Maria Simonds-Gooding:
A Categorical Analysis.

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Contents

List of Illustrations

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Introduction

In any attempt to place Maria Simonds-Gooding in an art historical context there is a temptation to merely describe the formal process whereby she produces her work and compare it to work produced at earlier periods of art history in a similar fashion. This of course is necessary, but it is also important to analyse the work thus produced in terms other than the formal. The aim of this study is therefore to both discuss the formal aspects of the work of Maria Simonds-Gooding, and to analyse those aspects other than the formal which influence and characterise her work. These tendencies are discussed under the following headings: 'Naivism and Symbolism' and 'History and Tradition'.

In discussing the non-formal aspects of Simonds-Gooding it must be borne in mind that although she is, as she claims, an instinctive artist, she is astute enough to recognise that certain biographical details cannot but have influenced her work. She has, for example, undergone an art school training with History of Art as a component, has a keen interest in other cultures, and has travelled widely both as student and artist. It is not unlikely then that work produced by such a painter will have been influenced by historical and contemporary factors. Similarly, aspects of the subconscious side of her work bear a relation to the instincts and symbols of contemporary naive painters.

This same breadth of reference is called for in a consideration of the formal aspects of her work. Parallels can be drawn between, for example, the technical aspects of Maria Simonds- Gooding's plaster pieces and prehistoric cave art. Similarly, her work resembles that of contemporary naive painters in certain formal aspects, most noticeably lack of perspective. Due to the fact that she depicts the life and area surrounding her, it is useful to take into account her own lifestyle and its strong connections with place. Much of the material available on Simonds-Gooding has a distinct lifestyle bias. The writers of most of these types of pieces, when they mention her paintings and etchings, are vague and uncertain of the work. Because of this it has been essential to carry out a large body of primary research. Much of this research consists of interviews and questionnaires by letter.

There is, however, a small but important body of critical articles on the work. These articles are not only interesting for what they have to say about the work, but are informative also in the different critical perspectives which they take,

therefore demonstrating the problems of assessing Simonds-Gooding's work. Many of these articles are concerned with her plasterworks in particular, a section of Simonds-Gooding's work which evidently is taken more seriously than others such as her etchings and oil paintings. In Peter Murray's introductory essay on Simonds-Gooding's mid-term retrospective he mentions the difficulties and solutions with which three writers in particular concerned themselves (1). Sean Dunne (2), Aidan Dunne (3), and Anthony Cronin (4) all discussed the work of Simonds-Gooding from three very different angles. In an article from 1985, Sean Dunne discussed her work from the angle of her character and lifestyle, but without commiting his words to a definition of the work (5). Anthony Cronin, the critic and, at present, cultural advisor to An Taoiseach, seems to have approached the work from a poetic and evocative angle. His article has been described variously as purple prose by the more prosaic *Phoenix*, and as 'an attempt to evoke the spirit' by Murray himself. Aidan Dunne in a *Magill* article rightly pins the work down to being 'inevitably concerned with land and people's relationship to it.' Simonds-Gooding herself prefers this particular piece by Dunne and sees it as the definitive published article. The truth of Simonds-Gooding's work probably lies somewhere between each writer's particular conclusions. Any attempt will be both analytical and evocative as neither can be discussed without reference to the other. By the use of taped interviews and written correspondence, backed by existing reviews and articles, new conclusions can be reached.

The bulk of the information available from existing articles and reviews is primarily based around the rural and traditional associations of her existence in Kerry. Therefore these articles are descriptive, non-analytical, lifestyle-oriented pieces. Simonds-Gooding's obvious emphasis on her lifestyle is revealing. Her lifestyle depicted in such articles is very much a product of the success of her work, but also a means to selling the work in the first place. Her lifestyle is seen as being of paramount importance and stems from the obvious initial curiosity shown in her choice of region. Therefore taped interviews and travelling to these locations both in Dublin and in Kerry were vital to understanding the background and psychology of the work, its aims and the person behind them.

At times her work comes close to a visual equivalent of her beloved Blasket Islands' literary tradition. Sometimes depicting many of the activities and places

featured in the Blasket library, her representation is one without people, a post 1954 Blasket life, where man has deserted the islands, forced off, but leaving his remnants in place. She has a deep interest in other prehistoric and pre- industrial cultures. Her interest focuses on everything from these societies, from their built structures to their pastoral traditions. The cultures are closely akin visually to that of the Dingle peninsula and range from India to Mexico. Her depiction of human life and its tenuous connections with the land is a mixture of the past's monuments and the ghosts of the former human presence, and it is this that Simonds-Gooding finds so useful and ultimately powerful.

Footnotes to Introduction

1 Murray, Peter, 'Maria Simonds-Gooding' (Introductory essay in the mid-term retrospective catalogue), Crawford Gallery Cork, 1985.

2 Dunne, Sean, 'A Sense of Freedom', *The Sunday Tribune*, 10-3-1985.

3 Dunne, Aidan, 'Places', *Magill*, 16-5-1985, pp.40-41.

4 Cronin, Anthony, 'Maria Simonds-Gooding', (Catalogue Introduction), Taylor Galleries, May 1985.

5 Murray, Peter, op. cit., 1985.

6 *The Phoenix*, 'Maria's Plaster', 24-5-1985.

Naivism and Symbolism

'I must emphasise, when I set out to draw and paint, I do not say to myself I want to make a map or I don't want the horizon, or that the perspective will go, no, firstly I only work from a subject that I am totally absorbed/drawn into and cannot pass it by. The minute I see such a place I feel I belong to it and it to me. There is a strong compulsion about this and that is why I sometimes travel - I find these places even thousands and thousands of miles away. It is not important to me whether it is on my doorstep or it takes a long journey to get there. These places are like all belonging to one universal family. It seems obvious once I find such a place be it an enclosure, habitation, boundary etc. that I must put it down as I see it. People remind me quite often that my perspective is not normal; it always amazes me. To this day I see my perspective as completely normal, and after it has been emphasised that it looks primitive I know that if I had not drawn it that way I can't see how else I could have. What reinforces this is that I am a hopeless draughtswoman and what people refer to as perspective, it is simply that it doesn't exist to the extent [i.e. because] I'm unaware of it. Having said all this, I believe we are all influenced by what we love and admire around us. The place where I live and the places I travel to, not only do I admire their ways of life, their spirit, but also everything they put their hands to, whether it be stone walls, enclosures or their art work. I absorb what I love around me and make it part of my life' (1).

Maria Simonds-Gooding cannot be termed a true naive painter. She is trained in an art school tradition and much-travelled, so the term 'naive' applies purely to the style and subject of her work. Her work is a mixture of folk art forms and reductionist thinking. Her direct influences come from prehistory and twentieth century folk art. Much of Simonds-Gooding's sensibilities and her eclectic attitude to her work spring from her academic development, having begun her first formal education at the Holy Child Convent School in Killiney, County Dublin at the age of twelve. This may explain the sincerity and vigour with which her work is executed. She says, regarding her education in the National College of Art in 1962 that it was mainly dull, drawing from antique still lifes. The same applies to her studies in Bruxelles in 1963 at the Centre de Peinture under a 'Flemish painter, M. Hebraut'. Yet it was at Bath Academy, under the guidance of tutors Adrian Heath and Michael Johnson, that she learnt, and received relevant training. 'At Bath I learnt to get in touch with my feelings,

not clever techniques ... they were not interested in technique, more the approach, and yes I did follow a very personal path in college'(2).

This late beginning in art college at the age of twenty three could account for her relatively untrained, uncontrived naive style. Much of her early impressionable years went by untouched by outside fads and influences. Therfore, her refined form of naivism had been cemented. The naive work of Simonds-Gooding doesn't necessarily indicate any type of incompetence, but a spontaneous appropriation of what she feels about the world directly around her. Much of the confusion around Simonds-Gooding's work begins with the area within which the work is placed. The problems of analysis of naive work in a fine art context are numerous and quite varied. The fact that she also has a substantial body of austere abstract work does not make a categorical analysis any easier. One must follow the dictum which Simonds-Gooding herself follows: 'The work says what I want it to, I change styles to suit my needs'(3). For Simonds-Gooding it is the basic need to explore and to indulge in the act of creativity which accounts for these changes in style which range from abstraction to figuration. Like prehistoric image-makers she has 'two modes of expression - one abstract and the other figurative, thus revealing complex thought processes'(4).

The factors involved in an explanation of naivism are rather elastic and quite vague. In *A Tribe of One* (5) George Melly has qualified his full description of the term 'naive', as being loosely based on a simplified romantic version of what we take the term 'artist' to mean. The description of 'compulsive' and 'primitive' is accurate, but if left unqualified is both vague and insubstantial. Simonds-Gooding can justifiably be termed compulsive. She has produced a large body of work which would easily attest to a compulsive or even an 'impulsive' artist. Likewise the primitive aspect of Simonds-Gooding's work is demonstrated by her use of her own forms and techniques. They can be viewed comparatively with the work of many naive artists.

The work of Simonds-Gooding could be classed under such a term as faux-naive. This does not suggest that her eccentric images are transferred consciously and thus artificially into her childlike style. 'Naive sophisticates ... contradiction in terms are occasionally referred to as faux-naive, but nevertheless

their work is not far removed from that of their more innocent colleagues'(6). Simonds-Gooding is one such neo-primitive or naive sophisticate. This does not mean that her work is a sentimental recreation of the past seen through learned eyes, but rather the product ofa direct visual honesty coupled with modern art references.

An example of this can be seen in the work of 'Habitation III' (**FIGURE 1**), fresco pigment on plaster, 43 inches by 58 inches, shown in 1970 and Jaap Wagemaker's 'Ocré Fonce' assemblage (**FIGURE 2**), 73 inches by 59 inches, 1965 . In both works there are many similarities, most noticeably surface scoring and a high degree of plaster moulding. In each, angular loops forming boundaries separate textured planes of plaster. The scored surface raises up protruding mounds produced by the act of tearing into the plaster face. These ditches of plaster straggle and trail, some eroded mid-field. In the work of Simonds-Gooding and Wagemaker a similar configuration of the hollow circular structures enclosed by a running boundary can be found. Similarly a smaller circular structure is found lying just outside the main enclosing form. The influence of Wagemaker's work can therefore be seen in her handling of materials and form content. Simonds-Gooding admits her interest in his work exhibited in the 1967 ROSC in an article from 1967: 'I spent hours there studying the paintings. ROSC got people thinking and talking here ... It certainly made an enormous impression on me'(7). Dorothy Walker has noticed that Simonds-Gooding owes a great debt to the first ROSC show: 'There is a post-ROSC generation of women Artists like Maria Simonds-Gooding, who works in painted landscape relief'(8).

This first ROSC was an enormous success. The fact that Simonds-Gooding was impressed is understandable. The show, held in in 1967, was the first time most Irish Artists and the public in general had a chance to see such work. Its aim in bringing international modern art from the last four years was highly regarded. At the time of the first ROSC, Simonds-Gooding was still studying at Bath Academy, Corsham. She admits to being 'enchanted' by Wagemaker's pieces, although she had already been working in such a way before this. However, she also admits a huge love for other artists who worked in a textured fashion such as Tapies. She stresses that 'Habitation III', based on the Bath Academy life model and the land structures on the Dingle peninsula, was finished by the time she had seen the 1967 ROSC. She also mentions that such materials

were very much in vogue at the time and were used by many artists. She freely admits Wagemaker as one of her starting ponts, but is disappointed that Walker did not conclude her article by admitting that afterwards Simonds-Gooding continued to execute plaster work in a more personal and distinct vein.

The work of Simonds-Gooding has a primitivist vision polished by a professional understanding of the materials used. This device is explained by Robert Goldwater: 'naive and sophisticated are not fused, each retains its independence and heightens the effect of the other'(9). 'Going into the Island' (FIGURE 3), etching 1982, is a virtual index of naive art techniques, some deliberately employed such as the flattened aerial perspective and the lines which circumscribe the simplified unproportional forms (10) . Others are the product of the subconscious instinctive mind such as the form's volume, portrayed by nervous lineation. In the etching the whale-like Blasket Island, subject of most of the region's literature, lies solidly in a brusquely modelled sea. Roads (i.e. signs of communications), cross paths, some swallowed by the onsetting darkness of night. Within the central enclosure is safety. Tiny huts are peppered clumsily across its area. Most sit safely by the roads, away from the enclosure boundaries. Several ongoing attempts at controlled agriculture and pastoral farming lie awkwardly squashed together or sit safely against the roads. Below, in the dark sea, lies a simplified *naomhóg* (11), islanders returning. The feeling of overpowering grandeur can be sensed, the insignificance of the small boat, itself an enclosed form, plainly shows the minor role which humans play in Simonds-Gooding's work. The anthropocentric view of man standing in the centre of the universe is stood on its head, as is shown by the island's apparent indifference to the humans.

Much of Simonds-Gooding's pictures interest the eye more as decorative pattern than as attempts at creating the illusion of reality. Her principle of perspective is simple: the eye level is not fixed in one position. Much of her perspective is non-tonal, it relies heavily on the method of linear perspective, a system of representing dimensions by line alone. There is no attempt to fool the eye. She sees perspective merely as a means of recording the relative position of her subjects in the landscape. The more distant the object, the higher its position on the page surface.

Softening of tone for objects which appear in the distance does not exist, colour tone remains constant throughout and changes only to emphasise and delineate the forms. The etching 'Going into the Island' shows examples of many of these methods. One of Simonds- Gooding's most constant devices can be seen in this piece. There is a vertical tilting of the picture plane. This method is closely related to the naive device of bird's-eye view. The result shows the eye level on a par with the drawn horizon line on the picture plane, leaving the view aerial and map-like. In the representational work of Simonds- Gooding seen in some etchings, the expressive perspective results in a decorative abstract composition. The aerial view in her work is used to enhance compositional clarity. One such similar compositional technique can be found in the use of aerial observation for the sake of clarity in nineteenth century estate paintings painted by primitive artists for wealthy landlords which revealed both elevation of the estate grounds and its plan.

Simonds-Gooding's landscape is seen as though from the view of a shamanesque out-of-body experience and not from a typical human observation. Philip Vann, an English critic who specialises in naivism, wrote the introductory essays for Simonds-Gooding's 1987 shows in London and Dublin. He outlined in **The Arts Review** how her perspective was :'All sorts of different almost contradictory senses of perspective are adjoined, without any self-consciousness, with no faux-naivité'(12).

By Simonds-Gooding's own admission she finds drawing perspective difficult and she says also that Mícheál Ó Gaoithín, son of Peig Sayers, was an enormous influence (13). 'He tended to look at his subjects from an upper viewpoint, and I tend to do the same. I do believe that he's really influenced me'(14). Although Simonds-Gooding was not aware of the drawings of Blasket Island writer Muiris Ó Súilleabháin (15), the same naive art techniques can be found in both. In Simonds-Gooding's drawing from 1989 'The Day the Boats were Looking for the Dingle Dolphin' (**FIGURE 4**) and in Ó Súilleabháin's untitled drawing (**FIGURE 5**) there is the same elevated viewpoint and flattened cliff treatment. Simonds-Gooding's love of the naive and their characteristics can be seen in her large collection of naive art which hangs around the walls of her house in Dún Chaoin on the Dingle peninsula. Included is the work of Finnola Lane from Listowel, Co. Kerry. Her decorative, colourful 'Market Day,

Listowel' hangs close to Jack Prendeville's near-abstract 'Conor Pass' oil on canvas. Her interest and inspiration from this field goes back to her early relationship with Mícheál Ó Gaoithín. His watercolours are represented in her cottage by a framed illustrated poem and portrait of himself and Simonds-Gooding. Ó Gaoithín regularly enquired about her work when she lived nearby. After having seen examples, he began painting and modelling mermaids, seals and local scenes in watercolours and waste clay from a nearby pottery. He laboured intensely while he was alive and produced works which are simple, affectionate and humorous, leaving behind a great many pieces of fine work.

Of all the devices in naive art, line is possibly the most essential, due to its direct and descriptive nature. It is the primary need of the naive to depict the image by lineation. Therefore outlining is the first step in possessing the image. 'Primitive painters, like children, tend to store up only clearly outlined "things" in their visual memory'(16). Adrian Heath, a tutor at the Bath Academy, Corsham, where Simonds-Gooding studied from 1966 to 1968, influenced her greatly due to his intense interest in line. She admits readily that she was made utterly aware of the expressive possibilities of line by Heath. This interest in line, she says, 'became the drive of life, an absolute obsession in my work where there is so much of it'(17).

She first became aware of the potential of pure line when she was made to work from the model by Heath. She states that the exercises of drawing a line from one side of the page to the other in relation to the lines of the model interested her intensely and she marks them as a large feature of her development. The most basic and smallest unit in Simonds-Gooding's work is line, and it is here that much of her interest lies. These lines are arranged in repetitive sequences which expand to form a more complex whole. The spatial connective device is based on the dynamism of the lines, arranged to direct the eye across her various forms. By her syncopation of a rhythm, the piece becomes a linear litany. It is this compulsion which attests to a type of Freudian repetition compulsion, the obsessive gesture where exaggeration and the repetition of the enjoyed experience of mark- making are important.

Simonds-Gooding has a need to bring matter back to its earliest state and break her areas into the most basic units; into Freud's primeval inorganic state.

Once a mark is discovered in every similar circumstance one is spared hisitation and indecision. 'It enables men to use space and time to the best advantage, while conserving their physical forces'(18).

Simonds-Gooding also mentions an interest in the lengthy repetitiveness of primitive music, where rhythmic sequences are played constantly until a type of percussive (in Simonds-Gooding's case 'linear') overlapping occurs. Her forms are simple shapes such as the modified square and circle. This perhaps links her directly with the beginning of all visual symbols. Like Cézanne, Simonds-Gooding uses natural forms as the basic elements from which pictorial forms are built. As with vernacular artisans of primitive societies, the marks and forms in her composition are quite complex and form a type of rhythmic unity. But Simonds-Gooding herself refutes the notion of the work as decorative and instead believes that her work illustrates the same kind of schematic representation found in most children's art. One way to differentiate between the depiction of decoration and rhythm is where the mark-making stresses the intrinsic rhythmic qualities of the objects and forms depicted, and is qualified by Malevich's statement on primitive art: 'Not ornament, but a feeling for rhythm'(19).

Simonds-Gooding's generic symbols seem to lie within the subconscious of most naive and primitive artists. One reason for this phenomenon is the fact that the aesthetic result and the guiding impetus are not seen as being separate. 'American Indians saw her New Mexico paintings... They thought they related to some of their most secret signs and beliefs'(20). It is no surprise that Simonds-Gooding and Indian primitive painter 'Quick-to-See' should be recommended to see each other's paintings. The universality of Simonds-Gooding's work was proven when the American Indians who had seen the Hoshour Gallery show in Albuquerque wanted to know about the *kivas* (Mexican mud structures) (21). The paintings, however, were not of mexican *kivas*, but of structures found ten thousand miles away on the Indian sub-continent. Betty Parsons said in 1982 that Simonds-Gooding had 'jumped the Romantic fence into a field of ancient signs and symbols'(22). It is the fundamentality of her images that makes her work so universal and therefore permutate for some into similar forms from their own experience.

There is much to be found in the subconscious strata of Simonds- Gooding's iconography. Her work goes beyond the visual and formal elements and enters an area of poeticism and symbolism. 'Nearly all my work seems to be about fields, enclosures and walls, and their sense of safety and security'(23). Symbolism places the enclosure as the equivalent for the ordered and the conscious, the circumscribed space as a spiritual entity. Therefore the subconscious forces realise themselves in these representational elements such as the enclosure. In an article on Simonds-Gooding, Hilary Pyle says that 'the small walled field typical of the West is treated in a similar fashion... but as the artist uses the images they hold a wealth of implications'(24).

Simonds-Gooding's enclosures mark the separation of inside from out. It is a type of place-marking which is akin to the concepts of territory and stability. Her landscape is inhabited by cultivators and herders, thus their concept of 'place' is interpreted as and determined by structures and boundaries. It is very much a Western concept of land, due to this insistence on ownerships and human usage. The demarcation ethic shows that the emphasis is on the humans' relationship to the land, not the other way around.

There is an emphasis on the macrocosm and not the microcosm of the landscape. This finds its parallel in Chinese art where the land is stressed and not the individual. The enclosure is seen as a 'means of bridging the gap between the boundless amplitude of nature and tight configuration of the finite thing'(25). For Simonds-Gooding the enclosure is a focus within an infinity which is hostile to the human. The land around these images of enclosures seems to be the unmapped subconscious. The lack of any landmark presents the idea that the place shown is more imagined than depicted, and thus the works are endowed with a sense of the unsure and ethereal. Placenames or locations are rarely given in the works' titles, leaving ambiguity in the work. This disorientation is reinforced by the frequent lack of horizon or foreground space, leaving an expanse of land which shoots off, unlimited by the frame. Theoretical parallels can be seen when Rudolf Arnheim points out the following: 'the more compellingly the pictorial space is shown as boundless, the more precarious becomes the status of central location because centrality can be defined only in relation to the boundaries of space'(26).

Simonds-Gooding overcomes this boundlessness by the use of her enclosure. It is a structure which marks out the indifference of nature from safety and domesticity. An enclosure will remain steadfast throughout. It will be constant and resist change. The enclosure, as Simonds-Gooding sees it, is the tangible, symbolic link between the inner world of man and the outer world of nature. 'It's an emotional statement, the cosiness of the enclosure against the empty space surrounding'(27).

Visual parallels can be seen between the psychology of fifteenth century medieval enclosure paintings and Simonds-Gooding's enclosure images. Perhaps this is due to the similarities of apocalyptic concerns and states of flux in the final period of the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. Initially religious cloister forms were the exemplars for the domestic, medieval enclosed garden. Likewise one can say the Simonds-Gooding early images of monastic beehive structures were exemplars for her subsequent agricultural enclosures where the image takes a more prominent and meaningful role. The sealed nature of this *hortus conclusus* prohibited any relationship with the surroundings. Due to this form's inward aspect, the enclosure began to be seen as the *hortus animae* - the garden of the soul. 'To the medieval mind paradise was definitely an enclosure'(28). Simonds- Gooding's comforting enclosures are modern versions of the enclosed gardens of fifteenth century chiliaism. She sees nature as harmonious. Her meditative enclosures are probably more poignant today where science is a very real portent of doom. The uncertainty of modern existence has replaced for Simonds-Gooding the irrational hysteria of the millenial fifteenth century.

In 'Up a Mountain to an Enclosure' (**FIGURE 6**) from 1989, the way to the enclosure sweeps upwards towards the safety of the known/consious enclosure. This corridor is a bright, safe path, akin to a celestial stairway. A double outer perimeter around the path's edge acts as a barrier from the outside, the unknown. The path is a white wedge-like structure that seems to act as a breaker, separating the darker half of the etching from flooding into the lighter left-hand section. An enclosed space on the right lies stranded, cut off by the thick sweeps of dark ink. This darkly etched area consists of a mass of repetitive works scratched ferociously into the metal plate. The strength of this etching is the repetitive nervous line juxtaposed with the white, unbitten metal. The black is the

unknown, invisible force: the primeval fear of darkness. The abstraction of this chosen subject of land and enclosure is enhanced by the absence of mid-range tones. Whites push forward from their black backgrounds. These chiaroscuro chinks of light which puncture the dark mass hint at the below surface, a luminous interior, an inner light from behind the paper's surface. The piece goes beyond the visual and shows a quality that transcends the surface, possibly one of spiritual, elemental intensity. Representation is rejected for the essence of the objects depicted, therefore reproducing the 'properties and perhaps particularly structural relations'(29) as an analogy with the phenomenon.

The enclosure is Simonds-Gooding's primal form. It is a form which is continued in the depiction of animals, especially sheep. Each has a glow-worm aura surrounding its form. This, she has said, is 'keeping the energy of the creature around it'(30). This encircling device is akin to Alfred Wallis' method of placing each of his painted ships on their own isolated chunks of sea. In Simonds-Gooding's 'Down by the Lake' (**FIGURE 7**), she uses the method of the enclosure to put a recognisable static form or structure into an unstable torrent of rushing variegated brushwork. The writhing torrents of vertical paint heighten the sheerness of the mountain wall on which the enclosure is perilously placed. Each form within this panorama sends reverberations like a stone in a pond into the surrounding rushing brushstrokes. When meeting a sheep form, the brushstrokes tend to circumnavigate the animal, enclosing it in a wrapped safety. The enclosures contain the sheep, keeping them from being washed clean off the mountain face by the rushing brushswork. The sheep themselves are depicted like punctures in the paper. They are positive spaces, unpainted, left bare, leaving one to imagine them as microcosmic enclosures themselves within the lush panorama. The mountain enclosure here is steadfast and resilient against the literal onslaught of the outside. The land around is untamed, an unstable base for man and his animals. The sheep here have a beacon-like quality, the only living things in this intense unyielding landscape. There is a closeness of interaction with the animals or humans depicted in such works, but yet a remoteness in their placement within the landscape, possibly to show the hermetic safety of those shown within this vastness. The sheep are painted staccato-like in the green enclosures. The stone walls of these enclosures sweep rhythmically crescendo-like past areas of static fields.

Such opposites shown in juxtaposition are intrinsic techniques of Simonds-Gooding. Order and disorder, safety and the unpredictable dangers of the outside unknown subconscious are placed adjacent, heightening the power of each other. This astuteness, coupled with a professionalism of execution results in a work of twentieth century art which displays considerable sophistication.

Outside the natural and manmade content lies a symbolic anthropomorphism, ithyphallic islands and rocks and embryonic seals and dolphins. The dolphin was a spiritual guide for sailors, a sign of the feminine principle due to the similarity of the words *delphis* and *delphos*, a gentle creature who was seen as an allegory for salvation. Throughout her work forms are narrated by black lineation, the chromatic of the germinal phase of life. The recurrent island vistas are archetypal references for isolation and death. Beyond the visible there is a metaphysical forcefield of the ocean which is a meditative, transitional element. The steep primitive, regressive aspects of the islands' cliffs reveal the tenuousness of this physical sanctuary from the unconscious. The domicillary forms found on the island can be defined primarily as an image of human cultivation and habitation, but are also identifiable more importantly as images of the self.

Footnotes to Naivism and Symbolism

1 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Letter to Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, 29-5-1990.

2 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Letter to Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, 9-1-1991.

3 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Interview with Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, Sandycove, Co. Dublin, 14-1-1990.

4 Ruspoli, Mario, *The Cave of Lascaux, The final Photographic Record*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1987, p.154.

5 Melly, George, *A Tribe of One: Great Naive Painters of the British Isles*, Oxford, Oxford Illustrated Press, 1981.

6 Lister, Eric, and Willams, Sheldon, *Twentieth Century British Naive and Primitive Artists*, London, Futura, 1984, p.vi.

7 Anonymous, 'A Puck Fair Bargain', *The Irish Times*, 20-8-1970.

8 Walker, Dorothy, *Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies*, Dublin, Blackwater Press, p. 623.

9 Goldwater, Robert, the chapter entitled 'The Child Cult' in *Primitivism in Modern Art*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1986, p.204.

10 The island referred to is the Great Blasket island, largest in a group of islands off the tip of the Corca Dhuibhne (Dingle) peninsula, County Kerry. The Blasket island population rarely exceeded two hundred at any time, now deserted, last inhabitants evacuated from the island in 1954. Inhabitants have produced twenty volumes of literature. The best known of these are *An tOileánach* by Tomás Ó Criomhthain, *Fiche Blian ag Fás* by Muiris Ó Súilleabháin and *Peig* by Peig Sayers.

11 A *naomhóg* is a domestic boat associated with the west and south-west of Ireland. It is a conventional small eight-oared boat, made of tarred calico or

canvas stretched over elm laths. It can be used with mast and sail for transportation of people and livestock.

12 Vann, Philip, *Arts Review*, 10-10-1986.

13 Mícheál Ó Gaoithín, nicknamed *An File*, meaning 'The Poet'. Born 1904, died 1974. Son of Peig Sayers.

14 Joyce, Barbara, 'Dunquin Artist's Work Relates to Secret Indian Beliefs', *The Kingdom*, 21-8-1984.

15 Muiris Ó Súilleabháin, born 1904, died 1950 in Connemara by drowning. Early years spent in the orphanage in Dingle. Returned while still young to the islands where he learned Irish. Joined the Civic Guards and was stationed in Connemara where he wrote *Fiche Blian ag Fás*. Long after Ó Súilleabháin's death the English Gaelic scholar, George Thomson, was working on a revision of *Fiche Blian ag Fás* which was to include a series of drawings by Ó Súilleabháin made for a children's edition of the book.

16 Bihalji-Merin, Oto, *Modern Primitives*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1971, p.206.

17 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Interview by telephone with Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, 14-11-1990.

18 Freud, Sigmund, *Civilization, Society and Religion*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, p.282.

19 Maelvich, Kasimir, *The Non-Objective World*, Chicago, Theobald Press, 1959, p.76.

20 Joyce, Barbara, op. cit.

21 A *kiva* was the most sacred part of a Navajo Indian's dwelling. It could be reached only by descending a ladder. Women are not allowed admittance. Interestingly also the Toda tribe, another subject of Simonds-Gooding;s work, have a sacred mound which is also off limits for female tribe members. In both cases the structures are circular, or at least an irregular shaped mud structure.

22 Parsons, Betty, Catalogue Introduction, 1982, Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, N.Y.

23 Joyce, Barbara, op. cit.

24 Pyle, Hilary, 'Man and His Place in Life' *The Irish Times*, 1970.

25 Willetts, William, *Foundations of Chinese Art, From Neolithic Pottery to Modern Architecture*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1965, p.331.

26 Arnheim, Rudolf, *The Power of the Centre*, Los Angeles, University of California, 1982, p.189.

27 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Interview with Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, Dún Chaoin, County Kerry, 20-7-1990.

28 McLean, Teresa, *Medieval English Gardens*, London, Collins, 1981, p.124.

29 Emmet, Dorothy, *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking*, London, Macmillan, 1945, p.10.

30 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Interview by telephone with Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, 14-11-1990.

History and Tradition

The etchings, frescos and paintings of Maria Simonds-Goodings are visual metaphors for her own concepts of mythology and history. The history of Simonds-Gooding's work does not recreate great historical moments but the continuity and lineage of habitative and cultivative life. It is a practical past, not an historical past. This practical past is a 'tradition' which constitutes part of people's present beliefs. To produce this 'tradition' the historian 'brings to bear every piece of evidence as can be drawn from secular history or from the discovery of the archaeologist'(1). Simonds-Gooding's history is that of human interaction with the agencies of nature called prehistory. It is not a chronology of human actions carried out on a rational level from civilisation. Prehistory, however undocumented, abstract and fragmented, is still history: 'Even if we say that prehistory is archaeology rather than history ... yet archaeology is in method an historical rather than scientific study. It is concerned with non-repeatable situations and seeks to establish enumerative generalisations and not universal or statistical generalisations'(2).

The mythology is not of the narrative kind, but of the epicality of the land and the persistent human struggle with it. The narratives in this mythology are unspoken. It is based on the origins of the land and human customs and traditions, the attitudes and beliefs, the myth of archaism, secular history and its remnants.

The plaster, low relief pieces made by Simonds-Gooding were begun after a period of time spent in sunnier parts of the world. The earliest works of this period come from time spent in Lanzarote, Masada and Galilee in Palestine, and on the Greek island of Karpathos. Trips to even more remote areas led to a more ethnological study of her surroundings. With an anthropologist friend she lived with the Toda tribe on the Nilgiri plateau in southern India and Shologas in the Billiqirirangan hills of southern India. these works were produced during the period circa nineteen seventy to the mid eighties. These plaster pieces are architectural in their formal construction and spatial considerations. The images' depth goes no further than the surface. In its spatial relationships it is close to Mondrian's concept of merging the practice of painting with the spatial considerations of architecture. These pale plaster and polybond structures are incised with sophisticated premeditated assertive lines, inserted with the same type of methods used in the art of prehistory. These topographical, monumental documents record the sun- bleached forms of domestic fields found in Greece,

India and northern Africa. The cultures depicted have an obvious sense of identity and history, their pastoral traditions are formed from the collective knowledge and needs of the people in the region, and are therefore indicative of who they are. The similarities of forms in Simonds- Gooding's work seems to point to the notion that these pastoral systems show the universal aspects of all rural peoples.

The wavering outlines used in these archeology-based works are the naive's/primitive's inclination for simplification brought one step further into abstraction. This is further explained by Robert Goldwater when he says 'it is no more than economy, that is the ultimate professional awareness, which is to say, the opposite of real primitiveness'(3).

These lines seem cautious and uncertain at a distance. Closer inspection reveals that these tentative outlines are in fact dug stridently into the plaster face. The rhythms have a basicness which evokes a type of elemental contemplation. Simonds-Gooding gives one an insight when she mentions: 'I head for the essential in things. I leave out what I can ... I go for spiritual abstract qualities in my work'(4).

The work is based almost totally on spatial arrangements and linear tension, and thus results in a stylistic austerity. they reject illusionism and the Renaissance perspective of conventional painting, that it to say, the ordering of elements of composition into a singular vanishing point. These land *maquettes* adopt the perspective of the retrograde and the prehistoric zoomorphic. They seem to follow crude archaic principles of proportion and division. The material of prehistoric wallpainting, such as pure natural pigments, are used. These are basic oxide materials, which are taken from the source, pulverised and mixed with a vehicle. Vibrant, earthy iron oxide and rich black manganese are exactly the same organic materials used for mid-paleolithic cave art. Simonds-Gooding's interest in the historical nature of her chosen materials spreads also to the surface she used. She imported slaked lime from Greece, used so often in Minoan frescos, but later on rejected it in favour of plain domestic plaster mixed with polybond glue. Her instruments too were closely allied to those of her forebearers. Like prehistoric man, Simonds-Gooding used blades, needles and burins.

Her incised lines form an exercise of engraving, painting, erasing and re-engraving. Usually in prehistoric works the image was incised, the interior painted in, and particular segments re-incised out from the background. Likewise in Simonds-Gooding's work there is a re-drawing and enlarging of her forms. Her readjustment and reaffirmation of her fragile lines find their analogy in the upper paleolithic linear forms which 'frequently have multiple lines and silhouettes abbreviated in a way that suggests they were left unfinished or have been worn away'(5). This vague pre-drawing is left alongside the final engraved image, thus leaving this odd form of prehistoric *pentimento* to be seen. The ambivalence is carried through the form's vague realisation, leading to the suggestion of possible meanings. This method is echoed in Simonds-Gooding's statement where she attests that 'the semi- instinctive line is left or taken away, they are brought in or out. I am careful to remove lines that have no conviction, what seems spontaneous takes quite a long time'(6).

The freedom of the mark-making in these works shows a deliberate awareness of the transience of the mark-making process. The similarities between Simonds-Gooding's fresco 'Earthspring' (**FIGURE 8**), and the wall painting of ibexes and mammoth from the sanctuary of Rouffignac Dordogne, near Lascaux (**FIGURE 9**), shows a closeness of handling form. Each subject is described by terse, confident line. Stronger, thicker lines strengthen the main image reiterating the form's structure where lighter descriptive lines have gone before. Some lines in each piece run off from the main composition for no apparent reason. In both there is a dominance of outlining. Line is used not for describing volume, but for the purpose of circumscribing, encapsulating, surrounding, possessing the image. The lack of detail belies the difficulty with which both images were scraped and painted onto their unyielding surfaces. The viewer is struck by the power of the physical effort involved. This explains why only the essential lines are used, revealing the most basic expressive nature of the images depicted.

The similarities of execution lead to similarities of problems when faced with recording the works. In the introductory essay of her mid- term retrospective exhibition in the Crawford Gallery, Cork in 1985, the Director Peter Murray described how the light seemed to be absorbed by her plaster pieces: 'As the light changes even the slightest scratches, appear and disappear and for this reason it

is almost impossible to photograph this artist's work sucessfully'(7). Interestingly Albert Skira notes that in photographing the paleolithic cave drawing in Lascaux that: 'The truth is that Lascaux paintings mysteriously shift and change, they are not painted on a uniformly flat surface ... The pictures at Lascaux literally defy the camera'(8).

The elementary geometric forms found in Simonds-Gooding's white plaster pieces are also found in a number of prehistoric images, an example of which can be seen in the rock paintings of Tassili in central Africa. 'Out of the masterworks of the Sefar site, suggesting serenity, tranquility and grandeur ... this painting, four metres wide, shows a herd, two huts and several figures'(9). Similarities can be seen in Simonds-Gooding's piece, 'Store Place', (**FIGURE 10**), fresco on plaster, 1982, and the cave painting from Tassili, (**FIGURE 11**). In both of these semi-enclosed corrals are pushed out from the centre to the side. The same incomplete outer perimeter of a varying thickness can be seen. It surrounds a small number of infilled uneven bunkers, seed-like marks orbit these within the outer rectilinear boundary.

Simonds-Gooding's eyes were opened to the cultures of primitive societies when she was recommended to read Lewis Mumford's *The Condition of Man*. This, she admits, was a huge influence and encouraged her interest in the beginnings and history of mankind. Her interest can be measured by such a statement as 'I would have been an anthropologist if I wasn't an artist'(**10**). With that same fascination for man and his history, Simonds-Gooding journeyed to Luxor and the Valley of the Kings in central Egypt. The most influential visit was one made to the tombs dedicated to Horus and Sobek-Re at Kom-ombo. The sacred nature of animals in ancient Egypt attracted her to the area. 'The importance of animals to human levels, giving them human characteristics, I responded due to the human looks of the animals'(**11**).

In connection with this, Simonds-Gooding has now begun to sculpt, albeit in a medium very much akin to her naive sensibilities. The new piece appeared in an exhibition in the Tigín Bán Gallery in Dingle town. It was made from papier-maché, a transient material with craft associations. when questioned about the use of such material, usually associated with children's crafts, she stated that the reason for its use was that she was filled with the sheer fun of the subject

depicted. The excitement which she got from diving with Fungi, the now famous Dingle Dolphin, made her work in a looser way, approaching and chosing her materials in a less serious manner as would be expected. Crayons, paint and papier-maché were used to portray a sculpture of innocence, humour and freedom. The piece consisted of a simplified, truncated dolphin's head beside two otters and a seal, placed on a tri-layered stand of stones on wood.

When asked the significance of the stand Simonds-Gooding went on to mention her use of the multilayerd stage as a type of symbolic layering of existences. She also mentioned that by way of this structure she wanted to show a ladder of prestige of the animals, akin possibly to the varying sacredness of the animal gods she had seen in the tombs of Kom-ombo. When questioned further, she mentioned that this tri-layered stage was a structure of emphasis, concerned with the action of making her concept more forceful by building upwards. The animals themselves are built up of paper, painted and coated. Much of the modelling is simple and thus leaves the forms rounded and ambiguous. This careful layering and wrapping of her chosen forms finds a parallel in the sanctuary of mummified crocodiles which are in the same Ptolemaic temple in Kom-ombo that Simonds-Gooding had visited. She readily admits to having seen and been greatly interested in the preserved animals and the characteristics of the preservation.

Simonds-Gooding constantly travelled to places of great antiquity and simplicity. In 1989 she travelled to the Sinai desert in western Egypt where she lived for a period of time in the monastery in the Sinai mountains. Subsequently etchings were done in Jerusalem at the Burston Graphic Centre. From this period 'A Monk's Enclosure on Mount Sinai', (**FIGURE 12**), etching, 1989, was produced, in which the evocative antiquity of St. Catherine's Monastery is portrayed. The image in 'A Monk's Enclosure on Mount Sinai' is reminiscent of aerial photography. The main element, the enclosure, lies on a mountainside, connected tenuously to the outer world and the page's edge by a rather worn, contorted path. The monk's enclosure radiates fingers of light into the jagged erosion of the desert. The enclosure is the *mandorla*, enclosing all of life, floating somewhat mystically above the hillside, anchored down by the umbilical path-structure. There is a small note of humour contained above the wall space; a tiny scrawled Jacob's ladder reaches up expectantly towards the heavens.

Within the monk's space lies a number of primitive, ineffectual structures. They sit clumsily inside the enclosure, an attempt to inflict an imagined order within the arid panorama. A cross and a makeshift, crude altar stand alone, symbolising man's futile attempts to come to terms with that which he cannot control and possess.

Simonds-Gooding's interest in place, tradition and customs, begins where she lives. Excluding her obvious archaeological interest in the Dingle peninsula, she takes an active part in this traditionally rich Irish-speaking community. She is integrated very much within her own location and takes an interest in its antiquities and cultural developments. Her work can now be seen in many places throughout the peninsula. She exhibits regularly with local people in the Easter exhibition organised by the *Comharcumann* in Dún Chaoin National School and frequently in the Listowel Graphic exhibition. One event which took place in the selfsame school was the painting of a large mural by the school's children, (**FIGURE 13**). The mural in the school was made in January 1982. All of the painting was done by the then current schoolchildren. Simonds-Gooding kept in the background, never actually painting, but supervising and mixing paints. She alloted various sections to each child, right down to the youngest child in the school.

'Before we started I took several of An File*'s [Micheál Ó Gaoithín's] paintings down and they could pick out what they liked from them, since they covered the whole spectrum of Blasket life. The islanders who lived beside the school like* Tom na hInise *and Seánín Mhicil Ó Súilleabháin came advising about the rocks in the Blasket Sound. They loved painting it'* (**12**).

The mural depicts the Great Blasket and its surrounding islands, including Inisvickillaune, the pyramid shaped Tearacht and the 'Sleeping Man', Inis Tuaisceart and the 'White Strand' on the Great Blasket itself. The remaining, empty houses which lie in the most sheltered spot are shown amongst the comparatively new field-patterns, laid out by the Congested Districts Board in 1907. Men in a *naomhóg* bring a swimming calf across the sound from the island, a regular occurence at one time and most widely known as the subject of a Mícheál Ó Gaoithín poem. Surrounding the boat are large seals, constant visitors to the Trá Bán (the 'White Strand'), who often numbered up to two hundred.

Dominating this narrative scene is the two hundred and ninety metre mountain An Cró on the Great Blasket.

Simonds-Gooding freely admits that she is most happy in Dún Chaoin and feels at a loss anywhere else. She also says that she relates better to her neighbours at Ceathrú, Dún Chaoin, than to anyone else. Her Dublin home is a recreation of her Dún Chaoin cottage. It is hidden away on its own lane behind a large wooden door. This characteristic mixture of seclusion and serenity makes its presence felt in her work. Ther is a need to contain a local order and a nostalgic need to uphold the traditions of older cultures of which she has had personal experience. Because of her awareness of the rapid transitions which her depicted cultures are going through it is vital that she maintains her own slice of the archaic life she admires in these isolated regions. It is her psychology of recreating, recording, maintenace, wish-fulfillment and retrospection which makes up her concept of tradition. An example is seen when, talking about the heyday of the Blasket Islands, she states 'I regret enormously that I didn't know them then'(13).

The fact that she participates and identifies with the community's institutions which represent the Dingle peninsula and its culture is significant. It shows a subconscious desire to be part of its continuing tradition. This desire is seen readily in her work which is characterised by references to the past and by her depiction of many Blasket themes. She illustrates and adopts many of these narratives, including the landscape and surroundings of the islands. She produces warm humorous work in the same way that Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach* does in the realm of literature (14). Both in their own particular medium focus on the signifance of the communities within their landscapes. They portray the processes of change in the realationship between man and the land.

Nowhere are the parallels between Simonds-Gooding's work and the Blasket literary heritage seen more clearly than in her 1973 set of etchings for Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach.* The large collection of images found in the literature gives her much material to work with. She includes in her repetoire, in the same way that the Blasket writers did, not only humans but the sea, the land and its animals. These illustrations have an intimate, subtle grandeur. They began with a series of monochrome etchings, completed after the pen and ink

drawings for *An tOileánach*. The meeting between the owner of the Talbot Press, Kevin Etchingham, and Simonds-Gooding during the 1971 Listowel Writers' Week resulted in the illustrations for Ó Criomhthain's classic. The autobiographical *An tOileánach*, first published in 1929 is written in Irish and describes vividly the harsh life Ó Criomhthain led on the Great Blasket. Two other famous Blasket autobiographies were proposed to be illustrated by Simonds-Gooding: *Peig*, by Peig Sayers, and *Fiche Blian ag Fás*, by Muiris Ó Súilleabháin. Unfortunately these did not materialise due to the Talbot Press' discontinuation of the project. The edition of *An tOileánach* was edited by a grandson of Ó Criomhthain, Pádraig Ua Maoileoin, and was launched at Listowel Writers' Week two years later in 1973.

The etchings based on the book's drawings are important, as they are Simonds-Gooding's first venture into her now most productive medium. 'Seals', **(FIGURE 14)**, etching, 1977, which appears in the twelfth chapter of the book, is one of the most naive in subject and depiction. Three benevolent, plump seals are shown moving across the damp pebbles and sharp rocks of an enclosed inlet, aided by their four paws (corrected from two to four by a well-meaning local fisherman). A fourth seal's head is truncated from his body by the page's lower edge, a technique used frequently by Simonds-Gooding in her depiction of animals. Their horizontal forms are equalled in force by two towering domineering black ithyphallic rocks, separated to show a beach and a seemingly endless sea. There were fifteen etchings in all which were subsequently shown in 1977 in the now defunct Lad Lane Gallery, Dublin.

In 'Seals' a parallel can be made between the visual work of both Simonds-Gooding and the Blasket writer Mícheál Ó Gaoithín. Niamh O'Sullivan notes in an article that Simonds-Gooding's 'Seals' is deliberately close to an Ó Gaoithín watercolour which Simonds-Gooding owns and admires **(15)**.

All of these etchings are monochrome and this strengthens and enriches the images. If the illustrations in *An tOileánach* depict an old, lost tradition, Simonds-Gooding's recent body of work, based primarily on the settling of an Atlantic bottlenosed dolphin in Dingle Harbour, depicts a living, thriving one. The animal has set a record for remaining in the same location for so long. The

popularity of the dolphin, both locally and nationally, therfore, is huge. Simonds-Gooding is totally aware of this phenomenon and its importance to the locale. She perceives this to be a local event and therefore a vital new chapter in local lore and tradition. She grasps this new tradition in the making and readily grafts it onto her existing store of older ones from the area. In 'The Day the Boat was Looking for the Dolphin', (**FIGURE 15**), etching, 1989, the contented animal lies safely hidden from the boat's view within an imaginary enclosure or sea close-up. The comforting brightness of this womb-like form contrasts sharply with the precipitous, looming mountain above. The mountain's volumes are made up of areas of rigorously eroded marks, condensed to give illusions of limitless depth and unhalting movement. The sharp inwardly-directed mountain walls donate a feeling of exhileration which a glider or bird would experience in its sweeping navigation from above. The walls placed on the steep mountain are an attempt to rationalise - and put some type of order on - the unknown, subconscious darkness. The absence of human forms on the boat shown conveys a wry understanding of man's helplessness and inevitable conquest by land and time.

Simonds-Gooding is aware that time is not on her side. She admits now that due to the development of the Great Blasket Island as a national park (**16**): 'I have a great urgency to paint once more the landscape and the island, for all that is about to go with the massive development on the mainland and on the Blasket Island'(**17**). Simonds-Gooding was aware of this life disappearing even in the late sixties. 'I was aware of the erosion of this rich and traditional place'(**18**).

The evidence of this need to document this way of life, apart from the paintings and etchings, can be found in the archive of Roinn Béaloideas Éireann in University College, Dublin, which holds a number of reels taken by her on super-8 film in the late sixties. These consist of three telecine videos, two in black and white and one in colour. The first is of Inis Tuaisceart, one of the Blasket Islands. Shown here are monastic beehive huts, cliffs and field configurations. On the island is shown naturalist and film-maker Éamonn de Buitléir. On the second video is an account of the mural in the National School in Dún Chaoin. The third is in colour and depicts the seasonal collection of sheep-wool from Inisvickillaune, the most westerly of the Blasket Islands. The brothers Tom and Pat Ó Dálaigh are depicted. Both had sheepgrazing rights on

the island for their lifetime. Shown are the bags of wool of the Ó Dálaigh brothers being loaded down the steep cliff to the naomhóg (the same way in which the sheep were brought to the island in the first place). All videos were taken at various periods over a number of years.

'The films I made were really because all the customs were dying. And it was to capture them - for no purpose thought of at the time - but a great urgency to do so. The urgency is gone now because already most of the people and the customs have died, although now I have a great urgency to paint once more the landscape and the island, for all that is about to go with the massive development on the mainland and on the Great Blasket Island. It may be the final stroke to finish it off. Happily local people largely believe it will bring the parish to life. I hope they are right ... '(19).

Simonds-Gooding has also salvaged such things as a fire-crane, which is wooden and was owned by the Blasket writer Peig Sayers. It was given to Simonds-Gooding by Peig's son Mícheál Ó Gaoithín. She also has the last spinning wheel from the Blasket Islands. Similarly Simonds-Gooding also lives in a cottage of a former Blasket Islander. The tarred canvas roof and the windows came straight from his house back on the island. She believes it is the only house on the mainland still standing, built in the old Blasket tradition. Still in place today, twenty four years on, amongst the many foreign, exotic souvenirs, remain the religious pictures of the house's previous owner.

Footnotes to History and Tradition

1 Emmet, Dorothy, op. cit., p.126.

2 Emmet, Dorothy, op cit., p.161.

3 Goldwater, Robert, op. cit., p.201.

4 Dunne, Sean, 'Lifestyles', *The Sunday Tribune*, 10-3-1985. p.10.

5 Ruspoli, Mario, op. cit., p.172.

6 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Interview by telephone with Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, 14-11-1990.

7 Murray, Peter, op. cit.

8 Skira, Albert, *Lascaux: On the Birth of Art*, Geneva, Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1955, p.5.

9 Lajoux, Jean Dominique, *The Rock Paintings of Tassili*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1963, p.120.

10 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Interview in Sandycove, County Dublin, with Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, 14-1-1990.

11 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Interview in Dún Chaoin, County Kerry, with Ciarán Ó cearnaigh, 20-7-1990.

12 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Letter to Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, 9-1-1991.

13 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Interview in Dún Chaoin, County Kerry, with Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, 20-7-1990.

14 Tomás Ó Criomhthain, born 1856, Great Blasket Island, died 1937. Discovered by scholar Brian Ó Ceallaigh, who urged Ó Criomhthain to write an autobiography which became *An tOileánach.* , published in Dublin in 1929. Ó

Criomhthain also dictated stories to English scholar Robin Flower, author of *The Western Island*, among the best known books written in English on the islands. Subsequently Ó Criomhthain's dictated pieces became *Seanchas Ón Oileán Thiar*, published in Dublin in 1956.

15 O'Sullivan, Niamh, 'The Eyes of a Child', *Sunday Tribune*, 1-11-1981.

16 An Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, presented to the Senate a Bill to establish the Great Blasket Island as a 'National Heritage Park', 10-5-1989, which became law after full party support, 31-5-1989. The Bill acknowledged 'that the Great Blasket Island is a unique and precious part of Ireland's national heritage.'

17 Simonds-Gooding, Maria Letter to Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, 9-1-1991.

18 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Interview with Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh at Sandycove, County Dublin, 20-1-1990.

19 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Letter to Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, 9-1-1991.

Conclusion

The work of Maria Simonds-Gooding stretches stylistically from the austere abstract sculptural white plaster works of the late sixties to the luscious paintings and stark representational etchings of the eighties. The polarities of style cannot be termed 'phases' of work, meaning differing styles of work following chronologically, one after the other, as these styles are interchanged constantly. She moves continually between both modes of expression, from abstraction to representation. Because of the very different formal styles involved in this body of work the emphasis had to be placed on the thematic similarities found in the work. Due to the differing approaches an understanding of the work takes into consideration many elements.

Simonds-Gooding's use of very different techniques makes an analysis of the formal aspects difficult. Due to her use of varying techniques one sees a type of art historical eclecticism with a bias towards the archaic and historic. One of the most striking visual influences in Simonds-Gooding's work is prehistoric art and its abstract style. Simonds-Gooding finds the suggestion of form in this work particularly powerful. Simplified forms and uncertain outlines leave both subject and meaning ambiguous. What is created goes beyond the surface depiction and leads to many associations including those of death and decay.

The influence of prehistoric art does not go beyond the visual for her. Like many things, Simonds-Gooding picks up anything of relevance to her own immediate needs as an artist and adapts and assimilates the forms into her own repertoire. She is aware of the connotations of her chosen materials. Her use of fresco is unique in Irish art, both ancient and modern. Such a foreign choice of medium reveals an astute understanding of frescos historical references. The intellectual weight of preceding fresco periods, Minoan, Roman, Medieval and Renaissance cannot be ignored. The fresco constructions were specially commisioned from a carpenter and were fitted with brass nails to diminish oxidation and reinforced by complex back-battening, both carried out with an eye on preservation. This is hardly the work of an untutored naive. Therefore, taking these factors into account, these anthropological images are depicted in a manner far from the grasp of most naive sensibilities. The sophisticated spatial arrangements in the plaster pieces could only be conceived and executed by such a professional, thus showing a knowledge of art history and its materials and techniques.

Her debt to naive art is seen in the formal aspects of her work, especially her representational work, such as her etchings. These bear similarities to the work of other naive artists, which she evidently collects as personal mementoes and as important art-objects in themselves. Evidence of these can be seen by the work given to her by Ó Gaoithín. She has the instincts, albeit honed by experience of a long art college apprenticeship, of an naive artist, but 'she is nonetheless aware, given her background and education, she can never be a real primitive'(1) .

In this case it can be seen that Simonds-Gooding is a painter who due to a professional art education brings a sophistication of composition and media use to the form of naive painting she finds suits her needs. Therefore, she could be termed a 'neo-naive' painter infulenced by a simplicity of form, colour and style. Her hybrid of the spiritual qualities of her subjects and the simplicity of form give these transient images a metaphysical quality, once again something which only a conscientious professional could achieve. Simonds-Gooding is a 'neo-naive' who uses her own selected index of naive art techniques to her own ends.

The subjects, such as the Blasket Islands and Greek islands, evidently show her love of ancient landscape. The landscape has many implications. She depicts the subjects of domestic history with some of the most sophisticated techniques available, fresco, etchings and, for a short time, film. These were used by Simonds-Gooding to record and document the mytho-historical themes in her own accomplished manner.

Simonds-Gooding realises what constitutes tradition and understands that like all things it is subject to change. Therefore she is quick to see tradition in the making in her own area and is willing to take part and become part of it herself. as is seen in her recent dolphin images. She is ready to connect to the institutions which represent the culture she is dealing with. This can be seen with her interest in St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai desert and Roinn Béaloideas Éireann in Ireland. Such places are the quintessential institutions of the cultures she is dealing with and this shows a definite awareness of the cultural importance of these places.

The large range of materials finds its equivalent in the eclecticism of her influences and references. This, coupled with an inbuilt questioning of the materials chosen, shows Simonds-Gooding to be very much a late twentieth century artist. As has been documented by Dorothy Walker, Simonds-Gooding

is very aware of her comtemporaries and was among the first to take the influences of international art and apply and assimilate them to her own distinct form of work, work which has now become a type of visual diary, fed through eclectic world art references. When asked to describe her work amd categorise it she mentions 'direct, dealing with the essential. The refernces have been the same over the years, but I change my style to suit my feelings, not the reference'(2). Therefore this strengthens the notion that any analysis of her work would have to treat the similarity of references as one of its central concerns.

Her work has remained constant, dealing continually over two decades with man and his relationship to the land. This fascination may have begun with her early realisation of the universal impact of man on land in primitive societies such as that of her childhood in Quetta, at that time part of India, and continues to the present with her settlement in the Dingle Gaeltacht community. It is no surprise therfore that anthropology is one of her main interests.

Her work goes beyond the perimeters of parochialism and reveals more of the universal. This is due mainly to the fact that the subjects which she choses, such as walled enclosures and domed dwellings, are objects of practical use in primitive societies, and will be designed to be of minimum construction and economic with materials which evidently leads to the basic fundamentality of her subjects. She constructs a visual language, understodd by most, but which incredidibly enough contains many references beyond the knowledge of many who see it. that, as Simonds-Gooding has aid, is 'what you get when you get down to basics'(3).

Footnotes to Conclusion

1 O'Sullivan, Niamh, 'The Eyes of a Child', 1-11-1981.

2 Simonds-Gooding, Maria, Letter to Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, 9-1-1991.

3 Joyce, Barbara, op. cit.

Illustrations

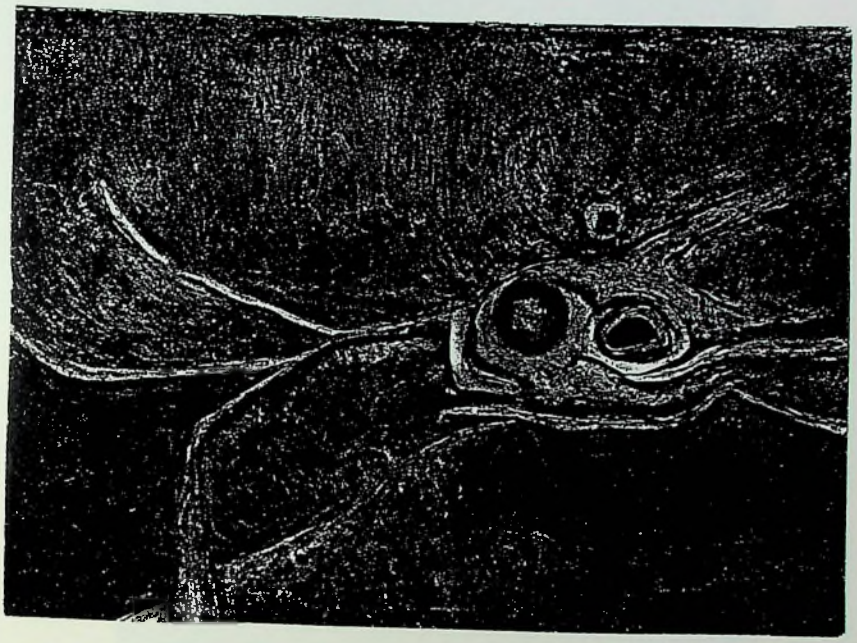

FIGURE 1 'Habitation III', Maria Simonds-Gooding, fresco pigment on plaster 1970, 44 x 60 inches.

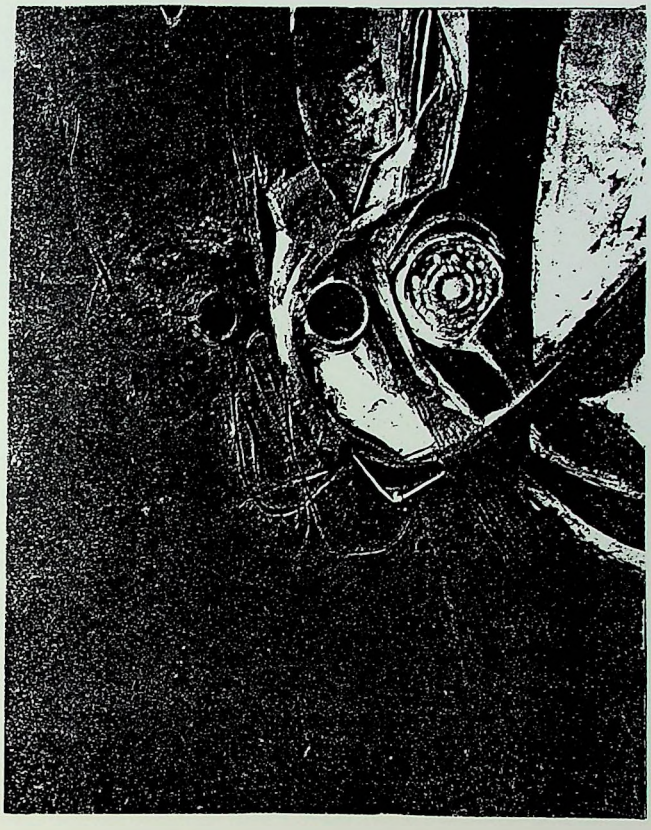

FIGURE 2 'Ocré Fonce', Jaap Wagemaker, assemblage 1965, 73 x 59 inches.

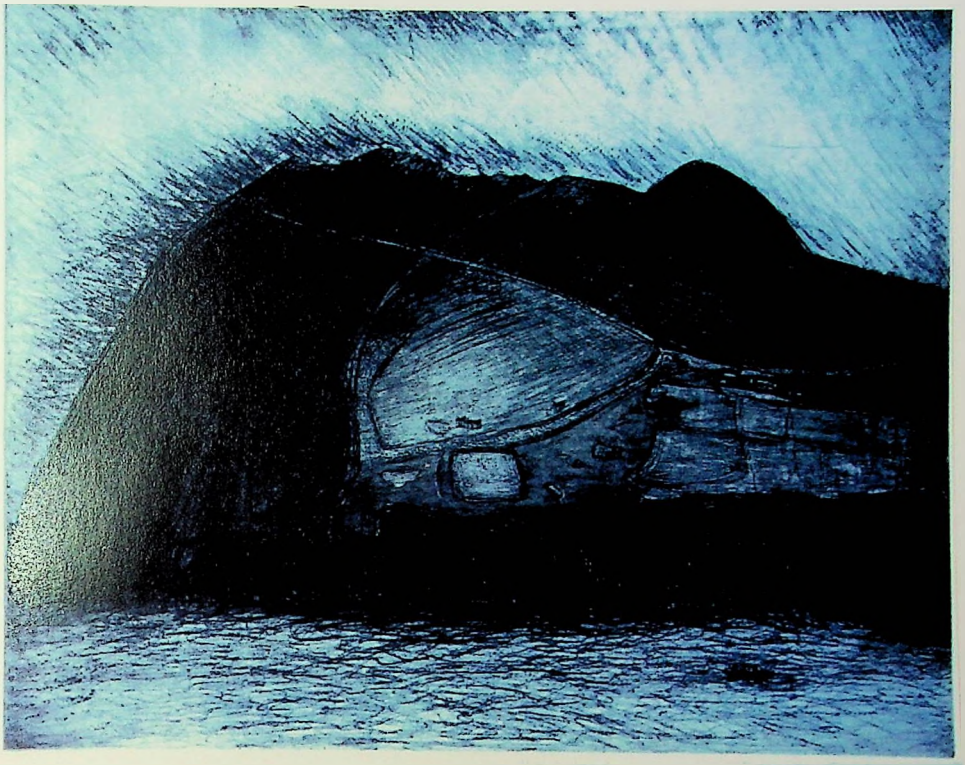

FIGURE 3 'Going into the Island', Maria Simonds-Gooding, etching, 16 x 19 inches.

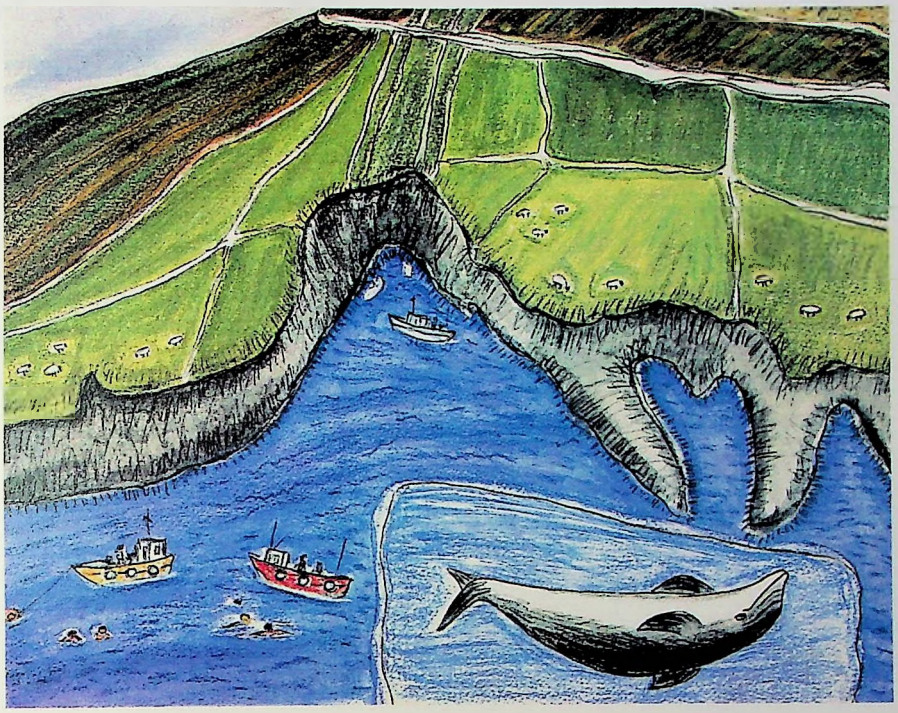

FIGURE 4 'The Day the Boats were Looking for the Dingle Dolphin, Maria Simonds-Gooding, mixed media on paper, 1989, 28 x 36 cm.

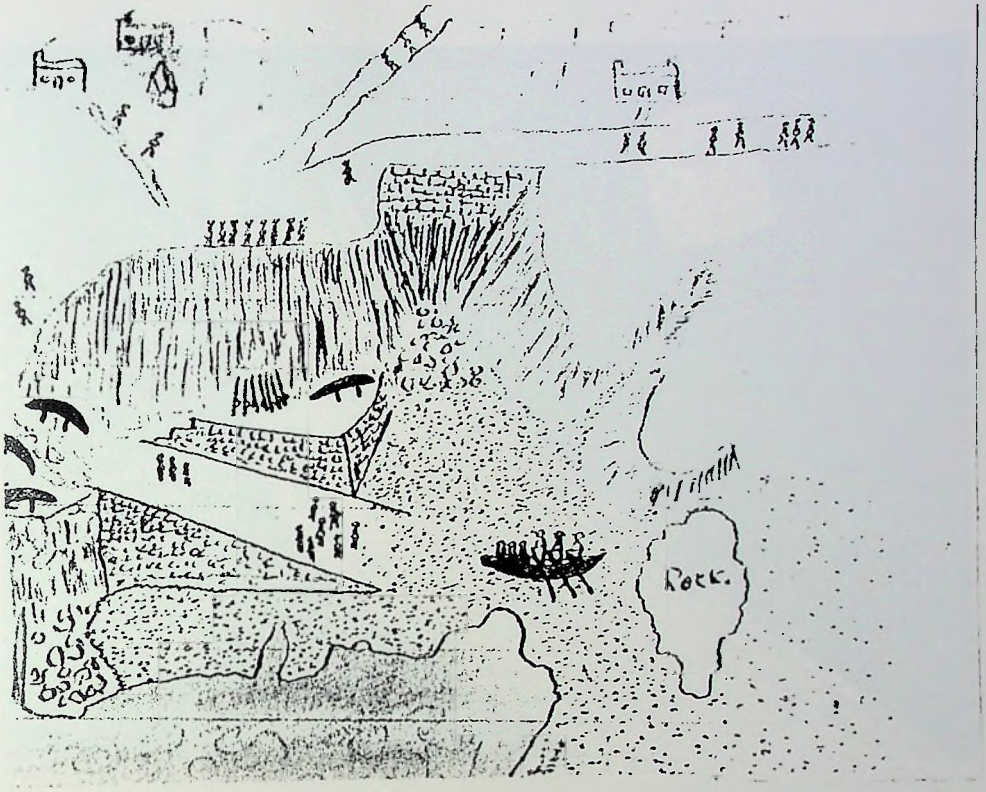

FIGURE 5 Untitled Drawing by Muiris Ó Súilleabháin.

FIGURE 6 'Up a Mountain to an Enclosure', Maria Simonds-Gooding, etching, 1989, 14 x 22 inches.

FIGURE 7 'Down by the Lake', Maria Simonds-Gooding, oil on paper, 1987.

FIGURE 8 'Earthspring', Maria Simonds-Gooding, fresco pigment on plaster, 1982, 46 x 62 inches.

FIGURE 9 Wall cave drawing depicting ibexes and mammoths, in the Sanctuary of Rouffignac, Dordogne.

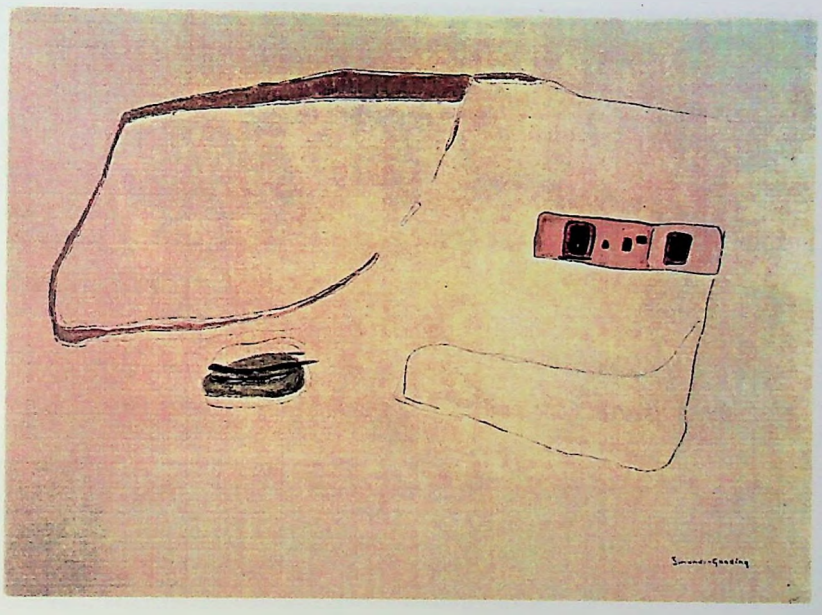

FIGURE 10 'Storeplace', Maria Simonds-Gooding, fresco pigment on plaster, 1982, approx. 48 x 59 inches.

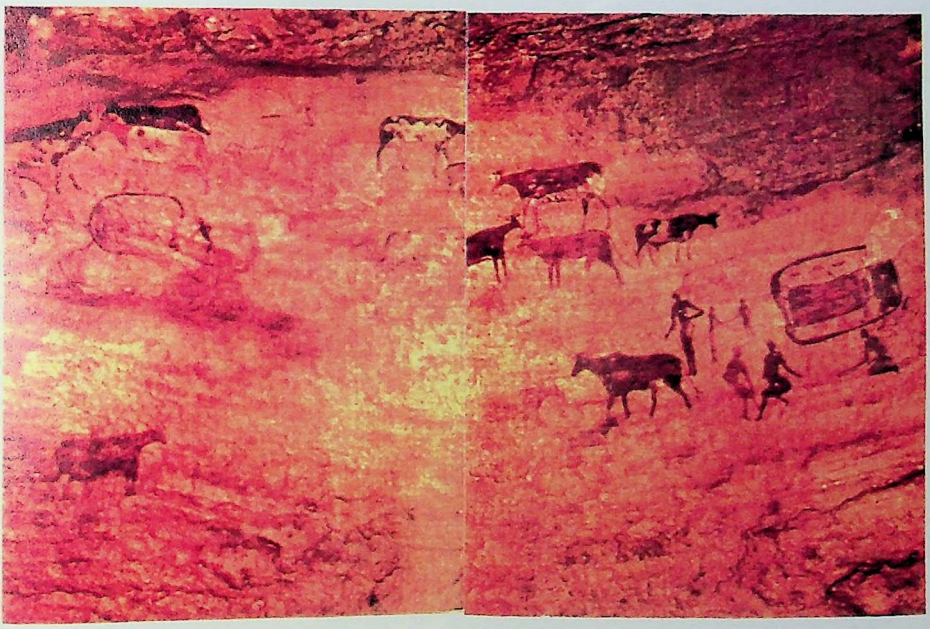

FIGURE 11 Wall cave drawing, Sefar, Tassili, 4 metres wide.

FIGURE 12 'A Monk's Enclosure on Mount Sinai', Maria Simonds-Gooding, etching, 1989, 19 x 22 inches.

FIGURE 13 Mural, Dún Chaoin National School, 1982.

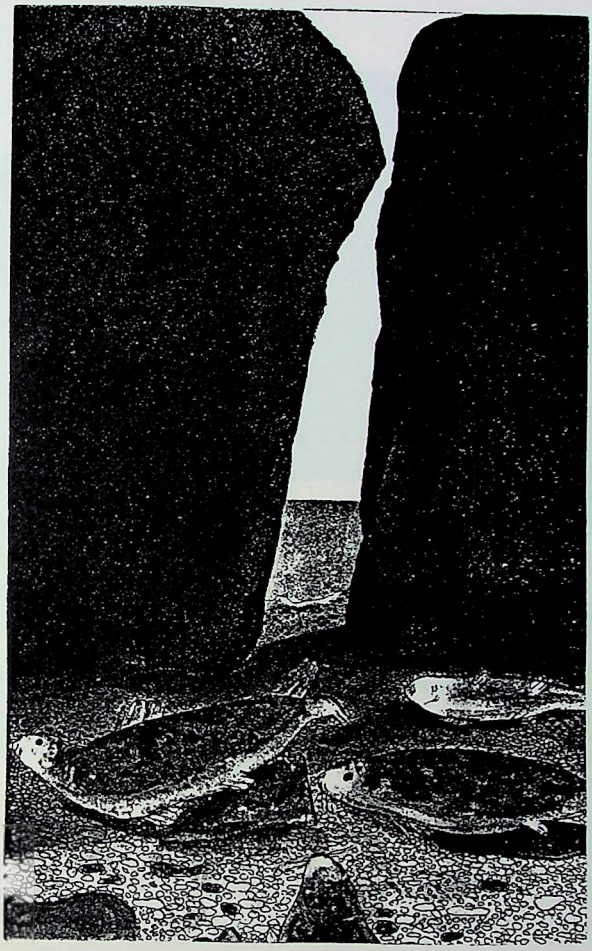

FIGURE 14 'Seals', Maria Simonds-Gooding, etching, 1973. 11 x 7 inches.

FIGURE 15 'The Day the Boat was Looking for the Dolphin', Maria Simonds-Gooding, etching, 1989, 14 x 22 inches.

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20-1-1990, Sandycove, Co. Dublin.
20-7-1990, Dún Chaoin, Co. Kerry.

14-11-1990, Interview by telephone from Sandycove, Co. Dublin.

LETTERS

Letters from Maria Simonds-Gooding to Ciarán Ó Cearnaigh, from Dún Chaoin, Co. Kerry.

29-5-1990.
26-6-1990.
28-6-1990.
1-10-1990.
9-1-1991.

FILMS

Telecine from Super-8, black and white, shot by Maria Simmonds-Gooding, 'Blasket Islands', late sixties.

Telecine from super-8, black and white, shot by Maria Simonds-Gooding, 'Cottage and Dún Chaoin Mural', late seventies.

Telecine from Super-8, colour, shot by Maria Simonds-Gooding, 'C.J. Haughey's House on Inisvickillaune, Ó Dálaigh Brothers', 1977/1978/1979.

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