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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
COLAISTE NAISIUNTA EALAINÉ IS DEARTHA

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIETY ON WOMEN AND THEIR ART

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education in
Candidancy for the
B.A. Degree in Art and Design Education

By

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DEDICATION:

To my Parents,

in recognition of their love and support throughout
my education.

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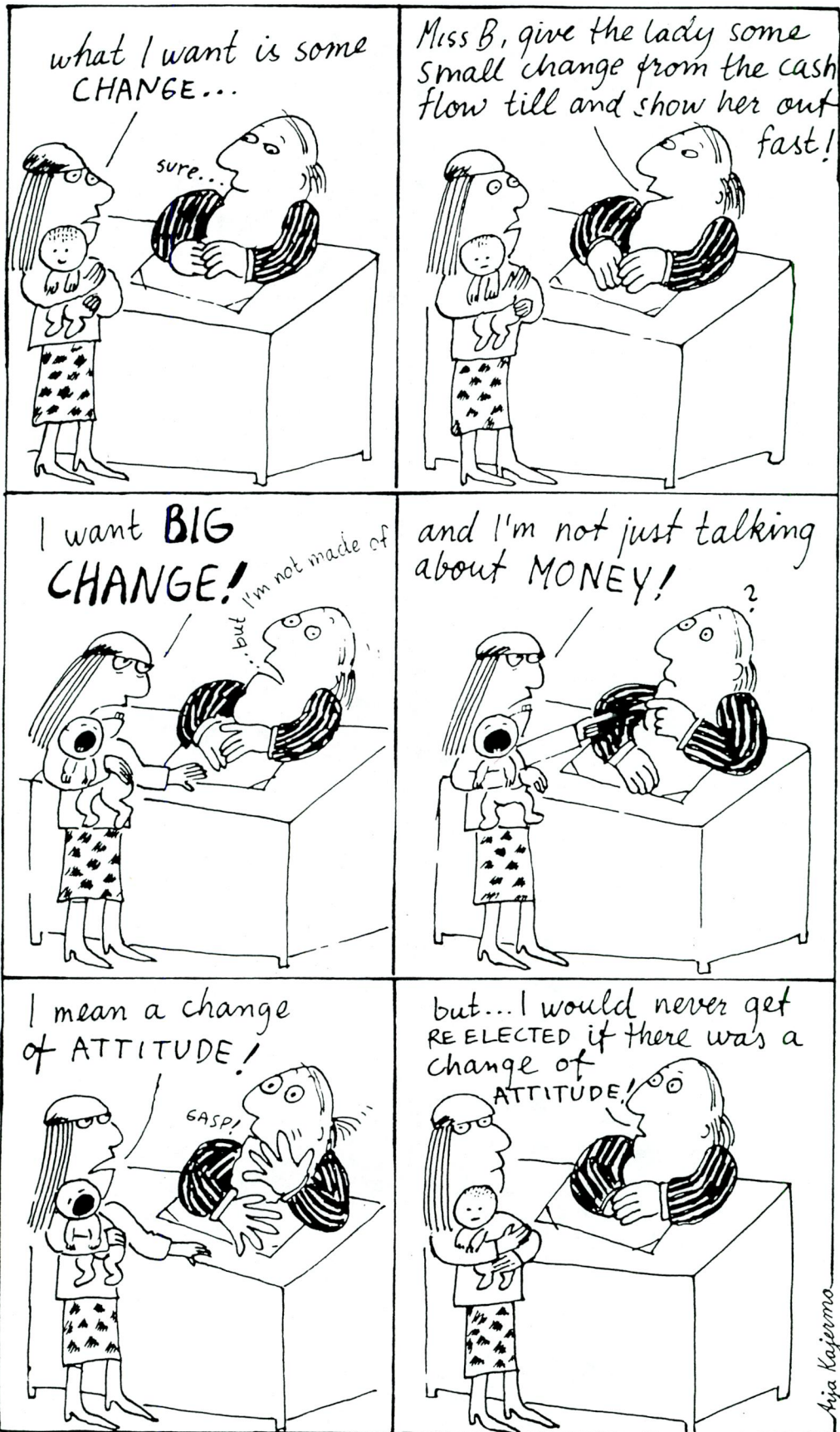
INTRODUCTION

There have been a great many feminist works published over the last few decades and the work of Griselda Pollock, Germaine Greer and Marina Warner are known to most of us. They served their purpose in bringing the myths and secrets of being female into the open and highlighting the various methods used by men throughout the ages to suppress women. Feminism according to the Collins English Dictionary is "a doctrine or movement that advocates equal rights for women". However the word feminism has become cliched and is all too often associated with dominating men hating women.

Equal rights is the key word yet every day we see new schemes being set up or new bye-laws being passed to encourage women to become equal to men on pay scale or jobwise, etc. Some motor insurance companies offer cheaper rates for women. There is a scheme set up by the EC that gives grants to women who start their own business if they employ women only. Around the country youth employment and training schemes are being pressurized by the sponsoring bodies to have more women on the previously male dominated courses, with the result that women applicants automatically get a place in the scheme regardless of the length of the waiting list. Is this equal rights for women?

There are many arguments for and against this type of special treatment for women, but do all these morale boosting tactics and encouragement not suggest that women are passive, timid, uncertain

creatures who have yet to realize that they want equal rights and so have to be pushed towards equality with the help of such incentives? Who is responsible for this attitude? Is it strong liberated women helping to push their weaker colleagues forward into equality whether they want it or not? Or is it men, terrified of being labelled chauvinistic and wanting to appear sympathetic to women's rights? Whoever it may be, such persons have the idea of feminism slightly twisted. Equality is equality it does not mean that "some deserve more equality than others". If women are passive creatures who need constant encouragement to become liberated, then why is this so? What kind of self image do women have and where did it come from? These are amongst the issues I will be addressing throughout this project in relation to women, to art and to society. During the course of this dissertation I will also be looking at these and other questions in relation to the development of myself as a person, a woman and the development of my own personal form of artistic expression and how this correlates with my teaching theories and methods.



CHAPTER 1

Sociological, Historical and Cultural Values and their Effects on Women.

BEAUTY'S SELF

My love in her attire doth show her wit,
It doth so well become her;
For every season she hath dressing fit,
For Winter, Spring and Summer,
No beauty she doth miss
When all her robes are on,
But beauty's self she is
When all her robes are gone.

The Feminist writings and works of art of the last few decades go a long way towards explaining women's self-image and it's origins. Some feminist writers, however, tend to place the onus entirely on men, again suggesting women are passive. But women are not passive, history is full of heroines, female political leaders and women artists. It has taken women artists and writers like Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro and many others to whom I will refer throughout this project, to unearth this history of women.

Judy Chicago's project "The Dinner Party", detailed in her book of the same title, traces an abundance of mythological and real female figures throughout the histories of various cultures. The Primordial Goddess appears in many cultures and precedes most patriarchal societies. According to Judy Chicago

The Primordial Goddess was originally referred to by primitive markings, triangular shapes that stood for the vulva, and sacred holes in rocks, the presence of which on or near animal images was thought to cause animals to multiply. It was

1871
The first of the
year was a
very dry one
and the crops
were very
poor. The
winter was
very cold
and the
spring was
very dry.
The summer
was very
hot and
the crops
were very
poor. The
autumn was
very dry
and the
winter was
very cold.
The spring
was very
dry and
the summer
was very
hot. The
autumn was
very dry
and the
winter was
very cold.

much freer. Although they were considered



Judith

ILL'1 Judith by Judy Chicago.
From the Dinner Table.

not until much later in history that the concept of the Primordial Goddess was expressed in sophisticated myths, visual representations, and specific goddess figures. By that time, the original creative power attributed to this feminine being had been greatly diminished and/or transferred to male gods.

As expressed in these later myths, female creators were conceived as having brought the universe into being either alone or in conjunction with a male partner, and the female spirit was generally predominant. It was not until men gained control of the social and political forces that the idea of life originating entirely from a male - rather than a female - source arose. It is possible to trace this slow changeover from matriarchal to patriarchal views of the origin of life through the surviving mythology. (1)

Jewish society, for example, was thought to be always patriarchal, but Chicago calls this into question and bases her argument on careful reading of ancient texts: according to her research

The Jews, like all early peoples, were matriarchal and worshipped a goddess. It required six centuries for Yahweh (God) to replace the goddess Astoreth as the primary deity of the Jews. Thereafter, Hebrew women gradually came to be treated like chattel, so that eventually they were subject to the total control of their fathers and then their husbands, who could divorce them at will. They lost all their legal rights and could neither own property nor engage in business on their own. Girls were raised with only the goal of marriage and procreation in mind. Once married, they were required to do all the household work and manual labour while their husbands taught or studied or worked. However, Jewish women were educated in order to teach their sons about Jewish law. This resulted in a somewhat inconsistent doctrine - women were encouraged to be intelligent and assertive, but their intellectual power was seen as positive only if it was directed toward the family rather than toward personal fulfillment.

Nonetheless, Judith was not the only heroic woman in Hebrew history. Jewish matriarchs were hardly all passive and repressed; many were scholars and leaders. There were certainly those who were submissive, but generally the stronger figures were more respected - unless they openly rebelled against patriarchal authority, in which case they were denigrated or punished. (2)

Ill' 1

The mythology of various cultures gives a basis for many of the concepts of the Ideal female. Marina Warner tells us of the advent of Pandora, the first woman of classical myth, and how she was

deemed to be the ruin of mankind. Badness is the essence of Pandora's being, she could not help but do harm. By merely existing she brought suffering to man.

Before her advent, men lived apart from sorrow and from painful work, free from disease which brings the Death gods in. But now the woman opens up the cask and scattered pains and evils among men. Before her coming Hesiod tells us that wheat grew naturally, but after her advent man must cultivate the ground and sow seeds.(3)

Eve, in the Christian story of the first woman, also brings about the downfall of a man. In accordance with the story of Pandora, she opens man's eyes to all that is evil and brings all the sorrows of mankind down on his head. According to a Swedish myth, Eve was not the first woman created but Lilith. Lilith took the form of a winged female demon who took great delight in strangling new born babies and it was only because she did not suit Adam that God created Eve.

Adam and Lilith never found peace together because when he wished to lie with her she took offence to his demands that she lie underneath him, claiming that she was his equal, being also made of dust. (4)

Beauty and desirability is their highest sin and "woman is an occasion of sin and an agent of fatality through the desire she inspires, not experiences". (5)

Helen of Troy is another beauty who brings about tragedy, not through malevolence but through dumb ignorance. Yet the theme running throughout the three stories places the blame firmly at the feet of the woman, and man is merely at the mercy of his own desires.

This theme runs through the history of a great many cultures and is reinforced by the song, dance, literature, and the visual arts created by men. However, alongside this theme runs another less obvious yet similar one and that is the theme of lone women of particular valour, character and strength. The ancient history of many cultures is full of great female warriors and leaders.

In early Irish history alone we have had many great female warriors and leaders. For example we have the trinity of war Goddesses, Marrigan Badd and Nacha, the great queen of Connaught, Maeve, who led her armies into many a battle including one against her own husband Ferdia; and the great pirate queen Grainnuaile or Grace O'Malley to name but a few. However, it must be mentioned that in the late seventh century the Christian church stepped in and passed a law "Cain Adarnain", imposing fines on men who employed women in military operations. Even the great patron saint of Irish women, St. Brigid, was originally a pan-celtic deity associated with healing, smithcraft and learning.

In the early Irish Christian church monks were often married and there was always a place for women and children in the monasteries at Glendalough and Clonmacnoise for example. Gradually the sexes became more separated and even separate churches were built for women. Eventually a fear of female sexuality came to the fore and chastity became a test for the male. According to St. Kevin:

Where there are cows there are women, where there are women there is sin, where there is sin there is the devil, and where there is the devil there is hell.

Another piece of ancient Irish poetry states:

I am Eve, great Adam's wife,
'Tis I that outraged Jesus of old,
'Tis I that robbed my children of Heaven,
By rights 'tis I that should have gone up on the cross. (6)

During the Romanesque period, female genitals were displayed on religious buildings as a reminder of the sin of lust. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Sheela na Gigs were a popular carving on walls of castles and churches, usually placed in isolation above doors and windows. The female genitals were crudely





ILL'2 Kerbstone; Newgrange, C.O Meath Ireland.

displayed as a dominant weapon in a reprimanding way to curb sexual immorality among men. The carvings were intended to give protection against the destructive forces of women's sexuality.

A woman trying to enter St. Senan's monastery on Scatterry Island fought back against this isolation and oppression with these words.

Christ came to save women no less than men, he suffered for the sake of women no less than for men. Women have given service and ministry to Christ and his apostles. Women enter the Heavenly Kingdom no less than men. (7)

Women, however, benefitted from the monastic system during the Middle Ages, which allowed them an education. Liadain, a renowned poet of Ireland, was a protege of this system. The Abbess Ebba was another. Presiding over an order of nuns during the Tenth Century invasions by the Danes, she and her followers disfigured their faces in order to protect their virtue from the Danish soldiers.

Female deities in other cultures hold powerful roles and enjoy a high status compared to the corresponding poor status of women in Catholic countries. Before Christianity came to Ireland, women enjoyed an equally high status. We know, for example that the passage graves were often associated with female deities.

Knocknacarra in Sligo, for example, was named Miosgan Meadhbha (Maeve's cairn) and it is thought that the spiral carvings of the neolithic age may represent the female form, while the angular shapes the male. Ill'2

There is also evidence that Goddesses were worshipped longer than gods in Ireland. The Tuatha De Dannan, an ancient Irish people, means descendants of the Goddess Danna. Legends of the deeds of brave women abound in pre-Christian Ireland - Macha (of the Red tresses), for example, a warrior queen who ruled over a council of women. Legend has it, that she disguised herself as a leper and followed her enemies into the woods, where she captured them and

brought them back to Emhain tied together. Her council of women ruled that instead of the customary death penalty the prisoners should be made slaves of the queen for life. Eachtach was another Fourth Century female warrior of such prowess, that the men of Ireland saluted her with a distinguished burial.

In Ireland it was the advent of Christianity that heralded the change in status of women. The change was gradual but insistent and reached it's peak during the Victorian era when women were seen as frail, petty creatures, owned and protected by their husbands.

Every aspect of Victorian society reinforced this concept from the restricting confining clothing worn by women to the laws of the land which allowed married women a status little above that of a chattel. The church in particular has reinforced this status for women throughout its history in Ireland.

Let us look at the effect Christianity and, in particular, the Catholic church has on Irish women today. First of all, the rules imposed on women and men by the Catholic church must be considered. The Catholic church teaches us that the family unit is sacred and that sexual intercourse outside marriage is a sin, women are also forbidden to masturbate as are men. Women are forbidden to use contraception other than natural methods and as intercourse is encouraged only for the conception of children, even natural methods, though acceptable, are not encouraged. This forces women to continue bearing children throughout their fertile years, as to refuse your husband his marital rights is also frowned upon by the church. Divorce is not allowed and separation is frowned upon except in extreme circumstances. Even today, in rural areas, and often in urban areas, separation invites social scandal and women are encouraged to suffer unhappy marriages in silence for the sake of the family unit.





ILL'3 Madonna and child by Unknown,
1300 A.D.

The Church endorses the woman's role as housewife and childminder. I vividly remember my local parish priest giving sermons on the ill-effects on children of working mothers. As the local parish priest is usually the Manager of the local National School, and many Secondary Schools are still today run by religious orders, the church's views on such matters are carried directly into the classroom. The Irish Catholic church in particular holds the Virgin Mary in very high esteem and evidence of this can be seen in the many religious shrines glorifying the Virgin all over the country. Most rural villages and many urban areas will have at least one 'grotto' or shrine to the Mother of God. On May day and indeed all through the month, school children and elderly people alike will bring flowers to the grotto. In addition to this most churches, schools and homes in the country will have a May altar decorated in flowers in honour of the Virgin throughout the month of May.

Hail Mary full of grace
Blessed art thou amongst women
and blessed is the fruit of your womb
Jesus

Ill'3

This particular Catholic prayer, paying homage to the Virgin Mary as Mother of God, is probably the most frequently recited prayer in Ireland, and is one of the first learnt by most Catholic Irish children. The Rosary and The Angelus are also prayers paying homage to Mary and are still said at least once a day in a vast number of Irish Catholic homes. Combine all of the previously mentioned rituals with the amazing popularity of pilgrimages to Marian Shrines such as Knock and Lourdes, and more recently Medjugorge, and the fact that the vast majority of Irish women will have the name Mary as either their first, second or Confirmation name, or a variation of the name, and one can see how strong the cult of the Virgin Mary still is in Ireland today.

The Virgin Mary is held in high esteem by most Irish Catholics and is seen as the epitome of perfection in woman. She is the perfect wife, mother, homemaker, and her perfection is exemplified by her piety and purity. She bore her child like any human mother yet without having been "sullied" by sexual intercourse. Her virginity and purity is held up as an example to every Irish woman. As most Irish women can hardly wait patiently for a visitation by a heaven-sent angel, we must resort to sexual intercourse in order to conceive a child, but by doing so we become "unclean". With beliefs like this drummed into every Catholic Irish woman since early childhood, we can hardly avoid growing up with a guilt complex about our sexuality and an innate embarrassment about our bodies. The supposition that sexual intercourse and bodily contact were made pleasurable in order to ensure the continuity of the human race is something rarely considered by the church, and certainly not a concept to be encouraged by it.

The attitudes of the Catholic church in Ireland towards women are not only carried into the schools, but are preached from the Altar every Sunday and are carried into the media by high-ranking dignitaries of the church. Catholic ideas and values pervade almost every aspect of Irish society. As the population of the country is predominantly Catholic, the laws of the State are in accordance with the Catholic church. Whenever a political issue, which may possibly undermine the laws of the Catholic church comes under debate, the church is very vocal in having its opinion expressed on the matter. During the divorce and abortion referendum the Priests and Bishops were very definite and vocal in their condemnation of those attempting to introduce new legislation. Every Catholic in the country was warned of the dangers of divorce and abortion. The Catholic church used their considerable power and money to sway the voters on both of these issues and on many other political issues in the past.

The attitudes and beliefs of the Catholic church impregnate almost every aspect of Irish society and having been brought up in such a society I, too, have been profoundly affected by the Church and this in turn has had an affect on my work and on my teaching. Be it acceptance or rebellion against the Church, it's influence on Irish women has been unavoidable and a great deal of consideration must be given to it's influence when discussing Irish women, their work, their views, and their attitudes in general.

Footnotes

- (1) Judy Chicago The Dinner Party, Women's Press, New York, 1978. P 99.
- (2) *ibid* P 118.
- (3) *ibid* P 217.
- (4) *ibid* P 221.
- (5) *ibid* P 222.
- (6) K. Meyer, Ancient Irish Poetry, Gill and MacMillan, Dublin, 1962.
- (7) K. Hughes and A. Hamilton, The Modern Traveller to the early Irish Church, Gill and MacMillan, Dublin, 1975.

CHAPTER 2

The Education of Women

Schools are key agents of socialization and in order to change or improve any aspect of a society one must look at the school system. There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that the system does develop and reinforce sex segregations, stereotypes and even discrimination. However, Sexism in Ireland is not just the responsibility of the school system.

From the time children are born they are segregated and stereotyped by their names, their clothes, their toys. Children sing sexist nursery rhymes, read sexist fairytales, learn their lessons from sexist books, which all serve to segregate male and female and set roles for them to follow throughout life. We all carry with us memories from our schooldays of being punished for a misdemeanour by being made sit with the boys, of separated playgrounds, of separate sides of the room and of separate schools for boys and girls. It is argued that this situation has drastically improved but we still have single sex schools which offer only subjects considered appropriate for that sex. Many all-girls schools still refuse to offer subjects like Woodwork and Metalwork to their students and Social Science or Home Economics are rarely offered as a choice in an all-boys school. Very often Art is treated as a girl's subject and often not offered as a choice in

boys schools or coupled as a choice subject with a more "male orientated" subject such as Physics or even Physical Education. Uniforms are another sexist device and putting young girls in uncomfortable, often impractical, shapeless, ugly gymslips not only serves to segregate the sexes but are a ploy to keep maturing young women as sexless and unattractive as possible to their male counterparts. The monopoly the religious orders have held on our schools for so long has been paramount in contributing to such sexist practices in the schools. As the religious orders lose their grip on our educational system, a semblance of equality begins to creep in but we still have a long way to go. The individual teacher can do much towards instilling a healthy attitude in children regarding equality of the sexes.

The individual teacher can ensure that the school purchases non-sexist textbooks for their individual subjects. They can make their students aware of sexism and help them combat it. They can ensure that the sexes are never segregated for any reason. They can watch their own language and make sure no sexist cliches slip in. The Physical Education teacher can encourage mixed Sports and Home Economics activities can also be mixed. The teacher can encourage the students to notice sexist attitudes in the media and discuss them.

In-service courses and seminars for teachers should be provided by the Department of Education to inform teachers of the statistical evidence regarding sexist practices and ways of dealing with the problems revealed by this evidence. Most teachers would be aware of the problems but would benefit from expert advice on how to correct the imbalance. Such courses should include seminars designed to enable teachers to examine their own attitudes and the effects of these attitudes on students. A definite proposal by the Department of Education on integration between the subjects would help

alleviate the problem of certain subjects being seen as more suitable for boys or for girls. Suggestions for subject integration are outlined in Chapter 3.

Single sex schools result in schools being equipped to teach subjects mainly associated with a particular sex. Boys schools, for example, would be more likely to have facilities to teach Woodwork, Metalwork, Physics, and girls schools are likely to be equipped to teach Domestic and Social Sciences, arts and crafts. Co-educational schools are likely to be equipped for both male and female orientated subjects and therefore offer a wider variety of subject choices to students.

The introduction of textbooks which recognise women's role in various subjects as well as the role played by men, would provide a more balanced education and encourage both sexes to perceive themselves as equal in society.

Above all else, and to sum up the above suggestions, the influence of the teacher's attitude to equality of the sexes must not be underestimated. Teachers are role models for students and their attitudes towards sexism will be adopted by many of their students, especially younger students. Therefore the individual teacher must examine his or her attitudes in detail and strive to use their influence for the betterment of an equal society.

We have already seen that during the Middle Ages women were entitled to an education of a fairly high standard in Ireland. By the Victorian era women were taught only those subjects considered necessary to a woman's role of wife, mother and homemaker. The social graces, housewifery and child care were considered appropriate subjects for women. Math, Economics and the Sciences were definitely not. This classification of "male subjects" and "female subjects" is carried through the Irish educational system

right up to the present day. Education for women in 19th Century Ireland can be summed up by the sixth of a set of limitations summarised by the studies of Ann O'Connor and Eibhlin Breathnach.

You must not have an education that would stimulate you to challenge the patriarchal stereotypes that control your life and encourage you to take personal responsibility for deciding your own destiny.(1)

The right of women to sit for public examinations in Ireland was first recognised in the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act in 1878. In 1879 the Royal University of Ireland Act recognised women's right to take University degrees. As career opportunities opened up for girls in the Civil Service, in particular, at the end of the 19th Century, education for women outside the traditional family role became a more acceptable concept. However, as with the "boys' subjects" and "girls' subjects" classification, a similar career classification still prevails to a certain extent.

There are marked differences in the kind of education received by boys and girls and, by and large, girls' education has been designed to fit them for the traditional areas of female employment (especially clerical work) and the traditional female adult roles of Mother and Wife. (2)

Having looked briefly at the history of female education in Ireland we must now look at the female students' role in Irish schools today. Every culture has norms of behaviour for males and females, this changes from culture to culture and over a period of time in each culture. Gender indoctrination begins at an early age, with the provision of sex appropriate toys. For example, the seemingly innocent traditional practice of giving dolls to little girls and motor vehicles or guns to little boys, has the effect of encouraging what is deemed to be sex appropriate behaviour. The practice of giving dolls to girl children encourages them to assume a nurturant expressive role for example. In an analysis of recent

research evidence by Shafter indicates that males tend to be

1. more active than females
2. more willing to take risks
3. more receptive to non-aggressive rough and tumble play.

Females on the other hand tend to be

1. More interested in and responsive to infants.
2. Less demanding than males.
3. More likely to respond to the parent's social virtues.(3)

People generally tend to assume many differences in mental functioning and attitudes between the sexes, although the real evidence indicates that many of these differences are untrue. However, this sex role stereotyping is very powerful, as are the myths in general surrounding women. According to the Department of Education Statistical Report 1985\86: Dublin Department of Education 1987 found that

1. Girls have lower profiles of their abilities than boys i.e. lower educational self images.
2. Girls have a more negative attitude towards Maths and Science subjects than boys.
3. Girls have more positive attitudes towards school but this is based on social rather than intellectual grounds.
4. Girls tend to be less assertive in class and to be less sanctioned and rewarded for intellectual achievement and effort than boys.
5. Girls have substantially different and primarily traditional occupation\career\marriage\work expectations than boys.
6. Girls have internalized relatively traditional family and domestic role expectations and have significantly higher levels of domestic responsibilities than their brothers.

These findings can be interpreted in one of two ways, one being that girls adopt these attitudes because they are the result of innate female characteristics and secondly, that the indoctrination of the myth of such female characteristics has itself given rise to such attitudes in females. Paula Caplan argues that such female characteristics as the nurturing instinct are not automatic and that men are just as capable of cultivating it.(4)

In a study by Damian P. Hannan and Maura Boyle, Etal (The Origins and Consequences of Selection and Streaming in Irish Post

Primary schools, Dublin ESRI 1987) it was found that conventional sex role expectations govern subject choice but, girls tend to have lower educational self images, lower confidence in their abilities, especially in Maths and Science. Girls have more negative views of the usefulness and intrinsic significance of the more "difficult" subjects. Although girls have, in general, a more positive view of their educational experience and of their relationship with their teachers, they have significantly poorer images of their own performance abilities than have boys even at the same level of actual performance.

These findings are crucial in proving that the lack of confidence women have in their abilities is not always based on fact, and that teacher support is extremely important for girls pursuing unconventional subject\career choices. Here I feel the necessity in citing a personal example of such an experience. In order to do Physics the girls in the convent - all girls school - I attended at second level, had to attend the local all boys school for the Physics class. This meant they had to march through the yard of the boys school at the end of the lunch hour and attract the inevitable attention in the form of scathing, sexist comments and wolf whistles. The two girls involved had to sit in a male dominated classroom and endure "special treatment" by the male teacher. Worst of all one of their own female teachers accused them of "only doing Physics in order to be with the boys" when they inevitably arrived a few minutes late for her class. Needless to say both girls loathed the ordeal and received low grades in the Leaving Certificate. This, according to some, was because girls are in general intellectually incapable of excelling in Maths or Physics. I believe it was the result of a lack of school and teacher support for their choice. One of the two girls went on to

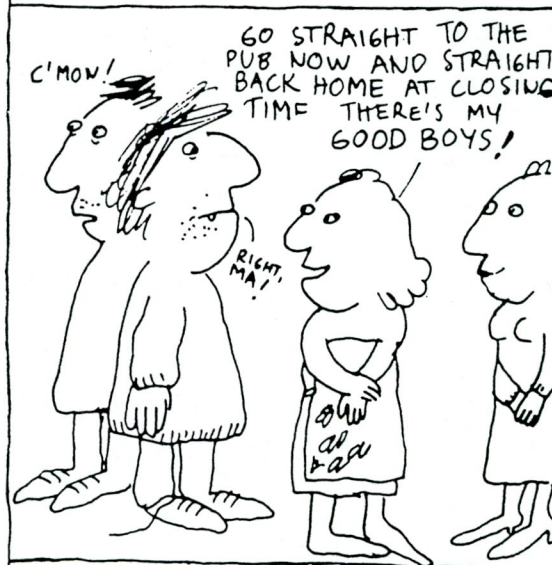
do a General Certificate in Science, Majoring in Physics, and is now about to qualify for a degree in Mineral Engineering in Camborne School of Mines in Cornwall.

According to the study by Hannan and Breen, factors considered to account for sex differences in subject choice were as follows:

1. Differential occupational and career expectations amongst boys and girls.
2. Differential patterns of self and subject attitudes.
3. School ethos and teacher support influences.(5)

Changing the choice rate means intervention to affect girls' self images, and attitudes towards subjects and occupational\career expectations. It also means intervening to change the associated 'Hidden Curriculum'. of teacher and school influences. The girl mentioned in the previous page who is currently studying for her degree in Mineral Engineering has achieved her goal as a result of strong parental support. In a study described by Margaret Goddard Spear in her essay, "Teachers Attitudes towards girls and Technology", replies to questionnaires showed that technical education was considered by teachers to be of greater importance to boys than girls. It also showed that teachers believed CSE\ 'O' level qualification in technical subjects would be of more benefit to boys in their future lives. (6) Since it is primarily teachers who are likely to influence students' subject choice, it is clear why girls are less likely to make choices in favour of technological subjects.

Girls, however, are far more likely to take art as a subject choice. When we look at the following figures taken from the Department of Education Statistical Report 1985\86 we see the substantial numerical differences between girls and boys in certain subject areas.



Aija Kajermo 200

Leaving Certificate 1986

Total number of candidates sitting examination 47,857

Subject	Boys	Girls
Maths (Higher Level)	12,570	7,943
Physics	16,086	5,078
Art	5,991	12,263
Music and Musicianship	534	2,980

Department of Education Statistical Report 1985\86:

Dublin Department of Education 1987.

It is strange to note that although a substantially greater number of girls take art as a subject choice, art history is a subject rampant in male bias as we saw earlier. In other words girls study the history of a subject which indoctrinates them with the belief that men are more occupationally successful in that area.

When we look at subjects such as Art history or indeed history in general, as taught in the Irish Second-Level educational system, we discover an alarming pattern of male domination. Textbooks studied for the Art history course are written by men and male achievements feature to such an extent as to practically exclude female achievement in similar areas. If we trace the work of the Art historians from Pliny the Elder through Vasari, Winckelmann, Burckhardt, Fry and Bell, Gombrich, Baxandall, Kenneth Clarke and Clement Greenberg, to name but a few, we discover a pattern of thinking that almost totally excludes female artists. If we look at Henry J. Sharpe's book, Art History and Appreciation, (7) a textbook used by a great many Irish Second-Level schools, we find a total of





ILL'4

Study For Portugal by Sonia Turk Delauney.



ILL'5 Bacchus by Elaine Fried de Kooning.

three female artists mentioned, all three being 20th Century artists. This book, it may be noted, attempts to cover a period of time from Neolithic Ireland 3000 BC through to the modern period in Europe and America,

Sight, Insight, Excite, History and Appreciation of Art (8) by Lourda Sheppard, another popular textbook in Irish schools, does a little better but the achievements by women artists are still largely ignored and this time the author is a woman.

However, feminism has had its own particular effect upon Art history and thanks to the efforts of a growing number of scholars who are devoting their research skills to this area, we know a great deal today about the work of women artists who were almost lost to us little more than a decade ago, as a result of their exclusion from the standard histories. (9)

Nearly all of the art movements of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries had women participants. Most of these women are ignored in Art history books especially Art history textbooks used by schools. It was not until I studied the subject of women in art history, in some detail myself did I discover this fact.

While studying Art history in Secondary School I never heard of the Impressionists Berthe Morisot, Eva Gonzales, Mary Cassatt, or Marie Laurencin, who was a prominent member of the circle working with Picasso. I never heard of Paula Modersohn Becker or Gabriele Munter.

I was told Robert Delaunay invented Orphism but I was not told of his wife Sonia Turk Delaunay's involvement in his discoveries. Ill'4. Dali and Magreite are names every art student connects with Surrealism but how many have ever heard of Kay Sage or Merrit Oppenheim. Was Elaine de Kooning not also an abstract expressionist worth mentioning? Ill'5.

Long before artists like Kathe Kollwitz Ill'6, Germaine Kichier, Georgia O'Keeffe, Angelica Kauffmann or Judith Leyster to name but a few women artists from the 17th Century onwards, women were working as artists and crafts persons.



ILL'6 The Down Trodden

by Kathe Kollwitz

ILL'7 Navajo Indian
Eye Dazzler Blanket.



Nuns worked in the Scriptorium alongside Monks illuminating medieval manuscripts. Women designed and crafted the famous Navajo Indian blankets Ill'7, Peruvian erotic pottery, and the black camel hair tents of the Bedouin of the Middle East. Salina Von Strassbourg worked on the facades of Gothic Cathedrals in the 13th Century and Marietta Robusti, Tintoretto's daughter was an accomplished painter in her own right. The list goes on but I chose Art history as an example of how women's role has been neglected in the teaching of this subject in the Secondary Schools. How can we instill a sense of self worth in our young female students if we wilfully neglect to teach them the history of their own sex? History as a subject in itself, as taught in the school, is also of a very selective nature and tends to ignore the great part played by women in Western civilisation.

There is much evidence to confirm the existence of a Goddess culture at least 20,000 years prior to the beginnings of Egyptian civilisation. Western civilisation has only been a patriarchal culture for the last 5,000 years yet that is the period and the culture that appears to be the only concern of our educational system whereas, were our young female students to be given the choice to learn about a female culture that existed long before a male dominated culture, it would instill a greater sense of appreciation of their own abilities and a confidence in their status as women.

Were we to readdress these subjects from a totally female point of view, might they not take on a totally different perspective?

Along with the dominance of a masculine value system in art and art history, has often come a blindness to female experience or sometimes quite literally to female existence.(10)

Footnotes

- (1) Mary Cullen Girls Don't Do Honours, Womens Education Bureau, Dublin, 1987. P 1.
- (2) Damian Hannan and Richard Breen, Girls Don't Do Honours, ibid P 102.
- (3) Damian Hannan and Richard Breen, Schooling and Sex Roles, Dublin Economic and Social Research Institute 1982. P 301.
- (4) Paula J. Caplan, Women's Masochism: The Myth Destroyed, Cox and Wyman, England, 1985. P 132.
- (5) Hannan and Breen, ibid P 304.
- (6) Judith Whyte, Etal, Girl Friendly Schooling, Methuen & Co., London, 1985. P 37 - 43.
- (7) Henry J. Sharpe, Art History and Appreciation, Gill and MacMillan, Dublin, 1976.
- (8) Lourda Sheppard, Sight, Insight, Exsight, Gill and MacMillan, Dublin, 1985.
- (9) N. Bride and M.D. Garrard. Introduction: Feminism and Art History, Harper and Row, New York, 1982. P 1.
- (10) ibid P 5.

CHAPTER 3

Education in General

Having discussed the segregation of the sexes in the Secondary School system, I would now like to take a look at the problems of the Irish educational system in general and how these problems may be combated.

In May of 1920, A.N. Bonaparte Wyse, a highly placed Catholic education official wrote a memorandum summarising the flaws in the Irish educational structure. His observations, which were presented in uncomprising outline form, are summarised below.

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Outstanding deficiencies are:

- A. Insufficiency of teachers' salaries leading to a great dearth of qualified teachers and consequent inefficiency of schoolwork.
- B. Bad schoolhouses and insufficiency of accommodation for pupils, the latter chiefly in Belfast.
- C. Want of local interest in education and of provision of local aid for upkeep and maintenance of schools.
- D. Laxity of school attendance and lowness of school leaving age.
- E. Inadequacy of pension system.
- F. Low salaries of secondary teachers, absence of pensions and insecurity of tenure.
- G. The results system.
- H. Insufficiency of government grants and overall lack of co-ordination of the primary and intermediate system.

If we consider today's main problems we can see how the situation has not altered very much. The low salaries of secondary teachers do not invite graduates to apply to the profession. Insecurity of tenure - no new fulltime pensionable jobs available, at present the best a graduate can expect is part-time work.

Insufficiency of government grants. Education of our youth is the basis for our future society and therefore should be given priority in financial consideration.

There is an overall lack of coordination of the primary and Junior cycle. Too great a gap between both systems, children leave a primary school where all subjects are integrated and enter a totally different system where subjects are fragmented and the day is heavily structured and timetabled. So how far have we come from 1920 in our educational system? Let us take a look at the latest innovation in our secondary school system, the new syllabus for the Junior Certificate Examination.

In 1985 the Curriculum and Examinations Board published two documents on the Arts in Education. The first, The Arts in Education - A discussion paper in September of 1985 based on the work of the Working Party on the Arts in Education, and the second, "The Arts" - August 1987, is the report of the Board of Studies for the Arts.

The purpose of the discussion paper was to examine the then current position of the Arts in schools and to make recommendations. The Board of Studies Report concerned itself with curriculum and assessment, and to "focus the aims of each art form, firstly in general terms and subsequently as appropriate to primary and post primary education".

As an outcome of the work of these Boards, and the work of the Curriculum and Examinations Board the new syllabus for Junior Certificate level was published by the Course Committee for the new Junior Certificate.

The aims, as set out by the syllabus, are more or less in agreement and based upon the general aims of an art education as set out by the Report of the Board of Studies.

The syllabus concerns itself only with the period in a students' education from their entry into the post-primary system, to the Junior Certificate. No consideration appears to have been made for the students' previous arts education or how their education will progress after the Junior Certificate although this had been a recommendation made in Curriculum Examination Board documents.

No arrangement with RTE (as recommended by the Arts in Education discussion paper) to show relevant arts education programmes as recommended, etc. appears to have been made or, if so, it is not mentioned. This is a very practical and feasible recommendation which has not been followed through.

Unless the Department of Education recognises the importance of the arts in education and makes adequate financial arrangements, the new syllabus will not be implemented properly. This, however, does not seem to have been taken into account apart from a suggestion that the choice of options be based on school resources, a very obvious and limiting prospect.

The Arts in Education Discussion Paper suggests cross-border projects in the arts, but no provision has been made in the syllabus for special projects of any type.

The Report of the Board of Studies; The Arts, quotes from The Arts in Education saying that any attempt to separate the education of the arts in primary and post-primary level "would reduce the value of the total educational experience". Yet this has not been taken into account in the syllabus.

The new syllabus is based on the traditional end of course exam system. The new syllabus, therefore, becomes invalidated. As recognised by the Board of Studies, an examination process is insufficient to assess the students' abilities to fulfil the aims of

an art education as laid down by the Board of Studies. In order to assess the practicalities and success of the new syllabus, a system of continuous assessment must be implemented.

Adequate financial provision must be made available for this purpose, otherwise the new syllabus becomes merely a revised version of the old syllabus.

Sexual attitudes towards the arts in education will not be removed as suggested by the paper on The Arts in Education, until such attitudes in education in general are removed. The options given in the new syllabus are unfortunately subject to availability of skilled personnel. Metalwork and Woodwork equipment, for example, is more likely to be found in boys schools or technical co-educational schools. This option, therefore, will be made available to boys.

Toymaking, fashion design and puppetry will be favoured by girls schools, with well equipped Social Science\Home Economics facilities.

There appears to be no encouragement of links between the arts and other subjects in the new syllabus. Even the History and Appreciation of Art and Design does not appear to be sufficiently linked with the practical arts. Projects undertaken by students, for example, should be researched historically while the project is being carried out.

Art Education should promote seeing and perceiving rather than just looking. It should encourage an awareness of the world around us, and it should consider how man and nature can work together.

Dance, drama, music and the visual arts, as explored by the discussion paper The Arts in Education, all share a similar rationale. They all play a 'major role in the personal and social development of the human being'.(1) They also play a major role in

the history of civilisation and form the basis of most cultures. They are all a form of self-expression and a means of personal development.

These four disciplines can be used in conjunction with each other to encourage creativity and promote a wide variety of skills. They can also be used collectively or separately to enhance other subjects and make them more enjoyable to students. The discussion paper "The Arts in Education" already points out the fact that one of the key advantages the arts subjects have over other subjects is that they are enjoyable and therefore interesting to students in general.

So many Educational theorists from Rousseau to Dewey and Steiner all advocate experience as the natural educator. Yet we continue to seat our school children in rows and pour information into their heads. To use Paulo Friere's methaphor, we treat them as empty vessels which need to be filled, clones who take no active part in obtaining the information.(2) This is slowly changing in the Irish education system but the rate of change is wasting time and wasting educational opportunities for many. Radical changes need to be made in our education system and, more importantly, in our perception of the nature of education. School should be a place students look forward to coming to and are reluctant to leave. We do not give enough credit to the natural curiosity and self motivation of the human being. The Aer Lingus Young Scientist Competition is living proof that our young people can be self-motivated and produce extraordinary results when they are allowed to discover and progress for themselves. If all school work was project based and all projects intertwined, not only would students be motivated but school studies and real life would no longer be segregated. The subjects studied in school must relate to each other and to real life in order to exploit their full value.

The following is a suggestion for a project based scheme of work for second level students. For each school year a basic theme would be suggested. "Europe in the Middle Ages" for example. Areas of study pertaining to that theme could include Geography, History, Art, Language, Music, Science, Drama, Domestic Science. Maths for example could be studied through Architecture, Ordnance Survey and History of Mathematics. Art could be studied through Costume Design, Painting, Architecture, Sculpture, Ceramics or Textiles. History could be studied through Social History, Political History, Art, Woodwork, Metalwork, and so on. The possibilities of interlinking the subjects are endless. Each student could choose a certain number of study areas, five for example, and spend one day a week working on each area in the form of a mini-project. Teachers would be co-ordinators and advisors, students would gather information themselves, organise it and present it. At the end of each school year each mini project would be presented to the other students and combined to form a large project which would contain information on a wide variety of different aspects of medieval life in Europe. Students would write reviews on projects they were not involved in and so would learn from each other. Projects could also take the form of plays and musicals.

Arguments against a scheme like this would take the form of saying that the limit of a child's concentration span necessitates the forty minute class. But a child's concentration span varies with their interest in the subject and whether they are actively involved in obtaining information or merely passive receptacles. Another argument could be that such a scheme would work only for bright, well-motivated children and that slower children and non-motivated children, with home problems for example, would suffer. This argument holds only if one has a narrow view of motivation.

The key to the scheme is to find what motivates young people and allow them to discover their own motivation to working hard, be it internal rewards or external motivation.

Assessment should be continuous, both internal and external, and involving teachers, parents and pupils. The student reviews of each others' work, for example, could form part of the assessment criteria. This would also be beneficial in teaching the students to be constructively critical in their assessment of others' work.

The ideas put forward in this scheme are ideas and theories that have long been stressed by the great educators of Western European history from Plato to the present day. It was through studying the theories of these educators and through my introduction to the work of psychologists such as Pavlov, Skinner, Bandura, Maslow, Rogers and Combs, and their individual learning theories, that I have reached my own theories and philosophies on education.

My theories are not the result of a rigid belief in any psychologist or philosopher in particular but rather an eclectic of what I perceive as the most positive theories of all. The next Chapter looks at the theories and ideas of the particular educational philosophers and psychologists who have been influential in the formation of my personal understanding of the nature of education and how their theories can be put into practice in the classroom within the existing structure.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) The Arts in Education, A Discussion Paper,
Department of Education, Dublin 1985, P 5.2.
- (2) Paulo Friere, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Penguin Books,
Middlesex, 1972, P 132.

CHAPTER 4

The Great Educators

The child's life is an integral, a total one. He passes quickly and readily from one topic to another, as from one spot to another, but is not conscious of transition or break. There is no conscious isolation, hardly conscious distinction. (1)

Then he goes to school and "various studies dwindle and factionise the world for him". Dewey points out that

Again in school, each of these subjects is classified. Facts are torn away from their original place in experience and rearranged with reference to some general principle. Classification is not a matter of child experience; things do not come to the individual pigeon unholed.

Does it not then make sense to treat school, and so the curriculum, as a continuation of the child's experience up to school age? It is widely agreed there are two approaches to education. Discipline is the watchward of one - interest and self-development is the other. One is logical, the other psychological. Guidance and control versus freedom and initiative. These were attitudes proposed by Dewey as long ago as 1902. Most contemporary teachers would accept the latter model of education despite the fact that the school system very much follows the former.

The ends of education are not fixed. They are changeable and must be modified in relation to shifting environmental conditions, the most important of which are changes in society. (2)

All genuine education is liberating and a major aim of education is to make the child morally responsible so that, as an

adult, he can form his own moral and become reasonably self-sufficient. This can only be achieved by avoiding indoctrination and establishing a framework in the school where the balance between individual desires and social needs can be constantly maintained.

In order to accomplish all of this the teacher must be a well-educated professional. He must have a broad range of general knowledge on which to draw in developing units of instruction for his pupils. He must have a sound grounding in educational theory so that he understands the philosophical, psychological and sociological foundations of education. He must be able to see the reciprocal relation between theory and practical activity without grounding in theoretical science or an abstract science that has little relation to practice. Teaching is a professional activity to the extent that it rests on principles of procedure. As the science of psychology matures this body of theory will become broader and deeper and the expertise of the teacher in promoting effective learning will become greater. Yet he will never become an authority "in matters of morals or merely a model of conduct. His role is to be chief agent for the liberation of the student. (3)

Familiarity breeds contempt but it also breeds something like affection. We get used to the chains we wear and we miss them when removed. (4)

The ideas of men like Plato, Rousseau, Locke, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Dewey, or of women like Maria Montessori, are generally accepted by educators today. School systems, while accepting the humanity of their doctrines, usually strive for compromises between humanitarian and economic factors. Each of the above educators and their followers have put their own particular stamp on the ideal education. Each agree and disagree on various points, some are more practical than others, but all take a humanitarian view. Rousseau's theories of natural education, although ridiculed by many at the time, have survived to inspire many great educationalists. His greatest contribution to education was his book Emile, published in 1762. As a philosopher he tried to achieve a synthesis between Christianity and the rationalist and materialist thought of his

time. His efforts towards a 'natural' education and his search for a freely accepted 'contract' between teachers and pupils have been the seed of all modern pedagogical movements. In the work of Rousseau we find a change in the history of ideas. This change was carried on, albeit in a variety of different formats, by his educational decendants.

Rousseau started a revolution in educational theory that in time completely changed the relationship of teacher and pupil. His insistance that nature is wholly good helped to destroy the harsh system of discipline widely prevalent in his day.

Pestalozzi was sixteen years old when Emile was published and his early reading of Rousseau and his own natural intuition gave rise to humanitarian philosophy of education that in itself was to influence future educators. According to Pestalozzi "the ultimate end of education is not a perfection in the accomplishments of the school but fitness for life". (5) Pestalozzi stressed the necessity of never losing sight of childrens' needs. Education systems should never bury children in their rigid structures and the individuality of the child should remain of paramount importance.

John Dewey was particularly inspired by Rousseau and he believed strongly in the development of independent judgement and the harmony of needs and abilities, the founding of a general humanity and not a training of people to fill set roles.

Both Rousseau and Dewey believed that the most important thing for the healthy and natural development of the child during the early years was that she should learn to use her physical powers, especially the sense organs. As the child gets older he should continue to learn through experience and should not be forced to bow to commands but to necessities.

The child should gain knowledge through natural curiosity and independent of longwinded unnatural studying. Although most educationalists agree on these principles in general, we still find children forced to sit in rows and have facts and figures poured into their heads without any regard for their natural curiosity and the short attention span of the average child. We should not treat the child as an "empty vessel" to use Paulo Friere's analogy. Educating the masses as we see it at present, does not allow for the individuality of the child and produces clones for a commercial society.

Maria Montessori, who concentrated on the education of the child in the early years of life, believed the function of education was to liberate the child by providing him with the necessary tools to learn for himself when he is ready. This puts the teacher firmly in the role of assistant to the learning experience of the child, not as a dictator.

The teacher should assist the children in co-ordinating the learning experience and be a supportive mentor and friend rather than an authoritarian figure.

I stress the word "friend" as I believe it is possible to be a friend to your students as well as a teacher. A friend, according to the Oxford Dictionary of current English, is a "person with whom one enjoys mutual affection and regard". When allowed the freedom to do so children will learn as much from each other and maybe more so than from the teacher. It is this atmosphere of mutual respect and affection that I would aim to foster in a classroom situation. Having already outlined a possible alternative syllabus I would now like to outline ways in which I see a teacher bringing the ideas of educators like Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Dewey and Carl Rogers into the classroom within the existing structure of the Irish education system.

Having already stated my belief that the teacher should be a friend to his or her students, the next most important function I would see a teacher fulfil would be that of assistant to the student throughout her educational experiences. A teacher should take on the roles of technical assistant, reference book, co-ordinator and general stalwart to the student. A teacher should never directly give information to a student but rather help the student discover the answers for him or herself. A teacher should encourage students to see mistakes as part of the learning experience and as a stable platform on which to build. A teacher should encourage students to look to him or her for assistance rather than force the assistance upon the student. A teacher should not seek to directly influence or motivate the student but rather encourage self motivation in the student. A teacher should encourage critical self-assessment in the student. A teacher should encourage students to vocalise their opinions, theories, ideas and perceptions. A teacher should always take into account the individuality of the student and encourage that individuality. A teachers' language should always be positive and should encourage the use of positive language in his or her students.

Most of these suggestions are in line with the ideas of the humanistic psychologists. Maslow, for instance, suggests "teachers should help and let children grow and learn". Rogers says "teachers should be trusting, sincere, prize students and sympathise with them". Combs believes "teachers should be sensitive, trusting, confident, versatile". (6) Robert Biehler and Jack Snowman, in suggesting ways of using humanistic techniques in the classroom, provide similar counsel to the teachers. (7) However, they also suggest being "a helpful teacher rather than a friend". (8)

In my view there are different levels of friendship and it is not possible to fulfil the above criteria without involving yourself in some level of friendship with your students.

To sum up, I would suggest that teachers be aware that they, like their pupils, are human and therefore not infallible and, like their students, live and learn from their experiences.

Footnotes

- (1) John Dewey - The Child and the Curriculum.
University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1964.
- (2) R.D. Archambault - John Dewey on Education. Selected Writings.
ibid - Introduction.
- (3) ibid - Introduction.
- (4) ibid P 355.
- (5) R.R. Rusk - Doctrines of the Great Educators.
Gill and MacMillan, London, 1979, P 139.
- (6) Biehler and Snowman - Psychology applied to Teaching.
Fifth Edition. Houghton, Mufflin Company, Boston 1986. P 384.
- (7) ibid P 385.
- (8) ibid P 406\407.

CHAPTER 5

A Retrospective View of my Personal Work and an Evaluation of the Project undertaken with a Section of my Students.

In their traditional roles of wife and mother, an increasing awareness by women of their value and worth to society has been aided to an enormous extent by better education for women and by the womens' movement. Feminist literature and thinking are now widely accepted but the power of centuries of social conditioning is difficult to ignore. Reading and accepting feminist teachings helps women to see themselves in a more positive light but still does not alleviate womens' inbred low self-esteem. In Paula J. Caplan's book Women's Masochism, The Myth Destroyed, she sets out to dispute the myth of women's natural passivity and masochistic tendencies. She cites as one of the main contributors to the myth, Sigmund Freud and his followers, many of whom were women of high social standing, as well as being respected for their education. Helene Deutsch, for example, who described women as naturally masochistic, narcissistic and passive, stated that these were three fundamental feminine traits. Marie Bonaparte, another well known and respected analyst, also supported this theory. The most important consequence this

myth has for women as Caplan sees it is that

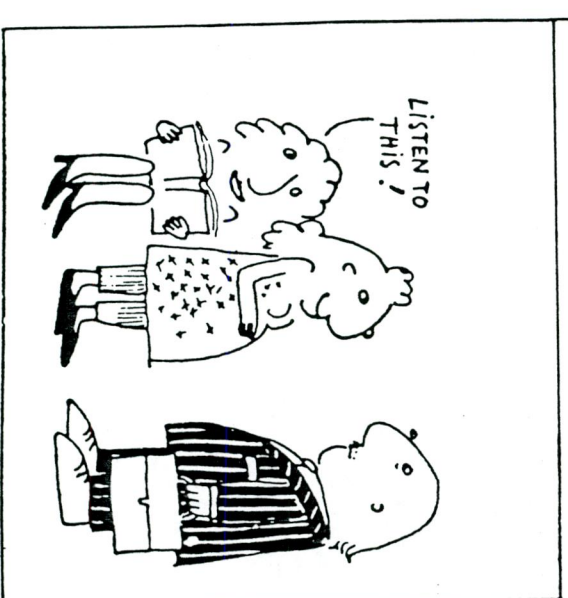
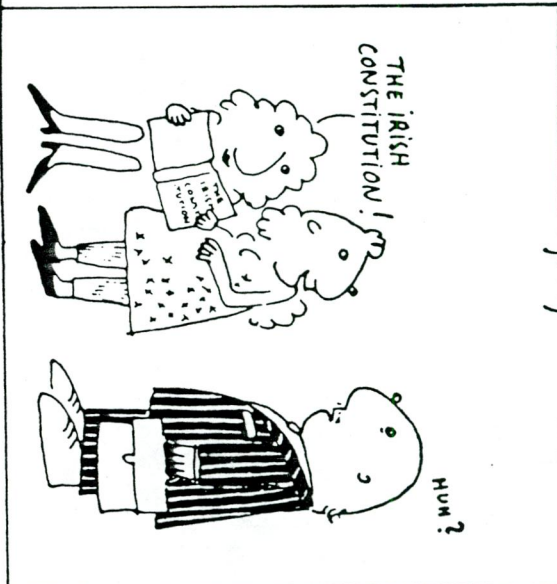
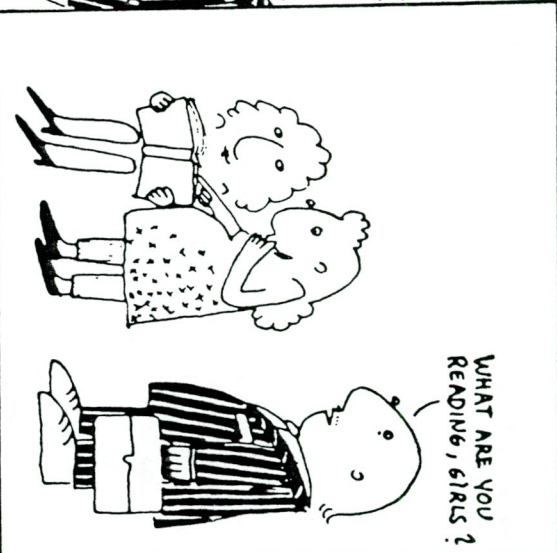
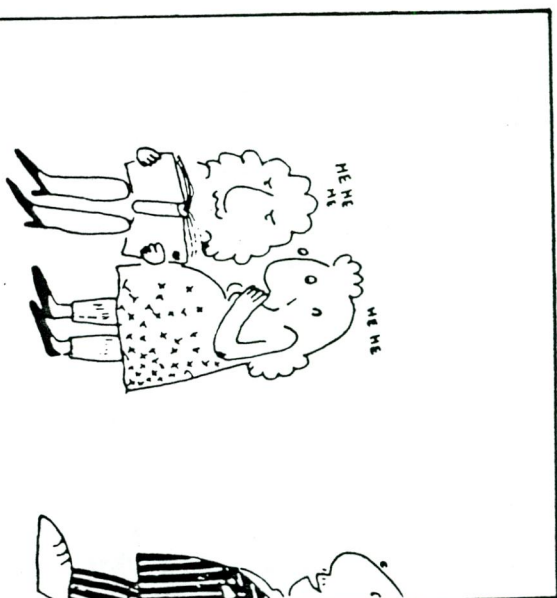
It is a powerful block against social action that could help women. Because of the myth women's problems can be attributed to our deep seated psychological needs; and not to the social institutions that are really the primary causes of the trouble. (1)

Western civilisation is full of such deep rooted myths about women and women's sexuality. Earlier in this Chapter we looked at the origins of some of these myths. Yet now that we can trace their history and refute most of them, as Caplan and other feminist writers have so successfully done, how can we undo the harm caused to women by them.

The main problem is of course that many of these myths are still believed and accepted by the vast majority of people and upheld by 'experts' who refuse to believe they may have been wrong. This is where education comes in. Education is the only way to reverse the damage done to women by these myths. It is not by any means an impossible task. It was only recently that Pre-Menstrual Tension (P.M.T.) was accepted widely as a physical condition stemming from hormonal imbalances, and not a psychological one. Now, it is accepted by courts of law as a valid reason for uncharacteristic, violent behaviour in women who have not been treated for the hormonal imbalances that are often the cause of such behaviour.

It is not only the Catholic church however, that reinforces these myths today. The advertising media also does so through its exploitation of the female body. In examining this exploitation, it becomes obvious that there is little or no correlation between these fragmented images of women with which we are bombarded by the media, and the reality of real women. The last thing I feel like doing when I am mopping the kitchen floor is dancing around singing a song in praise of the particular detergent I am using. Neither am

Anja Kayema



Shir Kajima 200

What's the ugliest part of your body?



You just said, "my feet" didn't you?
That's typical.
Most women feel their feet are the
least attractive part of their body.
Up until now all a woman could do was
hide them.

But now there's something you can
do to make them pretty.
Not just passable. Pretty.
Now there's a product named,
appropriately enough, Pretty Feet.
Pretty Feet is a pleasant roll-off lotion.
Pour a little on your fingers every day
of the week and rub it into your feet.
Then see the rough, dead skin
roll right off.

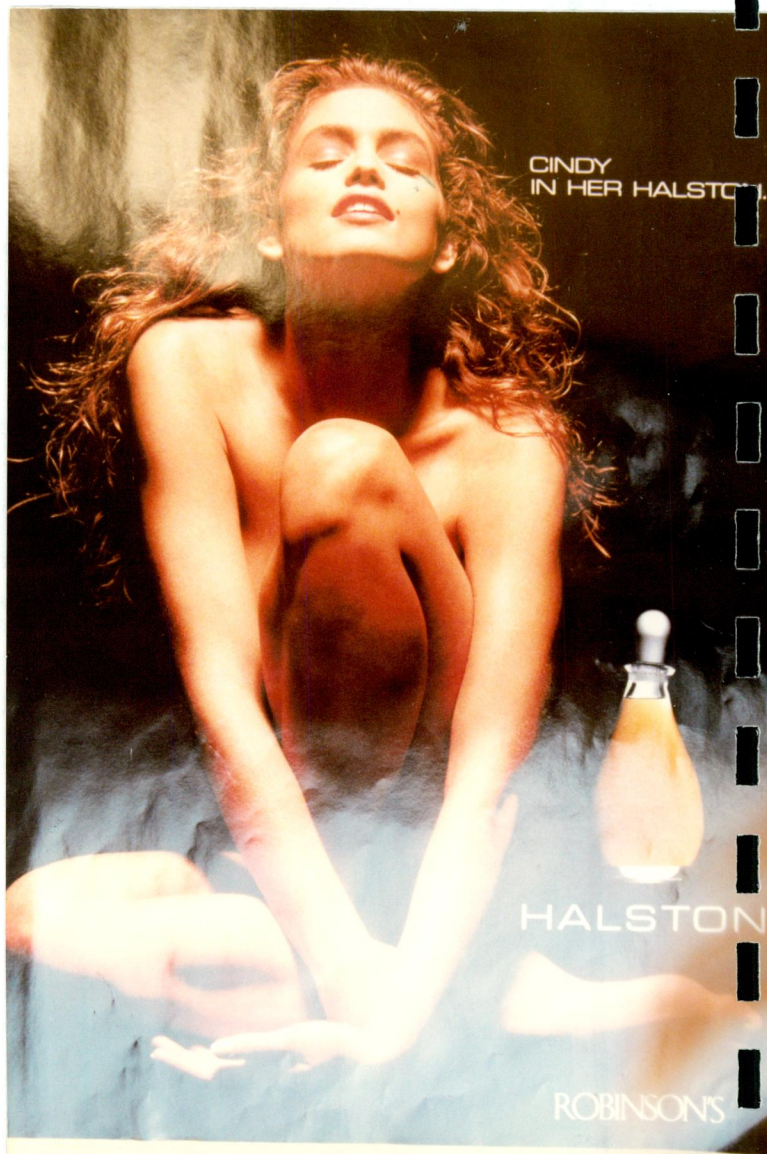
Soon you'll have beautiful feet that can
wear open sandals... lovely feet that won't hide
in the sand at the beach... smooth feet that won't run
stockings... soft feet that will be as sexy as
the rest of you.

If you're genuinely interested in making
the ugliest part of your body pretty, we'll be happy
to start you off with a free sample bottle of Pretty Feet.

Just write to Pretty Feet, Dept. G8,
Chemway Corp., Fairfield Road, Wayne, New Jersey.

ILL'8 Vogue
1962
Advertisment

ILL'9 Vogue
1991
Advertisment.



I dressed in my best clothes, complete with a perfect mask of make-up. I suspect not many other real women are either. Yet it is constantly insinuated by the media that we should always look our glamorous best for even the dirtiest household chores. We should also always be wearing a tolerant beaming smile when our husbands and children come running to us with filthy underwear to wash. The list of examples are too numerous to detail in the context of this project. Suffice to say, the media has played its part in creating the myth of the perfect woman, an image towards which all women should aspire.

Ideal beauty is a concept that the advertising media has capitalised on in particular. We are constantly bombarded by images of the perfect woman: perfection of body and facial features; mindless, soulless images of beauty. But there is no such ideal. With feminine beauty, "the ideal" varies from age to age, from culture to culture. A golden tan in some cultures may be the ideal but in Japan the whiter the skin, the more beautiful the woman. Ideal body weight can vary from eight and a half stone for a five foot four inch woman in Western Europe, to twenty three stone for a Tuareg woman of the Sahara in Africa. Notions of beauty can form a social tyranny and if you don't conform to the ideal you are a failure. Ill'8. However, as there is no universally held ideal, there can be no failure. For young women growing up in most societies, there are certain expectations to conform to as ideal. Women in Western civilisation today are expected to be liberated, progressive, forceful and yet also conform to the media's and the church's conflicting images of the ideal. Ill'9.

This is a fragmented image of the ideal women in Western societies. Pious, caring, mother, wife, and homemaker on the one hand and beautiful, well-groomed career woman on the other. This is the result of traditional values conflicting with modern ideas





ILL'10 Untitled by Cindy Sherman

regarding women's role in society. Economic circumstances during World War One and Two forced the British housewife into the world of industry. When peace came and the male population returned from the War, the women, glorying in their new found independence and confidence in their abilities, refused to return to the slavery of the home. The beginning of independence for women, however, began with the suffragettes of the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, and women's right to vote in democratic elections. The Irish women were among the first in Europe to "get the vote" and a strong women's movement in Ireland during the late Sixties and early Seventies, documented in June Levine's book Sisters continued the work of the early feminists. Once Irish women came out from behind their aprons they more than proved themselves in industry, in parliament, in the courts, and in the world of finance and education.

The recent election of Ireland's first female President, Mary Robinson, and our many distinguished female writers, artists, politicians, and so on, help to reinforce the growing awareness of their own capabilities in young Irish women today. However, to be successful and to be a woman means twice the effort in comparison to their male counterparts, and when women do 'make it' there is always the veiled innuendo that they only 'made it' because of luck or knowing the "right" people. In order to combat the fragmented images women have of themselves, and indeed the conflicting images men have of the ideal woman, education must stress the development of a positive self-image from early childhood onwards. The young child must see himself\herself as a person first and foremost, and only then as a male or female person.

Discovering the work of female artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro, Cindy Sherman, Ill'10, Mary Kelly, and other feminist artists, had a profound effect on my own

work. Painting was always something I enjoyed, something I could lose myself in and become my own person. For a long time I painted purely for the joy of painting, manipulating the medium of paint and exploring colour. Gradually the concept of painting as a means to express myself and transmit my ideas became increasingly important and I began to explore my own feelings about being female in today's society through my paintings.

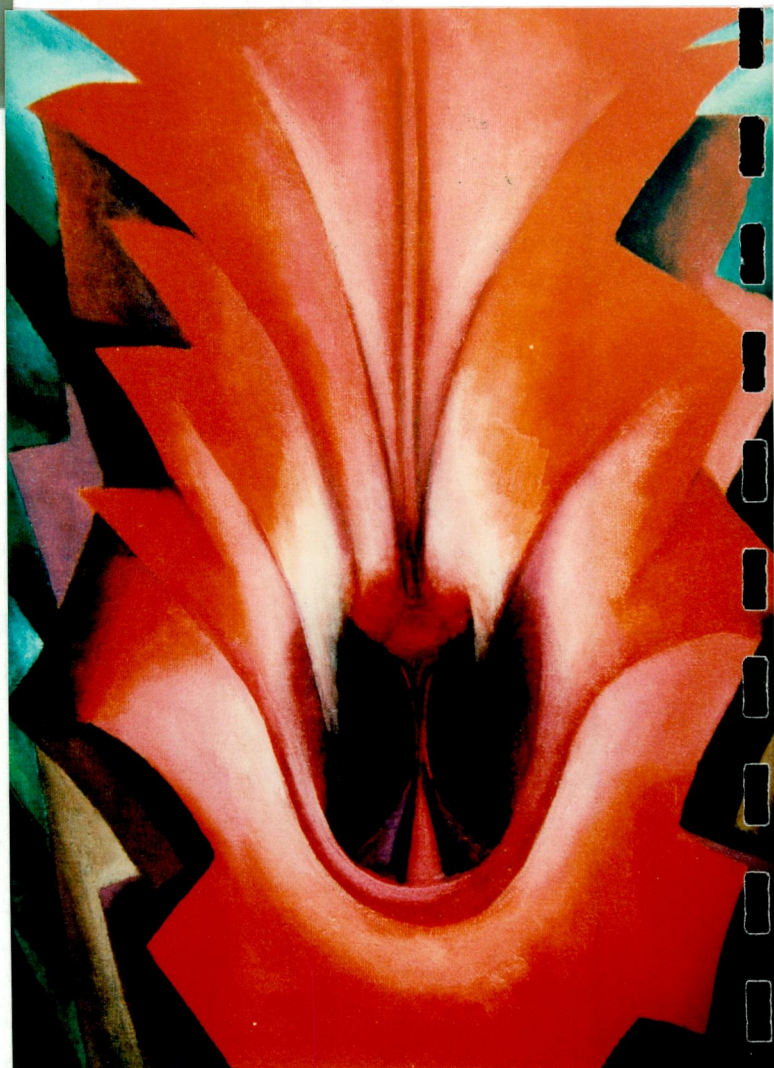
The theme for my personal area of major study for my Final Year grew from my work in Third Year. My interest centred on the natural beauty of the female form and the symbolic connections, both physical and metaphorical, between the female and floral forms. In a Thematic Art History project during the course of my Final Academic year I traced the use of flowers and plant forms throughout the history of art and looked at the use of the flower\female symbolic connection. However it is very difficult to explain a painting with the written word. A painting is purely visual and it is the visual experience that is important. The delicate yet powerful colours found in nature fascinate me, in particular those found in floral forms. The impressionistic technique is hailed as having captured the essential light in nature on canvas. But nature already uses this loose "brush stroke" and pure colour technique. Look at the Orchid for instance, or the splashes of colour leading the honeybee into the Foxglove. We cannot improve on the colour in nature, nor can we dominate it. We must not fight it but allow colour to dominate us and act as pure initiative and allow an instinctive colour sense to take over.

The constant struggle to capture the essence of colour in paint is only beginning for me and I feel I have a long way to go. My first painting in the series is purely experimental and the photographs taken of the painting in all it's stages are fundamental to the experimental process. This struggle to capture the essence



ILL'11 Flower Abstraction
by Georgia O' Keeffe

ILL'12 Flower Abstraction
by Gorgia O' Kefffe.



of colour goes hand in hand with the attempt to capture the essence of woman, fragments of female bodies floating in space are strong, forceful images, the gestures are graceful yet purposeful, echoing the positive attributes of women. This can be seen as an attempt to use typical media representation of the female form to describe the incredible qualities of women. It is another way of looking at the female body, not something fragile and symbolically beautiful, not something to be put on display to be used and discarded as merely an object, the body and the women go hand in hand, the body is indigenous to the woman and vice versa.

The flower paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe had a profound effect on my work, although O'Keeffe constantly struggled to refute the theories that her work was an unconscious expression of her femininity, she nonetheless influenced the work of many women artists whose work was an expression of their femaleness. When I first saw her work in the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in New York, I immediately saw her large semi-abstractions of floral forms as an expression of femininity. Ill'11 & 12. This was without knowing anything about O'Keeffe's life or her work. The theories that abounded about O'Keeffe's work during the 1920's relates her work to the status of women's art, a status she angrily rebelled against. "Hailed as the epitome of emancipated womanhood, she was accorded star status, but only at the top of a female class'.(1) O'Keeffe herself commented that "The men liked to put me down as the best woman painter. I think I'm one of the best painters."(2)

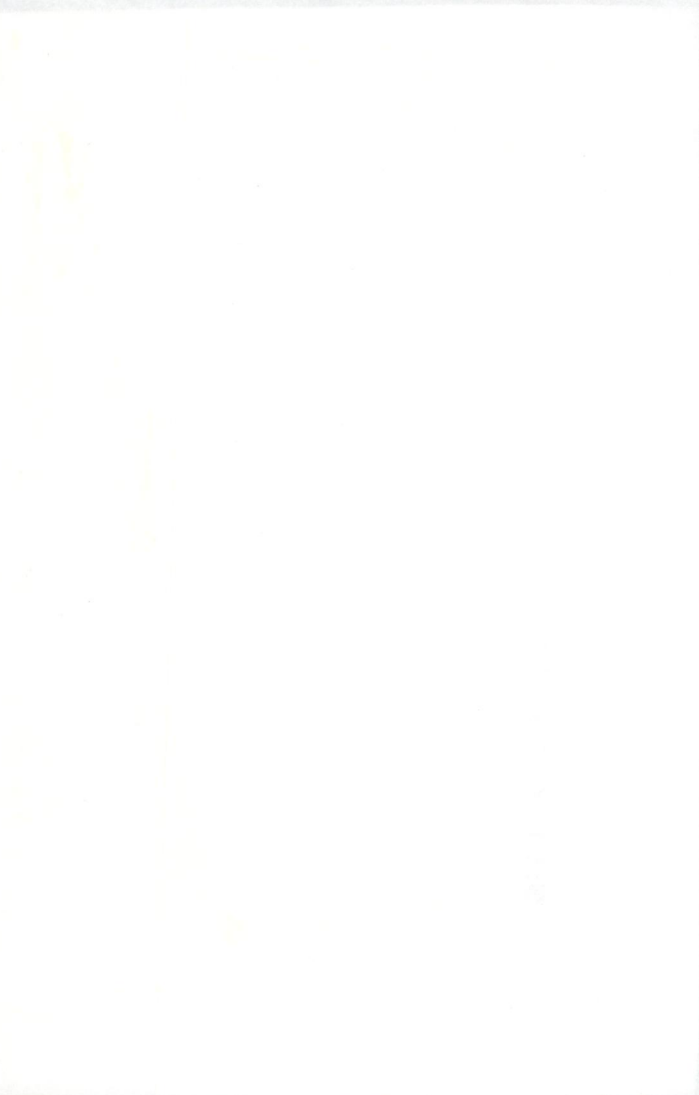
The feminist movement in the arts reached its peak in America during the Seventies.

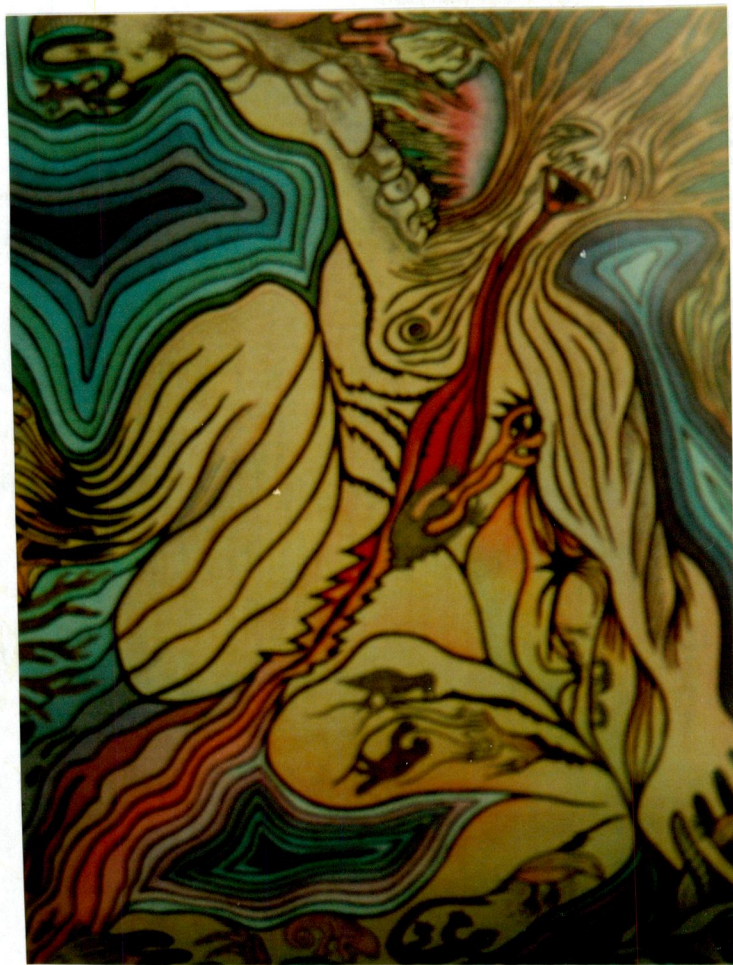
During this period Chicago and Schapiro both made the transition from geometric abstractions in sculpture and painting, to works specific to women's experiences of themselves and their bodies in which open, central forms predominated. Ill'13. Central core imagery was part of an attempt to celebrate sexual difference and affirm woman's otherness by replacing connotations of women's inferiority with those of pride in the female body and spirit. (3)

In her book Through the flower, Judy Chicago describes her fear of displaying herself so intimately through her work, her terror of having her work rejected and dismissed by her colleagues and critics. It was through her teaching experiences in the first feminist art course at the California State College at Fresno and a subsequent feminist art programme at the California School of the Arts in Los Angeles, that Chicago encountered the powerful support to be found among a group of women with a common goal.

Having been a member of an all-female class in College since Second Year, I too have experienced this sense of sisterhood. Having no male students in our class to compare ourselves with we experienced little or none of the bias that serves to segregate students work into male and female categories. Had I had male colleagues throughout my years in college, they might have served to influence my work in a different direction, but as I have not had that experience, I cannot say whether or not I would have pursued the particular path I have chosen. Many of the young women in my class are also in the process of exploring women and women's issues through their art and the constant discussion and exchange of ideas between us, has also had an influence on my painting. I have little fear of exploring my own femininity through my painting in the presence of my female colleagues, and I can only wonder if I would have had the freedom to express myself in this way in an all-male or mixed class.

Through exploring the floral forms in nature in a variety of media, my aim is to come to terms with my experiences of being female and to cast aside years of sexual repression inflicted on me by society. Through my research over the past four years in college I have discovered and tried to come to terms with this repression of the female. I now understand why Irish women in general are





ILL'13
The Tree of Life
 by Judy Chicago.

ILL'14 The Abandoned Doll
 by Suzanne Valdon.



uncomfortable with their naked bodies, why we refuse to see ourselves as perfect in merely existing and why we allow ourselves to be repressed, often not even realising we are being repressed. Ill'14. However, to ignore the power of such conditions by society is extremely difficult and I see my painting as a way to celebrate my femaleness without revealing myself totally to the world. Hopefully the future will bring me the confidence in myself and in my work to come out from behind symbolic forms and reveal my true self. This can only be achieved by rising above my fear of criticism and rejection and having the confidence in my own ability to reject the views of others who fail to understand me or my work.

I would hope to pass on this confidence to my students, to encourage themselves to see the positive aspects of their character and their work. While I would encourage my students to accept constructive criticism, I would also encourage them to analyse this criticism in terms of the critics experience of themselves as persons and of their work. Although constructive criticism can be helpful to a student, too much criticism or negative criticism can have a severely restrictive effect on development. Students overburdened by criticism can develop a fear of it and this can retard personal development, as to move forward can involve risk and invite criticism. During the course of my final year I taught one day a week in Scanta Maria College in Ballyrowan in order to gain teaching experience.

The aim of the school based project I undertook with my students was to encourage them to see males and females of any society or culture as a person first and then as a particular sex. In order to achieve this the students created a papier mache head, took a mask from this and then decorated both the head and the mask to differentiate between the sexes of their chosen culture. The following is an outline of this project.

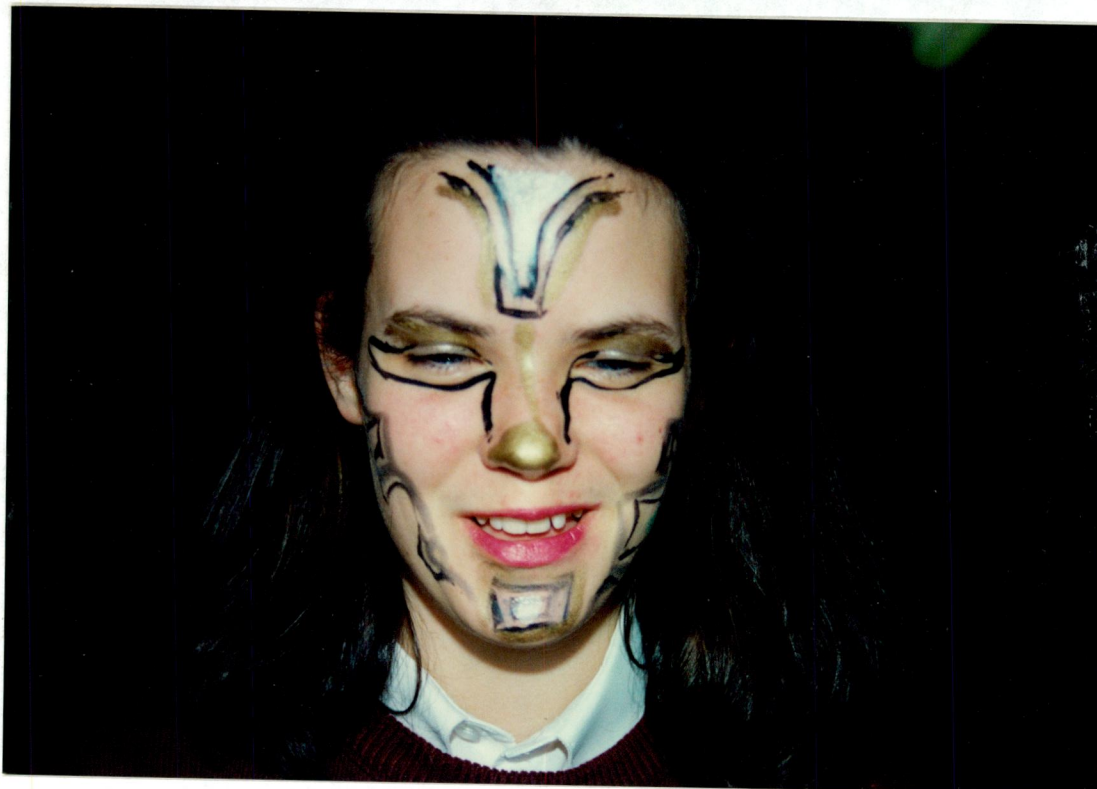




ILL'15 & 16; Students of Scanta Maria College Ballyrowan
studying form through plasticine modelling.



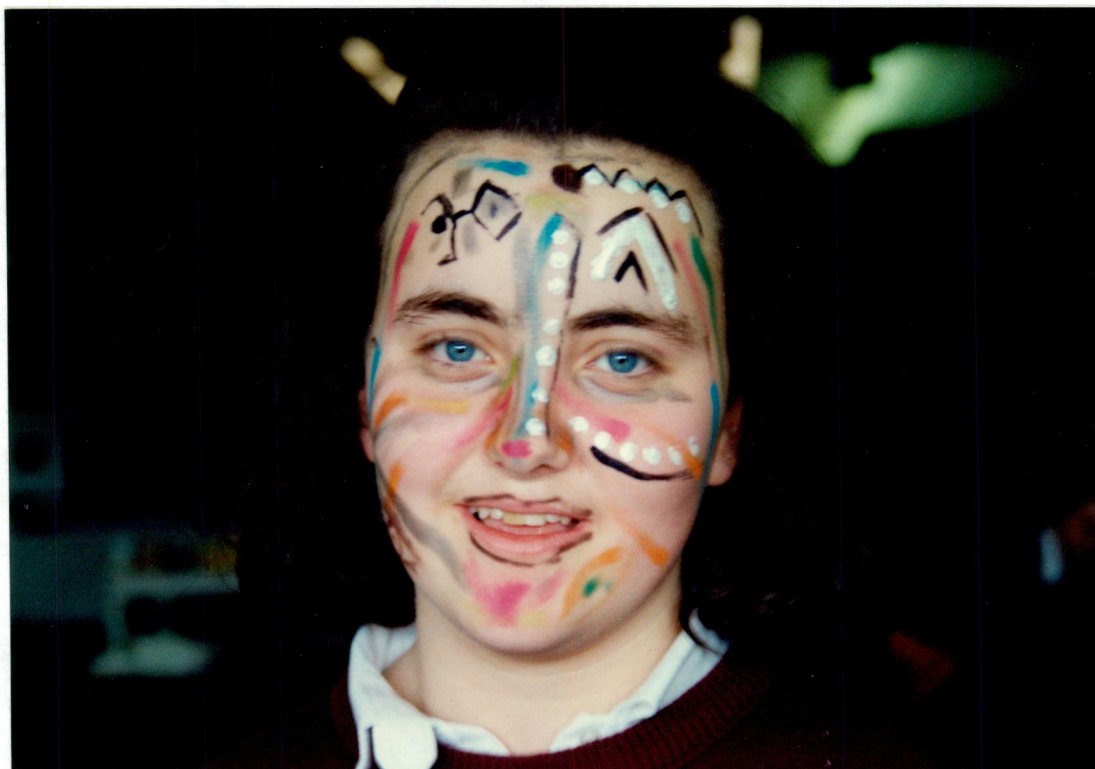




ILL'17 Egyptian facial decoration.

Students from Scanta Maria College Ballyrowan studing the styalization of facial features by various cultures.

ILL'18 African facial decoration.







ILL'19 Japanese facial decoration.



ILL'20 American Indian facial decoration.

The basic concepts of art being line, colour, form, texture, pattern, shape and so on can be taught in a variety of ways. In fact the possibilities are endless. However, in order to motivate students these concepts should be firmly rooted in the reality of the students' experience. These concepts must be given a relevance to the everyday life of the student. Ideally, an approach to these concepts should explore several secondary concepts and themes.

After having repeatedly encountered the assumption that "art begins and ends with Western European culture" among second level students I decided to approach a selection of the basic artistic concepts with a view to introducing the students to various other artistic cultures. I began with exploring form using their own faces as a theme and using shape to describe form. This class took the form of choosing basic cut paper shapes which best described form in the face and created a collage of the face. This approach also served to reintroduce the concept of light describing form which we had studied earlier.

We went on to describe form in three dimensional plasticine modelling. Ill'15 & 16. Having ensured that the students understood the structure of the human head and facial features the next step was to look at how various cultures stylized form through facial decoration and how they too might use facial decoration in a symbolic way to describe facial structure. Ill'17, 18,19 & 20. I then broke the class up into groups of four students and asked them to choose a culture they were interested in and research their methods of facial decoration and the symbolic reasons behind it. The next step was to create a human head in 3-D using papier mache, create a mask from that and decorate both head and mask in a modern rendering of their chosen culture. Ill'21. One form would be male, the other female, and the method of stylization and decoration should echo the sexes. This would help them examine the male\female

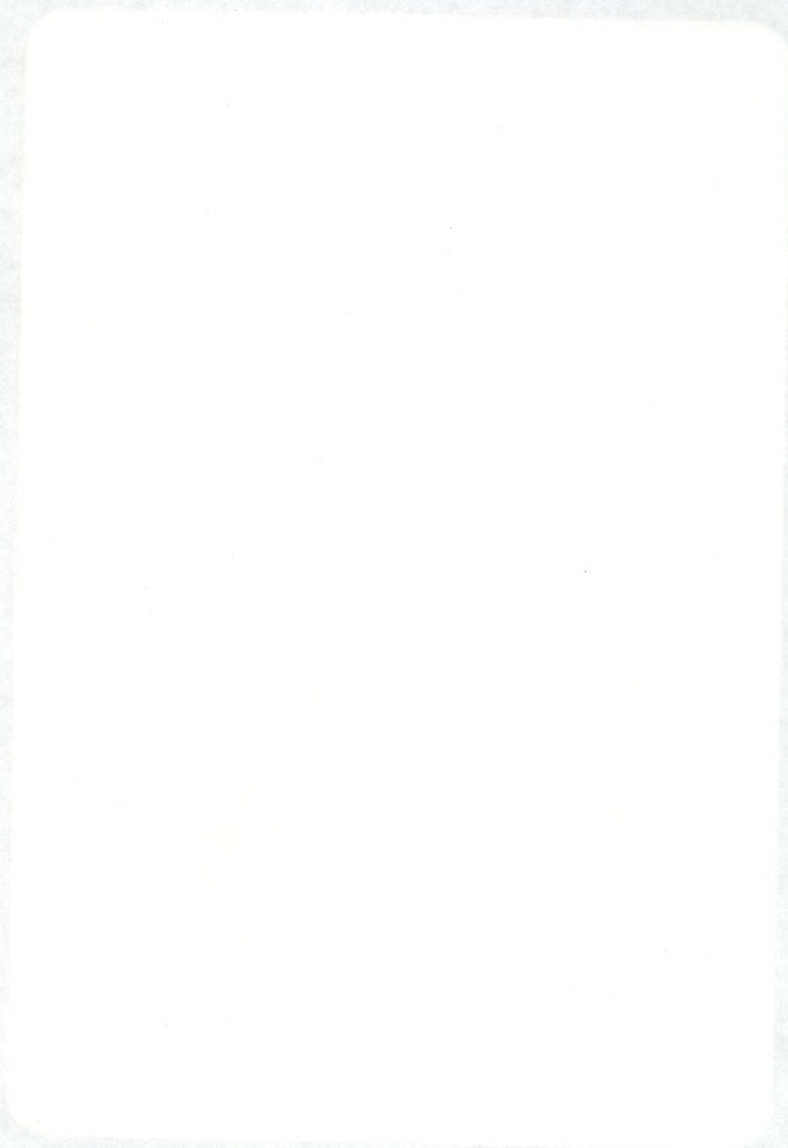
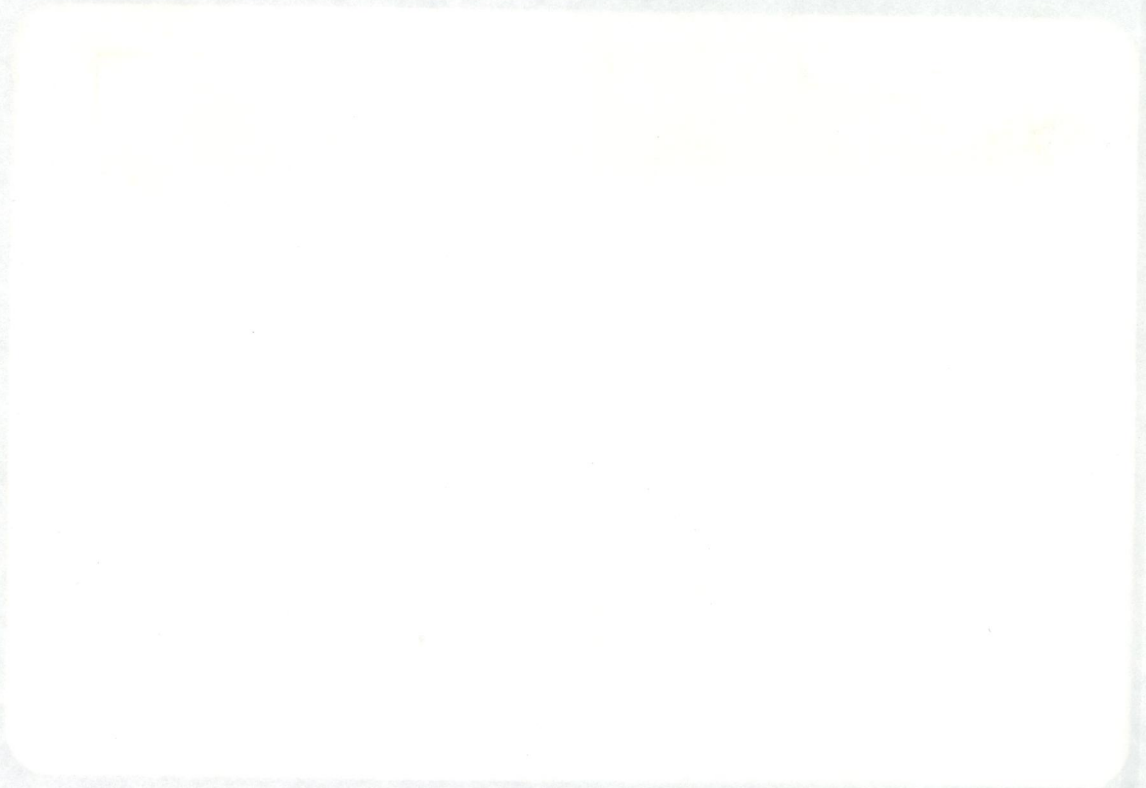




ILL'21 Making papier mache puppet heads.



ILL'22 East Indian.





ILL'23 Mexican; male and female.



ILL'24 Egyptian.

of various cultures, a small dramatic performance served to articulate their views on this. The puppets were large enough for the student to hide behind and the body of the puppet consisted of two sticks in a cross format to form torso and shoulders. Loosely draped clothing allowed the puppeteer to use her own hands and arms as the limbs of the puppets. Ill'22,23 &24. I videoed the students operating the puppets and while hiding behind the puppets and pretending the puppet was speaking the student described the differences in the daily life of the sexes of their chosen culture. The research involved in this project provided the students with the opportunity to examine sex roles in various cultures and so compare them with their own culture. The students also learnt from each others research.

The project was a success in that it also enabled students to study form in the human head in detail while also studying the sociology of a variety of cultures. The project also taught the students to work in groups and as most of the learning experience was self directed it has given them greater confidence in their own abilities. Undertaking a project of this type also helped me to prove my theory that children are self motivated if given the correct conditions to work in and the freedom to learn through mistakes and experience. This project proved to be just as much a learning experience for me as for my students and gave me greater confidence in my ability as a teacher.

Footnotes

- (1) Paula J. Caplan, Women's Masochism: The Myth Destroyed.
Cox & Wyman, England 1985.
- (2) Chadwick, Whitney - Art, Women and Society.
Thames and Hudson, London 1990. P 288.
- (3) *ibid.* P 284.
- (4) *ibid.* P 321.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has been an attempt to analyse the sociological, historical and cultural factors that have had their effect on women in today's society. Being a woman in Irish society today, these factors have also influenced my life and, ultimately, my work as a painter and a teacher. In researching and completing this project I have learnt much about myself as a woman, an artist and an educator. This new knowledge will benefit my personal work and my teaching once I leave the organised structure of college life. My interest in the subjects discussed in this project has not fully been satisfied by their limitations of this work and I hope to continue my research in the future, perhaps through a Masters in Art Education. Some time in the future for me my career as an artist and a teacher is only beginning and this dissertation has helped to clarify my ideas and theories. Finally, to sum up, I believe that in order to become a good educator a teacher must first appreciate herself and be confident in her abilities in her chosen field in order to promote a sense of self worth in her students.

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