

KIENHOLZ - IMAGES OF WOMEN  
THE DOUGLAS HYDE GALLERY  
12th JANUARY TO 21st FEBRUARY 1981

by

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## INTRODUCTION

The Edward Kienholz Exhibition in the Douglas Hyde Gallery (12th January to the 21st February 1981) was considered at the time, as a major breakthrough in the contemporary art scene in Ireland. In dealing with the artist I will attempt to cover as much as possible about his ideologies and his work (chapter 1) while particularly concentrating on the images of the female and her oppression which were presented in the Douglas Hyde. (This exclude discussion of "The Art Show" and "The State Hospital").

I choose Kienholz because certain aspects of his work have particular revelance to me. My work as a photographer and maker of relief and three-dimensional "paintings" is based on "illusions of" and "illusions to" our society. I articulate <sup>this with</sup> casts of my body, bearing in mind that this fragmentation of the female body has certain implications in pornographic imagery. The rescurection of this approach as a more positive form of self expression consequently led to an examination of the 1970's feminist position (chapter 5). In doing this I will attempt to draw out and discuss the stratagies of articulation employed by Edward Kienholz, in order to consider the implications of his work (chapter 4). I was further prompted in this direction of study by a seemingly contradictory statement made by Kienholz, a sympathizer of female oppression. Speaking about his former wife, he practically dismisses her ever existing, by saying that he no longer can remember her name. Another thought-provoking if not sexiast statement was made in reference to the casting process of "The Art Show", he says:

"It is much more pleasant to cast nice pretty ladies that it is to work with the hairy masculine counterparts"

The minimal existence of writings and lack of critical discourse in



relation to Kienholz work (in books, journals, newspapers and reviews) further made his prominent reputation, debatable. (chapter 6 conclusion).



## CHAPTER 1

### EDWARD KIENHOLZ AND THE DOUGLAS HYDE EXHIBITION

Edward Kienholz was born in Fairfield Washington in 1927. Since his early years which he spent on the family farm in Idaho right up to the present, he absorbed many of the necessary skills and ideas to suit his work. His family were small farmers and Kienholz could fix anything from a fence to a cultivator by the age of ten. From an early age he learned that everything had an inherent value, it all depended on how you applied it, as a recreational pastime he renovated wrecked cars back into working order with his Father.

Throughout the late 1940's and early 1950's he supported himself by taking on a variety of jobs, as he had been unsuccessful in gaining entry to an Art College. These jobs included car and vacuum cleaner salesman, orderly in a mental institution, window display designer and manager of a dance band. I find the variety of jobs interesting and think that there is no doubt that they provided him with important insights into the subjects and materials that were later to form the basis for many of his mature works.

His early abstract expressionist works were often painted on irregularly constructed surfaces. His use of rough texture and sombre tones show a strong painterly element which would be repeated throughout his career. In "Boy Scout leading his troops across the Hidden Valley Colorado" (1957) (plate 1) he painted the surface with brooms and poured the colours directly onto the plywood. He nailed pieces of wood to reinforce divisions of space, which were



disappearing underneath the wet paint.

In the later fifties Kienholz's relief constructions began to evolve into fully 3-dimensional assemblages, and from about 1957 his work became informed by a more figurative approach. In the early 60's his first major environmental assemblage "Roxy's" represented the beginning of work which was to establish his name as an artist of international acclaim. This series included "The Birthday", (plate 6) "While visions of sugar plums danced in their heads", "The back seat dodge 38" (1964) (figure 4), "The Beanery" (1965) and "The State Hospital" (1966) (figure 7).



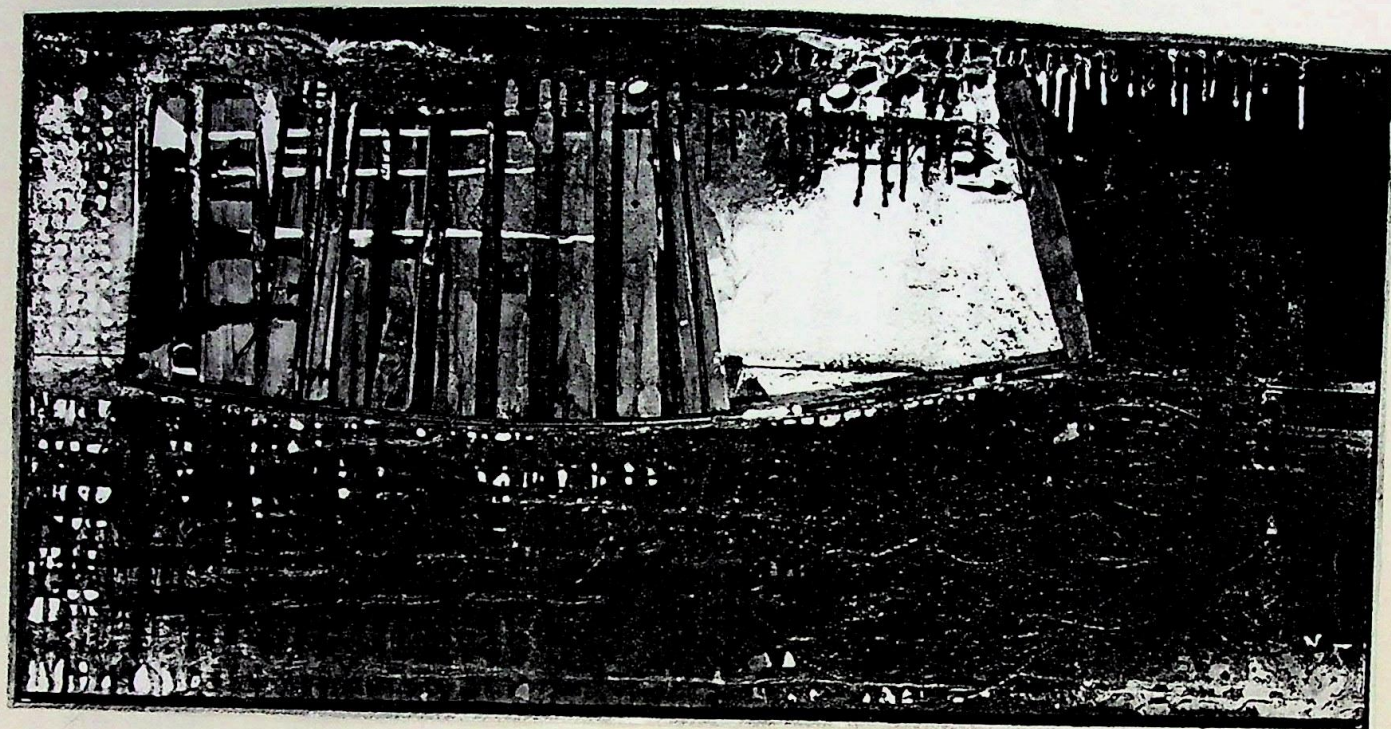


Plate 1 "Boy Scout leading his troops across the  
Hidden Valley Bridge, Hidden Valley Colorado"



"Roxy's" was a succession of room-sized installations which portray a cheap small-town Nevada brothel of 1943. the materials he used in this area of work are comprised of elements not necessarily intended as art materials. The torso of the human scale figure in "Cockeyed Jenny" (fig. 7) is made from a discarded dustbin. Sometimes these everyday objects are juxtaposed with more extravagant materials or fragments such as a silver handled brush and mirror on "Miss Cherry Delight's" dressing table, an animal skull placed as head of the madam of "Roxy's" which all cultivate an interest in the work beyond the prostitute in the brothel. The interest is unsettling because of the presence of the familiar in the bizarre representation of human figures.

In 1970-71 this series toured the capital cities of Europe, introducing Europeans to Kienholz's work, but it conversely served to stimulate Kienholz's interest in Europe. The success of the tour resulted in Kienholz being invited to Berlin by the German Academy. He then began to divide his time between a studio in West Berlin and another in Hope, Idaho. That same year he married Nancy Reddin and all the works now are signed by them both.

The "Volksempfangers" which he initially exhibited in the National Gallery in Berlin in 1977 saw the introduction of a new formal discipline to his work. The "Washboards" (1976) are a series of worn wooden washingboards which symbolize, without the presence of a figure, the toil of daily life. The objects are enclosed within frames of wood and also frames of chrome tubing, suggesting the enclosures of the womans environment. This series also showed a new concern for the events of European history. The old German wirelesses explore the implications of exploitation of the mass media by the state for



propaganda purposes. Passages from Wagners opera were broadcast in place of Nazi propaganda. The seventies also produced pieces such as the "Art Show" (1963-77) and "Still Live" (1974) which deal again with the historical concerns but also continue to pioneer this expression of the fundamental issues of Life, Time, Art and Death.

It is in the subject matter of the work that Kienholz most sharply diverges from the early twentieth century Dadists and Surrealists with whom he is often associated. The latter often worked in a more detached theoretical way. Similar to Duchamp, who placed a urinal in an art gallery, Kienholz uses an instinctive knowledge to exploit deliberate qualities of shock and sexual irony through the use of discarded objects in "Cockeyed Jenny" for example the discarded dustbin becomes the prostitutes body, the open lid it's face or mind, the bin itself sits on a bed pan, suggestive of the genitals. The objects are used cumbigously to suggest, women as a dumping ground for the male desires and emotions.





FIG. 1 Cockeyed Jenny 1961-64



Kienholz addresses the topical and appears to take his role as an artist seriously. He combines issues such as alienation, ("Middle Island"), (Fig. 10), (Fig. 11), racial unrest ("Five Car Stud"), oppression ("Roxy's") with Dada's irony and absurdity. The issues which are combined with Surrealist use of visual metaphor which result in explicit visual images which are rooted in social concern. These areas of work that I have outlined from the late fifties and sixties pre-empted the issues, subjects, forms and techniques that would follow throughout his career.

In 1972, for example, in Kassel, Germany, Kienholz presented "Five Car Stud" at the controversial Documenta 5 exhibition. This tableau showed a night scene in a building big enough to be an airplane hangar. There were five trucks whose headlights illuminated an assemblage depicting the castration of a blackman by five white people. In October 1989 in Louver Gallery, New York, the Kienholz's showed in this city for the first time in 23 years. Here the theme of racial tension re-emerged in "Claude Nigger Claude" (1988) (Fig 3). Constructed in similar materials, it shows a businessman waiting for a lift. Kay Larson describes the piece in "Social Work" as: "Strictly old style in its biting rage". (2)

A black man operating an elevator that resembles a prison, confronts his Doppelgänger in white face. As usual the artist implicates the audience, through social symbolism. Why does the fellow in the suit look odd? while the man in the elevator cage seems right for his role?

The Douglas Hyde Gallery in Trinity College Dublin was the venue for an exhibition of tableau by Edward Kienholz created from 1961 - 1979.





Fig. 2 Five Car Stud



This exhibition took place from 12 January to 21 February 1981. Sean Mc Crumm the then Director of the Douglas Hyde Gallery had been very impressed by the work of Kienholz and was supported in that interest by Barrie Cooke, artist, and board member of the Gallery. Their idea eventually won a favourable response from the board and Kienholz was invited to come and look at the space. In an interview with David Scott, author of the catalogue for the exhibition, I questioned how Kienholz fitted into the exhibition policy of the Douglas Hyde at the time.

"We were in the process of developing a policy at the time and we wanted someone from the outside who brought a more sceptical view of civilization. We wanted someone who would create an interest, a draw, which would begin to put the Gallery on the map" (3)

The Kienholz exhibition turned out to be the largest and best attended exhibition ever mounted in the Douglas Hyde and more catalogues were sold than at any other exhibition. It was in 1980 that Edward and Nancy Kienholz arrived to look at the space and eventually decided they would do the show. Yet Kienholz and Reddin were not entirely happy about showing in the Douglas Hyde as Kienholz expressed in an interview with the "Irish Times" (January 15th 1981)

"The architecture of this Gallery is really hostile to Art, it's really hostile to the environment too. I mean anyone who really loves art will design a gallery that is entirely bland" (4)

Nonetheless, they set about deciding what pieces would go into the show and they decided to present a range of his work from the moment when he began to develop his own recognisable and intrinsic style in the early sixties which was the time of the concept of the tableau.





Fig. 3 Cluade Nigger Claude (1988)



It was the most costly show that the Douglas Hyde has ever undertaken. It was the first time they tried to bring in so many large pieces, from so many places, "The State Hospital" from Moderna Museet, Stockholm, "Middle Island" and "Queen of the Maybe Day Parade" (Fig.8) from Louisiana Museum, and "Blue Boy and Pinkie"(Fig. 9) from Galerie Maegt Paris, and others from Kienholz own collection, and some from private owners. The cost was more than the gallery expected and the result was that the exhibition took a large bite out of their budget. David Scott explained:

"The show had been planned with the Riverside Centre in London who were to share expenses for the exhibition and the catalogue. Due to organisational problems and the limits of their budget they pulled out at the last minute" (5)

When this happened the Douglas Hyde had committed themselves to the extent, that it was impossible for them to withdraw and so the gallery ended up paying virtually twice what they thought they would have had to pay. If one considers that the annual budget of the Douglas Hyde in 1981 was £60,000, the final cost of the Kienholz show estimated at £30,000 amounts to 50% of their spending power for that year. This in turn saw a major cut in spending, the gallery managed to maintain their programme but went into deficit. The situation was alleviated by the Arts Council with financial assistance.

Attendance of the exhibition was estimated at about 15,000 people. Illustrating what an overwhelming number this was, Sean McCrumm revealed how, at times, they feared they would have to refuse entry to the Gallery, to issue allocated times to intending viewers, as the Gallery was so overrun with people.



FOOTNOTES

(Introduction and Chapter 1)

- (1) *THE ART SHOW*  
1963-1977 Edward Kienholz, Calendar 1st May 1976
- (2) *LOS ANGELES TIMES*  
Kay Larson, *Social Work*
- (3) *David Scott Interview*
- (4) *THE IRISH TIMES*  
Edward Kienholz, Elgy Gillespie January 15th 1981
- (5) *David Scott Interview*



## CHAPTER 2

### SOURCE OF THE ARGUMENT

1966 saw the eruption, in San Francisco of a controversy surrounding the work of Edward Kienholz, largely due to the piece of "Bunny Bunny you're so Funny" (1962) from the Roxy series, it was however, the tableau "Back Seat Dodge", which was to eventually cause the uproar. The conclusion of the argument seemed to make its deriders out to be fools.

The tableau in question consisted of a 1938 Dodge positioned on a bed of artificial grass. The couple inside, a chicken wire male figure and a female figure of plaster were fused together in a single faceless head, and frozen in a moment of sexual activity. Obscured in the background was a snapshot of fornicating genitalia suggesting the fantasy/reality intermediary of sexual activity. Evidence of this reality is the presence of a racoon tail hanging from the aerial and Olympia beer bottles strewn on the artificial foliage. The inclusion of authentic objects in the piece also locate it within the specific age of late thirties to mid forties, as exemplified in the 1940's style footwear, one placed on each figure. All these props evoke an environment of an older generation's sexual initiations, which often took place in a car.

Warren M Doru, who was a member or the Los Angeles County Supervisors Board, and also happened to be running for Governor of California, attacked the work in the show at the Los Angeles County Museum, signalling out these particular pieces as "Offensive pornographic works". The issue became a contentious public topic resulting in



cartoon captions such as "It's awful ..... close to the door°" The consequence of the uproar was eventually, not the closing of the exhibition, but the closing of the door of the 1938 Dodge car, which was then opened at certain hours for those who were over eighteen years of age.

Despite the controversy and its conclusion, interest was aroused by Doru's perception of the work, to the show in the Douglas Hyde. When questioned about Doru's insinuations, Kienholz replied:

"I am very unhappy that there is a controversy. I am not interested in that kind of publicity. It can only hurt not help. People may now come to see my work for the wrong reasons". (8)

But in fact the uproar provided Kienholz with a larger audience to address, since one of the major tactics of his tableaux is to subvert the viewers expectations, the controversy could be seen as optimizing the impact of his work, and also, if one considers that this argument (which derived from the pornographic insinuation by Doru) was situated in an era of pronounced media glorification where the revelence of art was seen and measured by the amount of attention it received. It was the initial shock element engaged in Kienholz work, which allowed him the scope to confront a captivated audience with larger cultural issues.

These pieces leave a mark on the mind of the spectator. Lawrence Weschler suggests that one may have ambivalent feelings about what he is trying to achieve. One finds oneself impressed by the vividness of the experience, despite the fact that the elements that force ones reaction are quite obvious, it is probably impossible for example not to react strongly to the mutilated exposed figures of "Middle Island", "Rhinestone Beaver", "Peepshow Triptych".



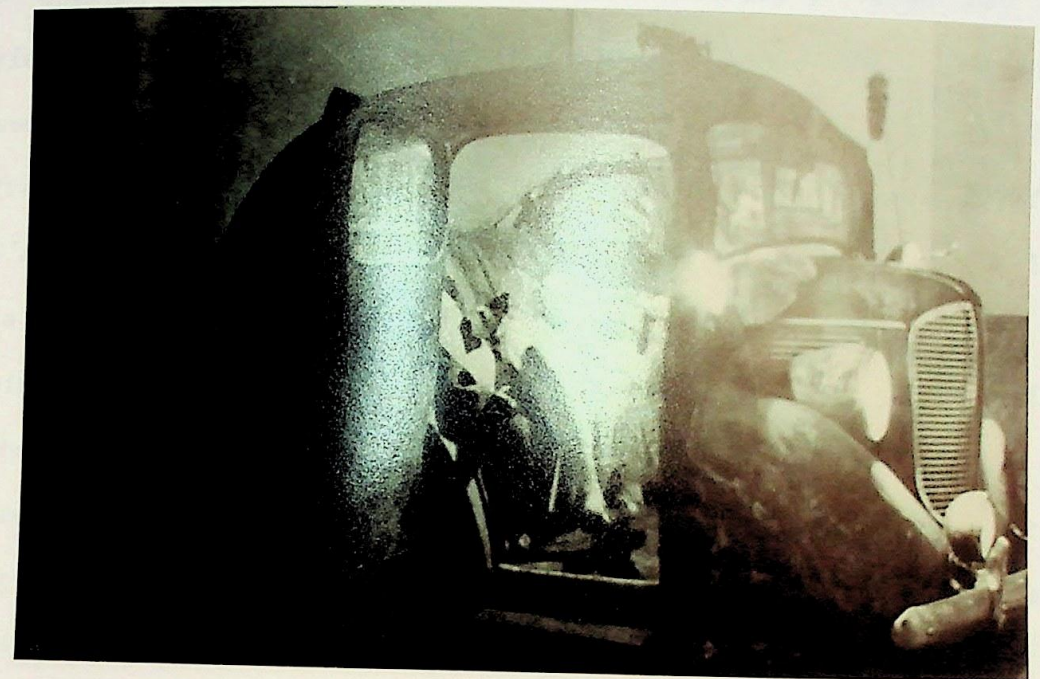


Fig. 4 Back Seat Dodge (1964)



He has without doubt located something in these images. Hidden beneath the organised surface of society is repressed violence and brutality, and what particularly interested me in this show, was his images of female oppression. The exploitation of women, whether sexually, emotionally, socially or politically has been a persistent theme of Kienholz's work from the early sixties onwards. In the Douglas Hyde Exhibition pieces like "The Birthday", "The Rhinestone Beaver", "Peepshow Triptych", "The Hawk", "The Queen of the Maybe Day Parade", all deal directly with this issue. To illustrate my argument, I will also outline how "Middle Island", "The Nativity", "Blue Boy and Pinkie", "Remembered Halls of Child" become indirectly implicated in my argument due to the ineffectiveness of their address. This ineffectiveness is reinforced by historical imagery such as that from 1860's to 1910, and from the feminist movement of the 70's as well as media imagery and the art gallery system.

(feminist movement of the 70's media imagery and the art gallery Kienholz as a socio-political artist attempts to visualize our contemporary culture. The 70's feminist movement suggested that a study of the psychological effect of devices employed within visual construction would show woman's position, in society's battle of the sexes. Kienholz's ineffectiveness is seen when his tableaux have an impact contradictory to their title or his explanation of the piece or its inspiration. This is due to, Kienholz's claim that he is "most importantly concerned with the effect on the viewer". (10)

In my argument, I will illustrate how actuality, (by which I mean, the state of being real) in the tableaux of Kienholz, without an awareness of these factors (such as the 70's feminist ideologies on the representation of women and the pedestal which he places these



ageing/fantasy tableaux by their placement in an art gallery) merely produces sensationalism.

In regard to this Kienholz himself claims that he is less concerned with the originality of the work of art but is "most importantly concerned with the effect on the viewer" (Roxy's and other works).

The pioneering efforts of the feminist movement in the 1970's suggested that mass culture and it's images of women are unavoidably implicated in any attempt to visualise our contemporary culture. Thus an examination of this culture from a distance, would ascertain what position of influence, its members hold, and a study of the psychological effect of devices employed within visual construction, would tell us about any actual changes, in the roles played by men and

Kienholz says in the "Irish Times" (January 1981):

"I'm doing much the same thing as I did in the 1960's, when I did Roxy's in which the theme of woman was used as object" (11)

My examination of the Douglas Hyde show is fundamentally aimed at exploring how appropriately the devices of Kienholz's visual composition address this theme.

Another element which causes apprehension in regard to the show is the minimal amount of critical reviews within Ireland at the time. I feel the criticism which did result here from the show obscured the issues (of the pieces) and evaded any critical analysis of the impact of the show and the works in question. This evasive attitude on behalf of the "Irish Press" was noted by "The Guardian" (12th February 1981):



"While it is something of a coup for the Douglas Hyde gallery to secure this exhibition by such an important and influential figure, the show with erect phalluses and gaping female genitalia, has not caused the expected controversy but has been received with mild curiosity and some amusement. Playboy magazine may still be banned over here (he is referring to Ireland) but the sophistication of today's Dubliner should not be underestimated" (12)

The suggestion that some of these images were perceived with "mild curiosity" would surely imply a censorious attitude in the reviews of these works. Was the mildness a reflection caused by the ageing of the imagery, which are saturated in a patina of the 1960's? thus feeding the art world's appetite which makes anything consumable?



FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 2

- (6) La Museum Furor Over; controversial Show On  
Ponoma progress Bulletin, Ponoma, California,  
March 30th 1966, section 2, page 1
- (7) La Museum Furor Over; Controversial Show On  
ponoma progress Bulletin Ponoma, California,  
March 30th 1966, section 2, page 1
- (8) La Museum Furor Over; Controversial Show On  
Ponoma progress Bulletin Ponoma, California,  
March 30th 1966, section 2, page 2
- (9) Weschler Lawrence "The Subversive Art of Edward Kienholz"  
Artnews USA September 184, page 100
- (10) Knut Nivers "Roxy and other Works"  
Actuality of Art, page 7
- (11) Gillespie, Elgy THE IRISH TIMES  
15th January 1981
- (12) Stephen Dixon THE GUARDIAN  
12th February 1981



### CHAPTER 3

#### MORAL POLARITY OF THE SHOW

The work exhibited in Dublin from "The Nativity" and "Remembered Halls of Child" to "Rhinestone Beaver Peepshow Triptych" represent polarities in Kienholz's ideas while most of the other works seem to fall somewhere in between. These polarities represent a moral circuit of demonstrations of sentiments imposed on the female figure, from predatory whore, turning a pirouette, to that of a sacrificial virgin. In "Pictures of Women - Sexuality" Rules of the Game, Jane Root in speaking about Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper, says that some of those who regard prostitutes with abhorrence are also their clients. Their hatred is unmitigated by the fact that prostitution exists for men like them, and choose to forget what Polly Adler a celebrated New York brothel keeper once wrote "If there were no customers there would be no whore houses". (13)

This argument has also been used in relation to Kienholz's work in "Edward Kienholz Works from 1961 to the present".

The structures within which Kienholz's work must be examined are in contrast to the ideologies of the 70's feminist movement. It must be emphasised that I am not trying to define all Kienholz's images as pornographic. The perspective that I am examining is the consistent portrayal of women as devalued in contrast to a more positive expression of female artists of the 1970's.

The first piece to be examined is the "The Nativity" (1961) which exists as a moral polarity because of its references to purity. It shows a





Fig. 5 The Nativity (1961) Section



typical arrangement of figures in the stable after the birth of Jesus, the child Christ in a wooden cradle in the foreground, the Virgin Mary to the right, crouched slightly forward to the left, Joseph, protector of the group and the three wise men offering gifts in the centre. As part of his visual imagery Kienholz uses a distortion of materials, Christ has a roadwork warning beacon for a face, Mary has a glass compartment in the back for her immaculate conception and Joseph is represented by a spiral like collection of wood fragments, with a halo on top. The materialistic gifts which the three wise men bring are suggested by the decorative logos from the bonnets of expensive cars. These materials locate the Nativity scene in our own society.

In relation to my overall argument one must notice here the implication of the only female figure as being one of "Household Nun". This classification by Bram Dijkstra, however, was related to such images as Arthur Hacker's (1858 - 1919) "The Cloister of the World" (1896) (plate 2) which responded neatly to a moral dilemma of that time where women's inaccessibility began to be seen as a guarantee of their moral purity. Any deviation from this imaginary self-containment on the part of the woman displayed her inability to serve as an efficient vessel for the nurturing of her husband's soul. Through this imagery Arthur Hacker displayed the fantasy of the sexless, virginal purity of the "Holy Trinity" of womanhood-mother, wife and daughter, but in reality the facts of life kept getting in the way. The image "Cloister of the World" displayed the fantasy of obedient passivity.

Men of this period (from c. 1860 to 1910) were enabled, through such an image, to take a voyeuristic look into the world of woman. These images served as receptacle for all the displaced fears and anxieties of the male, and if decorum did not permit direct public projection of



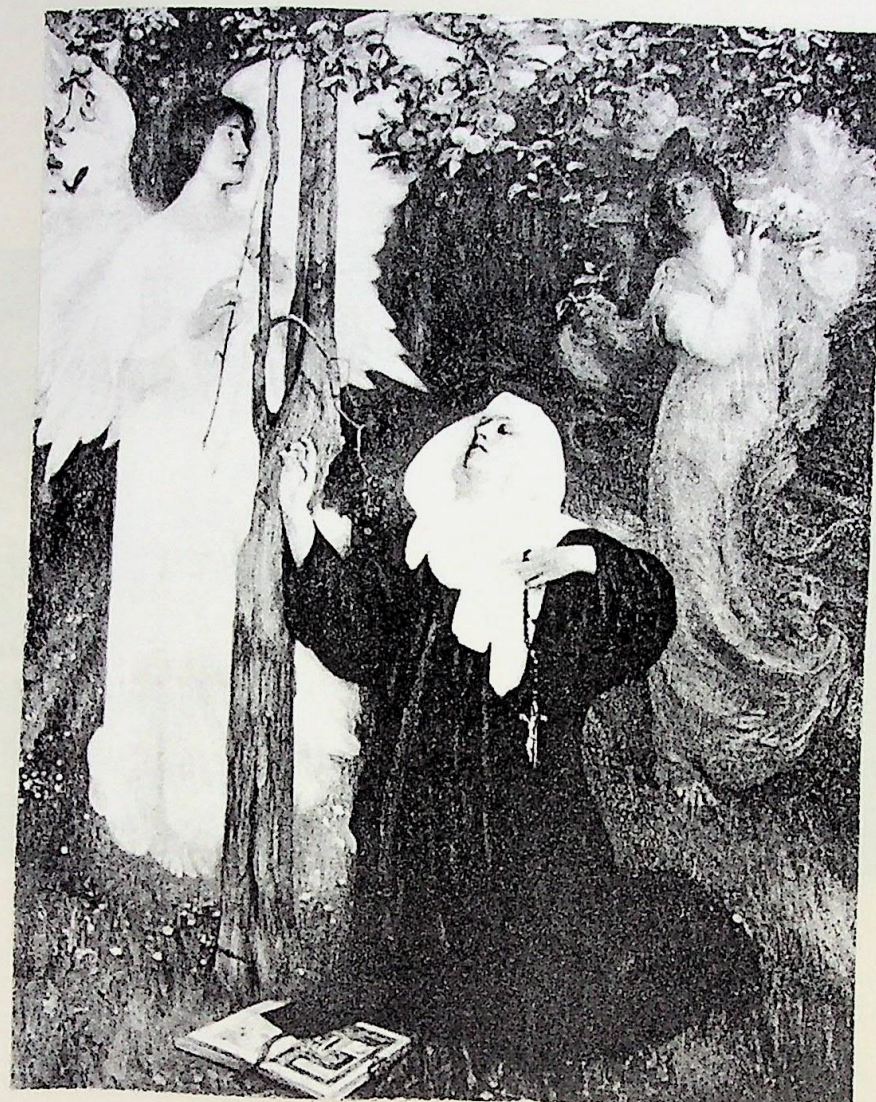


Plate 2 *"The Cloister of the World"* (1896)  
Arthur Hacker's (1858-1919)



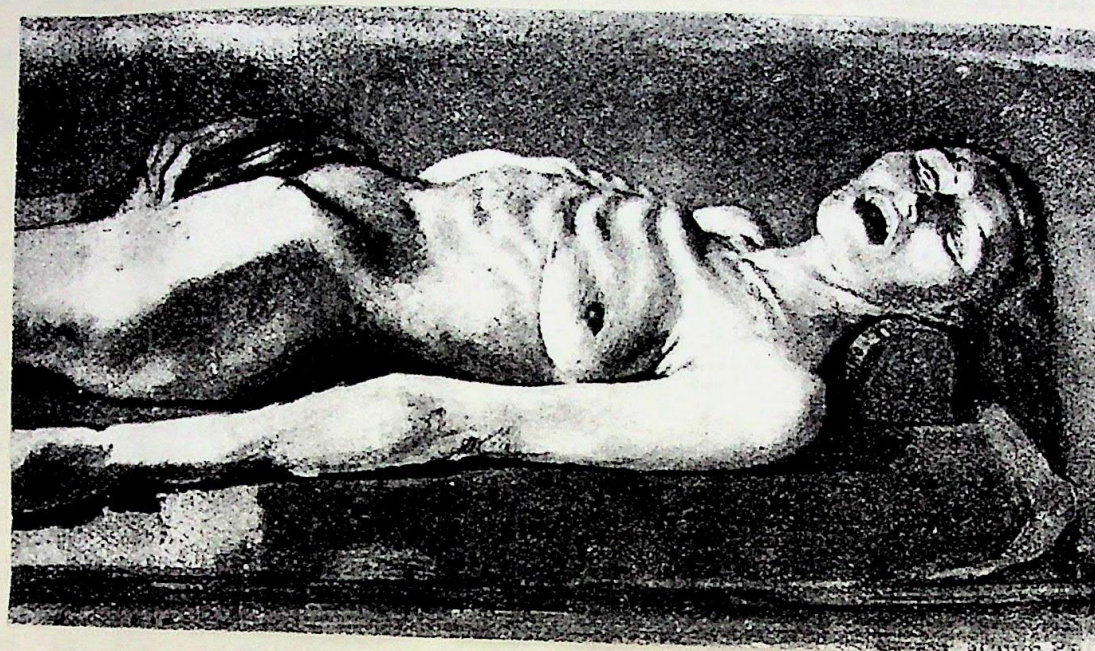


PLATE 3    *Study of a Dead Woman (1885)*  
Albert von Keller (1844-1920)



these erotic fantasies, which filled men's minds at the time, then it was made up for by the thinly veiled symbolism of artists who made what has since been seen by feminist art historians as pornographic representations and at such time was widely accessible and palatable. (plate 3)

Images of purity and innocence obviously find their expression in "Remembered Halls of Child" (1980). This piece crystalised a moment in the lives of two children, for eternity. Our instant affinity to this work is due to the black and white photographs which the two children hold up to their faces. The little girl has clambered up onto her toyhorse over which she has just dropped her skipping rope, she peers out at the adult world, through a window frame, while the boy stands behind the glass of the bay window, amongst a colourful jumble of toys. The images of these two children are both preserved, surrounded by their fantasy of their childhood world. When one, in an attempt to understand the piece, looks into a glass box full of toys, one suddenly sees one's own face. A mirror is used effectively to bring the viewer right into the scene and then all one's memories and nostalgia become coded in the interpretation of the piece. It is interesting that images of children like Hermine Heller-Ostersetzer "Goldfish" (plate 4) were supposedly directed toward children but were actually populated with adult fantasies about childhood, fabricated by grown-ups. "Goldfish" shows two young girls looking into a basin of water undressing before they bathe, in the background there is a goldfish bowl. This bowl and the washing basin symbolize woman's narrowly circumscribed domestic environment while the girl in "Remembered Halls of Child" is again passively observing that environment again through the suggestive enclosure of the window frame. The male fantasy of





PLATE 4 Goldfish (ca. 1905)  
Herman Heller-Ostersetzer (1874-1909)



purity inevitably found its expression in the mind of a child, the child became a reliable substitute for the untrustworthy dependency of women on men in a era which saw the beginnings of the suffragette movement. The innocence of the child is seen as a direct link to the Saintly Mother, the Holy Virgin, connecting "The Nativity" and "Remembered Halls of Child" as at an end of a moral polarity within the show. It is interesting to note, for further comparison, that the rocking horse which the young girl stands on, is set on wheel putting her in a position of vulnerability in the environment.



FOOTNOTES  
CHAPTER 3

- (13) ROOT, Jane *PICTURE OF WOMEN/SEXUALITY*  
*Rules of the Game*, page 69



#### CHAPTER 4

##### ACTUALITY AND PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE FORM

Herbert Marcuse writes in "Three Dimensional Man":

"Does not the threat of an atomic catastrophe which could wipe out the human race, also serve to protect the very forces which perpetrate this danger?" (14)

If we attempt relate the causes of the danger to the way in which society is organised and organises it's members, we are immediately confronted with the fact that advanced industrial society becomes richer, bigger, better as it perpetuates the danger. Under these circumstances, our mass media have little difficulty in selling particular interests as those of all sensible men.

"The policial needs of society become individual needs and aspirations, their satisfaction promotes business and independence and the whole appears to be the very embodiment of reason" (15)

Yet our society is, arguably, irrational as a whole. Its productivity is destructive of the free development of human needs ann faculties and its peace maintained by the constant threat of nuclear war. The intellectual and material capabilities of contemporary society are much greater than ever before which means that the scope of society's domination over the individual is much greater than ever before. Chronic joblessness, especially among young people, and also retired old people produce results ranging from the mindless violence of youth to the number of elderly who jobless and functionless, lapse into boredom which all to often becomes apathy and depression. Our realities thus become rooted in problems we encounter in our day to



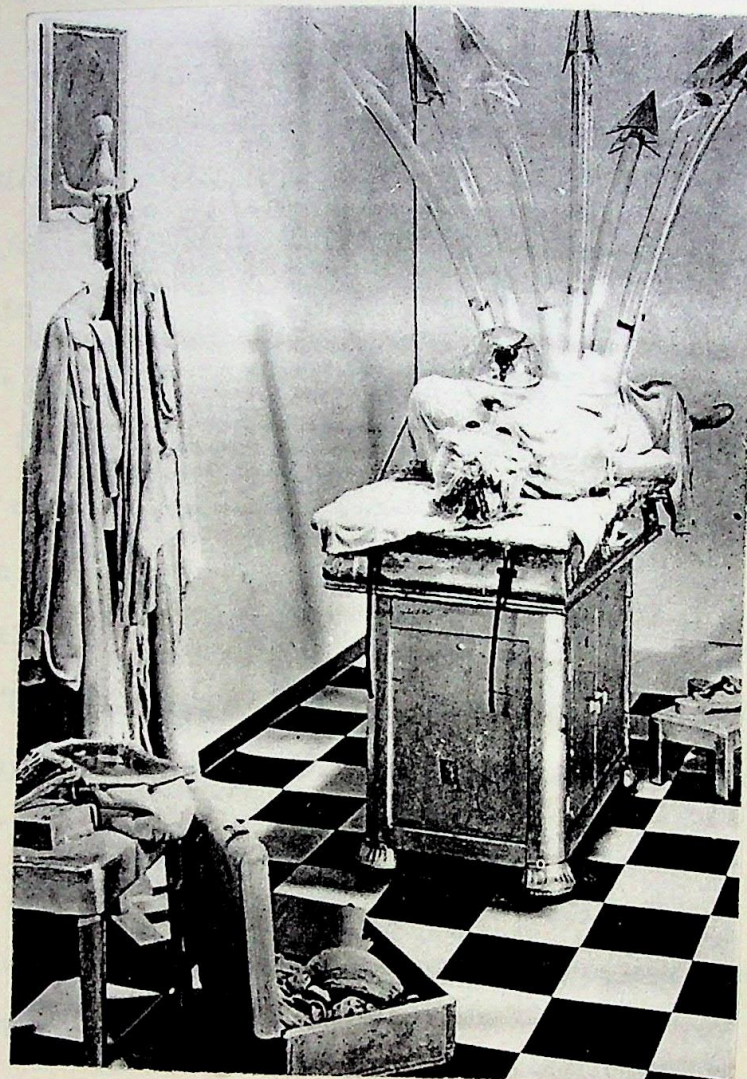


PLATE 4      *The Birthday* (1964)



day lives. This apathy is possibly induced because our reality can often be dull, boring and repetitive or extremely painful. Our basic survival often forces us to undergo many painful situations, whether we choose to bear them or not, the fact remains that we all have at some stage of other experienced pain, terror and emptiness. Whatever method one used to put this unpleasantness aside, is that individuals way of coping.

In "The Birthday" what Kienholz attempts to achieve is a balance between objectivity and subjectivity in a tableau which arrests time and place in a moment of despair. It shows the precise moment when life begins, the woman lies in fear and pain, constricted by the old wives tales that she is well used to hearing, what might be the joyful fulfilment of childbirth has turned into a lonely agonized despair. the plastic bubble represents a scream, the arrows - the spasmodic pain of childbirth. There is a card from her husband to explain his absence. "Dear Jane, I couldn't come down now because Harry needs me here. Ma says she might make it late. Keep a stiff upper-lip kid (ha-ha)... Dick".

So what state of reality does Kienholz convey in his pieces? In "The Birthday" This is because the quotidian references used in the work such as the coat stand with the coat flung over it, the suitcase filled with the womans personal belongings serves to draw our attention to superficial forms of actuality. The slimy substance (resin) on the arms and legs of the frozen figure are suggestive of afterbirth. This ability to make objects real, through sweat stains and grime (if the cloth beneath the figure were new it would lack traces for human presence but its aura is created by these stains) seem to be the





Fig. 7 The State Hospital (1966)



obverse of the tasteless, synthetic items he clutters into his environment. Our sensory capacity is also involved. This he achieves in the "State Hospital", for example with the stench of urine or sweat, or in "The Birthday" where the room feels airless. One begins to judge these pieces on the grounds of credibility and naturalness. The image thus relies on the tension between the real (aspects of actuality) and the abstract qualities (fantasy and symbolism) for example; arrows for screams and repressed pain. I find this area problematic and it is one which I shall take up later in particular regard to "Rhinestone Beaver Peepshow Triptych" in the Dublin Show.

The problems of our daily life emerges again in the plight of the household wife. The "Queen of the Maybe Day Parade" (1978), a table is set for dinner for a special guest, with glasses, plates and a festive candle. A woman waits, but imagines in advance what kind of evening it is going to be, but her only props are her own body, represented both clothed and idealised by a silver painted nude, and the domestic objects of the home environment. The face exists as a reproduction of a painted portrait which is also an idealisation of the woman as is the naked lethargy of the figure which she lovingly touches. A phallic lamp is seen dimly glowing and the womans expression is one of glowing expectation.

In this work Kienholz makes manifest the plight of the housebound wife whose fantasies and anguish are located within her body which is subtly made to merge with the domestic furniture of her environment, the picture of the womans face within a frame which hangs on the wall behind her. This piece could also be read as a suggestion of auto-





Fig. 8 *The Queen of the Maybe Day Parade* (1978)



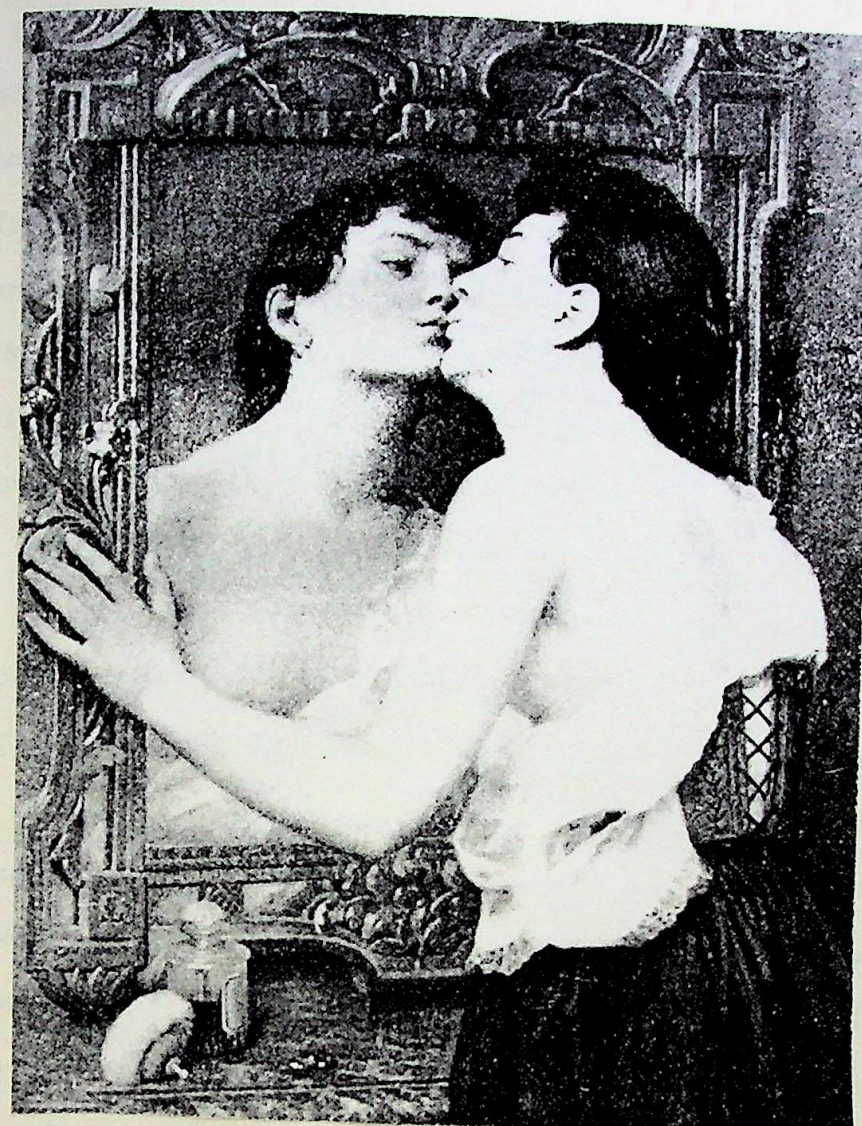


PLATE 5 *A Kiss in the Glass* (1885)



eroticism. In the show this piece could be viewed with voyeuristic fascination, the images of the woman having changed from that of a person who is apparently living for the interest of others, to become that of a narcissist? In comparison to the painting by Antoine Magaud "A Kiss in the Glass" (1885)(plate 5) illustrates the displacement into the visual arts, the male awareness in the visual arts of the fate of those who indulged in narcissism (as a result of the restrictions they lived within), as narcissists tended to destroy themselves in their search for their own fulfilment. Both works express an auto-eroticism inaccessible to the male, who has portrayed the woman at a safe voyeuristic distance, and allowed the work to be viewed with composure. Lesbian contact was seen as a simple extension of this auto-erotic tendency in Magaud's work and was also a suggested explanation of Kienholz piece by David Scott with the effect of opening an area for voyeuristic experience on the part of the male. In "Blue Boy and Pinkie" (1979) there is a further extension of the marital theme. Kienholz shows a middle aged couple who have allowed themselves to become trapped in their domestic environment, in spite of the different ways in which they have developed as individuals over the years. On the left we see a slumped and already elderly looking female figure who clings to the same fowl of domestic bliss, as the altogether more youthful and athletic looking male on the right. Instead of facing each other and communicating their feeling into the confessional-like box which divides them both, they gaze blankly and facelessly before them. The weariness of the woman expressed by her arthritic looking legs contrasts strikingly with the more purposeful stance of the male. The figures appear completely true to life except for the absence of their faces. Throughout the exhibition one sees particular





Fig. 9 Blue Boy and Pinkie (1979)



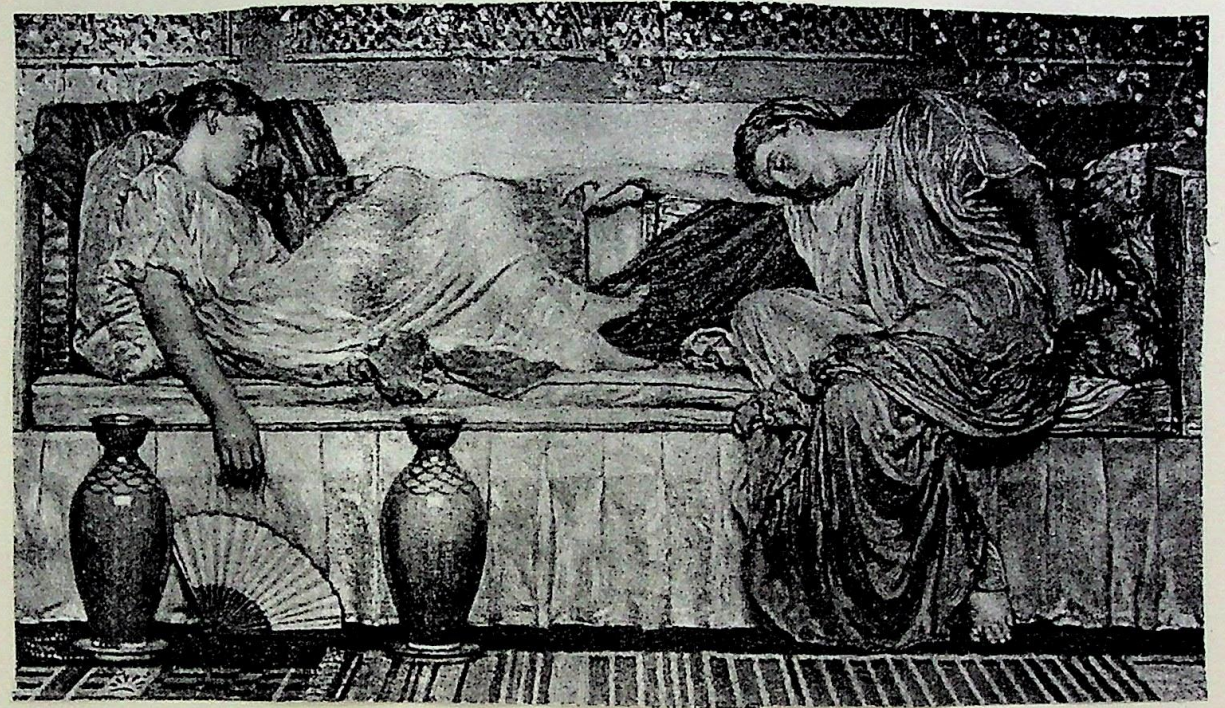


PLATE 6 *The Fan* (1874)

Albert Moore (1841-1893)



characteristics attributed to male and female figures. Strength and vigour are associated with manhood, for example "Middle Island", "The Hawk", while women are depicted as being weak, passive and emotional. "Middle Island", "Rhinestone Beaver Triptych Show" and "The Hawk". These strong negative connotations were seen in Albert Moore's, "The Fan" (1880) (plate 6) where woman's passivity was then used as justification for keeping woman in the least economically and socially rewarding jobs.

On Ireland Eye following the Dublin exhibition, Kienholz explains that "Blue Boy and Pinkie" were inspired by a middle aged couple who were about to get a divorce, on finding that would have to sell their house to get their share, they decided to physically divide the house in two and just live in separate parts. Interestingly this tale articulates strength and determination. It then becomes a question, as to why Kienholz chose to articulate the figures in such a way that the implication is of a weaker more emotional (sickly) female form?



FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 4

- (14) Marcuse Herbert *THREE DIMENSIONAL MAN*  
Introduction page IX
- (15) Marcuse Herbert *THREE DIMENSIONAL MAN*  
Introduction page X





Fig. 10 Middle Island (1972) Section



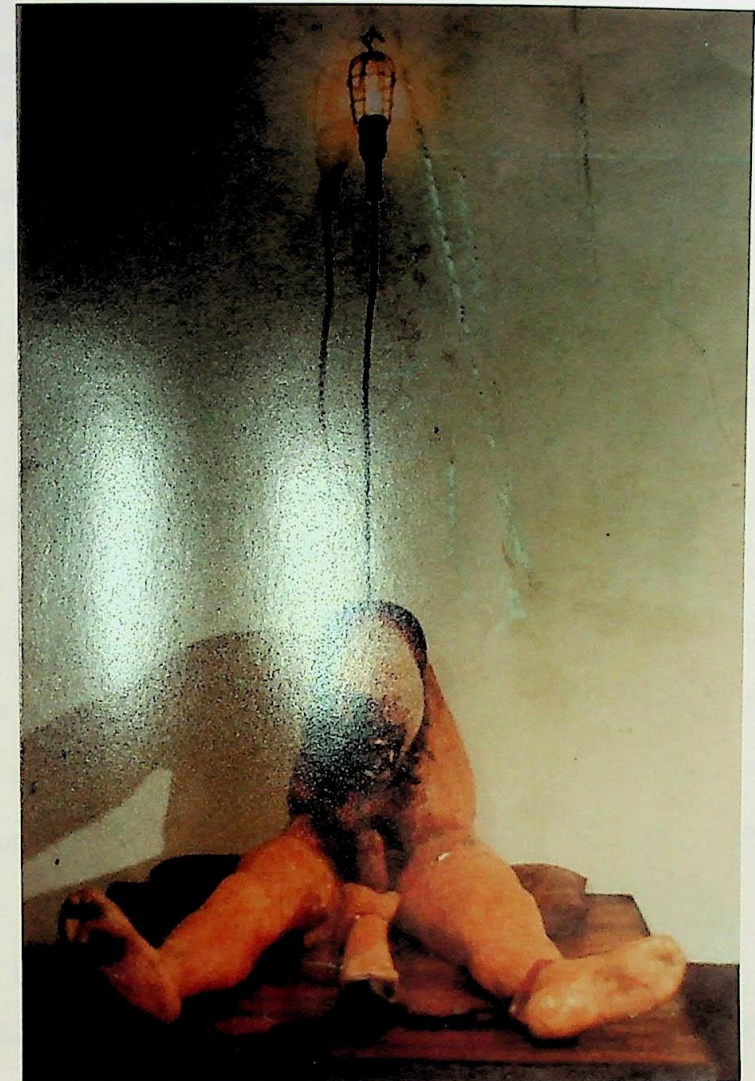


Fig. 11 Middle Island (1972) Section



## CHAPTER 5

### FANTASY

Many of Kienholz's pieces, like all truly nightmarish experiences remains essentially unfathomable, because firstly, he violently assaults the viewers sensibilities and emotions in for example "Middle Island" (1972) which moves closer to controlled horror, but still does not provide us with all the information to explain this situation within a context, in other words, reality is only in superficial forms of actuality. The obviousness present in some of the other tableaux gives way to a form which is provocatively suggestive. In this piece, the half animal, half human figures, in the work, are placed on a form that is "bed like", rather than a true depiction as in "The State Hospital". The piece is said to represent the middle years of married life. Separating the beds is a crooked rack fixed to the floor while two more are on either end of the piece which serve to reflect those racks placed on the wall. The male figure sits on the left, its torso melting into an animal like neck and head. Dripping canine teeth are revealed by the open-jawed expression. The legs are spread in anticipation, exposing a large penis which stands erect. The figure is weighted upon a hard wooden surface, supported underneath by some cushions. In between the calves of the male figure is a female hand (wearing a feminine gold watch) which is trying to grab the penis as a symbol of masculine potency, the fragmented arm is chained to an iron lock which surrounds the left leg. Above the male figure a phallic lamp which cast a clear shadow of itself and the animalistic head of the male figure, serve to heighten the lewd atmosphere of this section



of the work. The wife's passively expectant stance, is echoed by her glassy vacant stare and pathetic equine neck, which falls silently onto a plush red cushion. The legs again are spread revealing a gaping vagina. Other elements of fantasy are also suggested through the presence of actuality in details such as the phallic quality of the old fashioned black wired lamp, the photograph of luscious painted red lips, pearly white teeth, a relic of her youth in blossom, mocking her present crisis, of menopausal years. A superficial reality is also heightened by little luxuries of her environment, synthetic fur carpet, a mirror and a black lace shawl draped over her torso. The frozen moment is reinforced by a slanted stick of wood overhead, the manner in which it is positioned suggests that it could at any moment, fall. Also, the cushion on which the female head rests, is supported by, instead of legs, a set of wheels suggesting that the female form would slump to the ground should we pull the table. This reinforces the treacherous foundation within which Kienholz places the female form (already seen in "Remembered Halls of Child"). Apart from the presence of actuality in this work, the additional information which enables us to decipher the piece exists in the abstract form (fantasy and symbolism). Freud describes this effect as the "reality principle" over the "pleasure principle", where gratification is the main object of our wishes and desire; here it has been cast aside for logical reasoning in the conscious mind. Through his language in "Middle Island", Kienholz has visually surfaced these repressed desires, the threat to the males sexuality, despair of womans menopausal years. The work thus acts as an outlet for the overwhelming frustration the suppression of these desires can cause. The effects of actuality - shawl, carpet, and lamps, contribute to the the melding to the conscious and unconscious thoughts to create a truer picture of the world for the viewer. In "Five Car Stud" the blackman who appears to



be the victim is in reality fragmented parts of the three separate white peoples bodies, with a torso form filled with black water and floating letters which spell out "Nigger". By doing this the reality of the situation, has its source in unconscious desire. The combination of symbolic and pictorial representations is according to Freud, a comparable process in our constructions of dreams. Freud believed that dream is a fulfilment of a wish or fantasy. But in reality man has acquired the facilities of attention, memory and judgement, this rationality is imposed upon one from the structure of ones society. The one mode of thought that remains split off from this organisation of mental facilities and remains free from the rule of the reality principle, is fantasy. This is protected and stays true to the pleasure principle. Fantasy envisions the reconciliation of the individual with the whole of the individual with the realisation, of happiness with reason. these aspirations become a utopian ideal because of the reality principle. Fantasy insists that it can and must become real, that behind the illusion lies knowledge.

When this occurs in art, where it is combined with imagery, such as that of Edward Keinholtz, I feel it thus becomes a problematic issue. Because of the explicitness of some of the imagery, the subject matter he deals with, and the establishment of that fantasy as a principle where it insists on the fantasy becoming real. Then it is imperative that we question the effectiveness of Keinholtz's address to the viewer.

To quote Gregory Battcock:

"In a sense what is most important is what an artist does, rather than what an artist is, what an object does in terms of response rather than what it is" (16)



## ADDRESS

Feminist art to the 1970's disputed the objectification of women which led to their degradation.

In "looking On" it is said:

"The ultimate meaning of feminist erotica, is to reappraise the ways in which female sexuality has been produced and to use this as a springboard to develop new dimensions and meanings for female sexuality" (17)

This attempt to establish an authentic female visual language; of female desire served to attack the society which denied women the right to represent their own sexuality, where all such sexual images were seen as taboo.

Kienholz admits that since the 60's women used as object has been a theme of his work. As a social critical artist he has attempted through demonstrations of this theme to express sympathy with the emancipation of women from their oppression. Thus Kienholz's images could be seen in the light of T.J Clarke's writings in Screen (1980) on the theme of Manet's Olympia:

"This is a picture about not women, but the production of women as a fetish in a particular conjunction of capitalism, and patriarchy, such a picture would not identify woman or any particular woman but would confront the underlying mechanisms which produce the sexual discourse within which woman is placed" (18)

Thus since Kienholz does address the question of "the production of women as a fetish" we must question the effectiveness attained by his visual language which addresses the "underlying mechanism which produce this sexual discourse". Through the ineffectiveness of his language, by attributing particular weaker characteristics to the female figures



most of his images of women in the show portray the woman as devalued or more vulnerable, even if the theme of female oppression (as in "Middle Island", "Blue Boy and Pinkie") but of middle age. The consistent portrayal of the female form in this fashion especially in works in which it seems unnecessary, is counterproductive to the 70's feminists ideals of a more positive expression of female sexuality. In "Vision and Difference" Griselda Pollock quotes Mary Kelly:

"It is not the avant-garde undergoing profound charges in its changes in its post modernist phase, its new configuration corresponding exactly to the problematic s of womens art?" (19)

Kienholz's expression of the female form relies on a tension between the real and abstract descriptions of the piece. This tension as I have already established, implies an image of fantasy, the source of which, in Kienholz work, finds itself in the realm of male desire based upon this principle which insists it can become real. The added elements of description such as the paintwork add to the problem by their pandering towards the theatrical.

This is discussed in Feminist Erotica where it is said that:

"Meanings arise from how various elements are combined, how the picture is framed, what is implicated by dress and expression, the way these elements are articulated together" (20)

To illustrate why one would categorize an image as pornographic rather than simply erotic one would examine how the image produces the meaning. In "Rhinestone Beaver Peepshow Triptych", show the theme of promiscuous male sexuality is developed by Kienholz, through the use of the womans body as object and use of the rodent motif. The rodent a symbol of male sexual desire - is held up for reflection in a car window mirror, itself held by the prostitute figure in the centre of





Fig. 12 Rhinestone Beaver Peepshow Triptych



the piece. The womans face does not reveal feminine features but merely a startling reflection of the males own repucious desires, that is in a reflection of the rodents face. The concern is with the erotic details of the womans body and recouptriment; the metallic mesh of her pubic hair or the zippers of her leather boots. The opened tin reveals the prostitutes face, as that of the rodent while her boots achieve a sense of reality.

"Where woman is the sign, not of woman, but of that other who acts as that mirror where masculinity can define itself" (21)

Similar to the imagery described in the late nineteenth century by artists such as Giovanni Segantini (1858-1899) in "The Source of Evil" (or Vanity) (1897), the theme of the breaking of a mirror or surface of a pond was seen as a violation of woman's absolute or spiritual purity whether on a physical or a spiritual level. In succumbing to male desire/love. She was forced to break her mirror, forgo her identity and be spiritually absorbed by the man. If she recklessly sacrificed her self containment and "broke her mirror" she would be succumbing to worldly desires without a secure harbour for her selfhood" the love of a man through marriage. It was believed that mental disorientation and madness would be an inevitable result, and the woman would be thrown back into the animalistic state from which man was attempting to emancipate her. In "Rhinstone Beaver Peepshow Triptych" the animal juxtaposed with the female image suggests a carnal relationship between woman and beast (plate 8) and the revealing of the animal face instead of the womans would suggest that she had been thrown back into this animalistic state. Taken on this level the work holds an iconic fascination similar to Kienholz's other works described, of woman being seen while themselves unseeing. The image of man is made more



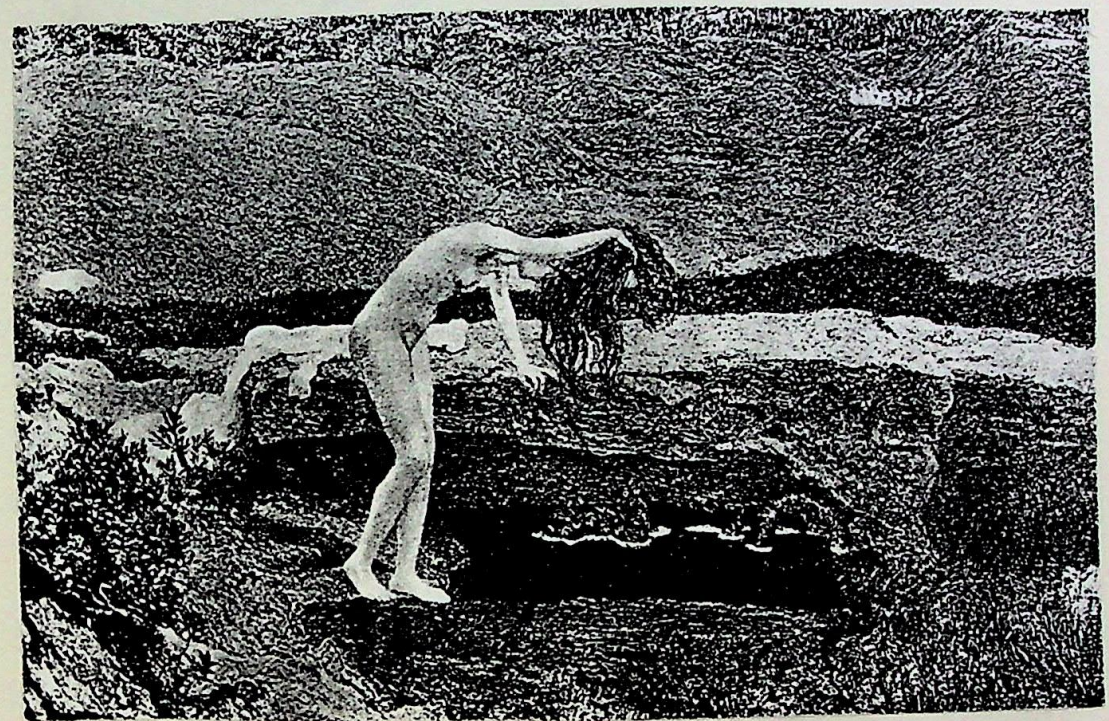


PLATE 7 *The Source of Evil (or Vanity)* (1897)  
Giovanni Segantini (1858-1899)





PLATE 8 Leda (ca 1890)  
Felicien Rops (1883-1898)



conspicuous by its absence. The explicitness of this image of woman and the projection of the male would indeed label it as pornographic.

In sexual violence and sexuality, Rosalind Coward writes:

"Pornography is the form of male behaviour which exhibits its most blatant form of liberal physical violence on women"  
(22)

So it is in the literal sense that Kienholz's piece attempts to place the viewer in that passive voyeuristic position only finding once challenge in its production, found in the form of two beady rodent eyes which stare out from the top right hand corner of the triptych. This seemingly reflects the viewers animalistic voyeurism. The employment of this as a form of rhetoric is not entirely accurate or convincing. The voyeur knows the bodies are not real and that they are there to be watched. The melodramatic and violent execution of these figures deflect our identification with them and I feel that ones initial response is mainly due to the over frenzied state of the surface - body surfaces are stained with paint which no matter what its colour looks like blood, sweat and melting flesh, and mutilated forms. The ambiguity intended by this rhetorical tactic does not effectively counteract the effect of his production of iconic fantasies. Yet this added tactic has sufficiently displaced any analysis of the effect in Kienholz's melodramatic exaggeration in his production of versions of already over-used themes.

The representation of women that is found in pornographic magazines is seen as a visual instrument of the control of women. In "Sexual Violence and Sexuality", Rosalind Coward says "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice". This expression of desire, of taking control of women, is seen as a theoretical expression of the same





Fig. 13 The Hawk (1978)



physical violence found in rape.

"The Hawk" is described, (in "Kienholz" a video made about the Dublin show), as a "further expression to the problem of the relationship between the two sexes". Two powerful masculine hands attempt to tear the wings off a startled bird.

"The ineluctable nature of the conflict being stressed by the enclosure of the struggle within the wire cruelly clamped to the birds wings" (23)

The worst thing one could do to a bird is hold its wings, the alternate title "The Rape" identifies the bird as symbol of woman and the work becomes a theoretical expression of the physical violence found in the rape of women. Again the real objects, ladder, chair, clothes, and hanger, do not provide us with the information to explain the piece within a context, the pun placed on the objects in the interpretation of the work, the chair becomes the solid, stable abstract of the males strength and thus again convincingly defines the piece in the realm of (the already established) fantasy. If this fantasy suggests that it can become real, Kienholz doesn't challenge the viewers perception in any way but establishes the work as an iconic demonstration to the act. Francis-Rupert Carabin's image of a chair (plate 9) placed on the womans back, physically constrains her position and keeps her in submission while in "The Hawk" the solidness of the chair keeps the woman sign weighted to the ground. Even if the chair was taken away the woman of both works remains portrayed in a position of vulnerability and restraint).

Kienholz in his concern for immediacy of effect on the viewer makes use





PLATE 9 "A Seat" (ca 1893)  
Francis Rupert Carabin (1862-1932)



of the "theatrical and showmanlike" bringing about an even more disconcerting representation displacing his intended effect. In "Middle Island" Kienholz's articulation of elements in the composition changes its significance somewhat. The implication of the collapsed woman changes its signification from the despair of menopausal years when one observes the entire composition and the female hand plunging toward the male penis now signifies a threat to the male sexuality. The emotional response of shock is not just initiated by the fragmented composition, the mutilated arms, the pulverised head, the exposed genitalia, but also the surface of glossy resin suggests sweat and streaked paint- blood. The addition of these factors with other forms of reality, already discussed, articulate an atmosphere suggestive of the aftermath of a violent act. What is important to recognize is in the aftermath of this massacre the maimed figure of the female assumes the position of death and the male figure attains the vigours of life. This is suggestive of the actuality of rape to the extent of violent death which exists in theory in "Rhinestone Beaver Peepshow Triptych", "The Hawk", and "Middle Island", the work establishes itself as fantasy, a principle that insists it can become real, real to the extent of the violent rape of woman manifested under the guise of "symbolizing the distance that has developed between them".

As Laura Mulvany says in "Vision and Difference":

"The image of woman stands in patriarchal culture as the signifier of the male other, bound by the symbolic in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place of bearer not maker of meanings" (24)



FOOTNOTES  
CHAPTER 5

- (16) Battock Gregory, *THE NEW ART*  
page 24
- (17) Betteron Rosemary, *LOOKING ON*  
Toward a Feminist, page 195
- (18) Clarke T.J., *A NOTE IN REPLY TO PETER WOOLEN*  
Screen 1980, vol. 21, page 99
- (19) Pollock Griselda, *VISION AND DIFFERENCE*  
page 197
- (20) Betteron Rosemary, *LOOKING ON*  
Toward a Feminist Erotica, page 197
- (21) Scott David, *KEINHOLZ*  
Video of Douglas Hyde Exhibition  
Language Department T.C.D.,
- (22) Coward Rosalind, *FEMINIST REVIEW, SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUALITY*  
page 9
- (23) Scott David, *KIENHOLZ*  
Video of Douglas Hyde Exhibition,  
Language Department T.C.D.,
- (24) Mulvey Laura, *VISION AND DIFFERENCE*  
page 161



## CONCLUSION

Griselda Pollock writes in "Vision and Difference:

"A work of art whose content is left unexamined (presumably because the content is seen as secondary to its form) continues to have a dangerous power of persuasion" (25)

Whether Kienholz's work is good or bad art is not the question in regard to the reviews of the show in Dublin but whether we see it as justifiable art at all. Do we believe the artists have some sort of social responsibility or do we believe that art is about abstraction; aesthetics; form; shape; and in short anything the artist wants it to be without question?

The bulk of the reviews in the Irish media, seem to dwell upon these descriptive recollections of the work, avoiding any confrontation with Kienholz's visual interpretation of the issues.

This illustrated in Trinity News (6th February 1981):

"The sufferings of women is solidly expressed in "The Queen of the Maybe Day Parade" as they become part of the domestic household furniture". (26)

The evasiveness continues in The Irish Times (January 15th 1981) following a description of "Rhinestone Beaver Peepshow Triptych" Elgy Gillespie concludes:

"It is extremely nasty as it is meant to be" (27)

In the Sunday Tribune (January 18th 1981) it is stated: "They don't shock anymore and may seem imbued with a patina of the 1960's" (28)

The continuous avoidance of the issues and the resulting concentration on the form prevails throughout the Irish reviews. However, this focus of attention is repetitive of many of the art journal articles related



to Kienholz.

This is interesting in the light of the writings of John McHale regarding the era from which Kienholz originated.

"The future of art seems no longer to lie with the creation of enduring masterpieces, but with defining cultural strategies.....as art and non art become interchangeable...the artists defines art less through any intrinsic value of the art object than by furnishing new concepts of life style" (29)

Edward Kienholz's generation retained the symbols of an anti-art stance, their nilistic implications being refined to a certain aestheticism. these changes have made way of artists like Kienholz to work effectively and unselfconsciously with their new media.

This point is clarified by Robert Silberman:

"Kienholz arrived in the middle of a positioned decade in which you were either part of the solution or part of the problem, it was easy to attach a good guy button to his lapel". (30)

This concentration on the form is disturbing because as Brian Fallon writes in the Irish Times:

"The radical chic of yesterday becomes respectable very fast, and art museums have quickly taken Kienholz to their bosom. He does in fact very much belong to an open and shut circuit". (31)

This is to be confirmed for me when I recently visited the Stedlijk Museum in Amsterdam to view "The Beanery" (1965). I had to join a queue which was regulated by a museum official. The safe guarding of the work seemed to be her permanent job and must be indicative of its of its value. Because of the queue one was pressurized to walk through, within two minutes and for further inspection go back to join the



queue. This pressure to queue and look quickly is symptomatic of our society in general but I doubt that this is the effect that Kienholz originally intended.

The piece itself I found somewhat dated and the dust, rather than evoking the real raggedness of the has served to confirm the work as a museum piece left on ones shelf for too long. I felt it evoked a feeling similar to exhibits in the Museum of Mankind in London, of reconstructions of how eskimos live or how stone age men made bread such additional paraphenilia as Christmas tree lights for cigarette tips confirmed my opinion.

Thus Lucy Lippards writings in "Overlay" becomes relevant.

"While some artists have never questioned the current marginal and passive status of art, and are content to work within the reservation called the art world, others have made conscious attempts over the last decade to combat the restless commodifications of their products and to re-enter the outside world" (32)

Because of the form of Kienholz work, he depends upon the gallery system, museums and institutions. This structured bulk, of many of his environments make them saleable only to people with space to show/display or house them. His work is made with the intention of being sold. This he took to the extreme in the concept of tableau, where he even sold his ideas.

Because of this formulas and predictable nature of Kienholz work I would disagree with Robert Silberman's reference to Kienholz in "Imitations of Life"

"If in today's art world they don't appear quite as exceptional as when they first appeared, this is testimonial of sorts to the success of Kienholz (and other artists) in extending the



boundaries of art" (33)

Rather one could see the testimonial to Kienholz success in the two-billion-a year art market in New York, or a single nights sale in Sothebys's which might bring in over twenty-million dollars, proving that the rewards of collecting are by no means exclusively aesthetic, the world of art is now mediated by a bureaucratic megastructure that is impersonal, increasingly powerful, and potentially sinister and has become dangerously over institutionalised, This statement by Suzi Gablik explains the commercialism of today's art world which many artists have come to reflect.

The repetitiveness of Kienholz work is suggestive of his succumbing to the mass culture he seeks to criticise. The level of seriousness with which the works are criticised positions him securely as a museum artist, rather than a contemporary social-critical artist. Brian Fallon writes:

"Kienholz is in fact one of those avant-garde artists who contains very little that is new, but is still made for a very lively exhibition on a cinematic level; it remains several stories above almost all the conceptual art to which he is akin." (35)

In the light of these arguments it is interesting to see Kienholz's position in "Museums" the word which can be traced back to the Greeks where it meant "realm of the muses" or "a place where man's mind can attain a mood of aloofness over everyday affairs." (36)



FOOTNOTES  
CONCLUSION

- (25) Pollock Griselda, VISION AND DIFFERENCE  
Page 163
- (26) Dolan Jarleth, TRINITY NEWS  
February 6th 1981, Page 7
- (27) Gillespie Elgy, THE IRISH TIMES  
January 15th 1981
- (28) SUNDAY TRIBUNE  
January 18th 1981
- (29) Hulten Pontus, THE MACHINE  
Page 13
- (30) Silberman Robert, ART IN AMERICA; Imitations of Life  
Page 140
- (31) Fallon Brian, THE IRISH TIMES  
January 15th 1981
- (32) Lippard Lucy, OVERLAY  
Page 136
- (33) Silberman Robert, ART IN AMERICA; Imitations of Life  
Page 143
- (34) Gablik Suzi, HAS MODERNISM FAILED  
Page 33-34
- (35) Fallon Brian, THE IRISH TIMES  
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- (36) Davis Douglas, ART CULTURE  
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