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INTRODUCTION

Dorothy Cross is essentially an independent artist, whose self motivation and independence has been expressed in a multiplicity of forms. An artist difficult to categorise.

It is this difficulty which has become the reason in writing this essay, fundamentally to give this artist's work a context. Which is intended to provide a broader understanding of the themes and working processes that have formed her art. As the artist has said: 'Art is a way of living ... a way of life ... a necessity'.¹

The noted Irish art critic Aidan Dunne has written in his introduction to the catalogue of the "Irish Women's Artists", exhibition in Dublin in 1986:

Irish women artists ... set out to consider and reconstruct those images. Such a programme inevitably involves grappling with a much wider range of issues than might at first be apparent ... dealing with such areas as individuality, male-female relationships and individual roles within social groups ... constructing an alternative image of the world we have come to take for granted.²

These apparent difficulties in assessing Irish women artists' work, manifest themselves in a discussion of the work of Dorothy Cross.

The issues listed by Dunne are the issues Cross has concerned herself with. I intend to discuss these areas of concern by reference to three major themes in the artist's work.

In the context of Aidan Dunne's observations, I feel it would be wrong to discuss Cross's work as purely

women's art. This could lead to a ghettoisation and a separatist's view of the art. The main reason this artist avoided early feminist theory, as she has said; 'I saw it as a denial of the male'.³ The male-female balance being central to Cross's oeuvre.

The works I will discuss are the "Chair" series (1984), which basically explored individuality; the "Spires" series (1986), which had as a basis the male-female relationship in relation to the structures in society. One dominant institution in particular, the church. And the "Ebb" exhibition at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin in 1988.

In this latter installation we find a culmination of the ideas explored up to this point. Individuality and male-female relationships are examined through the various "couples" of sculptures in the show. This exhibition had as its basic concern, sexual identity.

As the art critic Joan Fowler has observed:

The way in which the representations of men and women are related to the construction of society, ultimately it is this which becomes the meaning of Dorothy Cross's work.⁴

This is certainly one of the artist's major concerns. But for Cross it is a personal exploration rather than an objective theoretical analysis. As the artist has said:

Its much more intuitive than intellectual, even though I am conscious of Jungian theory.⁵

The work is influenced by dreams and the unconscious. Obvious analogies can be drawn to the surrealists concerned as they were with internal liberation.

Louise Bourgeois, for example, a French artist with an early allegiance to surrealism, has been a strong influence on Cross.

In fact, in examining this aspect of Cross's work, I have

discussed the work of several leading modern and contemporary artists whose concerns either mirror, or can be compared creatively with the works of Cross.

Another example of an artist who has denied any systematic or rational explanation to his or her artistic work was Marcel Duchamp. This artist regarded life as art, 'every breath an art work'.⁶ Duchamp's "found objects" became the "material" and basis for his sculptures or as he penned them, his "ready-mades". In this sense in his use of objects as symbols and codes we begin to see the profound influence he has been on Cross.

Not only are the concepts of the work studied, however, but also the peculiarly individual use of materials by this artist is observed. This is a characteristic and unique employment of different elements in the construction of her sculpture which gives to it a strong identity.

Through the works and concepts of artists such as Bourgeois and Duchamp, in the context of Cross's achievements, I hope to illuminate both the relevance and the international nature of this Irish artist's work.

CHAPTER ONE

Recognizing something in a found object
that validates something in myself.¹

(Dorothy Cross)

Cross's "Chair" series exemplifies her understanding of the relationship between an everyday functional object and how she perceives her own human condition.

The juxtaposition of the materials used in each of these "chairs", the choices of materials themselves, were all determined by the psychological motivations internal to the artist herself.

Cross is concerned with internal liberation just as the surrealists were. Rather than try to explain - or understand reality by recourse to purely rational explanations, the surrealists attempted to understand reality in terms of the unconscious and of dreams. Thus in cross's work, there is an interplay between the conscious and the unconscious, between the formal or artificial such as a chair, and the informal, the natural such as her use of materials, stone, slate, gravel, etc ... It is this internal and external relationship with reality that begins to surface in the artist's work; "chair" which we can call surreal.

Cross cites the possibility of change within every single individual, how he or she functions in everyday life. The relevance of surrealism, to the idea of change in the individual was well expressed by Dali:

The subconscious has a symbolic language that is truly a universal language, for it does not depend on special habitude or state of culture or intelligence but speaks with

the vocabulary of the great vital content, sexual instinct, feeling of death, physical motion of the enigma of space; these vital constants are universally echoed in every human being.²

Louise Bourgeois is another artist in whose work the influence of the surrealists can be seen. Her concerns and motivations are similar to those of Dorothy Cross.

Bourgeois is French in origin, (now living in the U.S.A.) was strongly influenced by the surrealists, but chose to exploit this influence in three-dimensional forms rather than the word or symbol. In her work this artist explores organic, biomorphic language and materials.

Her works, like those of Dorothy Cross, developed from an inner need. Personal content and deeply-felt themes are explored and sought which are realised for Bourgeois in an expressionistic style.

Bourgeois is articulate about the underlying psychological motivations in her art. In this regard, she can be situated within the surrealist tradition which saw the exploration and expression of the unconscious as art's primary aim.

However, both artists use different materials and methods to arrive at their (similar) conclusions. Cross relies on working with "found objects", man-made materials used for their inherent qualities. This use of materials is an almost polar opposite to the way in which Louise Bourgeois uses materials, which is much more formalistic, in her use of wood, bronze, etc., and in the way she carves and in her scoring and moulding of laytex forms.

Identities

*I see the fields and waters covered with an equal
light*

*There are no differences
Between the slumbering sand
The axe at the lip of the wound
The body like an outspread sheaf
And the volcano of health*

*Mortal and good I see
Pride withdrawing its axe
And the body breathing with full disdain its glory
Mortal and grieved I see
The sand returning to the bed it started from
And health feeling drowsy
The volcano quivering like an unveiled heart
And the boats gleaned by avid birds*

Paul Eluard, *Cours Naturel*, 1938.

There is, in Cross, an air of the collector, an eclectic artist, as it were, sieving through found objects and materials, as she has said: 'Recognising something in a found object that validates some feeling in myself'. 'Objects', she said, 'have a power that is beyond our control'.³ (Cross)

Cross then, as it were, constructs these "chairs" in an seemingly unconscious manner, allowing the viewer the opportunity to decipher the duality of its contents. In "spires", a later series, there is a rational or conscious use of given symbols or forms, to imply and express certain ideas she was concerned with at this time.

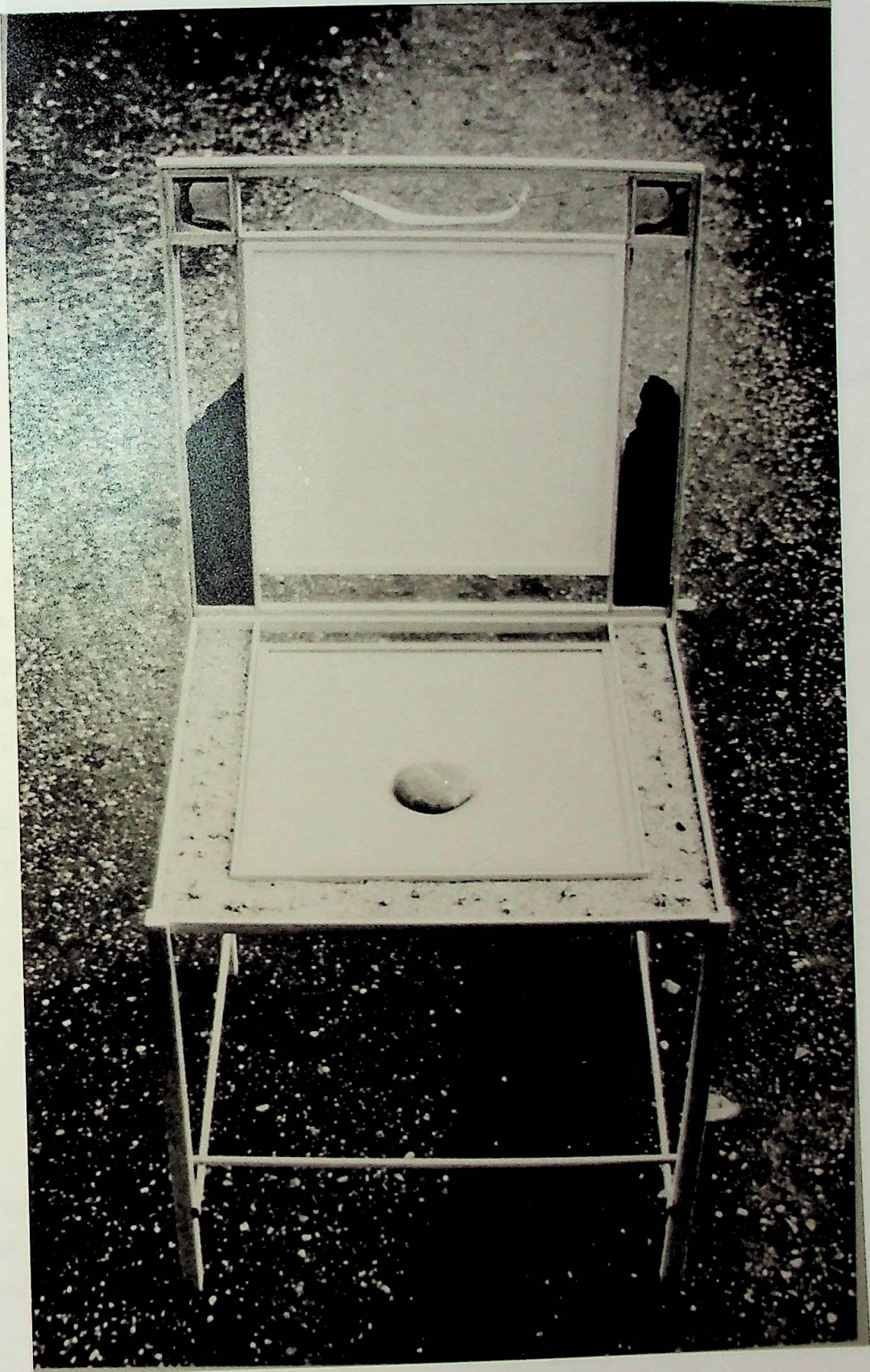
Bourgeois is motivated primarily by a polarity:

Created by a nurturing calm and clear - thinking mother on the one hand and a powerful, volatile and anxiety-causing father on the other and from her place in the family between an older sister and younger brother. In this scheme of relationships, it is anxiety, pain and anger rather than harmony, equilibrium and order that have more often been the source of art for Bourgeois.⁴

(Deborah Wye)

Her sculpture can then be perceived in Jungian terms as predominantly "Anima", that is the female side of our nature, the intuitive. That is not of course to say that the finished sculpture lacks order, despite the motivation, Bourgeois considers her background in formalconcerned indispensable. As she once observed, 'I seek formal perfection, that goes without saying.'⁵

Cross then in contrast begins with the "formal"; a given representation of space, i.e. the chair, "Spire". Through the composition, the juxtaposition of the



1. "Irish Chair", 1984.

contradictory materials used, she creates paradox.

Cross is an artist who believes in the necessity of change. In this sense she can be seen as "political" as the surrealists were political. Cross expresses the necessity for art to be 'another form of terrorism'⁶ in a society where things need to be changed.

Through her work, Cross attempts to set free real desire to make associations of a kind prohibited in normal existence by cultural or moral conventions. The finished pieces become a way of ordering the unconscious self and of relating that self to the external structures and systems of society.

An example is "Irish Chair", an essentially functional object rendered dysfunctional by being impossible to sit upon, a metaphor for feelings Cross experienced on her return to Ireland, a discomfort, an uneasiness in the situation in which she found herself.

This piece reflects internal conflicts, a constant condition in art. It is a blatant paradox, exemplifying a truth about modern art as perceived by Andre Breton:

...the determination of that plane on which life and death, the real and imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low are not conceived as opposites.⁷

(Andre Breton)

The "Irish Chair" becomes, in this surrealistic perspective, a profoundly relevant work; Breton again:

...the plastic work of art in order to respond to the undisputed necessity of thoroughly revising all real values, will either refer to a purely interior model or cease to exist.⁸

(Andre Breton)

The materials used in "Irish Chair", imply contradictory elements, namely strengths and weaknesses. Our interpretation of reality is challenged by the combination or juxtaposition of the materials in the piece.

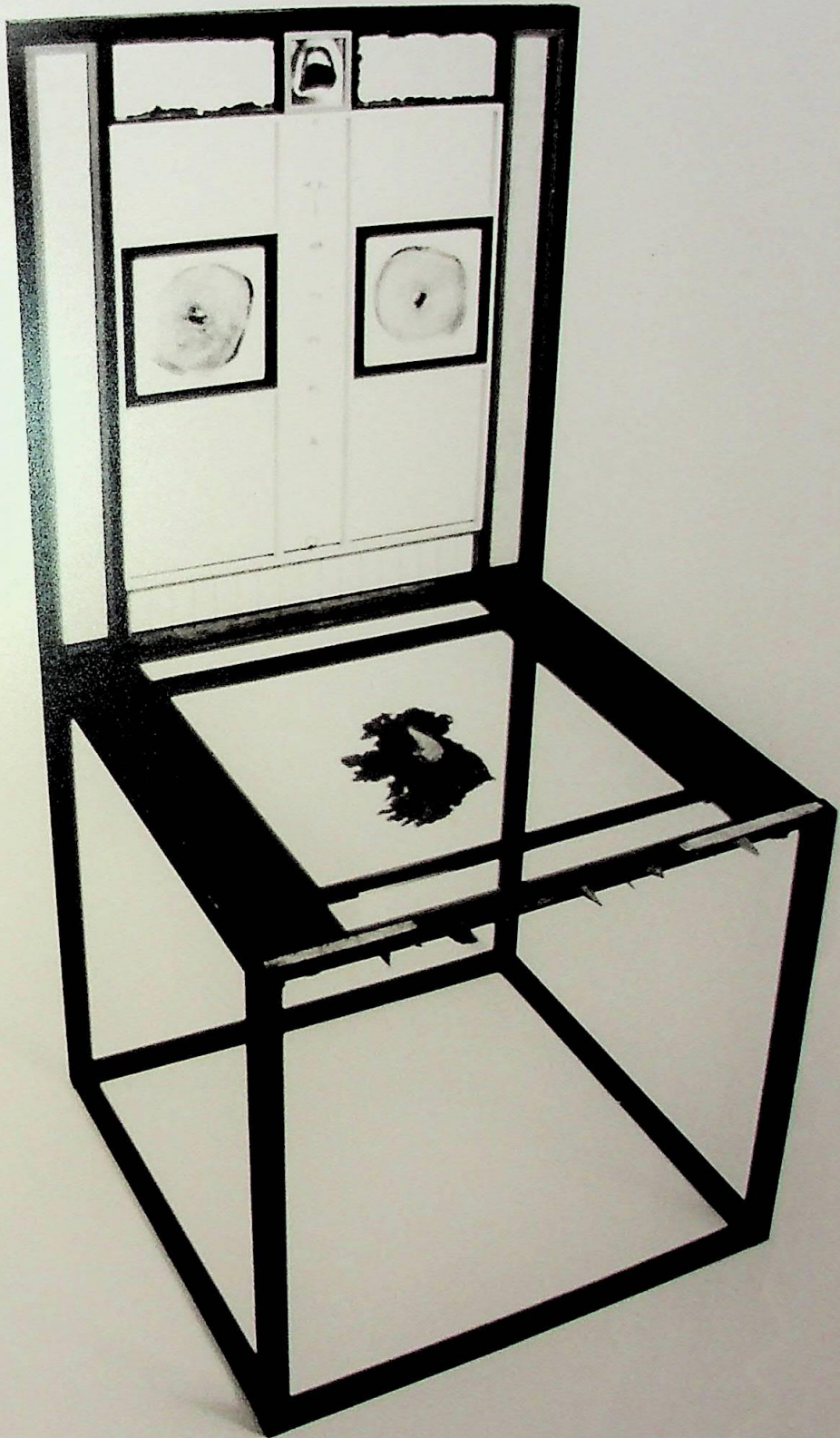
The back panel is made of Irish linen, the side pieces, black slat, on the top rail, a rib bone held in place by a string. To the right and left in squares are photographs of male arms (strongbow style ?) possibly lifting a weight or holding the bone in place (maybe a reference to the rib bone Adam took from his side to create Eve). On the seat made from a laytex material, is lodged a round stone, isolated, sinking into the material; the seat is surrounded by a gravel frame on which rabbit vertebrae are scattered.

This composition of materials contains several elements in conflict with each other within the structure of the chair; the linen for example, is set against slate, a substance with which linen does not marry. The conflicts give a certain personality to the inanimate chair. But this "personality" is just the result of our perceptions. In other words, it only has a "personality" because we give it one through our understanding of the artist's experience as conveyed by this particular work.

"Black Chair" (1984), another chair from this series, is comparable in composition and intention to "Irish Chair". Unique to this chair is a reference to place, by the inclusion of a map of Ireland. A representation made from sand, which Cross placed on the glass seat.

This aspect of "Black Chair" is reminiscent of earlier works Cross has made, which depicted the artist's idea of Ireland, real and mythical.

In these pieces there is a cynical view of "mother Ireland", little representations of Ireland, made from



2. "Black Chair", 1984.

sand or gravel (i.e. sealed maps) which are placed on glass shelves and displayed as museum specimens or as an archaeological find. They are placed under quasi-scientific scrutiny. In a sense, these particular sculptures question any notion of national identity presented as they are as constructs and fabrications for the audience to view.

In "Black Chair" this questioning of a "national identity" is also represented, but in the context of The Chair it becomes a questioning or search for personal identity within a cultural context.

There is (as in "Irish Chair") the juxtaposition of materials, conflicting elements. Again we see black slate set against the soft material of muslin. In fact in this piece we find exemplified a stark representation of the surrealist ideals as expressed "above" by Andre Breton. As he stated, opposing or conflicting factors are not conceived as opposites, but as in this piece they are contained within a formal structure, the "Chair". As Cross has said, a metaphor or representation for herself.

In "Black Chair" the artist has again used mixed media, wood, slate, sand, wire, black pigment and photographs. Again we find represented through the materials strengths and weaknesses; black and white; the "Yin" and the "yang"; black pigment and mirror; stone and glass; slate and muslin.

The artist has, through her inclusion of photographs in this piece which depict parts of the artist's body, made this chair a more explicit representation of the ideas and emotions she was expressing through these "chairs". As Aidan Dunne has written of the work at this time:

It is really this problem of individual identity, in a given physical and cultural context, that dominates her art.⁹

Cross's approach to representation by means of juxtaposition or collage in her work, was anticipated by the surrealists;

...their intention being to break down the conventional bodies, objects and identities that combine to produce what Barthes would later call "the effect of the real".¹⁰

This relationship, of the audience to the work, is the process by which the viewer becomes actively involved in the construction of the piece, the work accordingly gains a presence, a personality.

For Cross, art has to be something close to life, 'recognizing something (in the art work) that acknowledges something in yourself'. So, art is fundamentally about human nature rather than something that is systematic. The artist hopes that her art will tell her something about herself. As she says, 'Art is a learning process'.

Through communicating with an audience through her work, as it interacts with an audience in the surrealist sense described above, she may get answers to questions raised and issues tackled. As she says herself, 'Art becomes a very socialable thing' by this process.

Another Irish artist whose work is "sociable" in this sense is John Kindness, an artist to whose work Cross "responds". In his depiction of the Northern troubles, Kindness portrays Republicans as "dogs"; the Unionists as "monkeys", locked in a constant struggle, symbolic of a universal struggle. As John Carson has described this struggle in his introduction to Kindness's recent exhibition at The Douglas Hyde Gallery:

Given the horrific and mind warping complexities of the Northern Irish struggle and the seeming impossibility of its resolution. Kindness provides this reductive tantra which shunts our thoughts between the local and the universal, orange and green, black and white, good and evil,



3. "MONEY & DOG", 1985.

yin and yang ... His immaculate sculpture
 a way of trying to resolve an imperfect
 uncontrollable and unfathomable reality?¹²

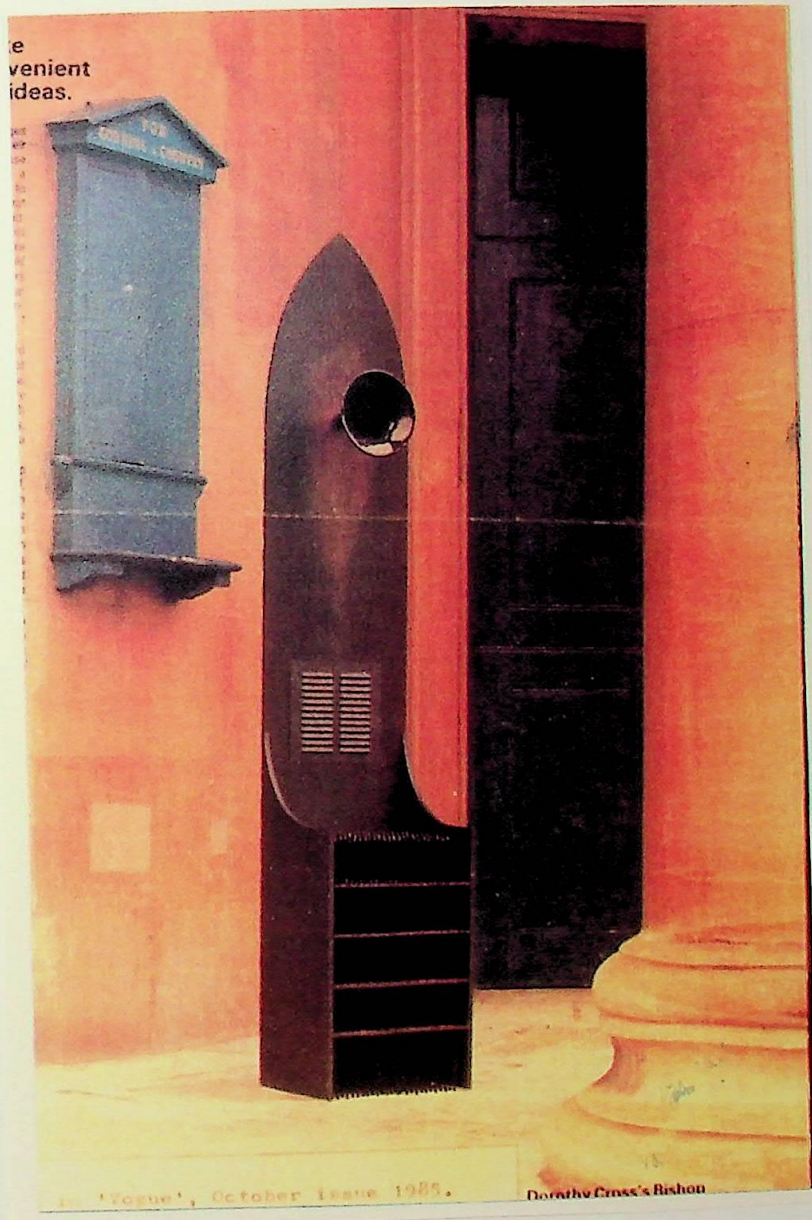
One poses the question - could this also be true of the work of Dorothy Cross? As we have seen with the "Chairs" series, Cross relates the interior world of emotions to exterior form of a chair, these pieces depict an interior struggle and conflict particular to the artist herself. But this struggle is comparable, if not identical to the universal struggle as John Carson has put it, a '... reactive tantra which shunts our thoughts between the local and the universal'. In Cross's sculpture images, this tantra is "The Chair". The conflicts and paradox posed by the materials used in their composition, can be interpreted as the universal struggle, the "yin" and the "yang".

The last "Chair" in this series worth mentioning in this present discussion is the "Bishop" chair. For it signalled a transformation in the ideas Cross had concerned herself with up to this point.

"Bishop" represented subjects and concepts exterior to the artist. Namely the artist's relationship to and her opinion of the dominance of the church in Ireland, which she expresses through the materials and the symbolism used in this chair. The unnecessary hardship imposed by the institution of the church or as Cross has put it, 'the unnecessary agony' and at the time of making this piece:

...the Bishops were on the radio ranting
 that contraception was the slippery slope
 to hell.¹³

This piece became a personification of the relationship between the individual and the structures and institutions in society. The beginning of a theme that would occupy Cross in her next series of works the "Spires".



4. "BISHOP" CHAIR (1985.

"Bishop" chair is gothic in design, it has a megaphone attached to the back. This exemplifies the "Bishops ranting on" comparable to a mouth piece. The seat has four levels or layers, again reminiscent of the later series "Spires". This is symbolic of levels of meaning or layers of consciousness. The spikes penetrating each level is symbolic of the suffering the church imposes on each new generation.

This sculpture marks an end or transformation in Cross's work. From the interior to the exterior. From self-exploration to a form of social commentary. As the artist has said, she took an "activist stance" on the issues effecting women and individuals in Irish society. Her next series "Spires" personifies this attitude.

CHAPTER TWO

"Spires" represented a reaction on the artist's behalf against what she saw as the patriarchal dominance of the church in Ireland. The sculptures can be interpreted as representing a sexual balance, which is imbalanced in favour of the male-dominated, phallic structures which are in the Jungian sense 'animus ridden'.

In these works there is once again the use of a given structure, which in the case of these works, gives them a social significance. Cross intended the "Spires" to be an attack on the power of the church, which she sees as being patriarchal in structure.

These sculptures were executed in Ireland at a time when the church was particularly outspoken on moral issues relating to women as individuals. Two national referenda were held at this period, the first concerning abortion (in 1983) and the second concerning divorce (in 1986). Both of these referenda were won by the proponents (in the case of the '83 referenda) and opponents (in the case of the '86 referenda) whose views were endorsed by the church.

As the feminist journalist, Nell McCafferty later wrote of women's experiences of the anti-abortion referenda of 1983:

We were spiritually mugged, verbally raped and placed under constitutional threat.¹

Cross had at this time just returned from the U.S.A., where she had been living for four years. She has said of this period that the church seemed foreign and alien. However, perhaps more disturbing in the context of the referenda and this ecclesiastical dominance, was the apparent indifference of many artists to what was going on in society at large.

'I was shocked', she has said, 'by the work in the galleries, which was predominantly formal and that ignored the issues immediately affecting people's lives'.² (Cross)

'These sculptures were then in essence, church "Spires", reduced to a small scale ... a toytown scale'.³

Church spires are psychologically potent structures, which have obvious phallic symbolism. Of them, the artist has said:

...to reduce them in scale was in a sense, to render them physically impotent'.⁴

(D. Cross)

They were intended as a joke on the church, a joke on its physical, psychological macho image. As Cross had said, 'the church no longer had any power for me'.⁵

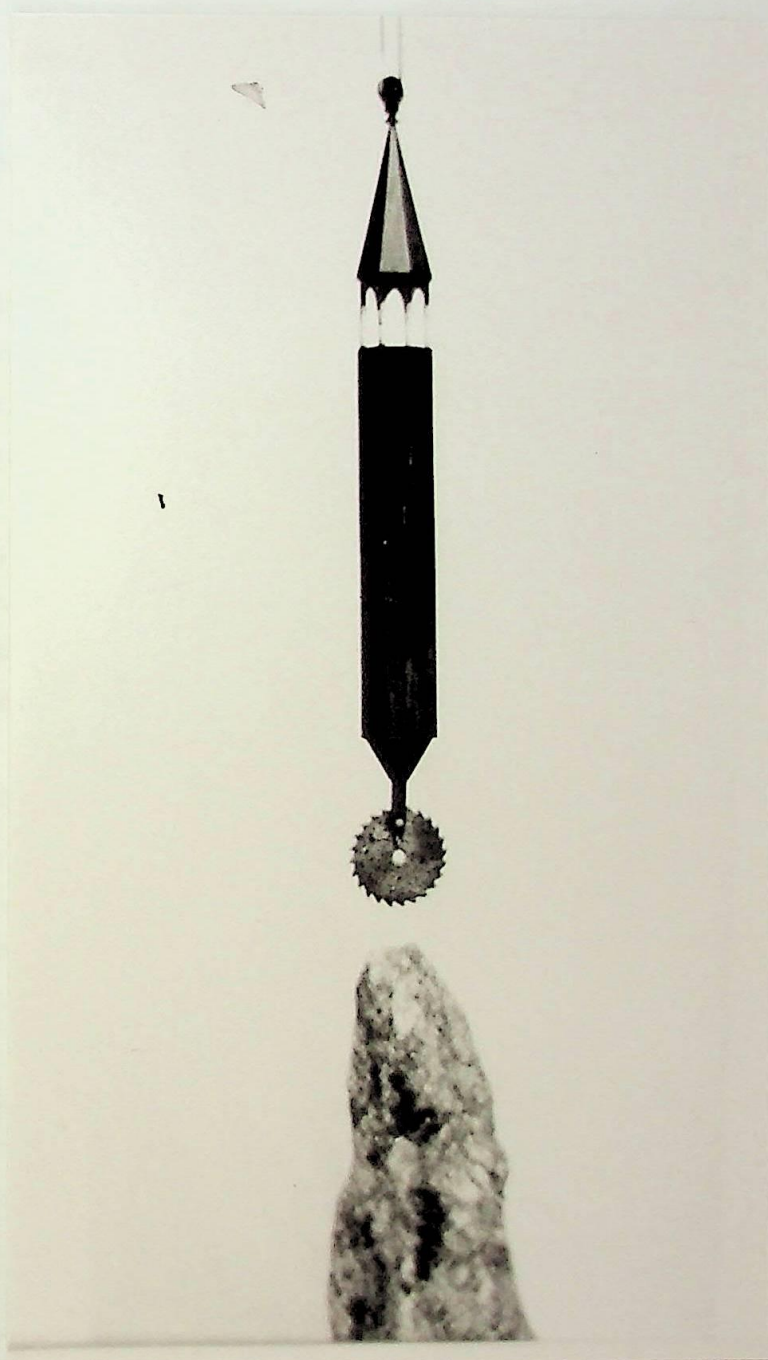
However, the pieces also represented ironically, the artist's powerlessness as a woman in Irish society. This is a society which she saw dominated by the male. The "Spire" motif is a symbol of this psychological dominance in Irish society. As Donal Kuspit, the American critic, has written:

...Man has totalized the idea of the autonomous power of the phallus, and made it the basis for his dominance'.⁶

(Donald Kuspit)

These sculptures in the Spires series were an attack on this imbalance of power within Irish society - a recognition of the sexual in the political.

An example of this, from the series "Touch Stone", is a piece sculpted as a church spire with a circular saw blade attached to the bottom, which is suspended over a solid lump of granite rock. This piece is an almost graphic description of the impotent threat posed by the established church.



5. "TOUCH STONE", 1985.

This can be seen as representative of the unnatural, fabricated structure of the church placed threateningly over something ancient and natural and timeless, like stone.

Given a Jungian interpretation, this piece becomes a representation of the sexual balance. The phallic (animus) church, on the natural (anima) female, stone.

In "Crank" (1985), we see a black spire which rises from a round base. This is caught in a wooden mount, like a cog in a moving device or "contraception". The word "Crank" exemplifies this notion.

In addition, this piece has a red staircase. Leading inward through the spire from one side to the other. This enables the onlooker to see the inside, which is hollow or empty.

This sculpture is made from plywood, a "man-made" material. The use of which is almost certainly symbolic, emphasising the Spire as a facade. Cross in turn sees the church as something fabricated (man-made) a facade.

Reviewing the exhibition at which these pieces were first shown, at the Hendricks Gallery, Dublin, in 1985, the critic, Aidan Dunne, wrote:

All the exhibition's pieces are visual puns, exploring the relation between the institution of the church and pure spirituality.⁷

(Aidan Dunne)

These pieces were for the artist rational statements. They were as she has put it a 'one line thing', an immediate response.

One piece that exemplifies this idea is "Rut". A piece that is blatantly phallic in structure and design; which encourages an immediate reaction on behalf of the audience.

The title of this piece gives a lead into the ideas the artist is expressing, comparable to "Crank". Possibly a reference to "being caught in a rut" like this sculpture. A black, angry, phallic structure grounded on twin circles of wood, caught or stuck in its wooden base. A metaphor no doubt for the position the church held in Ireland.

There is also, as seen in "Crank" the inclusion of an interior represented by four green boxes or rooms, visible through glass in the vertical column, of the piece. These boxes have holes going from one to the other, which depicts the hollowness or emptiness of these structures. As Cross has said, '...empty hollow shells, like the institution of the church'.⁸

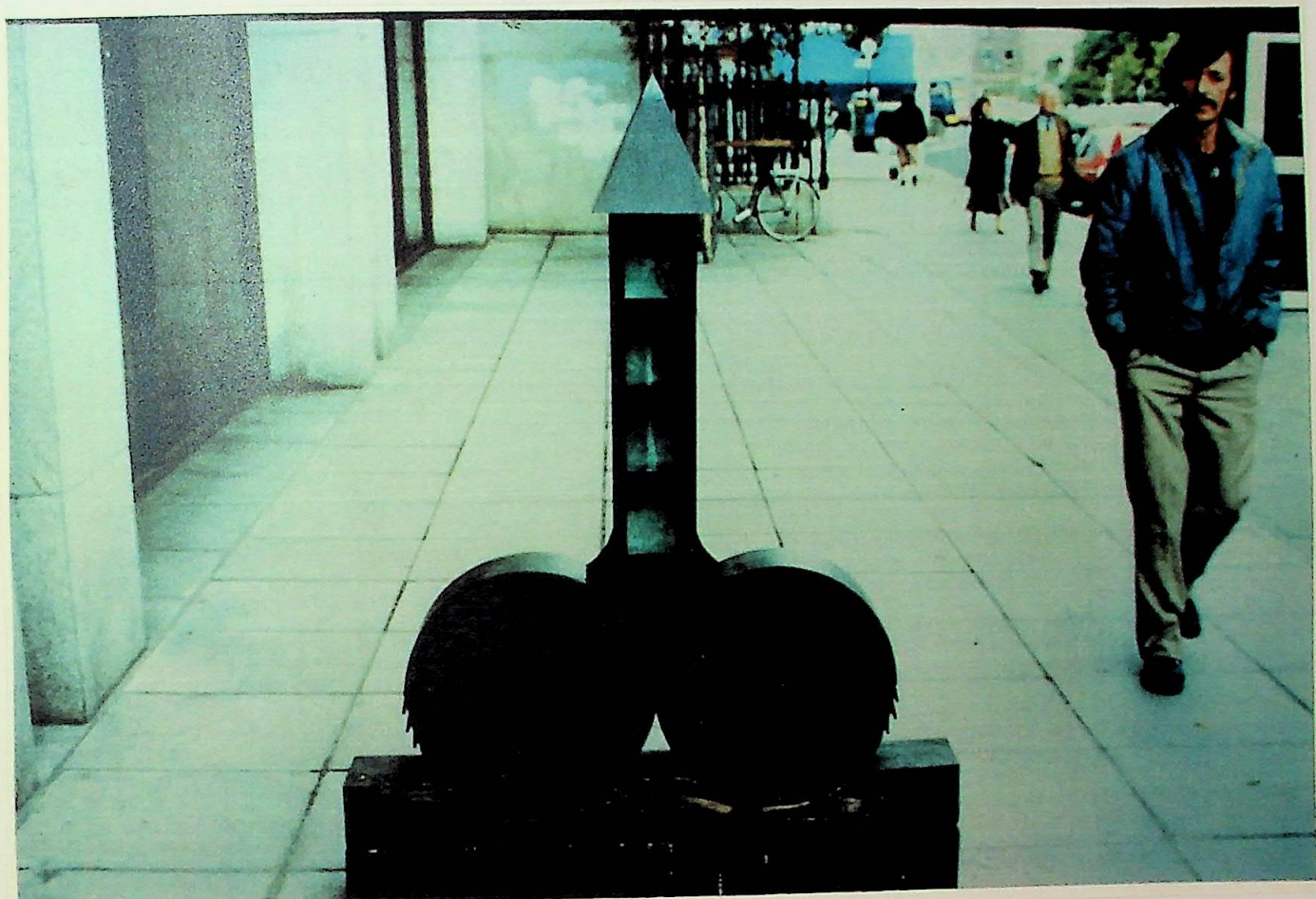
The four levels, or boxes in "Rut", are reminiscent of the levels in "Bishop" chair. If the viewer imagines him or herself in one of these rooms, they would fall through from one to the other via the "holes". Which emphasises this hollowness, there is nothing solid in these structures, they have no substance; they are just a facade.

These pieces represented a reality for Cross, and in effect a realisation of the ideas expressed by Donal Kuspit, above 'Mans' totalization of the idea of the autonomous power of the phallus'. This idea becomes explicitly represented in "Crank" and "Rut". The church is an expression of man's spirituality, which for Cross had become hollow and meaningless. Merely an expression of his dominance.

Unfortunately, the work was not perceived this way in Ireland. 'I lost out', she says. This led, on Cross's



6. "CRANK", 1985.



9. "RUT", 1985.

part, to a realisation that one could never predict how an audience would perceive her work or any works of art. Visual language, it seemed, was not to be relied upon to express rational ideas.

The art galleries generally have a very particular audience which leaves the work open for very particular interpretations and only these interpretations. In the case of "Spires" this perception rendered them impotent, which dented ironically the effect they were to have on the structures such as the church, which they were attacking.

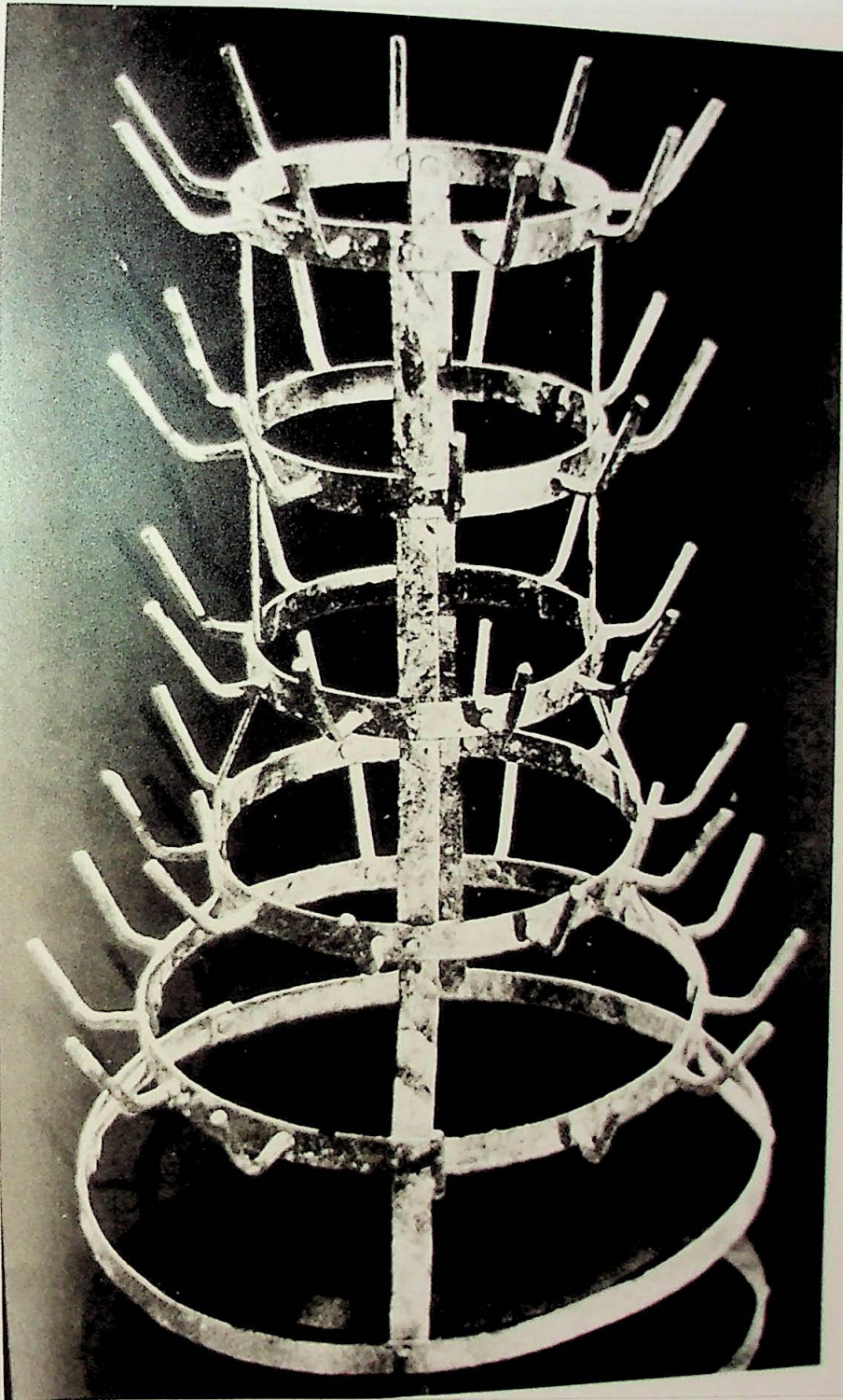
What her work in "Spires" achieved essentially, was a distillation of her Jungian concerns with the male/female relationship, the animus and the anima. The sexual within each individual which in turn reflects an exterior balance within society. This balance is demonstrated, by the sculptures in the Spires series to be, in fact, an imbalance.

An artist Dorothy Cross admires is Marcel Duchamp. In his "Ready Mades" we can see an obvious concern with matters which Cross deals with in her own work: The sexual in sculpture, the structure of society and the objects these structures produces.

Duchamp himself neither claimed the "ready-mades" were works of art nor admitted they were not. They were simply ready-mades, objects that occupied an area outside either category.⁹

(Artist of the Century, p.153)

Duchamp did not agree, at least as it applied to him, with the notion of the artist as the creator of "beauty". He was rather an artist who dealt in concepts, a "conceptual artist". He wanted, as he says above all to create with his ready-mades, something outside either



11. "BOTTLE RACK", 1914.

category, something which was a work of art, or something which was not an art work.

As he has said:

I threw the bottle rack and urinal into their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty.¹⁰

For example, take the work, "Fountain". This is a mens urinal, which Duchamp renders functionless by presenting it as an object of art, and by turning it upside down, which exaggerated its form. Its soft white curved lined concave structure was compared to a madonna, it has been referred "the buddha of the bathroom".

As Robert Motherwell wrote of another Duchamp works, The Bottle Rack, in 1914:

...the bottlerack has a more beautiful form than almost anything else made in 1914 as sculpture.¹¹

Motherwell was admiring the formal aspects of Duchamp's work, although Duchamp has claimed that it is not in its form, but in its content that we find its "meaning".

As Kermit Champa has observed, on "Fountain":

...the brilliant discovery within the world of the ready-made, of the perfect Freudian symbol, flagrantly obvious and stimulating once it was discovered, but utterly untranslatable and as a result perversely pure, phallic, vaginal? ... It was a man-made female object for exclusive male function. Yet who could characterise it precisely?¹²

The male and female represent established polarities of opposition, like the king and queen on the black and white pieces in a chess game - a game with which Duchamp was obsessed with all his life. In chess, we can see simplified the recognition of oppositions which were central to Duchamp's work and also to the



10. "FOUNTAIN", 1917.

work of Cross.

The recognition of the male/female in man-made objects which was a consistent feature of Duchamp's work, expressed a vivid realisation of the unconscious elements "at work", in industrial production and in the structure of society.

The sexuality inherent in production and in structures is inherent also in Dorothy Cross's work, as expressed in "Chairs" and "Spires".

These works represented the reconciliation of the male/female, strengths/weaknesses inherent in the individual and consequently in the structures and institutions of society which are created by individuals. These elements became the keys to an understanding of Cross's work and are themes which have continued to occupy this artist throughout the late '80's.



7. "LABYRINTHINE TOWER",

CHAPTER THREE

...As a result, a strange body comes into being one that is neither man nor woman, young nor old. It made Freud dream of sublimation and the christians of angels and it continues to put to modern rationality the embarrassing question of an identity that is sexual (among other things), and which is constantly remade and reborn through the impetus provided by a play of sighs.¹

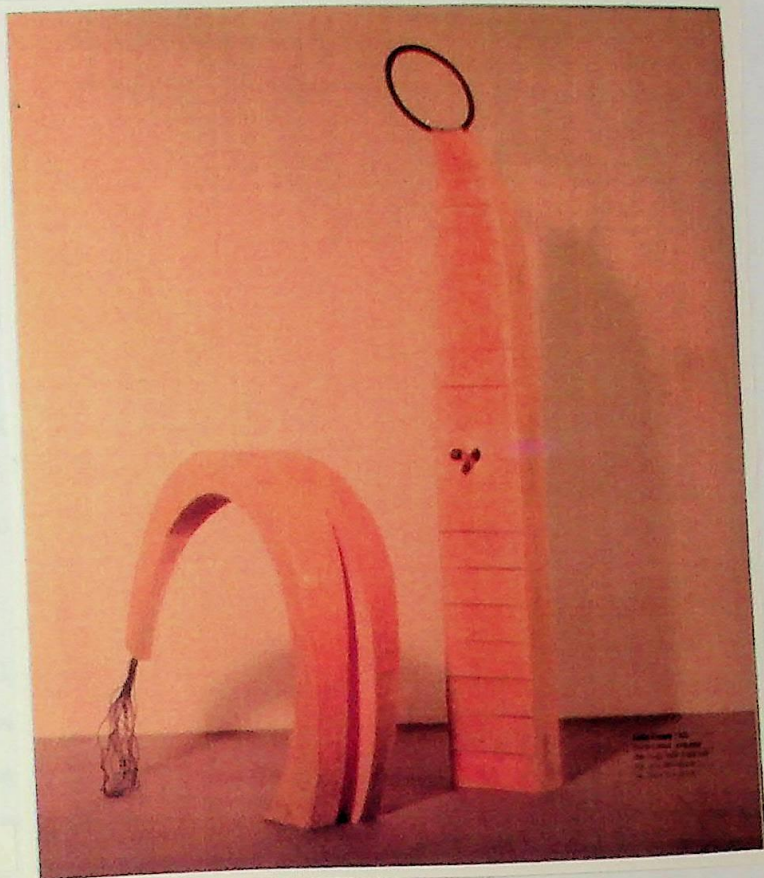
(Kristen)

A vital development in Cross's art was marked by her major exhibition, "Ebb" at the Douglas Hyde Gallery in Dublin in 1988. A shift was observed from the general to the particular. Whereas the artist had previously explored her major theme of sexuality, in a political and sociological context, as in the chairs and spires, there was in "Ebb" a decided shift to the personal, individual context of this subject.

The sculptures have a physical presence, a personality, which is deciphered through various codes: the use of found objects, man-made materials, 'a play of sighs' as Kristen has put it above. The audience becomes actively involved by the challenging of our perceptions with regard to sexual difference, stereotypes and so on.

Joan Fowler, in her introductory essay to the show described the exhibition thus:

...psychic depths in which case it opens up symbolic interpretations, personal associations or other realisms of possibility with these half-human, half-fish, half-threatening, half-inviting creatures, perhaps the constituents of dreams ... "Ebb" has its basis in these psychic and symbolic levels.²



"EROTIC COUPLE", 1988.



14. "SHARK LADY", 1988.

Fundamental to the show are the Jungian concepts of the anima (female projections in man) and the animus (the male projections in woman). In Cross's sculptures we are confronted by the male and female in each piece. A good example here would be "Shark Lady".

Cross has tried, as Kristeva has observed, 'to confront the controversial values once held to be universal truths by our culture and to subject them to an interminable analysis'.¹

Not only is the female stereotype confronted in this show, but also the male, the works are basically sexual representations, some stereotypical as with "Mr. and Mrs. Holy Joe", others more ambiguous, as with "Shark Lady". Fundamental to each couple or personality in the show is the sexual balance or imbalance, as the case may be. The more stereotypical the character, the more they are defined.

The installation was designed to suggest "layers" or "levels" of consciousness. As Cross has observed:

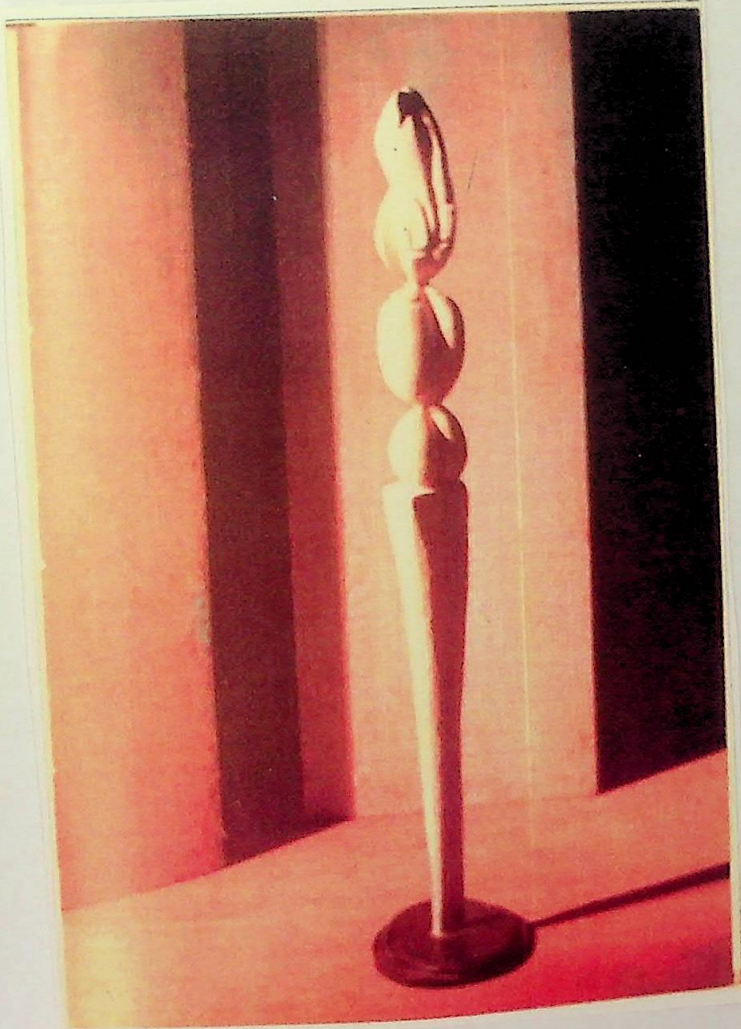
It is not about permanence, its like going down into a dream world where art acts as a filler-in between conscious and unconscious, it can clarify or it can mystify.³

To help convey this, the space of the Douglas Hyde Gallery was designed to suggest a descent. On entrance, the onlooker was brought down into the space via a boardwalk, extended from the staircase. This boardwalk was intended by the artist to be seen as an extension of the street pavement outside.

The effect of putting the audience on "stage" as it were, was to impede their entrance, restricting their movements, 'making them function in a particular way'.⁴ The purpose of this was to emphasise the importance of the audience as part and parcel of the exhibition.



13. VIEW OF INSTALLATION, 1985.



18. "SPRING", 1949-50.

As the artist herself has observed, 'People are more important than art'.⁵

Cross has said of the show that: 'it takes us into a world of the inner dimension of role-playing'. It is, she says, about acting out 'what one thinks one is ... the character you choose to like will tell you something about yourself.'⁷

In this kind of sculpture, objects imbued with a character or personality and in how these objects occupy the gallery space. The objects become as a crowd themselves in the gallery, motivating the audience into a mental and physical relationship. It is in these ways that I find closest parallels between Cross and the works of Louise Bourgeois.

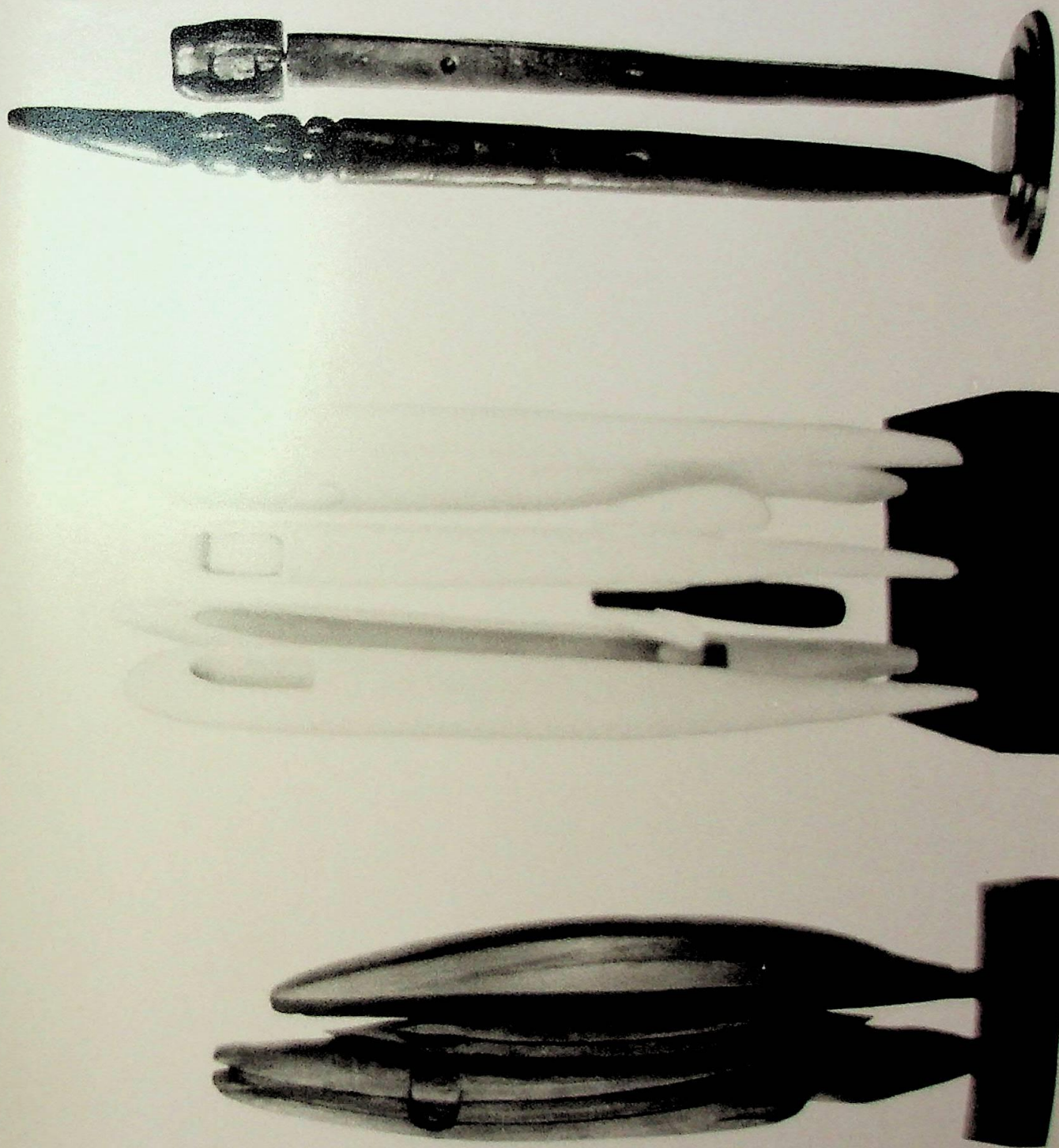
Bourgeois has said of her earlier sculpture that it had nothing to do with "traditional" sculpture, that it meant more physical presence and was an attempt, not to recreate the past, but rather was a way to control it.

In her installation Bourgeois' sculptures were arranged in such a way that the arrangement itself added to the relationship her audience gained to the pieces. The meaning of the pieces was adumbrated by the design of the exhibition filling the gallery space as people might, scattered about, alone or in couples.

This is just what we find at the Douglas Hyde exhibition, a gathering, a collection of personages, characters and, as it were psychic manifestations.

I take the line that the world is outside and inside, that reality falls to the share of both. I must logically accept the upset and annoyance that come to me from outside as symptoms of faulty adaptation to the conditions of the inner world.⁸

(Cross)



17

LEFT TO RIGHT: BROTHER AND SISTER; 1940;
QUARANTANIA, I., 1947-53; THE LISTENING ONE,
1947-49.

The audience, in their relationship to the work, become part of its meaning and of the possible interpretations of it.

Cross has said that:

... art has to be a visual language, a language to which the audience can respond immediately.⁹

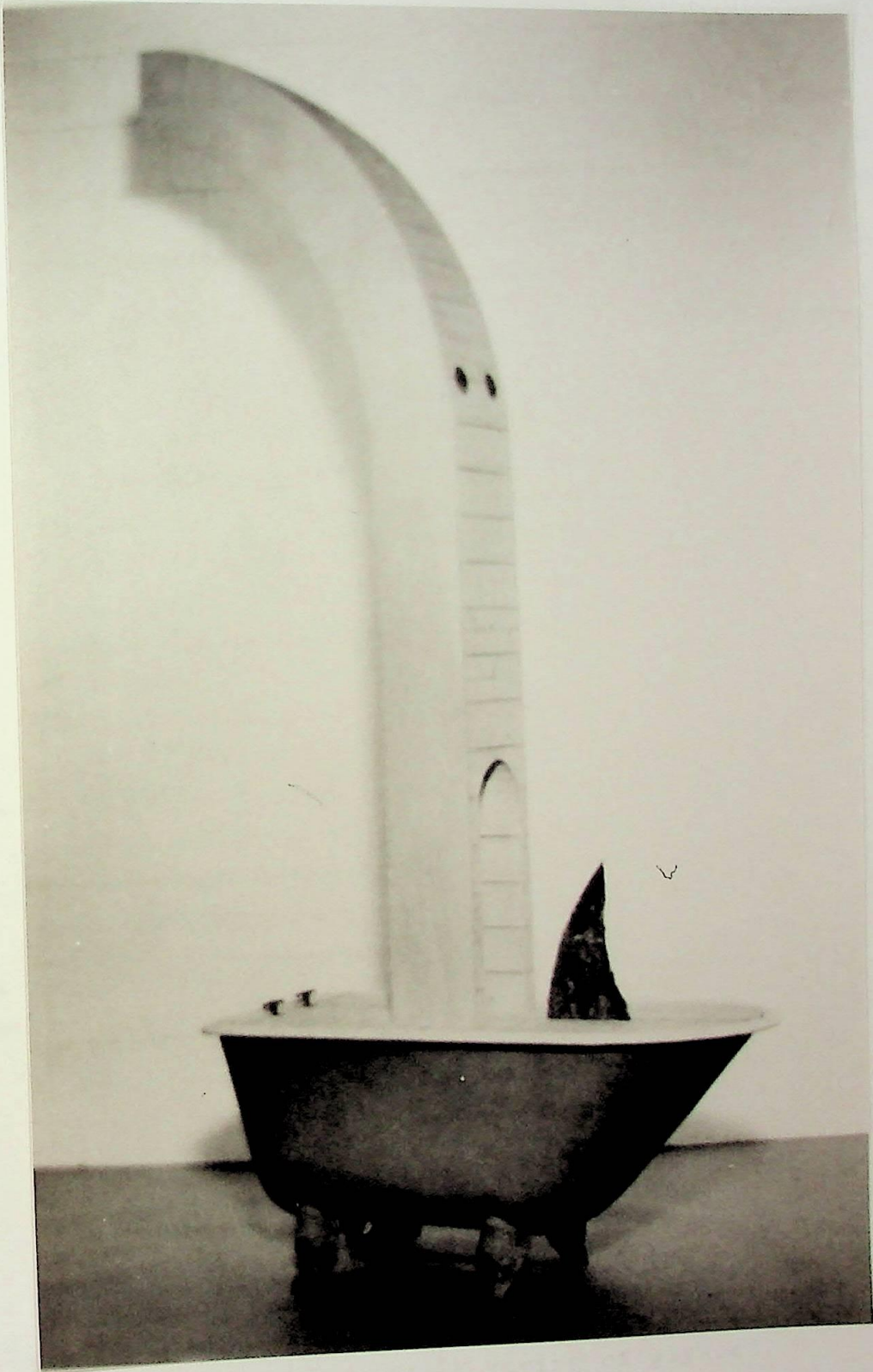
... a bath, a hook, a light bulb, a fin. This reflects Marcel Duchamps realisation of found objects in his "ready-mades". As Cross has said, 'I'm not interested in an art exclusive language I would like to communicate with a non-art gellery audience'.¹⁰

In "Ebb", the artist is attempting to get the audience to relate the conscious with the unconscious. This is what forms the work and which is exemplified by the objects used and their juxtaposition or arrangement in the sculptures, its language.

In this process, the work of Carl Jung is important for an understanding of Dorothy Cross's work. Jung, writing about Freud, criticised the master for being blind towards the paradox and ambiguity of the unconscious. He observed that Freud:

...dit not know that everything which rises out of the unconscious has a top and a bottom, an inside and outside. When we speak of the outside and that is what Freud did, we are considering only half of the whole, with the result that a counter-effect arises out of the unconscious.¹¹

In Cross's work, it is the unconscious elements in dreams, the imagination, as it were, 'taking a lucky dip', which allows aspects of ourselves to surface making them conscious. Through coming to terms with her own dreams and unconscious Cross allows us in turn, through her work, to analyse ourselves. This is the



12. "BATH", 1987.

significance of the audience's "socialization" with the works. The sculptures become genuinely a middle ground, a meeting place, between the audience and the artist.

In this context, it is relevant to consider Herbert Marcuse's criticism of the neo-Freudian view that human society is more influenced by cultural than by biological factors:

...they (neo-Freudians) cut off the roots of society in the instincts and instead take society at the level on which it confronts the individual, as his "ready-made" environment without questioning its origin and legitimacy.¹²

Cross is conscious of the "cultural moulding". As she said:

...everything is conditioning ... we are socially constructed ... I don't believe I have an individual voice.¹³

But her work also recognises Jung's and Marcuse's emphasis on the instinctive, or how the unconscious asserts itself in the human condition, something which "Ebb" exemplifies.

As the Director of the Douglas Hyde, Patrick Murphy, observed about the exhibition:

As we address them (the sculptures) they address each other and us in turn, this endless shifting results in an unsettling enigma as to the site of this work, these objects come to occupy an interior world, one of our own reading and yet they remain independent.¹⁴

"Bath", is a piece constructed using an old bath as a base. The top is covered in strips of plywood. Out of this plywood, there emerges a shark's fin, in bronze, cutting through the wood. From the plywood extends a long curved tower-like structure suggestive



8. TORSO, 1963-64. Fragile Goddess, 1970; Fillette, 1968; Untitled, 1970.

of the female body, with light bulbs for breasts, the artist comments on this piece is that it represents a duality of attraction and terror.

The materials used contribute to the meaning of the sculpture. Plywood, an inexpensive man-made material implies a "facade", a front, as our bodies are a front. The image here reminding the onlooker of the symbolism used in the "Spire" series. She uses bronze for what she calls its 'closeness to fish', which may be a reference to its impervious qualities under water, lead for its weight and also perhaps because of its toxicity.

All the materials are described in this context by Joan Fowler, as 'post-modern', in the sense that they are used conceptually in conjunction with the objects. The only time the term has been used in connection with Cross's work.

These materials and found objects are central to Cross's finished pieces. She has said that she gets more:

...excited over a rusty hook ... because of what it was used for, or the time that went into the making of it, or the fact that other people have used it, so its gone through time, it's been functional, it's had a kind of meaning and integrity of its own ... it's something to do with humans and still has, because I'm using it, but it can dictate and survive much longer than we can. In some ways we move in and out of them rather than they moving in and out of us.¹⁵

It is this notion of moving in and out of the objects which is close to how we function with the sculptures. In this context, our bodies are very much a physical trap, the body dies, the head doesn't. The sculptures in "Ebb" have no heads (which can be seen as a metaphor); we supply the heads, the audience in a sense become the



15. MR. MRS. HOLY JOE, 1988.

characters in their relationship with them. As Cross has said, 'the character you choose to like will tell you something about yourself'.¹⁶

Here we can also see an affinity with the work of Cathy Prendergast's sculptures, which are realistic, yet, because of the elements she has left out, she seems to search and make us search for the vital idea behind human and natural behaviour:

I would like my work to be seen as some kind of evidence of a private world. It is a separate reality which is inspired by drawn from, parallel to and yet very distant from our own world.¹⁷

It is no surprise, then to discover that "The Fish" in "Ebb" is a personal dream of its creator. But simultaneously they represent a widely recorded feature of the dreams of many people. One fish which is dominant in the show is the Shark, used to symbolise uncertainty. To swimmers sharks represent a physical threat unseen in the depths of the sea.

"Shark Lady in a Ball Dress" represents a pretty girl going to the ball. She has a shark or phallic like body, with breasts. She is thus animus ridden 'more prone to violence', she is for Cross 'slightly mad', extrovert. Her partner "Dancing" is placed to one side, and appears introvert by comparison.

Mr. and Mrs. Holy Joe are the most stereotypical couple in the show, the kneeling female form with religious statue hands, the much taller, dominant "Mr." with a hook extending from his back holding the "wedding veil" that extends from Mrs Holy Joe. A fork extends from Mr. where his penis should be, this also holding a statue hand - these figures are the most public or culturally defined, the most externally and obviously oppressed in the show.

One of the smallest and most introverted couples in the show are "blind" and "on the shore", both self-absorbed. "Blind" contemplates his spear. "On the shore" is content to contemplate her own sexuality.

In this context, the words of the feminist writer Luce Irigaray are relevant:

I search for myself among those elements which have been assimilated. But I ought to reconstitute myself on the basis of dissimilation and be reborn from traces of culture, works already produced by the other.¹⁸

"Mother" for the artist was an optimistic piece. The idea mother implies the possibility of multiple forms. As she said:

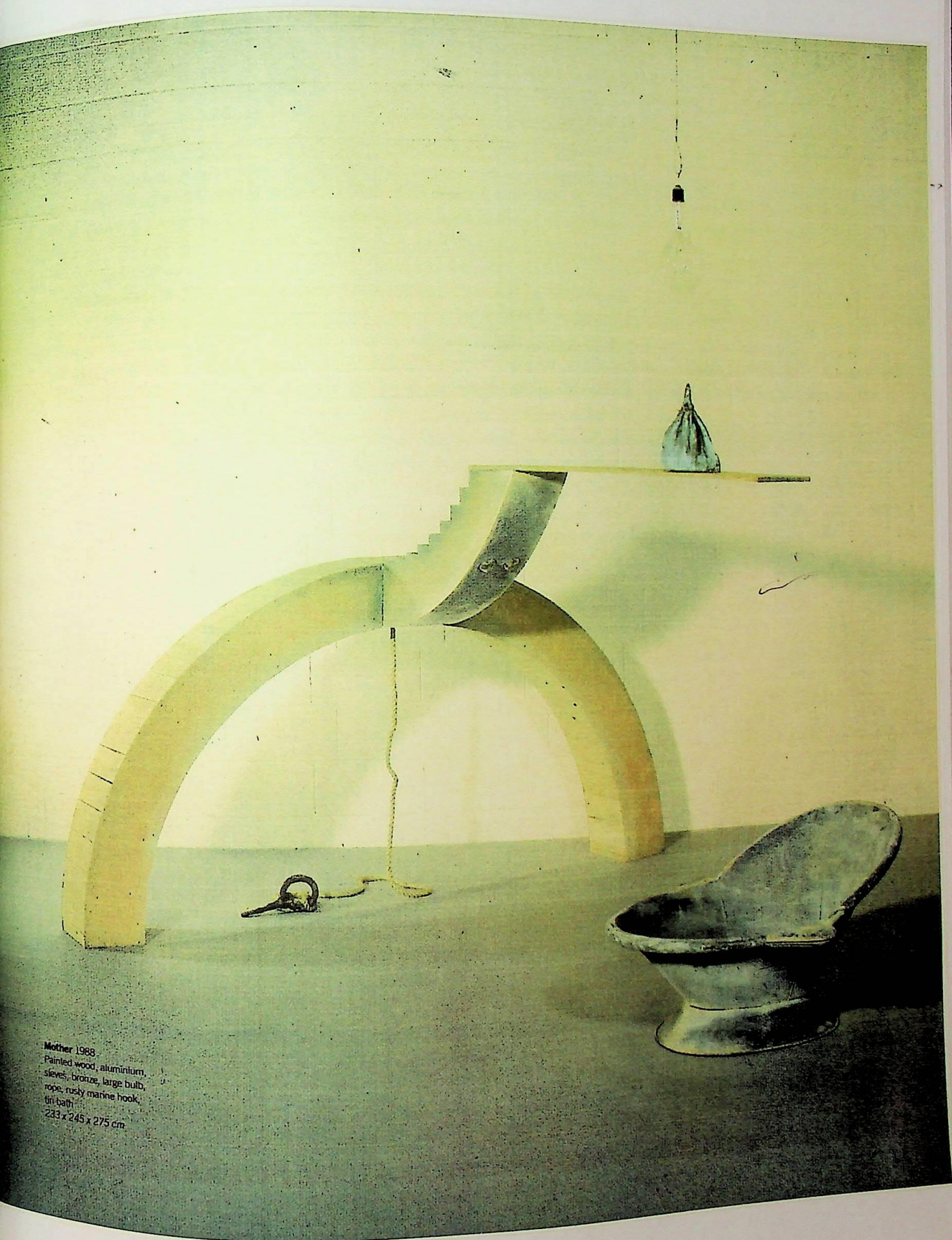
No way was it to put down other choices, but to open up possibility of change.¹⁹

"Ebb" was about the possibility change; "Mother" typifies this ideal.

The mother archetype in the psychology of Jung has quite distinctive qualities of solitude and sympathy, the magic authority of the female, the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcends reason. All that fosters growth and fertility. She is the place of magic transformation and rebirth, together with the underworld and its inhabitants are presided over by the mother.

Cross's "Mother" takes precedence here in Jung's definition of the archetypal mother. But for Cross she has both physical and symbolic presence.

"Mother" is big and cumbersome basically an arch in structure, with a small arch attached to its top or apex. There are steps on her back and tea-strainers on her front for breasts, implying domesticity. A



Mother 1988
Painted wood, aluminum,
sieves, bronze, large bulb,
rope, rusty marine hook,
tin bath
233 x 245 x 275 cm

plank extends from the top on which a miniature shark lady is poised, on the floor below, an enamel bath.

The Mother becomes a mother through her sexual connection with the male. This is implied by the rope which has a marine hook attached to its end, where she was once sexually attached, making her physically a mother. The miniature "Shark Lady" positioned as she is can be seen to have ascended the stair, to walk out the plank or diving board. The light bulb over her head implies a little star (like cinderella going to the ball). Shark Lady is like a new entity or possibility. Will she stay poised? ... or will she plunge? ... possibly landing in another domestic situation...represented here by the enamel bath.

"Mother" then represents the potential of woman after she has mothered. The idea of mother implies, multiple forms the possibility of rebirth and renewal, of change.

Traditionally the role of mother represents a sense of place for man, such a limit means that she becomes a thing ... she finds herself defined as a thing, moreover the mother, woman is also used as an envelope by the man in order to help him set limits to things ... this means that her status as an envelope and as a thing(s) has not been interpreted and so remains inseparable from the work, or act of man - notably insofar as he defines her and creates his own identity through her or correlatively through his determination of her being.²⁰

(Irigaray)

Cross's "Mother" had been attached to a man sexually, giving her the potential of mothering. But she has somehow gotten loose, free from the domination of the male, that can define her (as Irigaray has stated) through his defining of himself through her as a thing). The Mother in "Ebb" is an individual, she had a partner,

she has given birth.

Cross's "Mother" then is transformative, creative, she resides over the "others" in the show, like the Jungian animus, the woman, mother is the door to the unconscious, to the mystery and transcendence of existence.

CONCLUSION

The reader will, by now, be familiar with the work of Dorothy Cross from the perspective I have taken it. They will also I hope, appreciate the difficulty in writing a thesis on a young Irish artist who has not reached any conclusions in her work at this stage in her career.

In this context, there are a number of issues I have raised that are central to Cross's art and that are particular given their cultural context.

For example, Cross's position with regard to the church ... which was ultimately an attack on male dominance within the structures of society.

As political statements they very much reflect their country of origin. These sculptural "Spires", would hardly have the same relevance in Britain, for example, a country where the church does not have the same influence it continues to have in Ireland.

The work is then individual and distinctive in an international sense, but also distinctive in an Irish sense. Cross, as it happens, is one of the very few artists in this country who have tackled social issues through her art.

The work then in retrospect can act as a form of social commentary. But we can also see the personal development of the artist, an exploration of herself through these issues.

The sculptures not only function formally and conceptually, but also as a learning process for the artist. This can

be seen as political, comparable to the position taken by the womens liberation movement in the 1970's. They saw personal experience as inherently political. An idea that reflects the surrealist view. A legitimisation of art as a force of change on society. As Breton stated and I repeat:

...the plastic work of art in order to respond to the undisputed necessity of thoroughly revising all real values, will either refer to a purely interior model or cease to exist.¹

This optimises the position Cross has taken with regard to her art. It is as she has stated essentially a "self-exploration through the materials and symbols, the signs that form our culture. It is here I have evaluated the work.

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