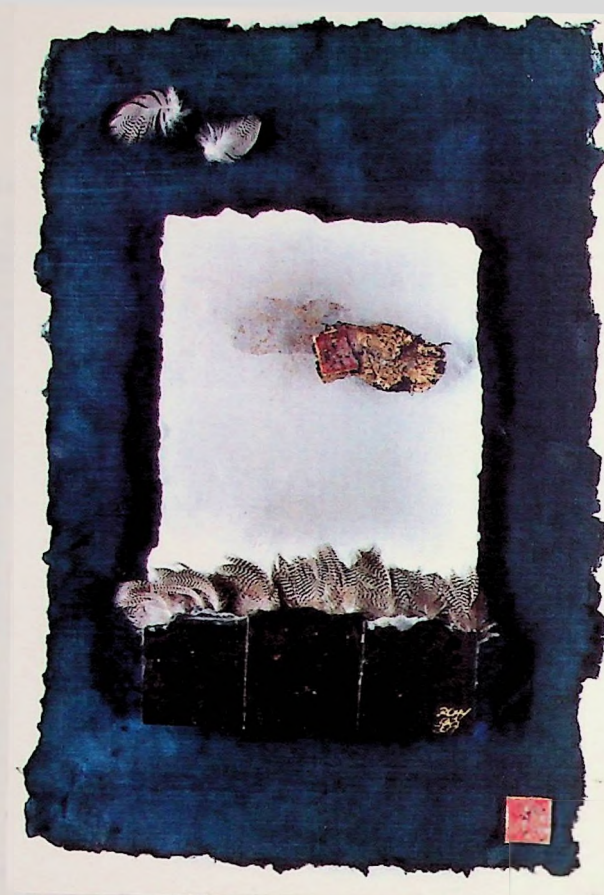
"...when the sea was full all the treasures were visible in it, but when the fierce sea ebbed, the crane bag was empty..."(Book ref.9,p.1).

In the earlier "Crane Bag" piece Romy used gold calligraphy on the background or base paper which has a quality somewhat like cured hide or vellum. The calligraphy itself is unintelligible possibly reflecting a feeling of loss; of a culture she feels is no longer fully understood. An investigation of written language seems to be a continuous theme in Romy's work. Whether that language is reflected in the various visual ideocyncracies of the landscape, in the texts or early manuscripts, in lines of music, or in the talismanic images of oriental prayer offerings, seems of no consequence to the level of her interest.

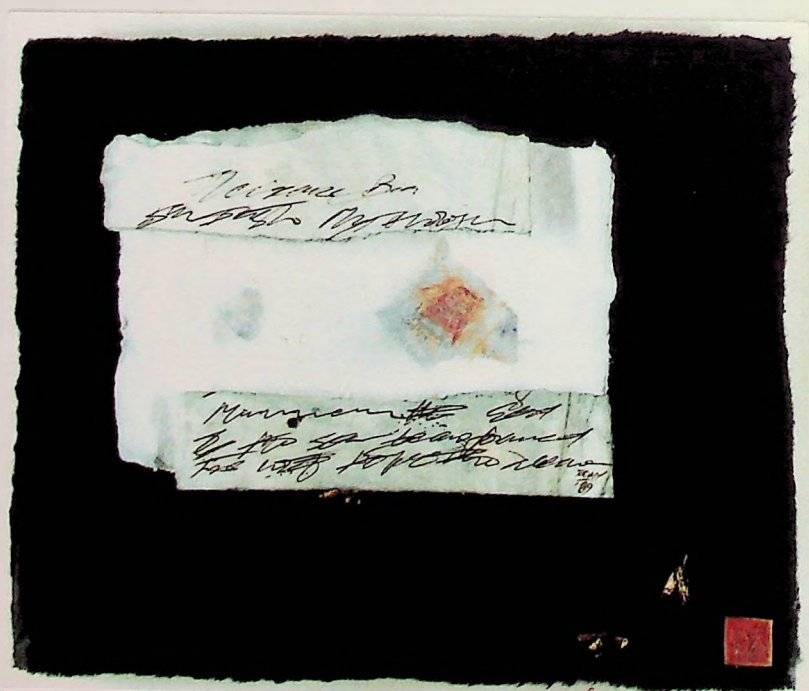
A good example of Language of Land, and of Letterform being congealed together would be "Flying Bog Cotton II" (see ill.6). The formal box-like layout was influenced by a photograph Romy took of a flat area of the Burren, at sunset. (ref. interview). It must have been taken soon after a rainfall because there are still pools of water reflecting like gold in the sunset, sitting on top of cubes of flat fractured rock. The whole scene had an incredibly mythical quality about it,



8 -"Crane Bag I." 1989



9 - "Crane Bag II." 1989



10 - "Rest for the Journey." 1989

(a firm confirmation for anybody doubting the existence of Leprechauns' pots of gold hidden in Irish landscapes). The pools of gold at sunset seems to be such rare treasure to Romy that she possibly felt the only way to convey it was as something ethereal or in flight. Thus the use of bog cotton. It is not absolutely clear whether her use of handwriting here is purely decorative or of greater significance. However presuming that it is more intellectually intentional, a possible interpretation of its use could be, an attempt to convey a sense of frustration about a lack of precise human language, with which the scene could be properly recounted. The fact that the ink of the handwritten piece was allowed to distort the text by bleeding over itself, and also seeping into the pulp of the handmade white backing sheet, is a further confirmation of a frustration with Language.

The use of Bog Cotton brings to light another theme in her work which is flight, (ref. interview) and seems she means flight in its broadest sense. This would include birds and feathers and also reflections of transience. (ref. interview). Romy has a great collection of feathers, some of rare tropical birds and others that are more commonly found. Some of the more exotically coloured feathers have influenced the dyed colours of some of her own hand made papers. She uses the feathers to convey many different things. In the two "Crane Bag" pieces it is obvious that they are symbolic of the flight of the cranes and the language they convey in their movement across the sky. It is also possible to see them used as a means of showing the transience of the knowledge that Manannan had trapped within the crane bag. As in both "Crane Bag I and II" feathers have been placed tucked under a pocket of paper which seems, to symbolize the crane bag itself.

In "Bundles of Feathers for Mozart" she has bound the feathers into tassels with silk. This piece was inspired by Romy's fascination with the brilliance of Mozart's music. It seems she found a sense of lightness and airyness and possibly a

sense of flight within it. The bundles of feathers seem to be tributes to the music. Also the use of 24 Carat Gold calligraphic markings suggestive of bars of music on the underlying translucent white sheet is further confirmation of this interpretation. The bundles of feathers occupy a large area of the picture plane, and occupy the area between the glass and the backing sheet in a dense and luxurious manner. This could be interpreted as a means of showing the way she felt the air becomes filled with the music. The picture plane seems soft and calm and generally a nice place, for the mind to reflect. Romy feels that it is important to feel a sense of calm from her work (ref. interview). This could possibly be an indicator of satisfaction with the resolve of the idea behind the piece.

Bundles and Tassles are a continuously present feature of Romy's work. She is fascinated by oriental buildings, packages and tassles and frequently uses them in the structure of her pieces. (ref. interview). The tassles seem to be containers or relics or even fetishes to the ideas behind the work. It is also interesting to note that a lot of the images where tassles are used are particularly devoted towards conveying a memory. In "Flying Bog Cotton II" it is a memory of golden pools on cubes of rock, in "Fragrance for the Journey" it is the memory of the relief of a pleasant smell on a hot train journey in China. In "Tribute to Muriel Crann", (see ill.7) which was commissioned by the Craft Council, the tassle bindings are like relics of Muriel Crann's lifeworks. "Bundles of Thoughts" (see. ill.4) which was an earlier work seems initially to be very literal proof of the connection between tassles and memories. However one can't help wondering if there is an intended pun on the word bundle, in the sense of too many thoughts. This is illustrated by the slightly confused looking collection of tassles combined with illegible text. This piece seems a lot more active than some of the later pieces. The colours are brighter and more aggressive, and the picture plane is less compositionally resolved than in later pieces, where the idea is



11 -"Offerings to the Morning Sun." 1989



12 -"Fragrance for the Journey."1989

compositionally explained alongside the visual symbolism being used.

There is quite a wide and progressive transition in Romy's work, between her last ceramic pieces and her more recent paper works. In earlier works the delicate and more emotive qualities of the papers themselves seem suppressed and maybe a little ignored (see ill. 4/5). As she began to get more involved in paper at the making stage, more of the narrative qualities of surface, texture, colour and translucency seem to be understood and used advantageously in the final resolve of her pieces. The quantity of more literal imagery in the pieces has been gradually economised. The amount of calligraphy is ghosted out in later pieces and imagery such as bundles, tassles, feathers and bog cotton is reduced to a bare minimum. The paper has become abstract image. It is a source of reinforcing feeling, supporting the more literal eclectic imagery. (see ill. 12). In the most recent pieces the literal imagery such as monograms, tassles and calligraphy seem like jewelery decorating the body of the idea which is contained in the hand treated paper. Maybe this transition will continue away from such imagery and the paper will go bare, satisfied with all the necessary images combined within its own qualities.

Chapter 2.

Teresa Mc Kenna.

Teresa McKenna's work is about Land. She refers to Land as an all-encompassing term for a sense of place, structures within the Land, the emotive qualities of Land the actual Landscape itself. She has tackled her fascination with Land in various ways between the early tapestries of her college days and her recent paper works.

McKenna started college in Ireland in the National College of Art and Design as a sculpture student under the old course structure, which had a very rigid approach to creativity with materials. A lot of attention was given to working from Life models and most of the techniques taught had a leaning move towards carving into wood and stone as opposed to building with a material. This approach did not appeal to McKenna's intuitive response to materials. So while carrying on in the sculpture department she tried out a few night classes, in search of a medium and approach to creating that she felt would enhance what she was trying to communicate. One of the night classes she tried was in tapestry and it was this area that she chose to work in when the course structure changed its rigid teaching methods and became the department of Fine Art. New tutors were brought in and students were encouraged to use whatever medium they wished. Teresa went to the tapestry department as a fine art student and began to build tapestry sculptures, using "found materials" and sisal, a kind of coarse rope. (ref. interview).

Having found a material and method of working that suited her McKenna was now worried about having only partially built a skill, in terms of proper masonry or wood-carving or all the technical lore behind various tapestry stitches. However after finishing her course in Ireland she received a grant to study tapestry in Scotland where the technical emphasis was much more liberal and her worries about learning skills were dispersed and "the doing took over" (ref. interview). This change in technical emphasis is probably to her long term advantage because both Romy Gray and Pamela Hardesty who are also discussed in this thesis are quoted in a group interview with David Brett as feeling "overtrained" in the fields that



13 - "Bogland on Achill." 1978



14 - "Shapes and Space in Land; Inisheer." 1983



15 - "Shapes and Space in Land (detail)." 1983

they studied at college (ref.1,p5).

One of the first major tapestry pieces Teresa McKenna made is "Bogland on Achill" (see ill.13). There is a very strong emphasis on the various types of weave used in constructing the piece which doesn't help to enhance the sense of place that McKenna wished to convey. The piece is about the awesome sight of manmade cuts in a bog rising up on a hillside on Achill Island (ref. interview). One gets a sense of awe mainly from the scale and depth of the piece, in some places the pile is six to eight inches deep, however overall it seems lacking in atmosphere. The piece seems too literal and binding in its attempts to simulate the texture and substance of bog, and so loses out on some of the more intangible atmospheric qualities that are very much an integral part of her later work.

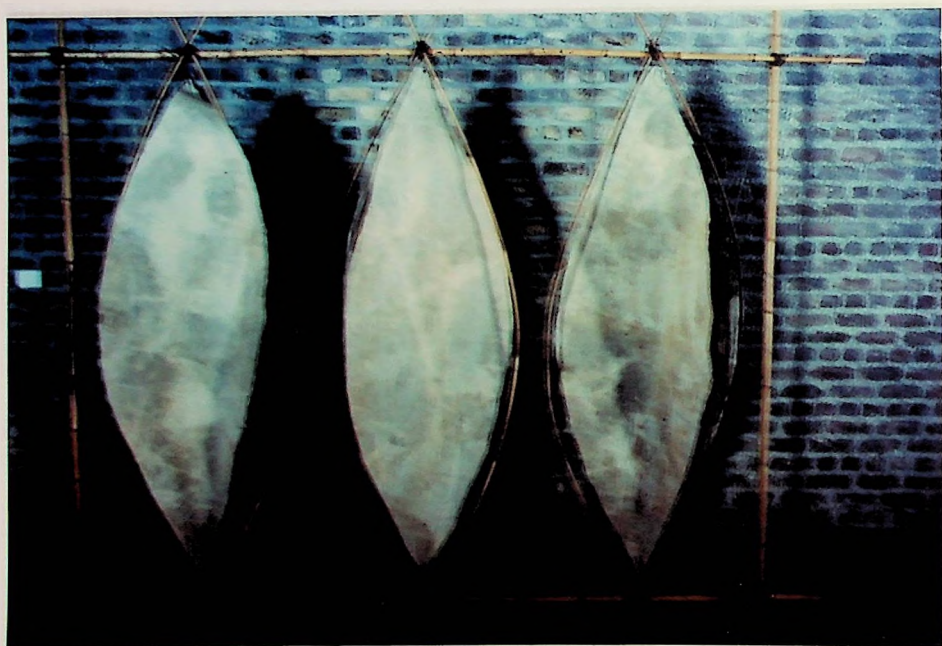
"Shapes and Spaces in Land" is about Inisheer the smallest and probably most barren of the Aran Islands (see ill.14). Teresa McKenna was fascinated by "the thinness of the land", and the methodical ways of the people who farmed it. She spoke of tiny fields with no gates containing one animal grazing on the sparse grass. Also the methodical rotation of an animal from one stone walled thin field to another by breaking down the wall of one field and moving the animal through to the next and then building up the wall again (ref. interview). McKenna seems to have questioned her methods of mark making in tapestry quite deeply between "Bogland on Achill" (see ill.13) and this piece. This is a feature of her approach to media shown consecutively through her works to date. Even though "Shapes and Space in Land" has a more minimal and abstract appearance there is a much greater feeling of deliberation about it. The frame that had been hidden in the "bogland" piece (see ill.13) has become an equally important part of the statement being made in this piece. The shorter bamboo pieces in the central section have a structural function in that they strengthen the frame. They also reflect the markings woven into the tapestry on the left. They also continue their direction into the spacial

environment of tapestry on the right. The spatial environments of both tapestries are also defined by the large bamboo frame.

McKenna considers the frame as a "scaffolding" for the piece. (ref. interview). One could interpret this as meaning both a physical and intellectual scaffolding. Although she says that when she first started to display her work in this way the "scaffolding" was purely a means of support for the tapestries. It seems that as the work progressed, the frame became more integrated into the overall appearance and concept of the pieces.

The actual markings of "Shape and Space in Land" seem much more controlled and deliberate without losing any of the emotive qualities of the rougher textures of the "Bogland..." piece (please compare ill. 13/14). There is no interference with the viewers attention resulting from the technical constraints of the weaving itself. Personally this piece reflects the paradoxical conflict of the methodology of the people of Inisheer's way of life and the stark, eerie, mystical beauty of the tiny barren island that is their home.

It is probable that the technical resolve in tapestry of that particular work, helped Teresa McKenna develop a new awareness of two-dimensional surface. She probably found that it was possible to create atmospheric and textural references without obligatory physical depth in the pile of the woven tapestry. There are two pieces that were part of an exhibition in the Guinness Hop store that was shown about a year after "Shape and Space in Land" was exhibited. They both clearly show a transitional stage in perception of surface. "Shapes in Land" (see ill.16) and "Work in Five Pieces" (see ill.17) both show a break away from tapestry as image and also a reconsidering of the frame as a viable part of the overall structure. "Shapes in Land" is probably the first piece where techniques, similar to those used by McKenna in her paper works, appear. (i.e. Laminating surfaces together to create image). There is a strong similarity between this



16 - "Shapes in Land." 1983



17 - "Work in Five Pieces." 1984

piece and structures made by American Indians for curing hides but McKenna claims that this is not intentional (ref. interview). However it could well be a subconscious analogy because she had been doing some work with animal skins prior to making this piece. Other than this there seems to be no apparent ideological explanation for structuring the three flat surfaces in this frame-like manner other than that their surface qualities have a strong similarity to parchment or vellum. Having seen McKennas previous work one cannot help asking why is there use of a frame when there is no tapestry? Also the lack of her usually strong markings that were present in her tapestries, doesn't make the usual connection between the surfaces and Land. The piece seems to be purely atmospheric.

In "Work in Five Pieces" (see ill.17) the frame has once again become an unseen element of the structure and thus there is less emphasis on the integration of space into the piece. This is also one of the first instances where any form of two dimensional drafting appears in McKenna's work. In terms of form, the overall treatment of the piece seems to integrate well considering there are five individual sections in the piece. However, the conflicting methods of mark making on two dimensional surface and in three dimensional tapestry is intimidating, when trying to consider all five pieces as one visual unit. Again in this piece, as well as in "Shapes in Land", it is difficult to see any literal reference to Land features. The markings whether two or three dimensional, seem to be purely abstract.

When looking back on this work McKenna admires its "wildness" (ref. interview). By that she possibly means its overall essence of intangibility. Even in "Bogland on Achill" (see ill.13) there is an indescribable quality of Land being communicated and it is probably the most literally true to Landscape of all the tapestry work discussed so far. She feels that her work in paper is much more descriptive about land in a literal sense, than any of the tapestries. (ref. interview). This is possibly because of the importance of

more drafting associated techniques in her paper works. Whereas in the tapestries drafting was only used in the preliminary stages of the work. The term drafting is used here because the conservative interpretation of terms such as drawing and painting do not seem to adequately define McKenna's approach to mark-making in paper. This also applies to the work of the other artists working in paper discussed in this thesis.

As McKenna is now aware of this unintentional transition from "wilderness" to literal in her work she may experiment with her mark-making techniques in order to recapture what she feels is now hidden. However it seems fair to consider her work in paper, the most thoroughly resolved of all her work to date. She feels that space around her pieces plays an equally important part in defining what she wants to say, as the structures that she actually creates (ref. interview). It seems from her explanation of the structures in her pieces that she is also "weaving" with space. The connection between surface texture and space in McKenna's work, seems so strong that it is difficult for her to consider them separate. (see ill.18). So really McKenna's work in paper is a progressive transition from what she was doing with tapestry. It was a reconsidering of surface that changed her medium from tapestry to paper; the sources of influences and approach to communicating her ideas are still the same. Therefore if surface is reconsidered, it seems logical that a new approach to space would follow.

McKenna's method of working in paper is actually quite physically similar to tapestry. She works by laminating sheets of paper together with wax and often interlayers the paper with buckram which is a stiff fabric similar to sailcloth. She makes marks between the layers of paper and buckram and they either overlap to create density and strength of colour or they become ghosted by a build-up of translucent waxed and glued papers (see ill.19). The layers of paper and cloth are like the basic threads at the start of the tapestry, and the markings between and on top of the papers are like the build-up of the weave.



18 - "Tribute I." 1987

"Tribute I" (see ill.18) is part of a series of paper works about Newgrange, Ancient monuments both natural and man made, and passage graves in general. Immediately the Celtic stone curvilinear markings give a literal perspective to the piece. Looking back at previous tapestries in the context of this work, their markings seem more vague and abstract. It is almost like the tapestries are holding back some essential information inside a skin of atmospheric woven markings. In "Tribute I" (see Ill.18) there is an immediate quality of stone and great age embedded between the layers of the paper. This kind of literal definition about "a sense of place" does not exist in relation to the tapestries. Maybe this is because stereotypical interpretations of media do not allow people to perceive such descriptions in certain media. However McKenna herself has admitted to a certain "wildness" in her earlier work so it is probably this that is, the cause of lack of definition in the tapestries instead of cliched perception of media.

It is easy for all the information that goes into making a piece such as "Tribute I" to filter through the layers of paper. This is because it is built of a flat surface instead of between bars of thread. As well as the markings, the forms of the various sections of the "Tribute I" piece seem literally reminiscent of an ancient religious monument (see ill.18). The lowest, kidney shaped section seems like a sacrificial stone altar and a gaping primitive style mouth, simultaneously. The darker more atmospherically treated pieces rising behind it seem like an imposing stone, environment backdrop for the expansive ritualistic altar below.

The quality of the marks on the surfaces of this piece are equally influenced by the overall sense of place as well as the monument itself. Notice the difference between the deeper and softer quality of the surface treatment in "Tribute I" compared to the thinner, harsher and more brittle quality of surface in the "Burren" piece. (see ill.18/20 respectively). These two pieces come from the same series of work yet the obvious influences of the environments from which both subjects



19 -"Tribute III." 1987



20 -"Burren."1987



21 -"Blackhead I." 1987

are taken, make very clear that both images have an entirely different environmental identity. The qualities of surface are a lot more sensuously descriptive than in the previous tapestries especially, the later transitional ones (see ill. 16/17). It seems that McKenna has found a way of describing emotive qualities of place more successfully in paper than in tapestry without losing any of the abstract quality of her work at this stage. The lack of definition she had, in relating her own perceptions within her work, seems to be reconciled in her paper works.

Two later works show this reconciliation of sensuous description in paper, being taken even further. "Farmers Walk" (see ill. 22) and "Blackhead I" (see ill. 21) are probably the closest work to traditional Landscape that Teresa McKenna has done to date. There is an unignorable inclusion of perspective in these two pieces. It seems that this is the first instance ever that perspective is used. At the same time there is a slight loss of the intangible abstract quality of previous works.

When talking about the "Blackhead I" piece, McKenna mentioned being fascinated by the height of the rocks jutting up from the bed of flat rock on which they were resting. She spoke of the deep sharp gullies carved into the flat bed of rock, that were running off into the distance (ref. interview). So it seems the inclusion of a kind of perspective would be a natural inclination if these were the qualities that she wished to display.

However, there could be a further more personal reason for this development. Possibly rooted in a recognition of the greater control and understanding she is achieving in paper compared to previous work in tapestry. As mentioned previously, she has noticed a change towards a more literal description of subject in her work (ref. interview). However she did not state any observations of particular features in her work where a noticeable change has been made. So it remains for the critical observer to draw their own conclusions.



22 -"Farmer's Walk."1987

Chapter 3. Pamela Hardesty.

"Farmers Walk" is the most recent piece of work to be discussed here. Again there is a noticeable inclusion of a kind of perspective. Compositionally this piece is quite similar to a traditional scenic view. On the extreme right there is a vertical column modelled in light and dark tone paper, possibly symbolising a tree trunk. The rest of the picture plane seems divided in the middle by a horizon line. The significance of these markings is probably very minor in terms of the main theme of the piece. The theme is another conveying of a "sense of place". However, here there seems to be an added element of knowledge or understanding of the environment explored by the artist. The atmospheric effects of the textures of land and sky are embedded in the layers of paper. They are very precisely described with crumplings and stains, dark opaque areas contrasting with lighter translucent areas. In previous tapestry works a lot of what is defined here was left up to the surrounding spaces in the frame to explain. What was originally sculpture has become more and more akin to painting. The qualities of "wildness" and vagueness seem to have given way to a more literal descriptive interpretation. This is something that McKenna seems to have been equally an observer of as a party to, and as yet she doesn't seem to have reconciled this fact in herself. However it seems that this is a positive progression and a further exploration with this medium will probably bring the reconciliation for which Teresa McKenna feels she is still searching. (ref. interview).

Pamela Hardesty is an American artist, originally from West Virginia, who has based herself in south west Ireland for the last four years. Her history of art education has been quite diverse. She started studying art theory in the University of Chicago in 1976 until 1978. It was probably around this time that she studied Sanskrit in an effort to gain greater understanding of Hindu texts. In searching for a spiritual identity for herself and a visual identity for her work, she turned her attentions away from her Methodist upbringing towards eastern belief systems such as Hinduism. In so doing she felt it necessary to learn the language of the sacred Hindu texts, which is Sanskrit, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the symbolism within the faith. However, she found its eastern philosophical traditions alien to her own personal spiritual experiences and has since reverted back to her Christian origins in Methodism.

Around 1981 she turned her attentions towards textiles and studied the technicalities of production textiles until 1983. Being from a West Virginian rural upbringing it is not unusual to see a turn towards textiles because there is a strong tradition of quilting and textiles in this area. Hardesty acknowledges that this would have had some influence over her choice to study this area. In 1984 to 1985 she studied for a Bachelor of Fine Arts through textiles at the California College of Arts and Crafts. The work that Hardesty was doing, at this stage, involved making a series of textile sculptures of ritual garments. (ref. interview).

It is here that the first signs of a desire to work with a more rigid material than cloth become evident. She has sculpted the cloth into a solid shape by incorporating wire into the weave of her tapestry. The garment she has constructed, involves the use of many highly complex tapestry weave structures and also the depiction of scenes relevant to the purpose of the garment. The ritual garment is then displayed as a wall hanging with the stiffening properties of the wire allowing it to seem filled out by space. (ref. interview).

The significance of allowing space to visually hold up the ritual garment, in a way expresses a dissatisfaction with her method of explaining her ideas about ritual and belief within cloth. She has said she

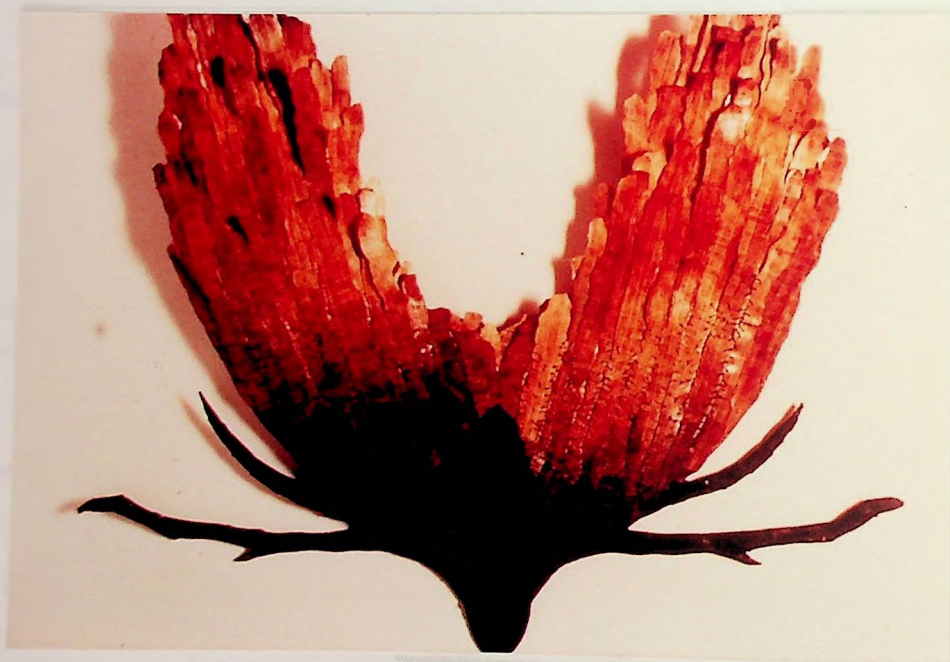
"...enjoyed the complexities of the weave structures, the richness of texture and colour possible with cloth but ... became increasingly frustrated with the softness of the fabric, with its many craft and domestic associations, and ... struggled to stiffen it away from these qualities." (ref.).

It seems sculpting associations of space, as explored by Teresa McKenna and Eilish O'Connell, are making equally significant statements about the ideology behind the piece, as the statements Hardesty has made within the cloth itself.

Hardesty came to Ireland in 1986 to work as a technical assistant to Regine Barch on a series of fine art tapestries designed by Pauline Bewick. She remained working with Barch in Caherciveen, Co. Kerry until 1988 at which time she began to reconsider what she wanted to do with her own work. The time she had spent in Kerry had been a very contemplative period and she had been very moved by the intricacies in the landscape of the area.

She decided to do a creative workshop based in the Burren, Co. Clare, and it was here that she began to seriously consider paper as a medium for her work. She had some previous experience with paper as a medium in California with Don Farnsworth, a very influential paper maker in the American paper movement. However her the work was purely experimental and did not have a major impression on her at the time.

After the workshop she returned to Cork and began to reinvestigate her consistent theme of search for spiritual insight, only this time in the much more rigid and versatile medium of paper. The relative newness of the medium and its lack of technical and historical "burden" was a very positive encouragement to investigate the properties of paper. She saw paper as something that would give her a personally significant vocabulary of texture and surface, with which to express



23 -"Visitor." 1988



24 - "Sacrifice." 1988/89

her visual explanations of her inner spiritual struggle.
(ref. interview).

Landscape plays a major role in Pamela Hardesty's paper works as a source of inspiration for imagery for her work about her own spiritual introspection. She claims that elements within the landscape of south west Ireland "act ... as strong emotional triggers" for her work. In a way her approach to the Land as a visual source is similar to that of Helen Comerford because she sees certain phenomena as a hint of something of almost explanatory relevance with regard to her spiritual struggle. Helen Comerford doesn't see the explanatory relevance of these Land phenomena purely in terms of her own religious spiritual life. For her, they are more likely to be connected to her investigations of the unity between their life forces. For example, similarities between rhythms and patterns in separate naturally existing things (see page 37).

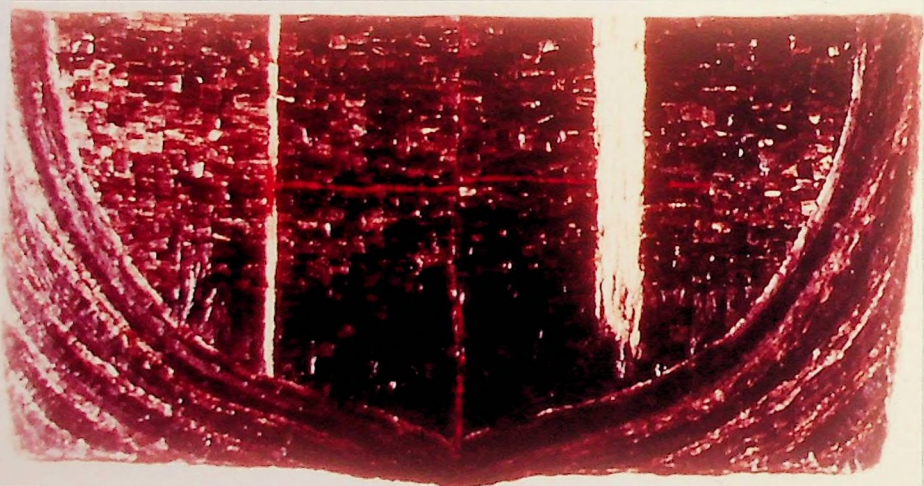
There is very little evidence of direct translation of natural landforms in Pamela Hardesty's work other than in "Sacrifice" (see ill.24) which is deliberately reminiscent of mountains. What is mainly of interest to her about the land generally appears in very small scale. These are "...the intricate coverings of lichens, mosses and plants...", their various growth patterns and subtleties of texture and colour (ref.C.Vitae). Hardesty has no direct knowledge of chaological studies as a modern science that Helen Comerford had when working on her "Earth, Fire, Air, Water" series. But when it was mentioned that scientific significance has been recently given to studies of rhythms and growth patterns in nature, she did not seem at all surprised. For her, the existence of chaological studies acts as a kind of reassurance that her own personal choice of inspirational source is considered viable to a broad spectrum of people.

The ideas of rhythm and pattern, that Hardesty takes from nature, translate themselves equally into the methodology of her work as into her visual symbolism. All her paper pieces are made up of layerings of a kind of rhythmic patchwork of

pieces of "treated" paper (see ill. 26). The layering of paper pieces seem to spread in growth pattern that in some way resolves the spiritual ideal within the piece. "Visitor" (see ill.23) and "Sacrifice" (see ill.24) are particularly good examples of this. In Visitor the overall emphasis in the growth pattern is a spreading outward, possibly of spiritual knowledge, from a centralised anonymous-looking black oval source. The overall image looks slightly like a bird in flight which is symbolic of "the holy ghost". In "Sacrifice" the mountains seem to be spreading from a central cross which divides the picture plane into four sections. In some sections the growth patterns seem to be drawn towards the cross and in others they seem to be pulsating away. This piece seems to be Hardesty's contemplation on the crucifixion. The idea of spreading of growth pattern is very important because Hardesty says that it is within the making that the understanding and resolve, of a particular spiritual struggle, is achieved and thus the piece is completed when the point of resolve is found.

Colour is incorporated into the pieces in a similar way to how it would be done in a weaving situation. The colour is applied by a controlled line of stitches in red thread across the basic structure of the piece. (see ill.26). Tonal differences in the coloured paper pieces are woven into the growth structures within a piece, to emphasise the growth direction (see ill.24). Tonal differences are also used to accentuate depth within the picture plane (see ill. 25/27).

The inclusion of depth in Hardesty's work is possibly reflective of her previous use of space to define the solid three dimensional shape of her ritual tapestry garments. Pamela Hardesty's paper works are all depicted on a relatively two-dimensional plane with no evident desire to include a sense of realism. Yet in certain situations it is obvious she feels compelled to allow "space" for certain elements in her compositions. This "space" is depicted as "depth" receding into the picture plane, achieved by darkening the tone of the paper pieces in the area that surrounds the element supposedly in



25 - "Standing on Fishes." 1989



26 - "Standing on Fishes (detail)." 1989

"space". Two examples of this accentuation of space by "depth" are firstly, in "Standing on Fishes" (see ill.15). The area around the base of the red cross is darkened, probably to identify a difference in surface plane between the semi-circular shaped background, and the two areas on both sides that are patterned by curved lines, following the shape of the background. Secondly in "Eucharist" (see ill.27) the areas nearest the central opening between the two bottom panels are darkened to accentuate the "space" as a point of entry into the picture plane.

The scale of Pamela Hardesty's paper works is very important to how she considers her approach in investigating the spiritual theme behind the imagery in each piece. She considers the smaller pieces as "fetishes", in the sense of magical amulets, which are representative of her particular spiritual understandings. The larger pieces tend to be considered more as "environments" in which her spiritual introspections can be examined. "Visitor" (see ill.23) would be considered a fetish piece, and it would seem to be personally representative of the Holy Ghost for Hardesty. "Sacrifice" (see ill.24), Eucharist (see ill.27) and "Standing on Fishes" (see ill.25) would all be considered as "environments". It seems self-evident that there is a stronger, more complex, spiritual struggle resolved in the imagery of these pieces; compared to the resolve of the imagery in "Visitor".

Transition between fine art tapestry and work in paper, although unexpected, is certainly not particularly unusual, in relation to Hardesty's method of working in paper. When asked about her work in paper in an interview with David Brett she said

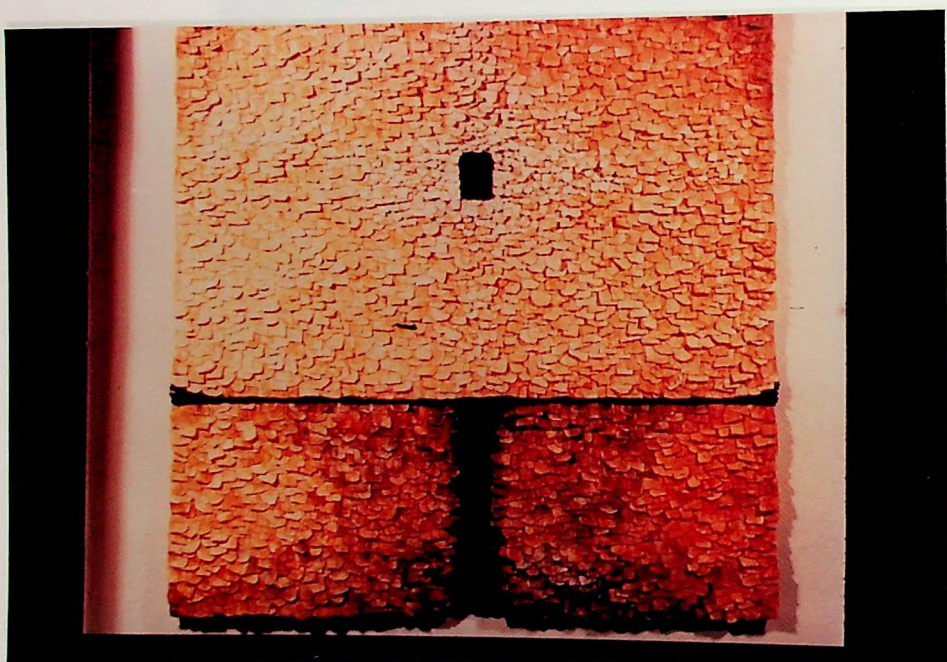
"The appeal for me is that paper can be treated like fabric, except that it is rigid; and can be made even more rigid." (ref1,p5).

All her paper pieces are constructed by layering a framework of patchwork pieces of paper into a pattern of texture and colour that relates to an issue of spiritual introspection. She incorporates colour and texture into each piece in a

similar manner to how it would be done in tapestry. The pre-coloured pieces of paper are threaded into the structure of the piece and then firmly stitched into place. Changing the direction and amount of overlap in the patchwork framework allows for subtleties of texture that would be simulated in tapestry by loosening and tightening the weave.

Hardesty has no presuppositions about preciousness in her paper work. She scratches it, soaks it in various solutions, rubs, varnishes, and scorches it, "until it changes into something else". (ref.C.Vitae). One would consider that having previously worked in such an intricate area as fine textiles, that she would have retained a type of sensitivity in her approach towards the particularly inherent qualities of paper. However it seems that she intends to use whatever method necessary in order to create the effect she wants. Just as in tapestry one would use whatever stitch necessary to create the required visual effect. Although she doesn't consider the inherent qualities of paper in her creative effects, Hardesty is very particular about archival stability in her work. She takes every precaution that the pieces are stitched and glued in a manner that ensures that they are permanently secure.

Pamela Hardesty has been working in paper for the shortest period out of all the artists discussed in this thesis, and her pieces seem to be some of the most thoroughly resolved work. The transition between tapestry and paper seems to have come about very easily for her. In fact it seems that even while working in tapestry she really needed to explain her ideas in a more physically rigid medium. Her personal spiritual investigations have been given a new visual vocabulary by her work in paper. If anything can be said about the quality of her work since she began to express her ideas in the paper medium, it is that it has been enhanced to a more matured level of self expression and introspection; coupled with an informed and sensitive approach to her medium in its own right.



27 -"Eucharist. "1989

Chapter 4.
Helen Comerford.

Helen Comerford is a sculptor in paper based in Kells, Co. Kilkenny. Her artistic training was in ceramics but she has never considered being a potter. She has worked in a variety of media including fibre glass, but since 1980 has been working in paper. This is partly due to health problems that developed from working in fibre glass and also because of a change in living environment, as she moved from Dun Laoghaire to Kells around that time. She felt that a more natural medium, in both a material and a manipulative sense, was necessary to express her feelings about her new environment and its unusual landscape (ref. interview).

She strongly believes in working consistently every day which helps in the discovery of her materials qualities. This, in turn, enables a vast range of expression within tight technical and stylistic methods. There is definitely a reflection of things infinite in her work, which she feels has come about after a long period of introspection. During that time her awareness of the rapidly accelerating adverse effects people are having on their environment had been heightened and has become a major issue of concern for her. Her recent work in paper has been connected to this but not on a social level. It is more concerned with drawing attention to the intricacies of the environment being missed as a result of pressure for more productive and sophisticated technologies in our lives (ref. interview).

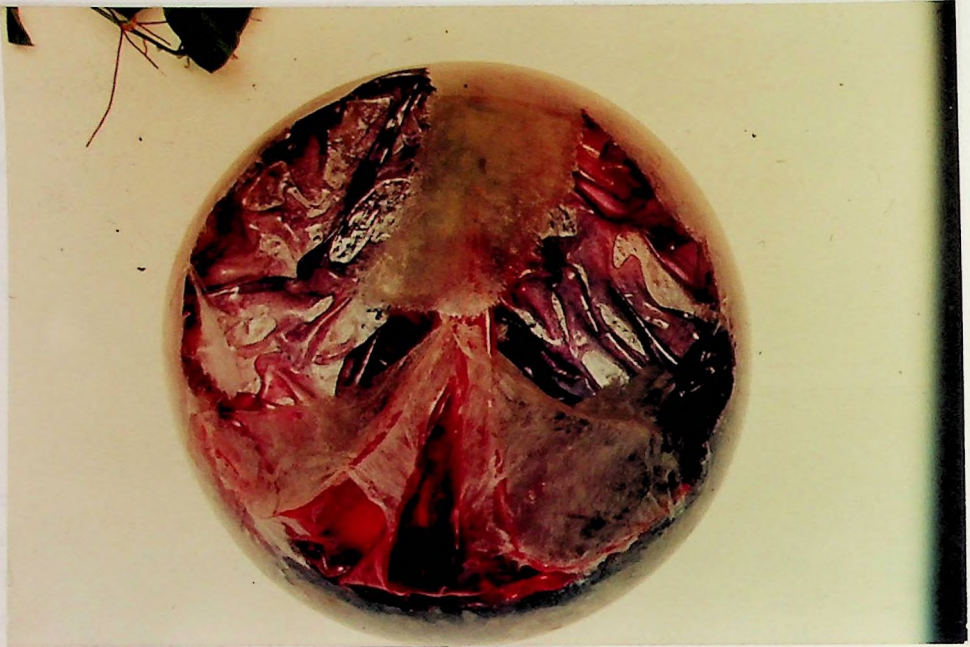
Her first experiments in this medium were with paper she made from straw. She also had the opportunity to travel to San Francisco with Bob Sloan, a sculptor from Belfast, where they both took part in a paper workshop as part of a sculpture symposium. Seeing such a vast range of possibilities further excited her about the medium and made her want to investigate it even more. She included two experimental pieces of paper work in her last primarily fibre glass exhibition, mainly because she liked their qualities so much. Seemingly, they caused quite a bit of attention because there were queries about their context in relation to the rest of the work being displayed. (ref. interview).



28 -"Earth Air Fire Water."1989



29 -"Earth Air Fire Water." 1989



30 - "Dome." (fibreglass) 1978



31 - "Dome." (fibreglass) 1978

On first glance, there seems to be very little linking Helen Comerford's work in fibreglass and her recent exhibition of paper works in the Taylor Galleries, other than an inherent sense of rhythm.. However, certain more subtle traits in her handling of ideas have translated themselves into her manipulation of paper in an equally effective manner.

Her sculptures seem to be containers of her ideas in that they are self-contained environments which explain an idea without much reliance on their surroundings. One could possibly use the term "fetish" to describe them, in that they often suggest that they contain something precious or magical. However it is not clear whether this is her deliberate intention. This is especially apparent in her fibre glass dome sculptures of 1978 (see ill. 30/31) where it is important to see rhythm and texture internally as well as externally. This emphasis on both the internal and external, combined with the translucent quality of the fibre glass, suggests that they are amulets, or vessels, containing light. In her recent paper works, a suggestion is made that the internal rhythms or life forms she is intentionally suggesting with layers of textured paper are contained within the paper itself. She has said that some of her imagery has been almost dictated by the qualities of the paper that she discovered as she was working with it. The images seem to be forcing themselves out of an outer skin or thickness of paper (ref. interview). The fact that they are block mounted emphasizes a feeling of depth in the paper that these ideas could be contained within. Some of them are also displayed behind a glass frame to further emphasize a sense of preciousness within layers as well as for protective purposes.

Her recent exhibition in the Taylor Galleries which opened in November 1989 is directly concerned with displaying rhythm and force within things. It was entitled "Earth, Fire, Air, and Water." She has taken a great interest in the natural links between the visible patterns in, for example, the bark of a tree and ripples in a stream. Her interest has been fortified by recent scientific evidence which suggests that

there is actually a proportionate mathematical link between such complex patterns resulting in the foundation of a new science called chaological studies.

Helen Comerford's manipulation of paper as a medium is very technically exacting. All the pieces in Earth, Fire, Air and Water show were made from Arches rag paper, then painted with a graphite medium that is naturally quite viscous and can be diluted to various consistencies, and then coated in beeswax for extra protection. Since works in paper are a relatively recent artistic venture, not much is known about how they survive over time. So all commonly known methods of preservation are being used by artists in an effort to reassure purchasers that they are archivally sound. This is especially prevalent in Ireland, because of the conservative attitude which exists towards media as pointed out in the introductory chapter. Hopefully, with time more knowledge of paper's qualities will become more widely known because there is a danger that over-preoccupation with preservation would stunt a more creative approach to this medium.

Ms. Comerford has built her images within the paper using small pieces of carefully torn and precisely cut, pieces of paper layered over and under each other, to create a three dimensional flowing image. Sometimes it is predominantly figurative with hints of vertebrae or circulatory systems and other times they are more elemented. As mentioned previously she feels that a lot of the resolve of her imagery was actually born of the paper itself. She has exploited qualities that she discovered within the paper while working with it methodically every day. She has taken such a controlled approach to her medium because she felt a need to confine her ideas to a symbolism that was uniform so that the links between the imagery could be seen on an equal level.

Her initial imagery comes from patterns in landscape. She is especially influenced by The Burren, which is close to where she now lives. It is easy to see a similarity between certain visual elements of her work and flaking rock and cracked earth. Some of the statements she has made about



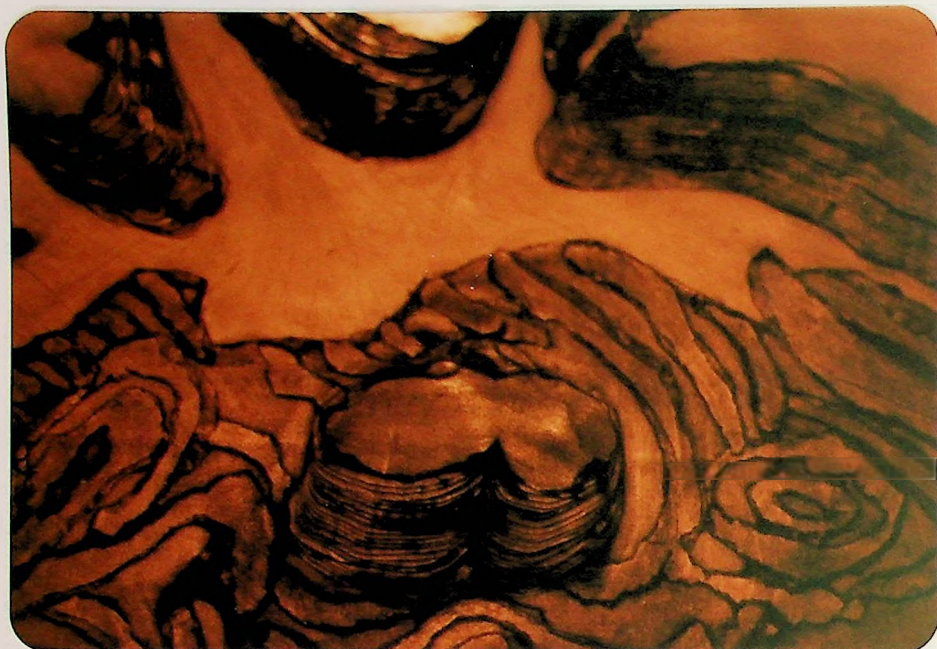
32 -"Earth Air Fire Water." 1989



33 -"Earth Air Fire Water." 1989



34 -"Land/Seascape I." 1989



35 -"Land/Seascape II." 1989



36-"Spiral." 1989

Rhythm in her work are very literal translations from nature. This is especially apparent in the seascape pieces where rhythms in tidal patterns and rock formations are translated into concentric circular swirls and flaking layers (see ill. 34/35). Also included in the show are two pieces called "Spiral" (see ill. 36) and "Square" where the internal rhythms of naturally existing geometrical images are investigated with layers of tightly packed and precisely torn and cut paper. Those two pieces are like springboards from which most of the pieces in the show could be derived. They are also the most honest and resolved pieces with regard to Ms. Comerford's particular use of the paper medium.

Other than the two seascapes and "Spiral" and "Square" the rest of the pieces in the show have a much more intangible quality about them in terms of the source of the rhythms investigated in them. Each piece can be seen to resemble certain qualities of many naturally existing textures and patterns when scrutinised and analysed from a purely visual and technical standpoint. Anything from wood grain, spinal columns, plant bulbs to microscopic views of scaly insects and butterfly wings seem to be pushing themselves out of meticulously constructed layers of torn and cut paper. The fact that all the pieces are titled "Earth, Fire, Air and Water, which are the mythical components of all matter, further enhances the complete sense of unity between the rhythms conveyed. Yet when they are considered as conceptual pieces in their own right, they still have an air of familiarity about them. This is really quite erie because as the artist herself pointed out, a lot of the final imagery was resolved by the papeers own behavioural traits.

Looking at Helen Comerford's work as something that has initially been influenced by landscape, or maybe it would be better described as influenced by traits of the land, it is unusual to see such a strong figurative element. It is as if the rhythms, patterns and cycles she has observed from the Land have become so dear in her mind that they have become animate and taken on life forms of their own. All the artists

discussed in this thesis have to a certain extent, responded to certain quality in land that is very important in relation to how their work is resolved. Helen Comerford is no exception. Alongside the figurative element in her work there is also a sense of something that is transient and fluctuating. It is this same quality about land that artists have been continually attempting to define in paint. it is refreshing to see yet another different interpretation in a new medium.

Within the pieces of the "Earth, Fire, Air and Water" exhibition Comerford has conveyed a sense of something alive, like land. There is a sense of something figurative displayed as a collective mass of rhythms and patterns which are, by their nature, cyclic and transient. At the same time, she is letting the natural tendencies of the material dictate the translation of the forms and ideas she is representing. In so doing the work is naturally going to be of a tighter and more rigid residue. This is because she has chosen to work with paper in its purest form, the plain white sheet. She has made no attempt to free herself from its rigid technical constraints and distort it to make it into something else like some of the other artists being discussed here. She said it was almost necessary to confine her medium because of the transient qualities of what she was trying to convey. (ref. interview).

It is a combination of technical quality and restraint and a satisfied introspective intellectual residue that has moulded these images into elemental life forms in their own right.



37/38 -"Earth Air Fire Water."(diptych) 1989



39 - untitled. 1989

Chapter 5.

Eilish O Connell.

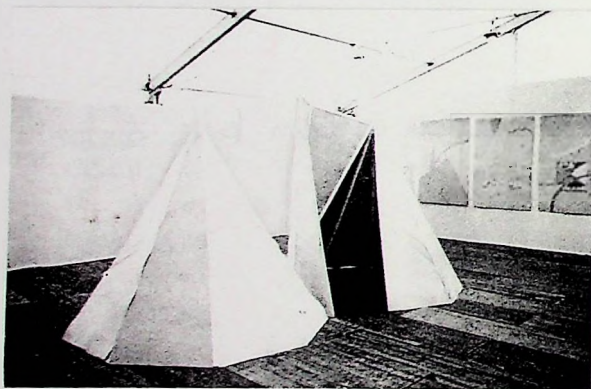
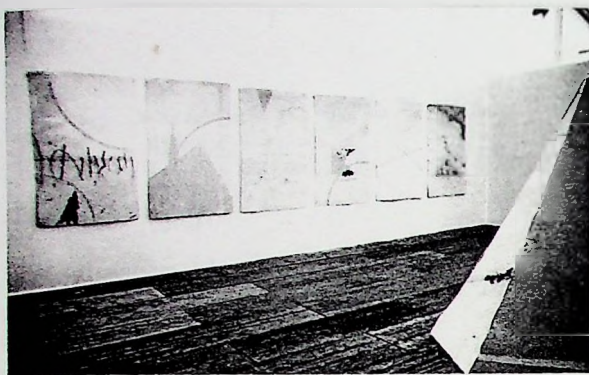
Eilish O'Connell started working in paper, as a medium in its own right, while still at college in Cork in the early seventies. She began to recycle her preliminary water colour sketches of her sculptures and other observational work as they became no longer useful. Water colour has always appealed to her as a medium (ref. interview). This is in a way stereotypically paradoxical. The cliched image water colour promotes is one of pretty washes and pastel landscapes, but this is quite the opposite to the powerful (both physically and intellectually) images that she uses it to generate. This is a light-hearted satirical reverberation of a cliché, although unintentional, for all those who aspire to the "Did a little girl like you make that great big sculpture" (ref. Sp.77). school of thought.

At first glance many of O'Connell's paper works seem to be in no way connected to her sculpture and in fact sometimes it is difficult to perceive that both areas of investigation have stemmed from the same mind. In fact the work in steel and paper are not a million miles away from each other. Conor Joyce has drawn this analogy between the sculptures and the paper works in his essay in the "Steel Quarry" exhibition catalogue.

"...she gives all her attention to flat surfaces, flattened paper, images without depth in order to track down the moment when a sense (rarely an image) of three-dimensional space is born of surface". (Ref. 4, p24)

It seems that what can only be investigated to a limited extent in metal or stone is given a much more heightened profile and investigation in paper.

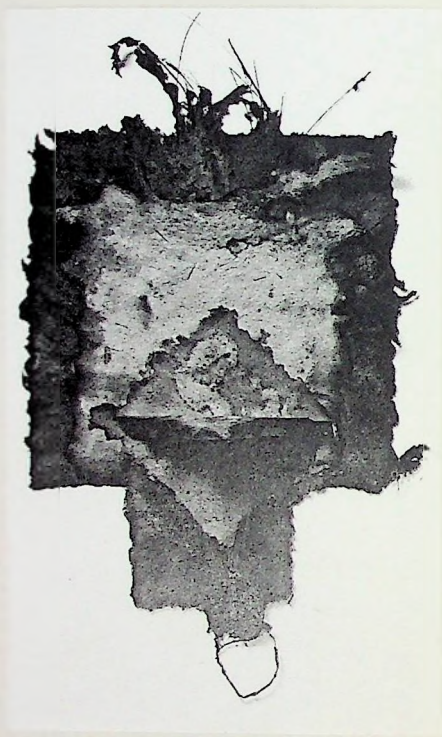
This investigation of dimension in surface is aided by the inclusion of "found" fibrous material and other more solid objects. She has no preconceptions about preciousness or archival stability in her paper work, unlike many of her contemporaries. This possibly stems from her lack of distinction between natural and manmade visual influences in her work. The investigations in paper started from an experimental viewpoint and in keeping with this idea no bias towards



40/41 - "Turfig it down to its slender quarry." (installation) 1982



42 -"Riverbed Series." 1985



43 -"Riverbed" Series. 1985

particularly archivally sound materials has been exercised in her work. The incorporation of undigested fibrous material, which slowly disintegrates the paper over a long period of time, embedded in the pulp is testament to this fact (see ill. 42/44). In illustration 44, which is one of the "forest floor" series, there is an incorporation of a rusted metal object that is very definitely manmade into the composition. The handmade paper, although containing natural grasses, twigs, fibre and twine, is treated with metallic looking graphite and a rust coloured ink. Technically this is a paradoxical composition of materials and yet visually there seems to be some internal force pulling both media together. Possibly what one is visually perceiving is a further investigation of two previous themes in O'Connells work (ref.4,p19).

The first of these themes was to remove possessiveness from the central core in a piece by emphasizing the effect it has on the space around it. the second is a fascination with columns in terms of their linear quality, taking into consideration Wassily Kanclinsky's definition of line as form in movement (ref.4,p22). The first theme is reinvestigated in this piece (see ill. 44) by slotting a piece of paper through the metal structure thereby defiling its central core. Then further investigating the properties of the structure's substance, and displaying them on the paper environment, that surrounds and occupies the metal structure. The second theme is reexamined by showing the upward thrust of a coreless column, from a base that is hooked under the paper environment which it is invading. Both paper and metal structure seem to be drawn together into one unit by the mesh of both life lines and tendrils of fibres that are reaching out of and circulating through the surface the paper, reflecting the "form in movement" and the potential surface qualities of the metal structure. The idea of removing possessiveness from a sculpture by de-centralizing it is one that O'Connell has taken up from the work of the American sculptor David Smith; as pointed out in Conor Joyce's "Steel Quarry" essay. (ref.4,p.20).

The main significance of Eilish O'Connell's favouritism of water colour in relation to her paper works is that the intensity of colour that can be attained with water colour is imitated with inks in her papers. She saturates the paper with vivid colour by impregnating the pulps with ink so that the colour becomes of surface as opposed to on surface. (see ill. 42). Inclusion of different coloured fibres that are allowed to protrude from the surface and overrun the perimeters of the piece (see ill. 43).

She gets a lot of her influences in terms of form and colour and texture from the Land although in later work the inclusion of more man-made sources has become important. However these influences are merely visual anecdotes, they have no significance in the essential core of ideas in her work which tend to be more concerned with an intellectual investigation of space.

As a result of O'Connell's obvious interest in investigating space it would follow that, fetishisation of environment by object, is a possible extension of an investigation of space. This issue of fetish is discussed extensively by Conor Joyce in his "Steel Quarry" essay, but its discussion is perhaps a little overindulgent in relation to any sexual interpretation of O'Connell's work. (ref. 4p.19 + p.24). A definition of a fetish, in terms of object, is something that is worshipped as magical. In other words a fetish must then be a container of a force or ideal. It has been established that O'Connell's sculpture is an investigation of space and environment, by creating an object that defines it. It seems too speculative to suggest that the forms which she creates are in fact a debasement of images which would be considered sexual fetishes. For example, the suggestion that the coreless column is a defetishisation of the phallus, (ref. 4p.19) and the use of the triangle or pyramid as a defetishisation of the uterus or female public hair. (ref. 4p.24).

Joyce raises this theory of possible feminist statement by defetishisation of the triangle image with relation to



44 - "Forest Floor" Series. 1986



45 - "Forest Floor" Series. 1986



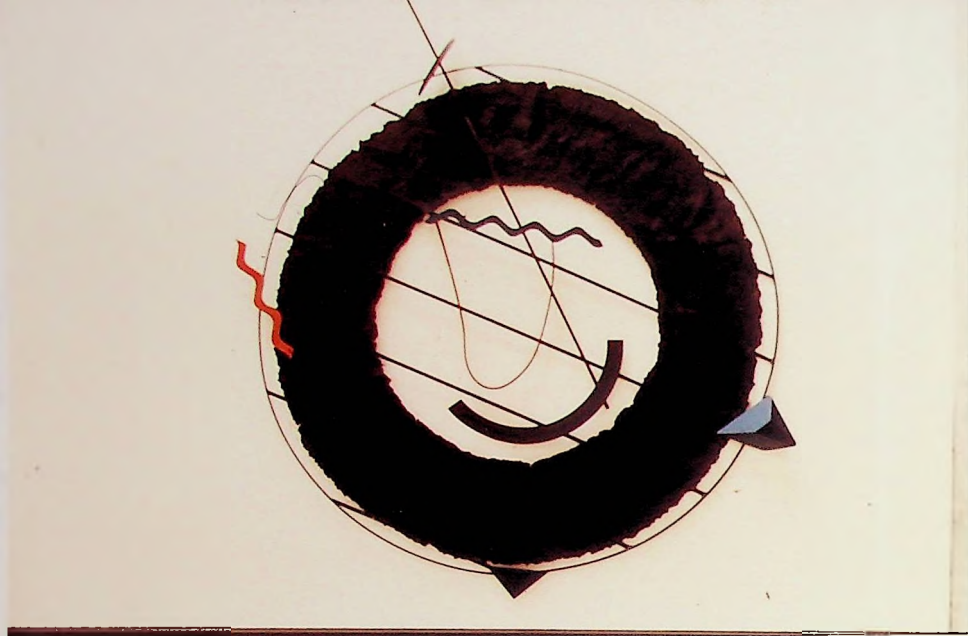
46 -"Forest Floor" Series. 1986

"Turfing it down to its slender quarry" (see ill. 40/41). This was a paper sculpture installation by O'Connell in the 1982 Pans biennale. She used two three-dimensional, hollow structures, similar in construction to nomadic tents; alongside six rectangular two-dimensional paper panels that had images of triangles worked into their surfaces with feathers, twigs, bones and coloured paper pulp. It seems the use of the triangle images on these panels was intended to evoke an awareness of the three dimensional hollow structures positioned next to them. A possible material connection would follow in that both panels and "tents" were made of paper. An exploitation of the cliched perception of paper as a medium for two-dimensional use only, would encourage the viewer to become aware of the space contained within the hollow open tents; and thus aware of the external or environmental space vibrating between the paper panels and the tents. This piece seems to be attempting to show space as the container of ideas. The ideas are being defined and returned to space by O'Connells installation. Joyce's analysis of the installation as an attempt to draw attention to desire to make space habitable and sexual desire within space seems out of context; because these theories bear no relation to O'Connell's continuing theme of creating sculptures that are de-centralised and non-possessive of space.

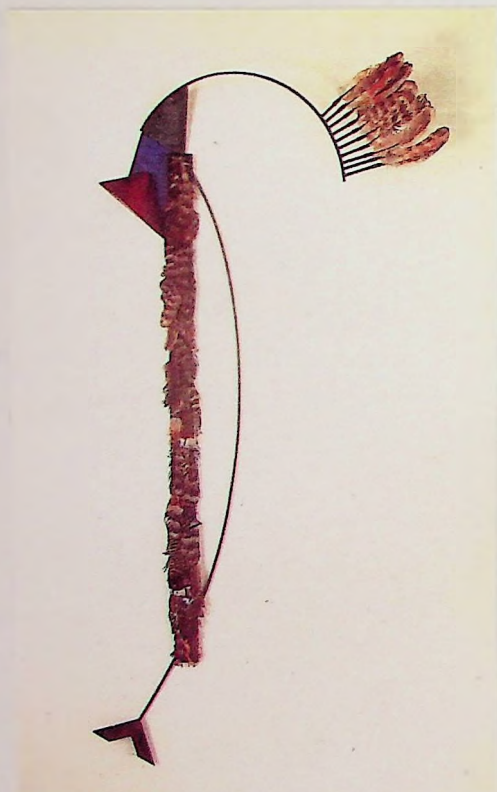
O'Connell's experimentation with surface texture and dimension in paper has seen the incorporation of paper with metal in a series of her wall sculptures. The discovery of surface qualities in some of her experiments in the "Forest Floor" series (see ill. 44/45) and their similarities with the qualities of corroded and abused metal have translated themselves in a more controlled and refined form into ideological statements O'Connell would have previously confined to expressing in stone or metal. "Rinutu" (see ill. 47), "Zumi Waters" (see ill. 48) and "Chiachi's Farm" (see ill. 49) are all examples of this. The coolness and smoothness of metal, as a medium, does not generally lend itself to intermingling with atmosphere. Whereas the versatility of surface that can

be had in paper can be very atmospherically sensuous, and at the same time reflect the colour and reflective qualities of metal (see ill.45). In "Circle" the use of paper as the main body of the piece softens the rigid geometric metal shapes out of their static condition. The organised positions of these metals shapes define the perpetual motion within the circle, which in turn draws them into its orbit. The energies that define the space around this coreless circle, that would previously have been trapped in stone or metal, are here freely expressed in what is essentially a two-dimensional surface. The use of metal in this piece is merely to provide the accessories that help to define the circles perpetual motion.

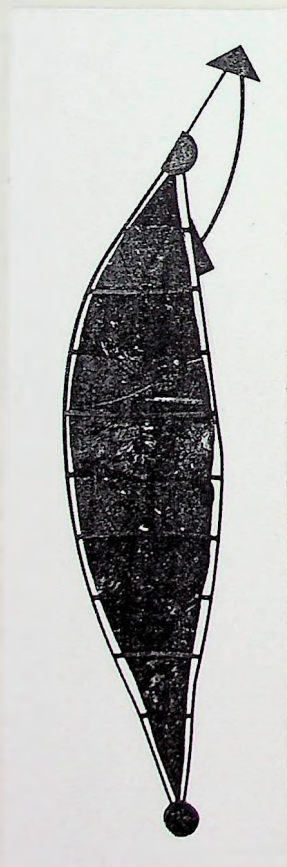
Eilish O'Connell's investigations in paper are a merging of drawing and sculpting techniques into one medium. Substance and surface become the same issue. She has investigated surface with pigment and texture, in search of a hint of three-dimensionality (see ill.42). She has even gone so far as to investigate the textural and colour properties of metal in paper (see ill. 44/45). She has proven that paper is an equally viable medium as metal or stone for her intellectual investigations of the relationship between object and space (see ill. 40/41). But all her work to date has been an extension of her investigations in metal and stone. Paper is a medium which brings a freshness of approach to the pre-conceptions she develops from working in these mediums. These ideas are reinvestigated and new aspects are discovered for eventual transition into, more conventionally three-dimensional, metal or stone.



47 - "Rinutu." 1987



49 - "Chiachi's Farm." 1984



48 - "Zuni Waters." 1985

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