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AN EDUCATION DISSERTATION

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INTRODUCTION

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Fabric printing is one of the oldest methods of textile decoration, dating from the very earliest of times. Since then, it has flourished, and now is the most popular means by which we decorate our fashion and furnishing fabrics. In this dissertation, I will be aiming to demonstrate how working in this medium is a valid means of developing artistic intellect and aesthetic skills. I will be looking at this, not only in the context of myself, but in the context of the pupils who will be also involved in the personal project.

One of the main points I will be making is because of the fact that we see so readily and easily, our seeing could very easily become recognition rather than perception. Frank Franz argues this point in saying

....."never has it been so urgent to speak of seeing, even more gadgets from cameras to computers, from art books to video tapes conspire to take over our thinking, our feeling, our experiencing, our seeing."

I will be advocating that the visual arts can develop the skills of perception and create a visual awareness of the built as well as the natural environment. I will also be discussing how such visual awareness needs to be fostered or we are capable of destructing, in this age of modernism, the very architecture which holds the key to our heritage.

I will also be drawing attention to present position of the visual arts in Irish education and what has been done in recent years to increase its standing in this field. I hope to demonstrate how a good visual arts education involves the whole person mentally, physically and emotionally. I will be aiming to show that the skills developed in art are transferrable skills and can be used to advantage in many other subjects within the school curriculum. I will be pointing out how lack of emphasis on aesthetic values in our Educational System is reflected in our environment and our attitude to it.

I have also incorporated a brief history of fabric printing in association with an account of my influences in this area. This includes both fabric designers and artists. I feel it is necessary to do this as it will help evaluate your own work in light of what has gone before.

Finally, I have given a practical account of the class project in textile print and aimed to show how such a project incorporates many elements of the visual language such as line, shape, colour etc. I have also evaluated how I felt these pupils benefitted from such a project as well as the lessons I learnt as a teacher. I would hope that upon being read, this dissertation would elaborate on the view of the arts discussion paper, 1985 when it commented on

..... "The intrinsic value of the arts as distinctive forms of knowing. When such a view is properly described and understood, the Educational significance of the arts will emerge and accordingly, the provision of a good arts education for all children will be seen as a priority."

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CHAPTER 1



My Personal Project



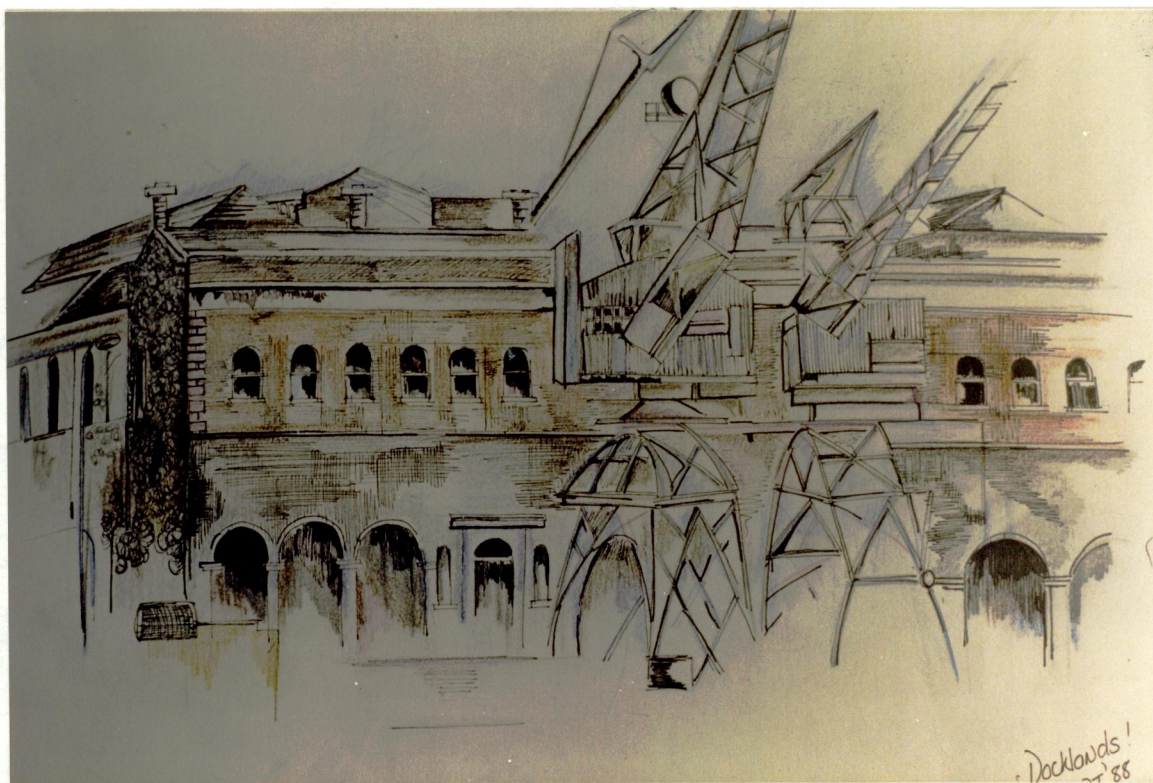


Fig. 1. Initial Drawings for Personal Project.

My interpretation of the general theme for our project this year concerns or deals with the natural and manmade forms which surround us everyday. In my previous years in college, I had avoided using an architectural source for any of my work. I decided that this year was a valuable opportunity to develop a side of me which I had not explored before by using architecture as the main visual source for my personal project.

There are many reasons why I was stimulated to use these structures as my research material. In other years I had used natural forms such as vegetation; flowers; trees, etc, as the source for projects. The reason I had never explored architecture was because I felt it would demand more structured drawing skills than I felt I had, in order to achieve the correct proportions of the source. If a line was not in the correct position when you drew a flower, it would not be as noticeable as it would be if you did the same thing when you were drawing a building. One line out of place could throw the whole drawing off balance. What I was doing in reality, was setting myself a challenge, the essence of which was not to give up easily.

Initially, I ripped up more pages than I drew on. I found it difficult and frustrating to draw these structures. The temptation to opt for the tried and trusted nature source was a strong one. The main thing that encouraged me to persist was the fact that I was becoming increasingly aware of the variation of line, shape and pattern to be found using this source. These elements, plus colour, are the basis of the print process. Another reason that I surprised myself by sticking to this source was the near absence of colour. The success of a printed length is largely dependent upon colour and its distribution. My personal preference is for sources which are colourful and vibrant. However, I felt it was necessary to develop my basic quality of line drawing, rather than allow colour to

overpower the undulying structure, and cover up my shortcomings. Because of this, I decided to postpone the colour aspect of my research until the design stage of the print process.

I was also aware that using architecture as a visual source would make a lot more demands on my design skills at the design stage of the print process. To be true to the source, I would have to explore techniques which would describe the inherent qualities of architecture. For me, the main characteristics of architecture would be the hard linear edges, the flat surfaces, the juxtaposition of large against small spaces.

This manner of working would be totally different to what I was used to doing in previous years. I relied more on the textural aspects of the source and manipulated the texture and colour to create areas of interest. Because of the source I was using, I would also have to explore more complicated methods of repeating my pattern to make the architectural forms look more integrated and harmonious. My main goal was, through the research and design process, to develop an affinity with a source which felt, initially, alien to me. If I achieved this I could feel at the end of the year that I had not walked away from any areas of the design process because of lack of confidence.

I was aware of the beauty of architectural structures before, but now I began to perceive how they would be suitable for my artistic development in a practical way. It was only through studying these buildings, while making observational drawings that I began to perceive these everyday structures in a new light. I realised just how ignorant I was with regard to the history of Dublin. For many art teachers in any town or city, the actual history of the architecture could be a valid means of linking up art with subjects such as history, civics in the curriculum. I feel it is very important to make this link with art and other subjects in order to integrate are more within the curriculum. I will be looking at this aspect

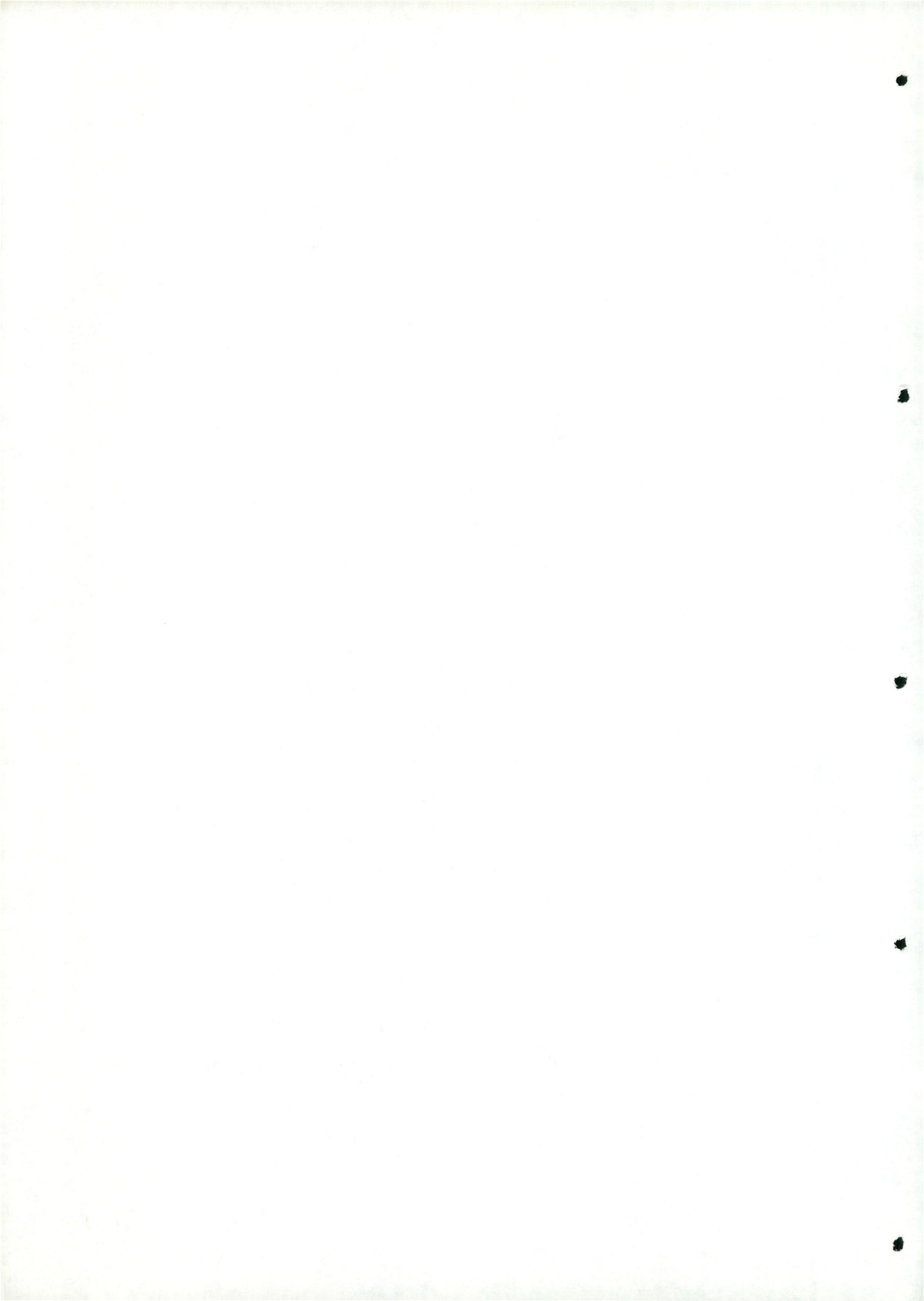




Fig. 2. An Architectural Sketch by Fredrick Franz.

in more detail later. I also became more sensitive to the actual design of buildings, in isolation and in relation to other buildings in the surrounding area. This new found awareness and genuine interest led me to further research into the welfare of the architecture in cities. I will be also discussing this in more depth in a later chapter.

It also occurred to me during this project that the natural forms of vegetation are in a constant state of flux; plants bud, flower and die. Vegetation is part of the natural order of things. In many cases it does not really require the help of man to flourish. Architecture is monumental, it is a product of man and his needs. It is just as important a feature of the environment as nature, yet it does not get the same general appreciation as nature does. Through research, I have found that the environmental source of architecture has not been explored in its full potential in any craft area, least of all textile print. Just because architecture is the product of man and not some higher being, does not mean that it is not as pleasing to the eye and the senses as a flower or a bird.

..... "Art is not all meadows, cows and daisies, it is also streets and buildings, coffee cups and aeroplanes".¹

I was also encouraged to use this source because I felt I was producing a product of the 1980's, not just regurgitating what had gone before. I would hope that upon looking at my print or designs, people would benefit by seeing how an architectural source can be adapted to a craft such as textile print. I am now convinced that the subject or source of a work should be of compelling personal concern to the artist and the final product should encourage people to try and understand the artist's feelings and outlook. If my final product would encourage a few other people to question their own traditional ideas on what art should develop from, then the whole process will have been worthwhile.

CHAPTER ONE - FOOTNOTES

1. "The Zen of Seeing", Franz, Fredrick, Wildwood House Limited,
Great Britain, 1973.

CHAPTER 2



Architecture

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While making drawings of various buildings and features of Dublin architecture, I became, as I said in the previous chapter, increasingly sensitive to the design and location of certain buildings. I have always had a particular interest in history. This interest did not extend to our architectural heritage until I was doing my visual research for my project. What I observed would hopefully encourage both my pupils and I, in the future, to take an active role in any organisation dedicated to the preservation of our capital city, which is said to be the finest example of Georgian architecture in Western Europe.

..... "Architecture provides a commentary on our lives. It creates conditions in which the human senses may flourish and develop".¹

If we look at our cities, we cannot fail to notice the change from century to century. Every generation builds its towns or makes additions to those it has inherited. I believe that town design is more than finding solutions to a number of organisational problems and it requires an artistic solution. Today, countless people can be adversely affected by a single designer's miscalculation or insensitivity. A townscape is, by its very nature, slow to change, so any mistakes in design are difficult to eradicate.

The things we respond most strongly to are things in our immediate environment. The town is one of the largest environments which comes within our experience. In the slow evolution of the urban environment, people have unconsciously given expression, not only to their material needs, in the construction of buildings, but also to their spiritual and emotional needs. We express our most important ideas and traditions in permanent structures such as buildings. Our architecture has to do with our identity as people and our pride and prejudice, our architecture helps crystallise in our minds the events and personalities of the past. It helps identify the Irish ethos in today's world. When we no longer believe in the values represented by these buildings, we lose our desire to maintain or preserve them.



Fig. 3. An Old Photograph of O'Connell St. with Nelson's Pillar as its centre piece.



Fig. 4. An Aerial View of Dublin as it is today.

..... "Efforts to preserve old buildings are most likely to succeed in communities where people have rich and positive memories of the lives of these buildings."²

For some people with preconceived ideas, many buildings and monuments do not hold positive memories but serve as a reminder that Ireland was subject to British rule for many centuries. When the Irish Freestate was born there existed three equestrian statues in Dublin - William III in College Green, George II in Stephen's Green and Field Marshall Gough in the Phoenix Park - all three are now gone. Nelson's Pillar in O'Connell Street, the principal landmark in the city fell victim in 1966 to the same national fanaticism as did a group of statues in front of Leinster House - the centre of which was a figure of Queen Victoria. In 1950, when the Dublin Corporation decided it was no longer compatible with "national dignity", the cast-iron crowns which surrounded the central tablets and were an integral part of the design of Kingsbridge, were removed. This bridge was built in 1821 to commemorate George IV's visit to Ireland. It is interesting to note that the historical interest of a building or monument in Ireland does not include the darker side of Irish history. I would hope to instil in my pupils that good design should be appreciated and preserved regardless of what history or preconceived ideas it is seen to embody.

The presence of old buildings in our environment can imbue a community with a sense of continuity in the midst of change. These buildings are a visual embodiment of our history and I feel we destroy an opportunity for self-understanding when we destroy the forms which represent our past. The growing interest in antiques and old items, I believe, shows that people need a feeling of identity and meaning in the midst of an environment which is constantly changing.

As a culture, we are quick to notice design changing in clothes and home furnishings, but are less skilled in discerning wider relationships within our living space and environment. Where new buildings are added to

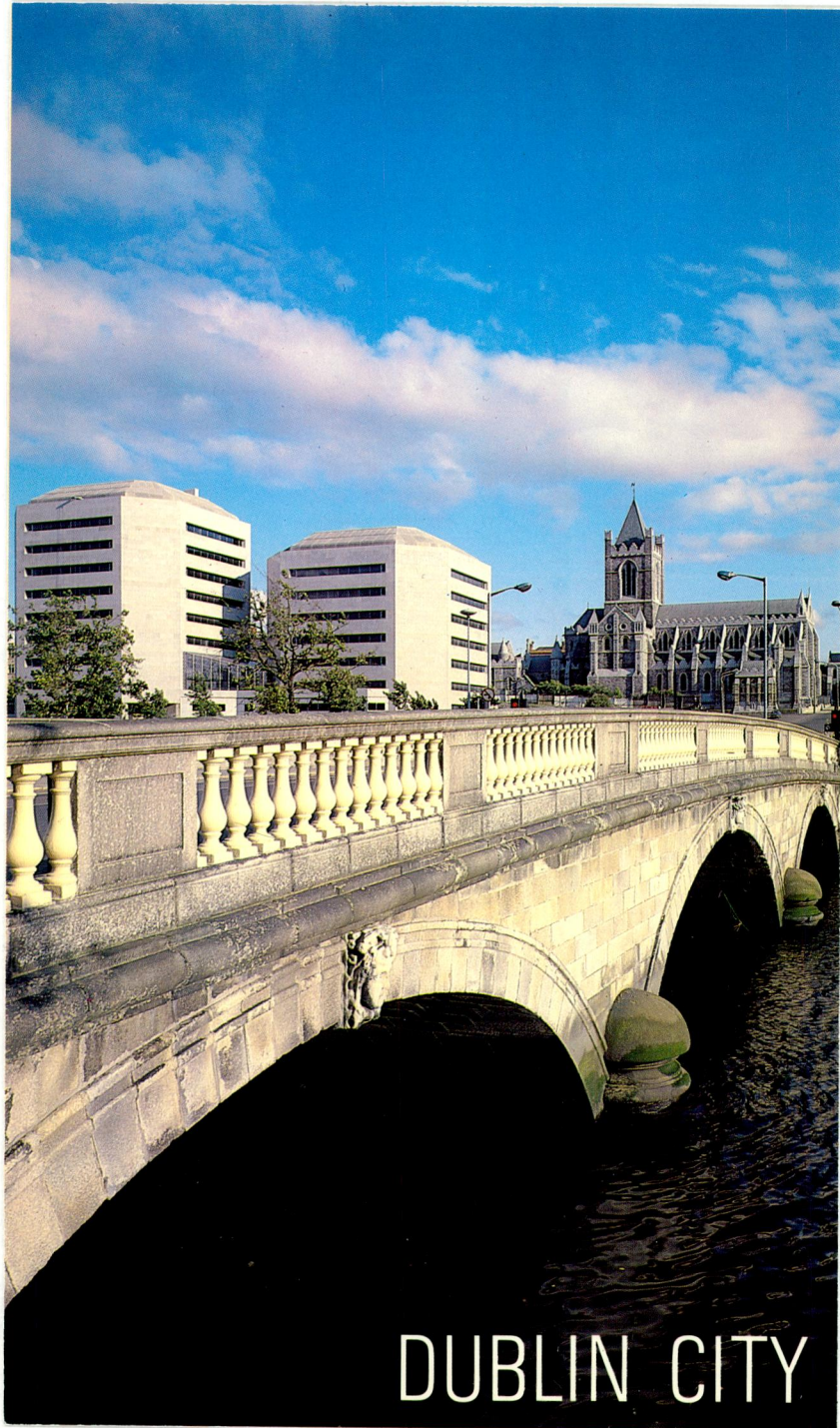


Fig. 5. Woodquay, following the building of the Civic Offices.

an existing street, the problem of intergrating the existing townscape arises. I am not suggesting that it is necessary to clothe modern buildings with period costume in order to harmonise or integrate them, but the architects and town planners could consider the character of the street or neighbourhood.

..... "It would be an ideal situation where an Architect may express the language of modern architecture and the needs of a modern town and yet not conflict with the interest of the existing townscape. If old and new architecture are well integrated, then the relationship between the two will give coherence to the overall structure of the town."³

If we look at our own capital city, Dublin, it becomes obvious that there are definite inconsistencies in styles of architecture, which has made it increasingly difficult to see it as a stylistic whole.

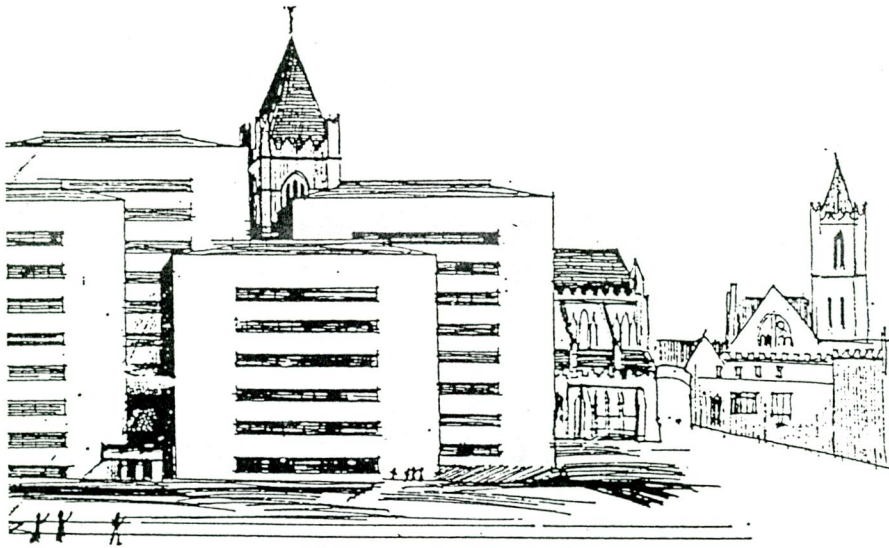
The Dublin tourism guide describes the city as

..... "one of spacious streets, fine buildings and friendly people, a city which combines the beauty of more leisured centuries with modern progressiveness."⁴

This may be true, but I found that the manner in which they are combined is not doing justice to either style. Stephen Gardiner, architecture critic, declares

..... "Dublin has become a shabby city, shabby because its centre is peppered with crude concrete structures, flashy mirror facades and other inappropriate schemes which have no connection at all with the spirit of things."⁵

The most blatant example of this is the Civic Offices on Woodquay. These offices are built on the immediate perimeter of the most important Viking site ever unearthed in Dublin, containing as it did, the very story of Dublin's early birth and development. These buildings totally overshadow Christchurc Cathedral. At £20 million plus, these two granite-faced blocks



"Far from destroying the view of Christ Church Cathedral, the Corporation project has enhanced it."—Noel Carroll (28-3-79).

Fig. 6. The original plan for Wood Quay by Architect, Sam Stephenson.

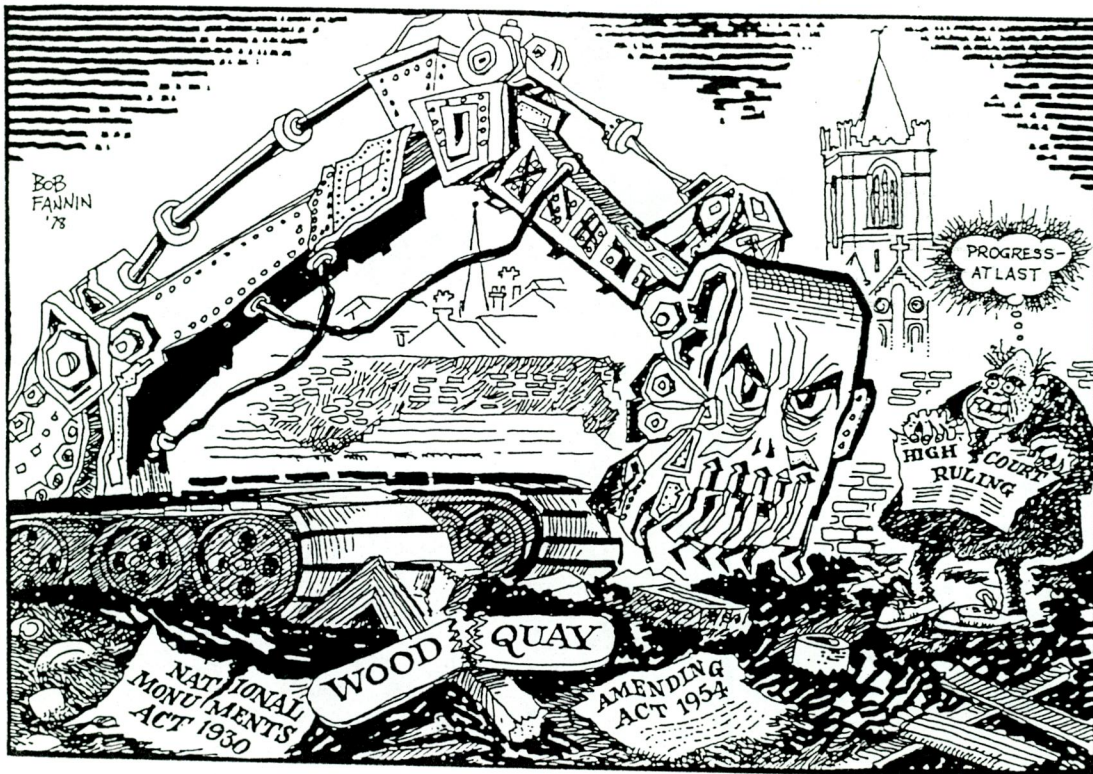


Fig. 7. A newspaper cartoon ridiculing Dublin Corporation.

are the most expensive buildings ever built in Dublin. Dublin Corporation spurned appeals to cease construction from over eighty social and cultural organisations, including the Council of Europe and cast aside a petition signed by 2,000,000 people. They shut their eyes to mass meetings in the Mansion House and protest marches through the city. The Irish Times of 23rd September, 1978 said the Corporation has

..... "all the appearance of a deliberate and brutal opting for the uncouth and for the shortterm and to hell with heritage, history and higher values."⁶

This interest in the environment on the part of the people need not have died after Woodquay. Following this campaign, efforts could have been made and could be made yet again, to renew that level of support for the preservation of our heritage.

Woodquay is just one example of the continuing destruction of Dublin. Many of the fine Georgian streetscapes have been demolished to make way for high-rise office blocks which do not blend in with the surrounding buildings. An example of this is the E.S.B. building on Fitzwilliam Street. The E.S.B. are responsible for the destruction of sixteen eighteenth century houses which formed part of the longest and finest Georgian streetscapes in the world. Liberty Hall has become a decidedly shabby memorial to the tower block age of the early 1960's. Ian Nairn describes the

..... "silly flippancy" of the roof as "a harsh slap in the face for the dome of the Custom's House."⁷

I feel that it is vital, through art and any other means, that children become aware of what is happening in their built environment and make informed aesthetic choices about these changes. It must be accepted by the future generations of Ireland that one of the most important national assets belonging to the people is their heritage and knowledge of its true origins and the buildings and objects which constitute keys to their ancient history.

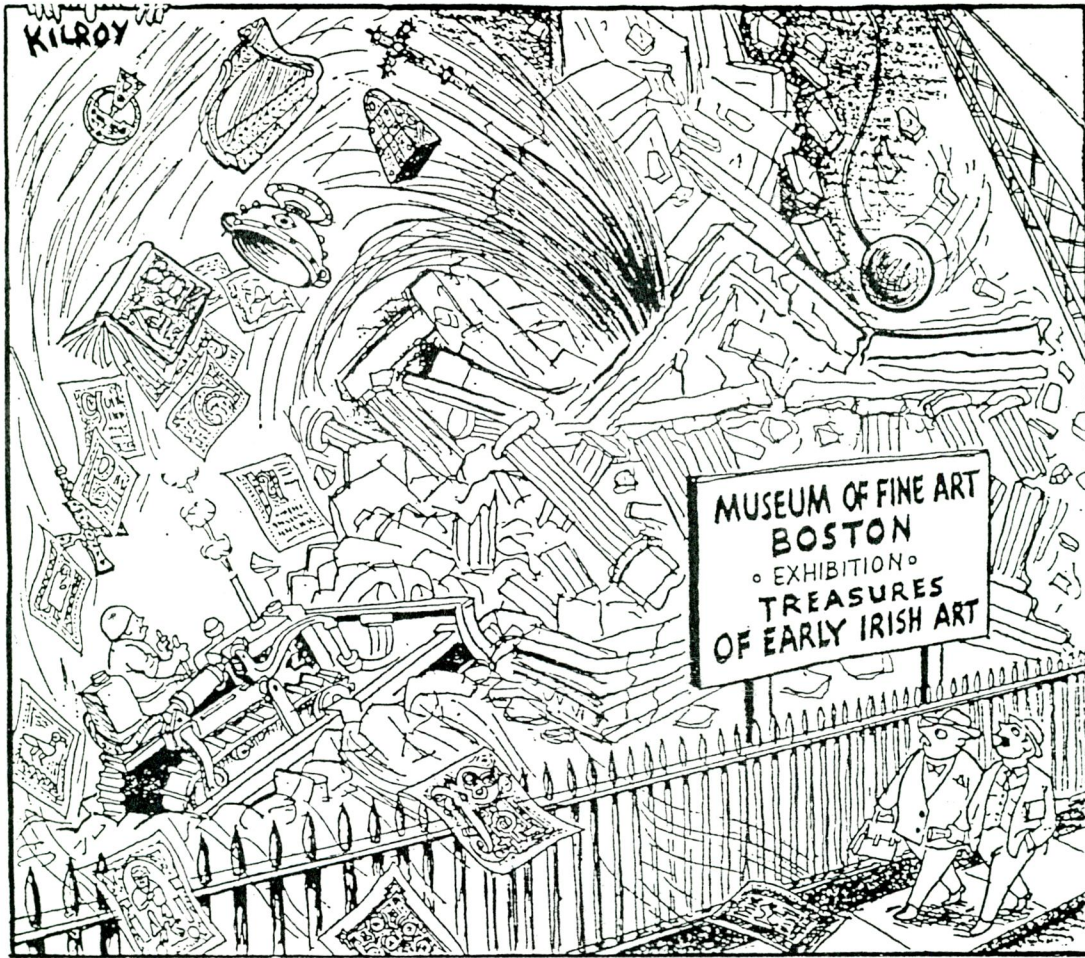


Fig. 8. What the Irish do to their National Treasures.

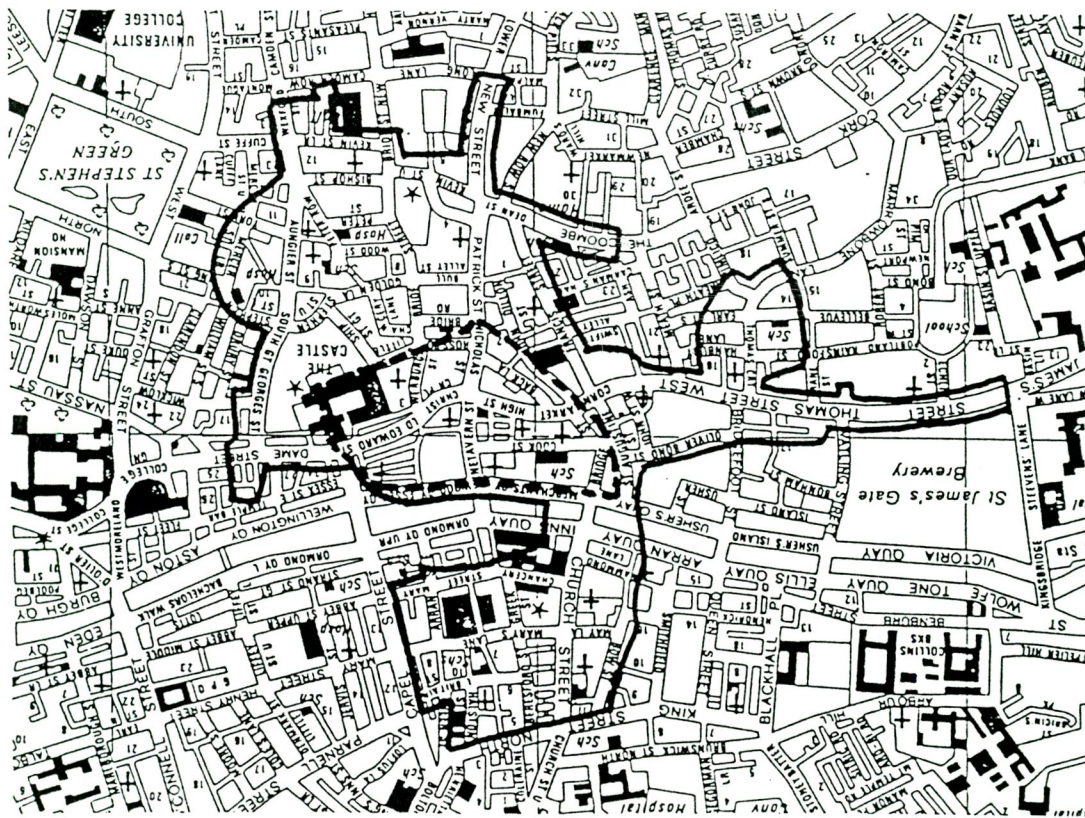


Fig. 9. The medieval core of Dublin which should be protected by planning law.

Laura Chapman advocates this social consciousness in saying

..... "The children of today are tomorrow's citizens. As tax payers and decision makers, they will, either by choice or default, recreate their environment. As human beings, children deserve an educational program that prepares them to feel some personal and direct control over the shape of their world and what it says about being human."⁸

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CHAPTER TWO - FOOTNOTES

1. "The Shape of Towns" Rowland, Kurt, Ginn and Company Limited, 1966.
2. As Above.
3. As Above.
4. Dublin Tourism Guide, 1989.
5. Stephen Gardiner, "The Destruction of Dublin", McDonald, Frank, Gill and MacMillan Limited, 1985.
6. Irish Times, 28th September, 1978, "The Destruction of Dublin" McDonald Frank, Gill and MacMillan Limited, 1985.
7. Ian Nairn, "The Destruction of Dublin", McDonald, Frank, Gill and MacMillan Limited, 1985.
8. "Approaches to Art", Chapman, Laura.

CHAPTER 3

Historical Reference

Man's urge to decorate his clothing and the fabrics of his environment dates back from the earliest times. Fabrics decorated by print existed long before woven or embroidered fabrics. Various records show printed fabrics did exist around 2500BC. Patterned garments are shown on wall paintings in Egyptian tombs and there are other mentions of similar findings in the Caucasus of 2,000BC. Whether it was the people of China or India who were the first to make blocks for printing on cotton cloth, it seems that textile printing was a fairly extensive industry in India in the earliest part of the Christian era.

However, until the advent of chemically-produced dyestuffs there was very little direct printing (that is, printing with a paste containing the colour and the fixing agent) the exceptions were almost all pigment colours. These pigment colours, (which I used for my main lengths) unlike dyestuffs, which stain the fibre of the cloth, merely coat the outside of each warp and weft thread they contact.

The great importance of hand screen printing as an industry is that it affords the creative and imaginative designer the means of putting on cloth extremely varied ideas and effects. Because the pattern is painted by hand onto a plastic film or "kodatrace" and the screens developed directly from this, it follows that there is virtually nothing that can be painted on paper that cannot be screenprinted onto cloth. The development of hand screenprinting was encouraged in the 1920's and early 1930's by the need to find a method of printing new designs on the "art silks" and other viscose and acetate rayons. For these new high fashion fabrics, a process was required which would print, easily and less expensively, greater yardages than could be managed by the slow hand block method.

During the 1930's, 40's and 50's, English and European coutoure houses made great use of screenprinted silks and fine wools. The British industry was injected with new blood, in the form of refugees from Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany who brought with them great technical skills



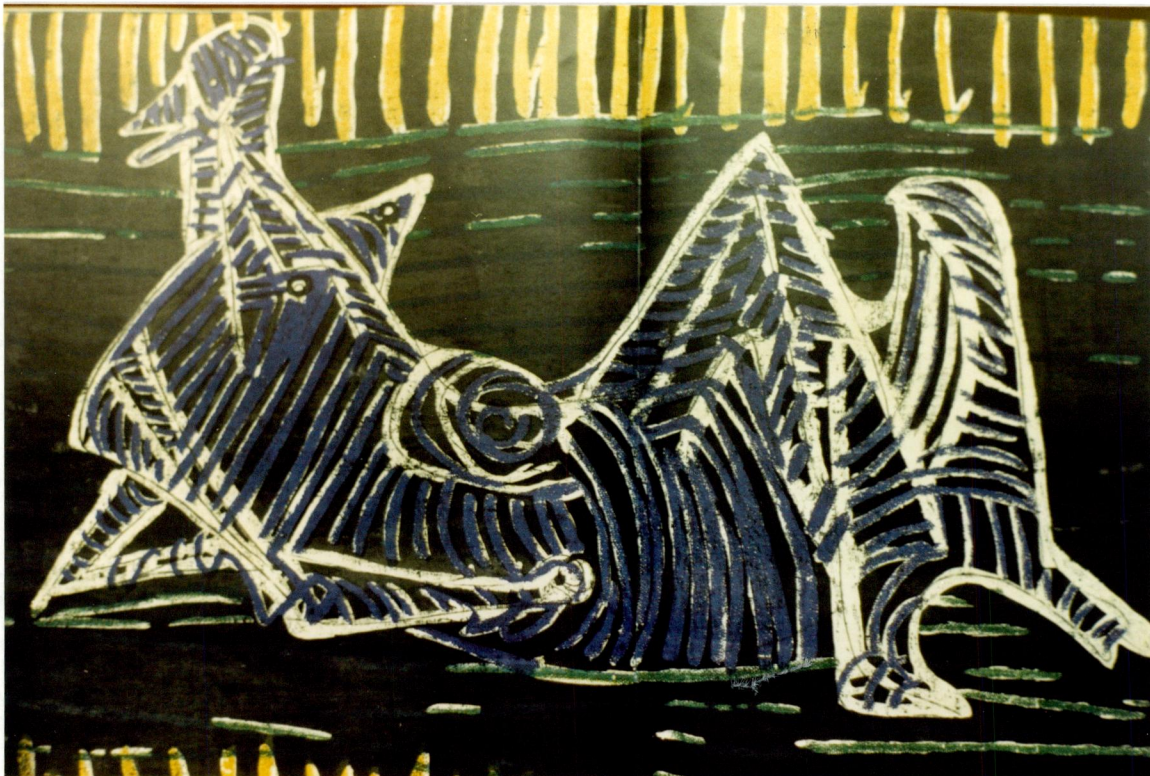


Fig.10. Screen printed fabrics designed by Henry Moore for "Ascher".

and a new approach to colour and pattern. The production of new pace-making designs and quality fabrics became the order of the day. Hand screen printing was the only method whereby experimentally drawn designs could be carried out on cloth. This, coupled with the ease with which the colourings could be changed and the low cost of making screens, was largely responsible for a radical change of design styles.

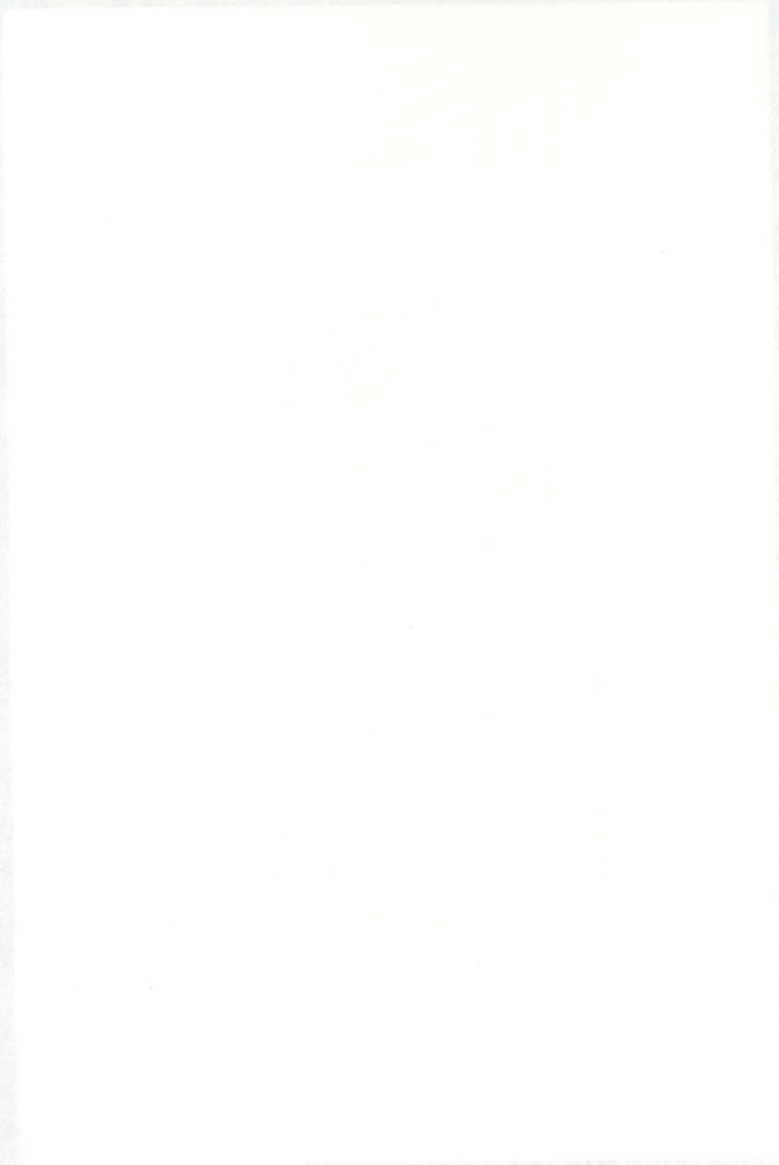
In researching the history of textile print, I was particularly impressed and stimulated by the considerable accomplishments of Lida and Zika Ascher in the sphere of textile design. Under the Ascher name, many leading painters (matisse), sculptors, graphic artists and theatrical designers were contracted to design for the most practical fashion accessory - the printed headsquare - as well as fabric lengths. This crossed the divide between the so called fine and applied arts and the relationship between art and industry. A textile designer, Jean Atlan, advocated the painter had a lot to learn from the craftsperson.

..... "Personally, I am wary of painters who do not love beautiful textiles, - carpets, pottery, and jewellery - I hold in great esteem, painters who have the courage to learn from the weaver or the potter."¹

'Fashion and Fabrics Overseas', (June, 1949) explained the crucial role of the specialist textile converter. He/she promotes style and design and transforms the grey goods of the weaver into successful fashion fabrics. Ascher, although he did not design for fabrics himself, he was astute at selecting designs which were creative and effective. Ascher has been described as a rogue among producers in that

..... "he and his fabrics go pioneering with the moderns."²

He was, at heart, a missionary eager to apply the finest art forms to everyday life. Although he contracted great artists to design for his fabrics, Ascher still used the simplest of fabrics on which to print. He was dedicated to cotton and experimented for years with colours and a more soph-



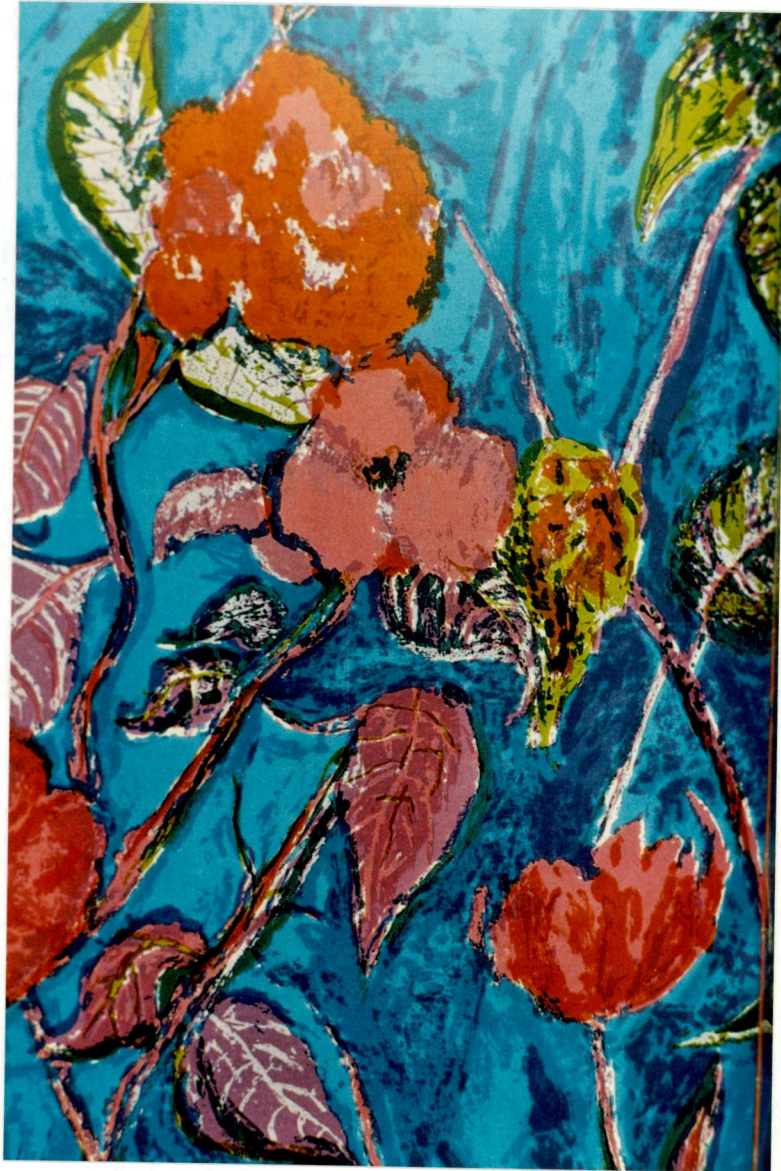


Fig. 11 A design can be ruined or made with colour.

isticated design angle in a crusade to establish cotton as a high fashion fabric. I find this admirable as it is often found that the best quality designs are printed on outrageously expensive fabrics, which are not in the price range of the general public. In producing good quality prints on cotton, Ascher was, in the most practical terms, ensuring that the finest art forms could realistically be applied to everyday life.

..... "Art must affect everyday objects as well as working in stone and on paper."³

Ascher had the insight to realise that

..... "a design can be ruined or made with colour."⁴

It was usual for him to produce multi-coloured designs from one to five hundred colourways. He admitted that

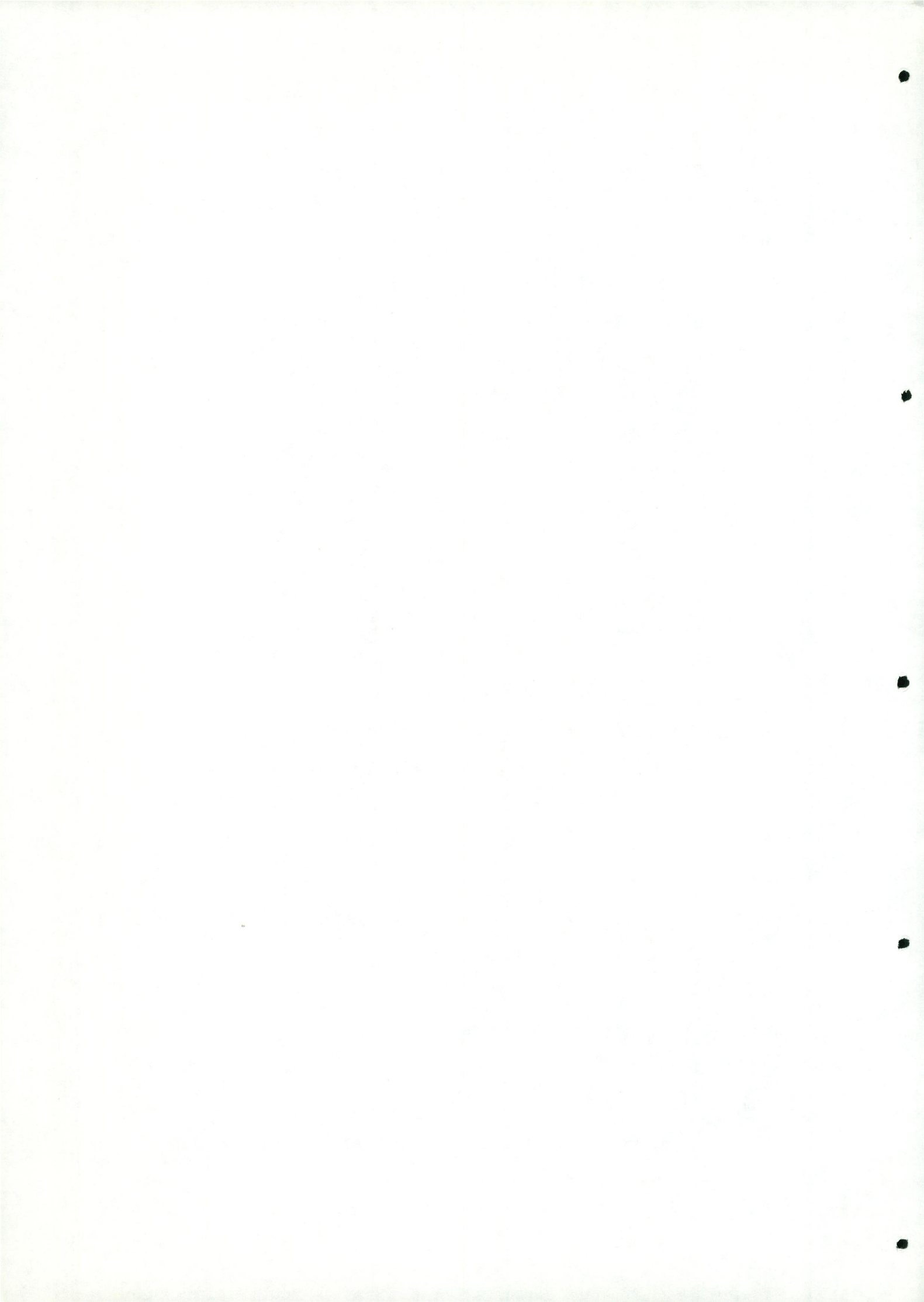
..... "a mediocre design can sometimes be saved by good colour but a design totally without a soul is beyond redemption."⁵

He explored What I find fascination about textile design, the fact that by astute manipulation of colour, similar designs are given different identities. Deep purples, yellows and black give blooms strength and dominance, whereas pastel flowers on silk in primrose, mauved pink, warm pink, white and tangerine immediately achieve an aura of romantic innocence.

..... "In textiles it seems to me, it is rather the surprising inversions of colour, and form that create a notable design. The artist's drawing only comes to life when the colours of which it is composed are changed about by the printer in almost as haphazard a way as in a Kaleidoscope, to form new and unexpected harmonies."⁶

The Ascher fabrics brought sparks of life and colour to the dreary post war years. Under the Ascher name, designers experimented with off-beat large prints, and vivid colours confronted each other in dazzling mixtures. The Sunday Times of February 8th, 1959, documented their popularity.

..... "Prints are back with a bang, some are in exotic tropical colours producing a riot of orange flame and purple."⁷



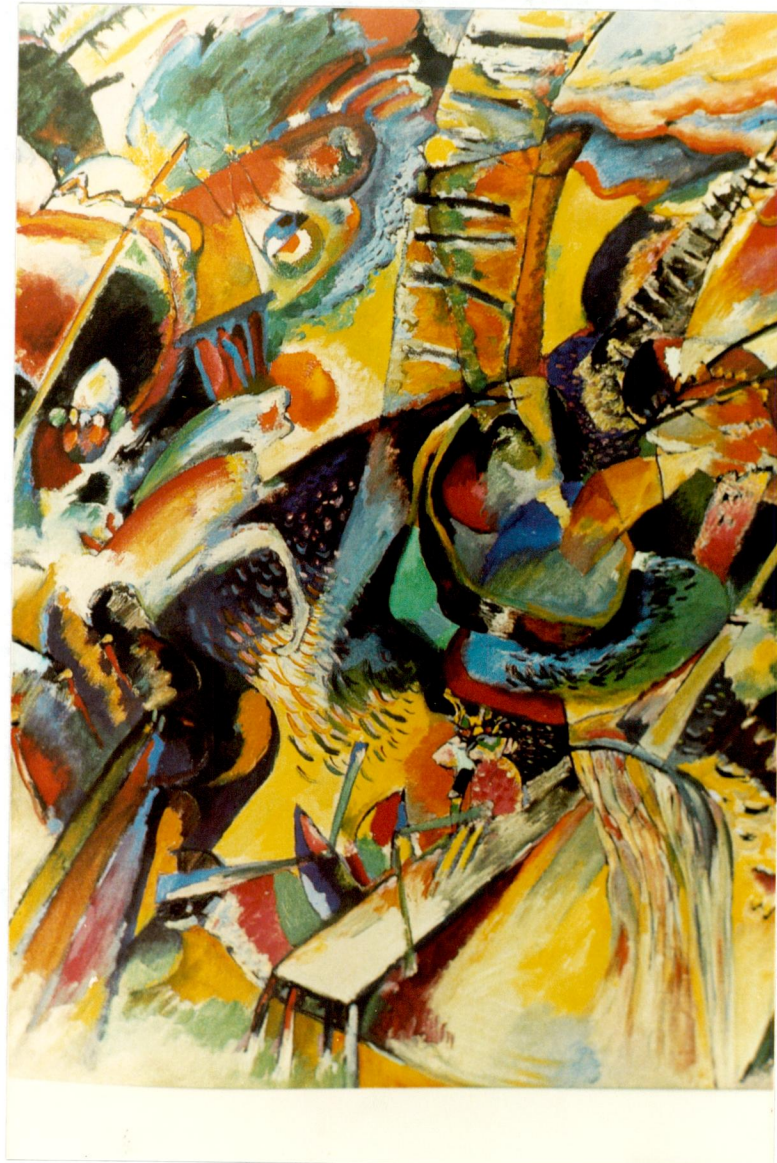
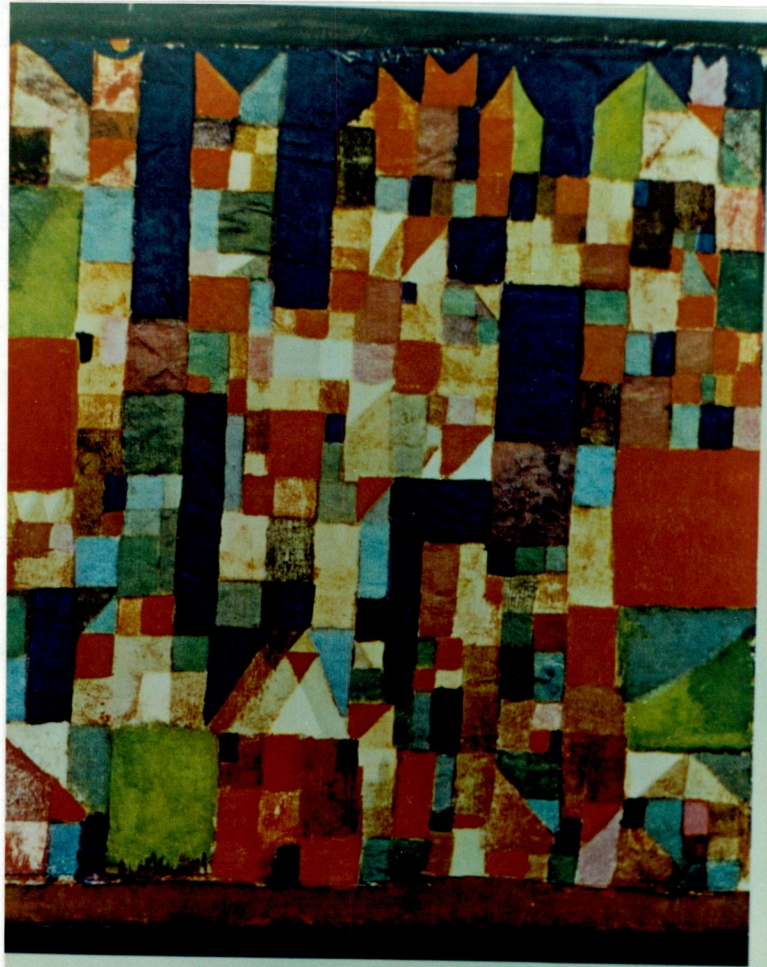


Fig. 12 "Improvisation Gorge" 1914, by
Kandinsky.







PICTURE OF A TOWN WITH RED-GREEN ACCENTS (Städtebild), 1921 Oil, 17³/₈" x 17³/₈"
Private Collection, Switzerland

Fig. 13 "Picture of a Town with red green accents", 1921, By Klee.

At this time it was considered that the colour pattern and rhythms of abstract art lent themselves well to textile decoration, whether it was hard-edged and restrained or fluid with bright colour. Colin MacInnes reviewing the Lefeure Gallery Exhibition said

..... "The artists here are mostly abstract painters using a non-realistic idiom or one that suggests cognate forms without defining them. How successfully this style of painting lends itself to textile design which has always been, after all, a form of abstract art."⁸

The work of two such artists, Klee and Kandinsky, suggested images to me which were influential in determining the final decision for my print.

Some of the paintings by both these artists could be almost directly translated into the print process, with very few changes, because of the nature of abstract art. Kandinsky always seemed, in his art, to have the urge to achieve the simplest basic form by abstracting motifs and reducing them to their simplest geometric elements. I was interested in this idea since the nature of my source made it easier for me to reduce the forms to their geometric elements. Kandinsky's most characteristic trait, however, was that of using patches of vivid expressive colour and these planes of colour became more dominant than line in his work. The idea is also fundamental to the textile design process, whereby a difference in colour more than linear definition, separates one area from another. I found Klee's use of shape more appealing than Kandinsky's. In later life, Kandinsky reduced his forms to the simplest and most concise forms. For example, line, angle, triangle, circle, square and rectangle. Klee was not so rigid in his interpretation of shape. He used colour to achieve maximum impact in many of his works and I was impressed by his effective juxtapositions of colour. I did, in fact, use one of his works as the colour source for my printed length of fabric. Another element of Klee's work which appealed to me was the fact that he too, often used architecture as a source for his work. He was influential in presenting me with various ways through which





Fig. 14 Screen printed fabric by Mario Nissim for "Ascher"



Fig. 15 Examples of Screen printed cotton by "Ascher"

I could abstract my original drawings, yet keep an architectural feel or elements in my design.

In conclusion, I should mention stained glass as a further influence in my work. I have always been mesmerized by the translucent and vibrant colour which is an inherent quality of stained glass. In churches around Dublin, we have marvellous examples of stained glass by such artists as Harry Clarke and Evie Hone. In my main length, I am aiming to achieve the same intensity of colour which stained glass incorporates. Having discussed all my major influences for my project in print, I would like to finish by expressing a desire to see other young designers looking to architecture and recognising it as a valuable visual source for textile print. I have derived great pleasure from exploring man-made forms and would recommend this source as inspiration for the creation of exciting, contemporary fabrics.

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CHAPTER THREE - FOOTNOTES

1. Jean Atlan, "Ascher", Victoria and Albert Museum, 1987.
2. "Ascher", Victoria and Albert Museum, 1987.
3. Oscar Dominguez, "Ascher", Victoria and Albert Museum, 1987.
4. "Ascher", Victoria and Albert Museum, 1987.
5. As Above.
6. As Above.
7. Sunday Times, February 8th, 1959. "Ascher", Victoria and Albert Museum, 1987.
8. Colin MacInnes, "Ascher", Victoria and Albert Museum, 1987.

CHAPTER 4

Educational Relevance of Personal Project





Fig. 16 A Sketch by Fredrick Franz.

..... "The focus of teaching is the developing, changing, dynamic child who becomes increasingly aware of himself and his environment."¹

The most important parallel experience which I will share with my pupils is the experience of seeing and drawing what we have seen.

..... "We do a lot of looking, we look through lenses, telescopes, television, our looking is perfected everyday yet we see less and less."²

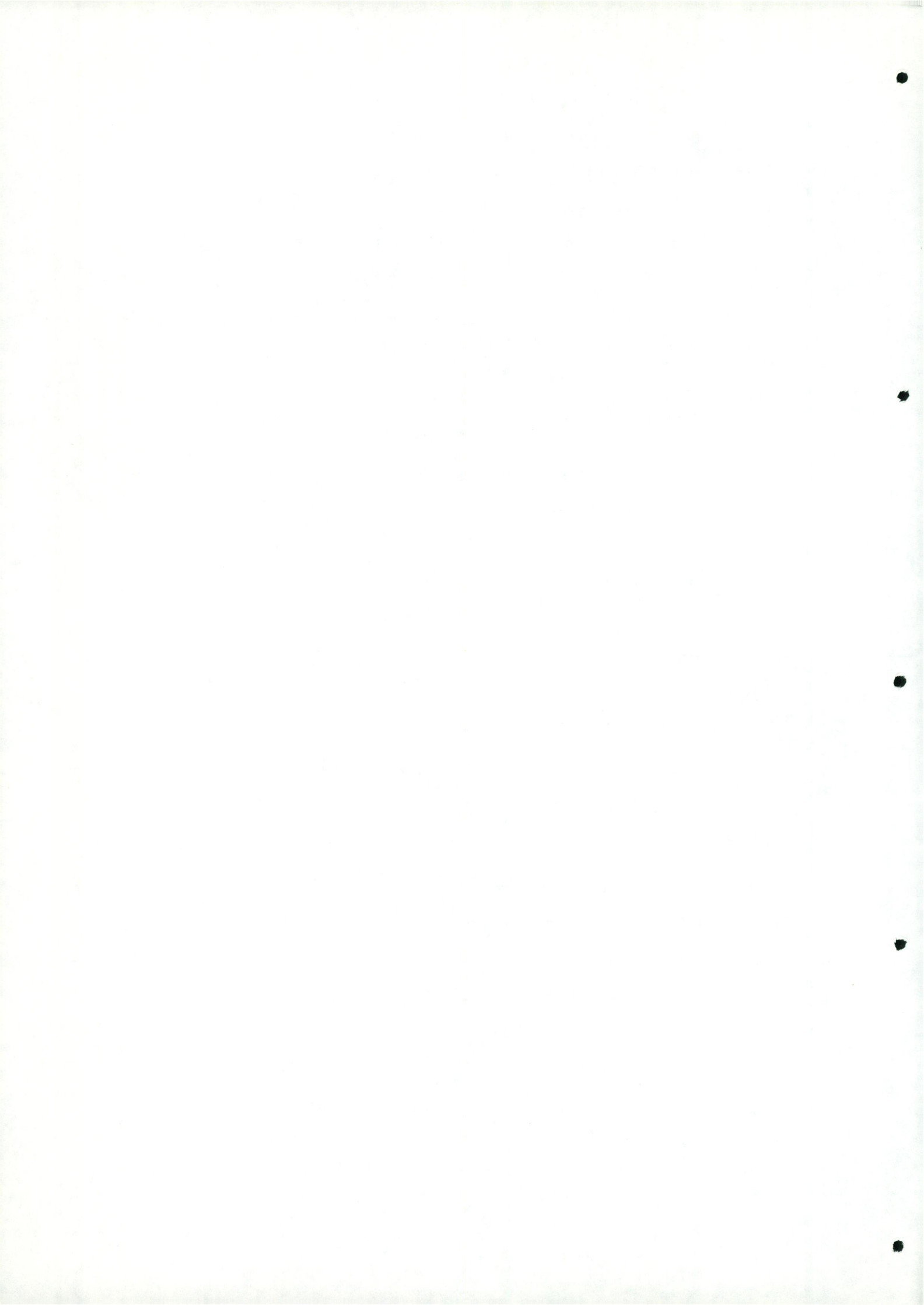
Observational drawing is not a matter of looking and recording what is in front of us. It is a matter of seeing and experiencing the ordinary things in life until they are suddenly not so ordinary anymore.

..... "I learn that what I have not drawn I have never really seen and it is when I start drawing an ordinary thing, I realise how extraordinary it is. All that is, is worthy of being seen and being drawn."³

It also works the other way, in that things we see as extraordinary may in fact, upon observation, be seen to be made up of the simplest components. I would hope to bring my pupils and myself away from the patterned way of seeing things and look at the environment anew. As J. Ruskin said, people should try to see the world with the "innocent eye" without preconceived ideas, so they can depict what is actually visible.

Art produces a sense of the visionary in human experience. The way we perceive is influenced by the experiences we have had during the process of living. If that process did not include becoming aware of the visual world of our environment, it is unlikely that the world will become a resource upon which the individual will draw on as a source for his/her own creative work. Eisner believes

..... "the significance of being able to see and perceive cannot be overestimated. The process of responding to visual forms is as demanding and complex as the process of actually creating art. The ability to respond to visual forms is not merely an adjunct to artistic activity but an active creative process in its own right."⁴



The perceptual skills developed in art are transferable skills and can be used in relation to many other subjects within the school curriculum. In fact, most of the skills and dispositions promoted by a good art education are transferable into a wide range of non-art contexts. I hope this aspect of a visual arts education will help persuade Education Administrators of its value as a subject in schools.

..... "Learning does not merely mean the accumulation of knowledge (perception) but it also implies an understanding of how this knowledge can be utilised (interpreting)." ⁵

My pupils and I would have to explore ways in which we could communicate what we had perceived and experienced through the medium of textile print. Since fabric is the vehicle for expression, it is necessary to be skilled in the actual management of the materials.

..... "Since each material sets different limits for an artist's work, then each material requires a different set of technical skills." ⁶

Both my pupils and I will need to be further education in the technical skills needed to give expression to our ideas. If one is not familiar with the technical skills required, one could feel frustrated, uptight and lose concentration. These negative feelings would hinder any progression.

..... "Children need to develop technical skills in order to achieve expression through visual form." ⁷

Today, the tendency to separate art from the intellect has been a source of difficulty for the field of art education. Such a conception does not do justice to art or education. People with a high level of ability in the art field are deemed to be "talented" or as having a special ability - something one has or has not got. I believe the majority of man's abilities are developed to different degrees and the same is true of art. The problem here is, as Eisner says

..... "if one conceives of artistic ability as a consequence of qualitative intelligence and if one views such an ability as, in part, the product

of educational experience, then the door is left open to ask how such intelligence can be developed."⁸

This broadens what we consider to be human thought. Art today is too often conceived of to be a mere expression of emotion, and education a process through which thinking is fostered. Under such a conception, it is clear that art will be considered peripheral to the major mission of education.

It must be acknowledged that thinking is not limited to the verbal and numerical. These are not the only symbol systems necessary to become a fully productive and understanding member of our culture. The visual arts is another symbol system and form of meaning which is largely neglected by Educationalists. The idea that thinking is not limited to the verbal is reinforced by Dewey when he said

..... "any idea that ignores the necessary role of intelligence in the production of works of art is based upon identification of thinking with use of one special kind of material, verbal signs and words. To think effectively in terms of relations of qualities is as severe a demand upon thought as to think in terms of symbols, verbal and mathematical. The production of a genuine art work probably demands more intelligence than does most of the so-called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves as been intellectuals."⁹

I believe intelligence is not merely a capacity we are given at birth, but is capable of expansion through experience and as Eisner said.

..... "It is through such expansion that our consciousness of the world and the meanings that the world can provide, also expand."¹⁰

When my pupils and I draw, we will confront, initially, the task of transforming the objects perceived on a two dimensional surface. We would be aiming to create a structural equivalent of the perceived object on the drawing paper. This would involve the cognitive process fundamental to education. Some psychologists such as Goodenbury views children's drawings





Fig. 17 My final textile lengths based on an architectural source.

as data useful for determining their intellectual maturity or the level of concept formation that the child has attained. The ability to form concepts is generally accepted to be an intellectual ability requiring that the child recognises similarities and differences among a group of particulars. The art process at whatever level involves this type of concept formation. My pupils and I will be going through the process of concept formation during our personal project. A greater understanding of the print process will be fostered in me by my tutors and at a simpler level I will, in turn, increase pupil understanding and concept formation in relation to print.

However, the ability to manage materials and the ability to perceive qualities that flows from one's work are not sufficient conditions for the creation of a visual form. The person also faces the problem of transforming some image, idea, or feeling into a form which will convey what the individual intends. The person must invent or find a structure or code through which his ideas, images or feelings can be expressed. There would be the problem of creating an image in the print medium which others could realise as representing something in the environment, and which would be suitable from a design point of view. It must be realised that there are valid learning processes taking place in the creation as well as the perception of art.

..... "Learning to perceive what is stable, learning to overcome visual inconsistencies, learning to construct mental images of visual possibilities and learning to construct such images in another material, are not simple tasks. It is the particular province of art education to assume responsibility for fostering these aspects of human ability."¹¹

My pupils and I would also, during this process, have to learn to verbalize our impressions, as well as communicate our impressions in a visual way. Children in particular, would benefit from learning to synthesize

their impressions in verbal form as the process would give further coherence and clarity to their experience. It is necessary to make decisions about the value of the experience. Without this evaluation and critical judgement, our response to visual forms is incomplete. Some art educators claim that verbalising about art reduces visual experience to verbal experience, but Eisner sees no validity in such an assertion as a necessary consequence of talking about art.

..... "There is no reason why man should not use one of his unique intellectual tools, spoken language, as a tool for experiencing visual art. Although verbal language is not now and can never be, a substitute for the visual, it can function as a midwife to aesthetic experience. It can provide evidence of the extent to which a person can see and feel the work in question."¹²

As with perceptual, cognitive and technical skills, the skills of interpreting, synthesizing and evaluating are transferable skills and are of educational benefit in more than the context of art.

Art is one subject, which by its very essence, places value on individual meaning and expression. When my pupils and I come in contact with our visual source, it will draw individual responses from us all. We will both be conferring our private and imaginative interpretation of the visual source onto fabric. All visual forms have expressive character. Eisner defines expressive character as

..... "the quality of life - the sense of feeling that the visual object elicits."¹³

Art will provide my pupils and I with an opportunity to use our skills and ideas creatively to construct an idea or form which will record our personal response to the source. Our idea, when transformed into print, will become a medium of expression. The idea that art expresses personal feeling is strongly advocated by Suzanne Langer.

..... "A work of art is an expressive form created for our perception

through sense or imagination, and what it expresses is human feeling."¹⁴

One of the parallel experiences which my pupils would, hopefully, share with me would be a growing appreciation and understanding of the relationship between art and the environment. I have touched on this lightly in the previous chapter, but wish to reinforce the value I attach to this particular aspect of the personal project. I feel it is of vital importance that I share my newfound understanding of the history and traditions of art with my pupils and in particular, the history and traditions of our own capital city. It is the particular responsibility of art education to provide access to the knowledge, ideas and values of our heritage, including architecture. One of the main aims of a visual arts education is, states the report of the Board of Studies '87,

..... "to develop a practised understanding of the continuum between art and the environment and consequently, a sense of responsibility for the natural and build environment."¹⁵

In Woodquay, Dublin has a permanent monument to ugliness. If the future teachers of art can foster in pupils a capacity to make developed critical judgements in relation to their environment, then maybe such grim mistakes can be avoided in the future.

I have been looking at the education benefit of art with regard to my pupils and I, but I feel it is necessary to look at the state of art education in Ireland. Are any practical measures been taken to ensure that the educational benefit of a good visual arts education is realised in a national context? In September, 1985, a Curriculum and Examination Board discussion paper was published. This paper made a rationale for the arts in Irish education. The "arts" included dance, drama/music and the visual arts. The Board agreed that

..... "the lack of understanding of the value of the arts in our society is the greatest impediment to change and to better provision for arts

education. Until and unless the arts are taken seriously and their unique educational contribution realised, the present low status of the arts in Ireland will be perpetuated and the indefensible neglect of arts education allowed to continue."¹⁶

The Board recommended that efforts be made to develop more favourable attitudes towards the arts in education. They also suggested that

..... "a rationale be developed for each arts discipline with clearly stated aims, objectives and criteria."¹⁷

This happened in 1987. The Board of Studies endorsed the general aims described in the discussion paper. This report went further, however, and sought to focus on the aims of each particular art form. In the visual arts section, the general aims, aims at primary level and aims at post primary level are laid out clearly and concisely. The Educational benefit of a good visual arts education is incorporated in these aims. Upon reading, it leaves one in no doubt that such an education is welcoming to all and can be sufficiently flexible to cater for individual needs and abilities. The report also looked into the mode of assessment and certification of the arts in education. It claimed

..... "The diversity of aims requires a system of assessment and certification which will admit the different ways of knowing which are the essence of the arts. The system must accommodate the individual view and reflect the value which the arts place on individual meaning and expression."¹⁸

The report suggested a greater element of school based assessment might be suitable, in order to take account of the process as well as the product.

The recommendation that the arts syllabus be revised was taken into account, and in February 1988, the Authorities of post primary schools received the new Junior Syllabus for the related activities of the disciplines of art, craft and design. This syllabus will replace the existing art syllabi for the intermediate and group certificate from the beginning of the 1989-90 school year, and will be examined for the first time in 1992.

Existing assessment procedures will remain in force for the present. I was pleased to note that the syllabus will be instrumental in increasing pupil awareness of the environment in saying

..... "The starting point for each learning experience is crucial in developing the students' capacity for focussed personal response. This motivation should be visually orientated, and derive from the students' direct experience of the natural, social and constructed environment."¹⁹

If implemented properly, I believe the Junior Syllabus will increase the status attached to artistic education and easthetic values in the school experience and hopefully, in the near future, similar syllabus will be formulated for the senior cycle.

In conclusion, it is reassuring to see that changes have, and are being made which will help bring art in from the periphera in the school experience. School administrators are beginning to realise that education needs the arts because the making and receiving of art calls for human processes which, because of their nature, are not required in other curricular areas such as the sciences, languages or business studies. During our personal project in print, both my pupils and I have used these human processes in an educational beneficial way. Not only will we have gone through the process of creating our own individual art forms, but we will also have made for better communications with ourselves and with others. "The interdependant disciplines of art, craft and design", states the Junior Syllabus

..... "are fundamental to human existence, predating human language. They unite in the basic human need to shape the world, for functional purposes and to express and communicate ideas and feelings. The contribution of the visual and plastic arts to the celebration of life is a unique and enriching experience for all."²⁰

CHAPTER FOUR - FOOTNOTES

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2. "The Zen of Seeing", Fredrick Franz, Wildwood House Limited, Great Britain, 1973.
3. As Above.
4. "Educating Artistic Vision", Eisner, Elliott, MacMillan Publishing, New York, 1972.
5. As Above.
6. As Above.
7. As Above.
8. As Above.
9. John Dewey, "Educating Artistic Vision", Eisner, Elliott, MacMillan Publishing, New York, 1972.
10. As No. 4.
11. As No. 4
12. As No. 4.
13. As No. 4
14. Suzanne Langer, "Educating Artistic Vision", Eisner, Elliot, MacMillan Publishing, New York, 1972.

15. "Report of the Board of Studies", Curriculum and Examinations Board, 1987.
16. "The Arts in Education", Curriculum and Examination Board, 1985.
17. As Above.
18. "Report of the Board of Studies", Curriculum and Examinations Board, 1987.
19. "Junior Syllabus", Department of Education, 1988.
20. As Above.

CHAPTER 5



An Account of the Classroom Project





Fig. 18 Linear Pattern by a Second Year Pupil.

In the last chapter I discussed the parallel experiences which my pupils and I would share during the process of textile print and the educational relevance of such shared experiences. In order to understand how the pupils came to achieve educational benefit from the project, I feel it is now necessary to give a practical account of the classroom project.

The medium through which the pupils would work was to be Screen Printing. First of all, it would be necessary to do some research work from which they could take an image to work into a design. However, before I could bring the pupils to do any research drawings, I felt it was important to do some lead up work in the important areas of line and shape. I must say at this point, that because of shortages of hours on my scheduled teaching timetable, it was necessary to secure another class in another school, namely the Loretto College on the Green. The art teacher there gave me a class of fifteen second years, with which I could carry out this project. Because of this factor, it was not possible to have covered these areas earlier in the year.

In the initial class the pupils explored the linear quality of objects and the linear pattern contained within these objects. By doing this, I hoped the pupils would begin to train their eyes to look at things closely and record every detail they had perceived. They were already aware of what media would achieve the best quality of line. They also explored how to measure one object against another in these drawings, which I felt would be helpful while doing their research drawings. I felt the pupils thoroughly enjoyed this class. The task totally absorbed them and their level of concentration was high. From their final drawings, it was obvious that the pupils had learnt a great deal about perceiving. They had incorporated as much detail as was possible in the time allotted. I also found their standard of drawing to be good for their level of maturity. They were excellent at





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Fig. 19 Shape Studies by Second Year Pupils.

verbalising their experience and synthesising what they had actually learnt.

In the process of screen print, quality of line is important but analysing the shape content of a source is also a fundamental aspect of screen print. It would be necessary to place large shapes against small shapes to achieve a balanced composition for the final piece. Using the same source, the pupils explored the shape content of the various objects. using thick markers, and in some cases, paint. During this process they became aware of the existence of non-geometric as well as geometric shapes and how they could work together. From the previous class they realised that many areas of the source could be broken down into very small shapes. They were, however, now further challenged to select which areas would consist of large shapes and which areas would consist of small shapes, in order to achieve a balanced composition. The pupils grasped this concept well and they were aware by the end of the session that smaller areas of detailed shape looked more balanced and effective against larger areas of shape. All the time it was obvious that their level of preception was increasing. In the initial class on linear pattern, they were looking at every line and recording it, but in this class they were perceiving what should be left out as well as what should be incorporated in their drawing. This was a vital stage in the learning process and they would encounter it again and again in the process of designing for their final print.

At this stage, I felt they were ready to begin the actual research of their source for their final print. The source for the project was the St. Stephen's Green Centre on St. Stephen's Green. Apart from the fact that it was ideally situated from a practical point of view, it also incorporated a variety of architectural elements which I felt would be visually stimulating for the pupils. The centre includes a variety of shop fronts on two different floors, a quaint coffee shop, beautiful ironwork, streetlamps, and of course, the glass structure of the building itself. Since the centre only





Fig. 20 The St. Stephen's Green Shopping Centre.





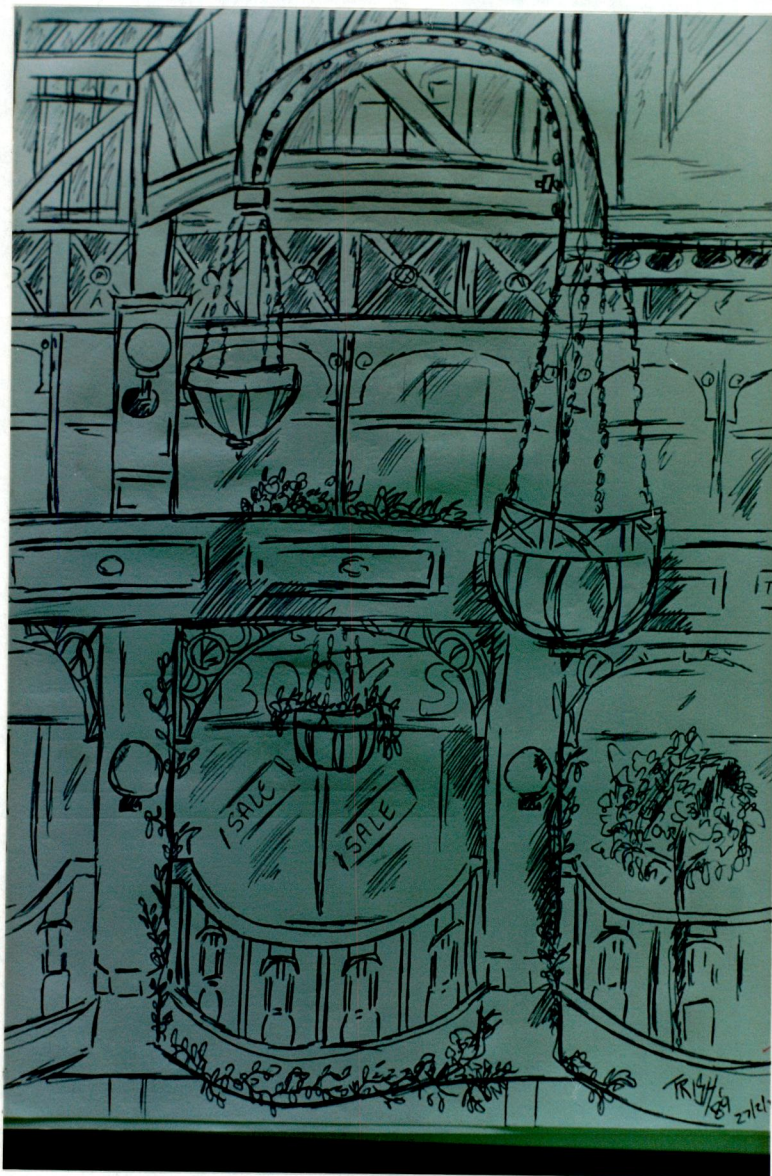


Fig. 21 Observational drawing of St. Stephen's Green Centre by a second year pupil.

opened late last year, it still held an aura of novelty. The pupils had not done any research work here before and this made for an enthusiastic attitude from the start.

The pupils spent two double periods exploring the centre through observational drawing. I did not confine them to a particular area of the centre, as I felt this would limit them unnecessarily. Instead I allowed them to select an area which they found visually stimulating, and which incorporated the elements of line and shape. Because of the layout of the centre and the size of the class, it was not too difficult for me to keep track of them. Most of the pupils drawings showed a good level of drawing skills and were very perceptive and sensitive. However, some pupils were having difficulty achieving the correct proportions of the objects, and it was necessary to redemonstrate how to measure one object or area against another. I feel that I should have given one class over to this area before we started our research, but in their previous drawings, I had not detected the magnitude of the problem. It may have been that this source may have overwhelmed some of the pupils and this I could sympathise with when I considered it in the context of my own work.

During the process of observational drawing of their source, I feel the pupils became competent in transforming the area perceived onto a two dimensional surface. They became more aware of the relationship between areas and objects as regards scale. They also discovered how to create a sense of visual space in their drawings through including areas in the foreground, middleground and background. They became aware that the further objects recede into the background, the smaller they visually appear to become. Most importantly, however the pupils came to terms with the fact that in order to draw something it is first necessary to look closely at what they are to draw. The closer they observed something, the more likely they were of recording what they had actually seen.





Fig. 22 Design Work incorporating shape.

On returning to the classroom situation, it became necessary for the pupils to analyse their drawings in the context of fabric print. Following discussion and visual demonstration, they went through the process of selecting an area from one of their drawings which would be suitable for fabric print. At this stage, they became aware of composition and each pupil selected an area which they felt would be appealing to the eye in the finished product using a view finder. Following this, the pupils also learnt the valuable skill of how to enlarge their drawing by the grid method on to a large sheet which would be the size of their final print. They also discovered that their selected area would have to be directly proportional to their large sheet or else their drawings would not be in proportion when enlarged. This was a time consuming but very valuable experience for future reference.

At this stage, it was necessary to bring what the pupils had discovered about shape to bear on these working drawings. I, here held up progress in making the mistake of asking the pupils to explore the shape content of their drawings on the large sheet. Although the pupils were fulfilling this aim, it was an extremely slow process because they were working in paint. I decided it would be better to abandon the idea of doing a large shape study and instead do the same thing on tracing paper ^{OK} mashed down over their selected area. This was a much better solution and because their working area was smaller, it encouraged the pupils to simplify their drawings further. Here, the pupils faced and overcame, the challenge of refining their selected areas into a balanced shape study. This process reinforced the concept that everything has a shape content.

So far, I have made no mention of colour even though it is as fundamental to screen print, as is the elements of line and shape. While doing their observational drawings, the pupils did not introduce colour. This was due partially to the fact that the colour content of the centre was not





Fig. 23 Design work incorporating three colours.

particularly stimulating, but mainly to the fact that the pupils would be limited to using two colours. A third colour would be achieved through overlapping these two colours. If the pupils had used colour in their drawings, they may have been disappointed that it would be such a complicated procedure to achieve them in fabric print. At this stage, the pupils explored colour and colour mixing. They learnt that when two colours were mixed in paint a third colour could be produced, but they also became aware of how this could be utilised in the print process through overlaps. They discovered how the concept of advancing and receding colour could be used to create a feeling of visual space in their designs. Each pupil's selected their colour combination which they preferred and made a colour study of their design from their shape study.

Following design completion the next step was to explore the process through which the images were to be expressed. A master tracing had to be drawn up from which two subsequent stencils could be rendered from. Here the pupils had to register their sheets, so each sheet fell exactly on top of each other. This is a vital stage or else the print will not register in the final product. The pupils managed the drawing of the first stencil which is quite a straightforward process, but they found the rendering of the second stencil confusing. In the second stencil, each shape would have to be made slightly larger to ensure that no white shows through on the print. In some designs, there were a lot of "floats". In other words, areas of paper you wished to keep in your stencil but did not connect to any part of it. These would have to be laid in the correct position on the fabric by hand. This part of the fabric print process demands full concentration. On the whole the pupils managed to overcome these problems and gained a more intimate knowledge of the print procedure through this process.

Through the cutting out process of the stencils, the pupils had to learn how to manipulate the materials at hand. The fact that they had used an





Fig. 24 Enlarged master tracing for stencils.

architectural source made this easier in that a lot of the shapes were angular as opposed to curved. Here, the pupils became aware that skill in the management of material would be necessary if their final image was to resemble their design and express the elements they wished to express. The pupils had to develop their technical skills if the final product was to be successful. This week, when the pupils begin to print their designs, they will also have to demonstrate their competency in managing materials through mixing pigment colours and using a screen and squeegee to print their designs.

Looking back over the project, I feel the pupils have learnt a great deal. They have increased skills of perception through observational drawing from a source in their environment. Because of this, they have become more aware of its possibilities for future work. I would hope that this may have sown the seeds of a responsible and caring attitude towards the environment which incorporates their heritage. The pupils have also increased their knowledge of composition and design mostly by successfully transforming their images into a design which would suit the print process as regards shape and colour. I do feel, however, that if I was doing this project again, I would suggest the pupils aim for simpler designs as this aspect led to complications at the stencil stage. The level of concept formation involved in screen printing is high and I would only do as complicated a project with a junior cycle class if their level of concentration was high. The pupils also learnt the artistic terminology of design and print and used it effectively when evaluating their experiences.

This has also been a very valuable experience for me, which I can draw upon when teaching screen printing in the future. I discovered the pitfalls of exploring this process with a young class, and if I was to re-do it, I might go about it in a different way which would be conducive to further understanding of the print process. I would also have done more

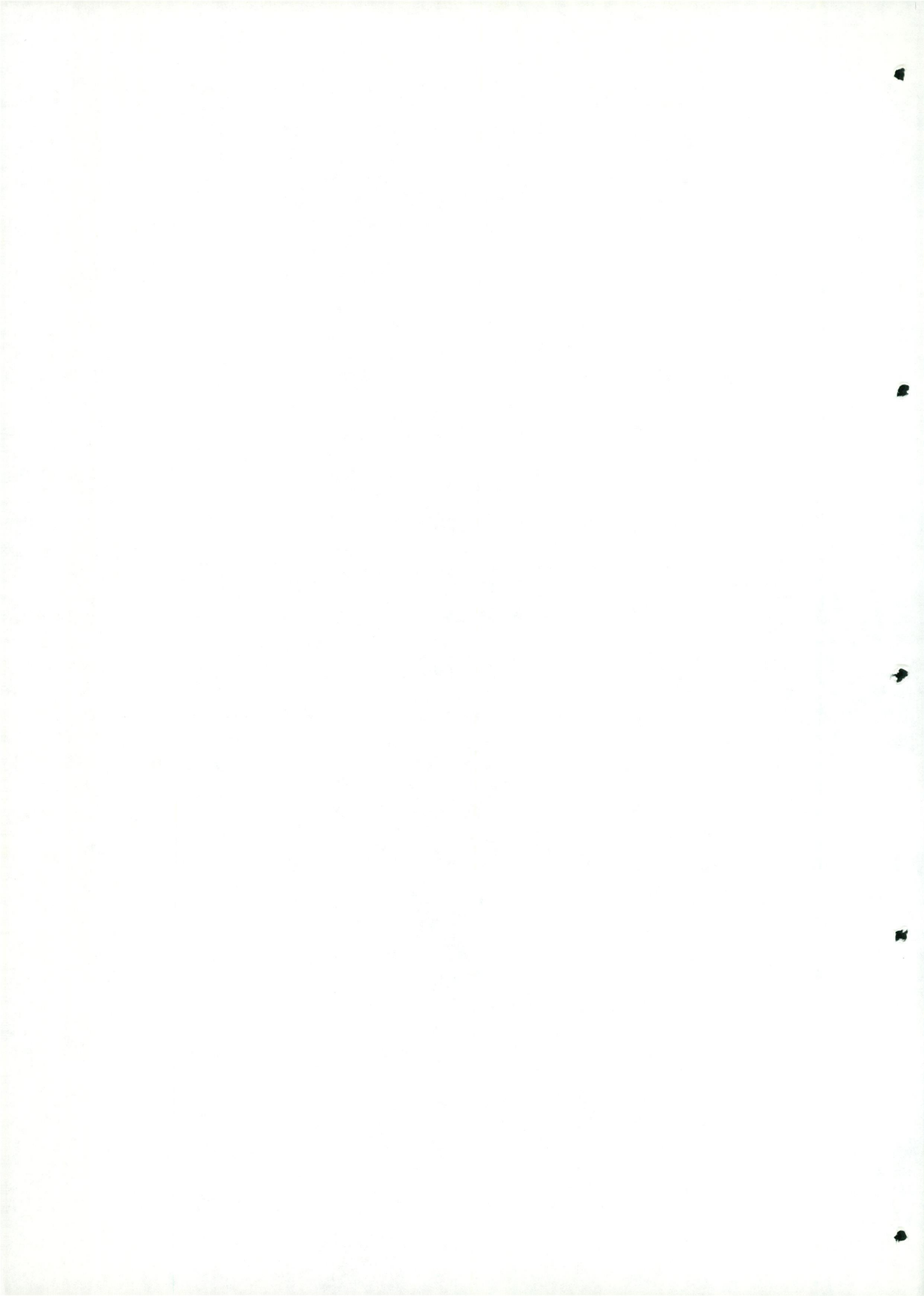
lead up classes which would have helped the pupils in the area of transforming three dimensional objects on a two dimension surface. It may have been necessary to have concentrated more on the technical skills of stencil manipulation. When I see the final product, I will be better able to evaluate if these areas affected the final product and that evaluation will be included in my lesson plan notes. On the whole, I feel doing this project was of immense educational relevance to both my pupils and I. The project also provided a means of self-expression for the pupils and fostered creative thinking. The sooner that the potential of a sound visual arts educational is realised by the Educational System in Ireland, the more likely it is that all pupils can develop mentally, socially and emotionally through art experience.

"Art is a form that vivifies life. It helps the growing organism realise its alive. It moves one to the height of feeling that makes it possible to identify that experience as a unique event in ones life."

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CHAPTER FIVE - FOOTNOTES

1. John Dewey, "Educating Artistic Vision", Eisner, Elliot, Macmillan Publishing, New York, 1972.



CONCLUSION

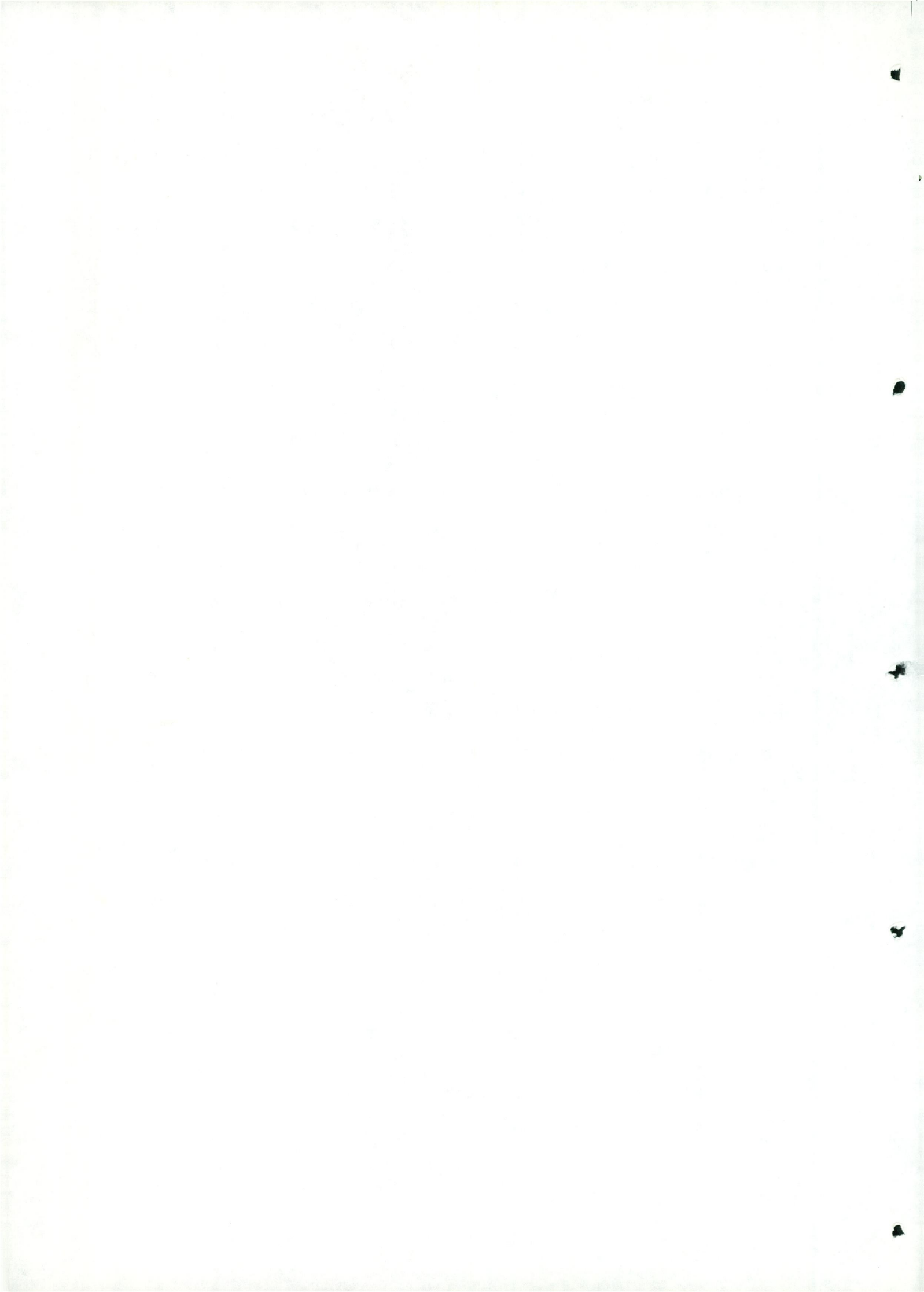
C O N C L U S I O N

Through exploring the visual language, and art education over the previous four years, I have become increasingly aware of the peripheral status of the visual arts in Irish education and in drawing the experiences of my pupils and I, together, I feel that this is educationally indefensible. The creative and practical approach of a visual arts education which incorporates the artistic and aesthetic is an essential part of education.

Although much has been done at a national level to increase the status of art, it is still only the tip of the iceberg. I have only to look at the example of the school in which I completed my Secondary Education. Untrained art teachers are teaching the visual arts because of lack of Government funding. I am sure this is typical of what is happening country-wide. Apart from the quality of teacher education, lack of financial input has made for many other problems which reinforce the neglect of the visual arts. These factors include pupil-teacher ratios, class size, pressure on classtime from other areas and inadequate facilities. Existing provision for art education is inadequate and must be improved for the sake of future generations.

To encourage Government funding for this aspect of education, it is vital that more must be done to increase the understanding of the value of the visual arts in our society. The neglect of the visual arts should on no account be perpetuated. The Curriculum and examinations discussion paper believes that once financial funding for art education is increased, there will be;

- (a) School based assessment.
- (b) Adequate space and materials.
- (c) Sufficient qualified teachers.



(d) More adequate pre-service education for teachers and continuing in-service courses.

It is also vital that changes be made in the existing syllabus at every level to increase the potential educational significance of art education. As a future teacher of art education, I feel it is my responsibility to advocate any changes which will give art the same, if not more, status as other subjects in the curriculum. To conclude, I think I will let Eisner have the final say on the subject:

....."Art calls to our attention the seemingly trivial aspects of our experience thus enabling us to find new value in them. Works of art display insights, makes them vivid and reawakens our awareness of what we have not learnt to see. Thus, art is the arch enemy of the humdrum and mundane. It serves to rediscover meaning in the world of vision."

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