



NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN  
COLAISTE NAISIUNTA EALAINÉ IS DEARTHÁ

SYMBOLS AS AN INQUIRY INTO VISUAL LITERACY

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education  
in  
Candidacy for the

B.A. Degree in Art and Design Education

by

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"Breadth and balance; in the final phase of compulsory schooling every young person should have a wide range of educational experiences. Particular attention must be given to reinforcing and developing the skills of *numeracy, literacy and oracy*. Particular emphasis should be given to social and environmental education, science and technology and modern language". 1

Ironically this quotation is taken from the 'aims and principals' of the Art, Craft and Design syllabus of the new Junior Certificate. Visual literacy has been blatantly omitted. How can "Breadth and balance" in education not recognise the need for development of that sense which we use throughout our waking hours; the visual?

The same syllabus paper also states;

"Art, Craft and Design are there inter-dependant disciplines. They are fundamental to human existence, predating written language. They play a major role in human evolution and development. Each involves a different way of thinking:

- . Art emphasises ideas, feelings and visual qualities.
- . Craft emphasises the right use of tools and materials.
- . Design emphasises planning, problem-solving and completion, using drawing as a means of thinking.

These unite in the basic human drive to shape the world for functional purposes, and to express and communicate ideas and feelings." 2

This contradiction of thought has become more apparent to me throughout my four years as a student teacher. Without being biased as a teacher of art, I can say that I believe visual literacy is of the utmost importance for both artists and non-artists in our society, as well as for pupils in a school context.

I agree with Donis A. Dondis when she says in her book, " A Primer of Visual Literacy;

"The world did not arrive at a high level of verbal literacy quickly or easily... The problem is no different for visual literacy... a definition of visual literacy is as more than just seeing, more than just making visual messages. Visual literacy implies understanding, the means for seeing and sharing meaning with some level of predictable universality. To accomplish this requires reaching beyond the innate visual powers of the human organism, reaching beyond the intuitive capabilities programmed into us for making visual decisions on a more or less common basis, and reaching beyond personal preference and individual taste." 3

One of the aims of this dissertation is to show that visual communication and understanding are innate in humankind throughout a diversity of times and cultures. In order to do this it proved necessary to start with Man's earliest form of visual expression, and follow a theme through to the present day. In carrying out my research, both historical and



educational, it became apparent to me that the need and ability to express through symbols was and is a part of our basic development. A multitude of complex ideas, which would require many words to express, can be imparted in an instant through a visual symbol.

Prehistoric man and young children appear to have realised this but, the potential these symbols possess is often overlooked in education. I believe it is crucial to develop the inherent capability children have to explore and communicate in this way. I will deal with the details of children's art in a later chapter.

If I, as an educator and artist can tap natural visual ability innate in myself and my pupils, then I will have a strong basis on which to improve visual fluency.

The dictionary definition of a symbol is; "a thing representing or typifying something" and symbolism is; "representation - of abstract ideas - by means of symbols". 4 As a symbol is a 'representation' rather than the 'thing', it is generally simple, but with complex meaning. Could we have a world without symbols? How dominant and useful

are they?

We have the sceptre as a symbol of power; an English business-man has his brief-case and umbrella as status symbols; 5 African body scars denotes tribe and rank to a stranger; what is a dove with an olive branch? What do you mean when you cross your fingers? 6 The deaf communicate through hand signals - indeed, according to Desmond Morris, every move we make is a symbol of our feelings and thoughts. 7

We are surrounded by an abundance of varied symbols, however I will concentrate on circular or spiral symbols throughout each area of research. This stems from my personal interest in Megalithic Irish art and the mystery of the triple spiral. This simple motif seems to have been sufficient to describe the meaning and outcome of life. 8

Mandala symbols - which take a circular or spiral form - have been popularised by Carl G. Jung. 9 Mandalas also express this "greater meaning" and can also be personal expressions of the self;

"The centre is symbolic of the external potential. From the same inexhaustible source of all seeds grow and develop, all cells realise their function; even down to the atom there is none without its

nucleus... the centre principle manifest itself through man in the same way as it does through a flower or a star; in it we may discover our cosmic commonality - our cosmic community". 10 J. and M. Arguelles.

I intend to use these ideas as starting points and links between my own work, my discussion of Education and of the school project; and finally demonstrate the relevance of visual heritage to all of these areas.



### Footnotes

1. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, The Junior Certificate Art, Craft Design syllabus, An Roinn Oideachais, Dublin, 1989, P.1.
2. Ibid, P.2.
3. Donis A. Dondis, A Primer of Visual Literacy, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachussetts, 1974, P.182.
4. The Educational Company Ltd, The Educational Dictionary, Collins Press, Great Britain, 1982, P.277.
5. Henry Dreyfuss, Symbol Sourcebook
6. Carl G. Jung, Man and his Symbols, Aldus Books Ltd, London, 1974, P.53.
7. Desmond Morris, Manwatching - a field guide to human behaviour, Equinox Ltd, London, 1982, P.17.
8. Michael J. O'Kelly, Newgrange - Archaeology, art and legend, Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1982, P.147.
9. Carl G. Jung, Mandala Symbolism, translated by R.F.C. Hull, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, U.S.A, 1972, P.7.
10. Jose and Miriam Arguelles, Mandala, Shambhala Publications Inc., Boston, Massachussetts, 1972, P.51

## II HISTORY AND MEANING OF SYMBOLS; THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MY PROJECT.

In order to understand my own identity as a receiver of art heritage I will follow a theme of symbolism through art history to the present day. I will in general be dealing with symbols which hold a meaning that can be applied to a variety of cultures and times. Whether these universal symbols exist or not is a controversial question.

What would constitute a universal symbol? If a specific figure that is found in all cultures, had a similar meaning in each culture, it would be regarded as being universal. One aspect of the debate over the existence of universal symbols is the lack of agreement over a means of judging what evidence serves as concrete proof.

The word "symbol" has had a long and interesting career in Western thought; The Greek word *sumbolos* was used over 2,000 years ago to denote a thing which had been divided and was rejoined. <sup>1</sup> For example, two friends would break a token in half, on meeting later only the original halves could be rejoined. Therefore the rejoining of the token was proof of the mutual

relationship of the two people involved. In this instance a tangible thing represented the abstract notion of friendship.

Michael Gibson in his book 'The Symbolists' 2 reaffirms this notion of symbol. He talks of the Greek word *symballen* (to put together) as a term used for business transactions. Gibson suggests that when two men agreed while transacting a deal, they would break a shard of pottery, as before, each would keep a half. Subsequently, if a messenger was sent to complete the transaction the piece of pottery would symbolise the agreement made.

The Irish Educational dictionary states that a symbol is, "a thing representing something". 3 It could be said that a person's pulse (a thing) represents the fact that the person is alive (the something). But, because of the fact that this relationship is a natural one and not just a cultural convention means that the pulse would be more correctly constitute an *index*. Equally so, symbols should not be confused with *icons* which actually bear a physical resemblance to that which they represent.



Henceforth, I will use the word 'symbol' as defining an abstract motif which depicts a thing or idea. Richard L. Anderson provides me with an explanation as to why I have chosen to research a particular symbol drawing on both scientific and mythological evidence;

Symbolism is an iceberg.... whose submerged features are accessible only at the cost of a great outlay of effort and ingenuity. In the past, very little enlightenment has been provided by either the tough-minded scientist... or the armchair romantic... The modicum of insight we now have has come from pursuing a middle course between these two extremes. 5

I believe that there are beliefs, feelings and ideas which are best described as succinctly as possible through symbols. Many of these messages to be expressed are abstract or philosophical ones. A visual image is capable of expressing much more at one glance than a letter or number. The visual image also allows for greater interpretation, unless the meaning has been specified and commonly accepted. Obviously contemporary symbols are more easily recognisable to us than those of our ancestors and equally so, local symbols mean more than those of distant cultures.

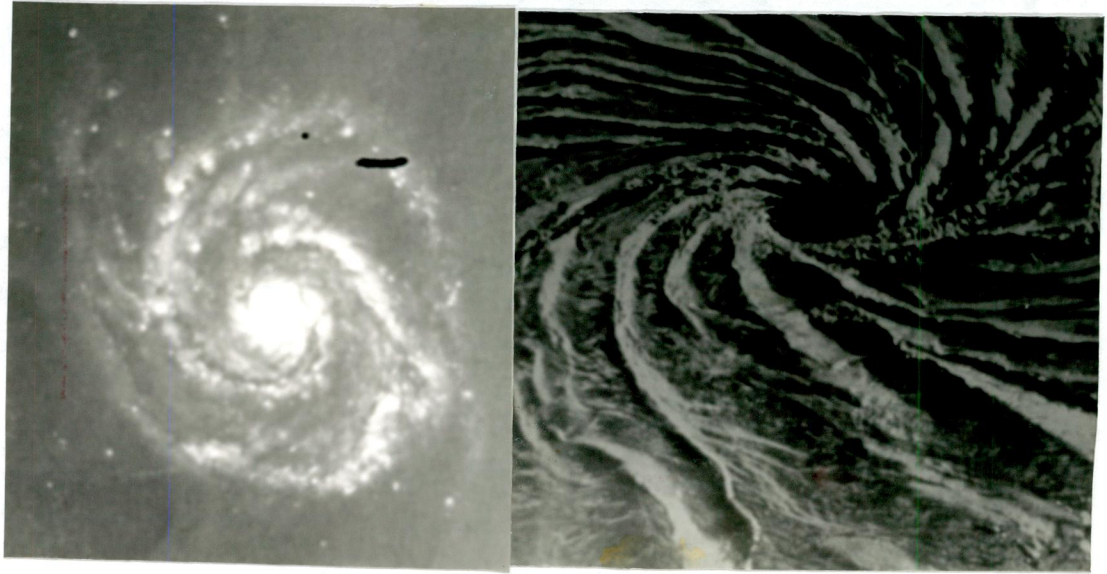
But if a symbol as stated, is a "representation of something then that which it represents must exist

in the social or physical environment of that person who creates that symbol. Therefore, I believe it is crucial to realise and investigate the fact that there appears to be a suggestion of a symbol system existing as a universal means of expressing very similar ideas. I will refer also to Carl. G. Jung and his idea of a "universal consciousness" later in this chapter. 6

I have chosen to explore an example of this apparent universal meaning which is to be found in our own Irish art heritage; that is the Spiral. To me, the spiral is one of our most famous and fascinating symbols and as my research has shown, it has been widely used in a variety of cultures since prehistoric times. Throughout this chapter I will cite examples of the international spiral symbol and meanings for it in the context of its contemporary culture.

Newgrange, Co Meath is the finest example of a Megalithic passage - grave in Europe. The tumulus dates from c 3000-2500 B.C and is thought to have been built by Ireland's first settlers; farmers who travelled by boat to our west coast from Iberia in Spain (similar buildings and motifs are to be found in Spain today also dating from Megalithic times). 7 The passage - graves on our west coast are crude in





1. Spiral in nature



2. Triple spiral at Newgrange



1. The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year, and the second section deals with the specific results of the work.

2. The second part of the report deals with the specific results of the work. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the specific results of the work, and the second section deals with the specific results of the work.

comparison with those in the east. This implies that the skills of the immigrants became more refined as they cut their way through the dense forests of our island.

The scale and great architectural and engineering skills required to construct such an edifice as Newgrange, leads one to deduce that these people had a highly organised and advanced society. No residential buildings remain from this time, therefore the people used their time and energy for the benefit of the dead. Many of the slabs of rock which have been highly decorated at Newgrange were painstakingly carved with primitive tools before being placed in position. Consequently, many motifs are hidden from human eyes, but could perhaps be appreciated by the spirits of the dead. This irrefutable fascination with the After life has been used to explain the dominant triple spiral motif which is said to symbolise Life, Death and Rebirth. 8 The main triple spiral dominates the entrance stone; each spiral can be followed continuously to the centre and back out again and each spiral connects with the others to form an overall triangular composition. (O'Kelly)

According to P.A. O'Siochain in his book, the Triple Spiral has also been designated as the symbol of the Celtic triple goddess, who held great importance in Irish legend. She was used to dealing with everything from the most mundane practical problem to deep philosophical thought. The notion of the Trinity of three persons in one seems to have had a significance for the Irish that Edward de Bono happens to validate by saying; "the plain purpose of the third party is to convert a two-dimensional fight into a three-dimensional exploration leading to the design of an outcome"

O'Siochain also tells us that in mythology the spiral has been referred to as the eternal labyrinth from which there is no escape. It has also been described as the vortex created by the three elements of fire, air and water. The White Goddess, the moon, has at times been referred to as the Triple Goddess because of her dominant influences over the waters of the world and her association with the ebbing and waning of the seasons, particularly Spring, Summer and Autumn.

Brigid was also a triple goddess - here symbol is the swan whose serpentine neck, I believe, is



reminiscent of the curvaceous nature of a spiral. With the arrival of Christianity in Ireland, the goddess was elevated to the rank of saint. Another example of how the new church was built on the existing culture is to be found in the Book of Kells which shows an abundance of spirals used for decorative purposes and familiarity. 10. Although this is not conducive to any theoretical premise, I propose that they could perhaps have been used in Christian terms to signify three persons in one; Father Son and Holy Spirit.

I would conclude that the meaning of Irish spiral symbols appears to have been inseparable from natural life cycles of some sort. I will refer to this notion again when discussing my personal work.

The artists at Newgrange were probably unaware that their contemporaries in the Canary Islands were executing engravings of spirals to their own ends. In The Rock Art of Africa, Professor A. R. Wilcox documents more than forty sites at La Palma where spirals, concentric circles, labyrinths, meanders, and "serpenti-forms" are to be found in abundance. 11 It has been observed that these symbols frequent water sources and Wilcox suggests the rain-making rites took



3. Spirals from the Book of Kells



4. La Palma spirals, Canary Islands



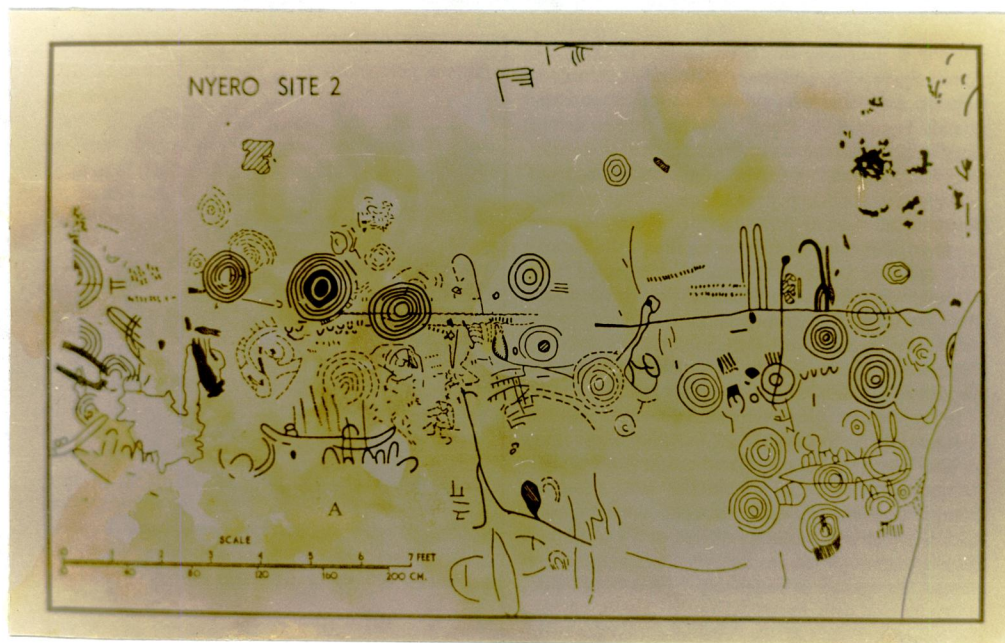




place at these life-sustaining sites. Although this is supposition the author later documents a similar occurrence in Central Africa and Tanzania. Various archaeologists have placed the date of the Tanzanian rock paintings anywhere between 6000-1000 B.C. 12

At a site in Central Africa called "Ng' amoritung' a", a variety of spirals and concentric circles are to be found. The name of the site means "people of stone" and according to local legend the stones were originally people metamorphosized by the devil. Similar explanations have been given for circles of standing stones in England.<sup>13</sup> The symbols are carved onto the stones which stand beside the graves of pastoral farmers and are thought to represent the life of the deceased.

Across the Atlantic in another southern continent, Maria Reiche has made a study of geometric symbols on a grand scale. In her book "The Mystery of the Nasca Lines", she documents designs on the San Jose pampa in Peru which probably date from the time of Christ. The lines are best viewed from the air as they cover acres of ground. Reiche states;

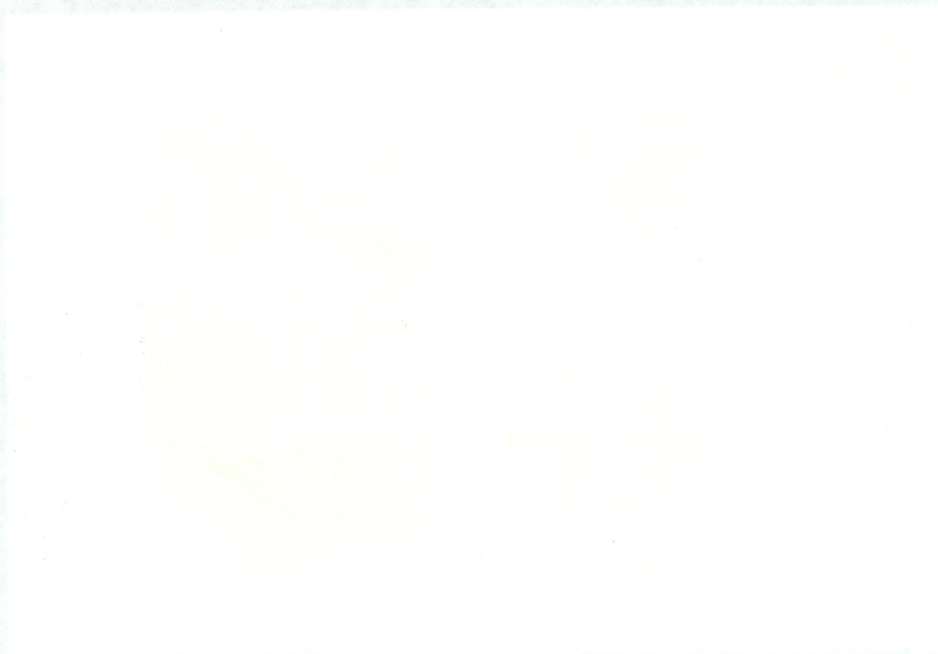


5. Motifs at Ng'amoritung'a



6. Circle at standing stones, Africa







7. Aerial view of Nasca lines, Peru



8. Australian aborigine carving





"apart from straight lines and zig-zags, spirals are the most numerous design on the desert, more than one hundred spirals have been discovered, many made from a line which can be followed continuously to the centre and out again.

Not all spirals around Nasca were drawn in the desert, some were chipped into rocks in the mountains, and some were carefully painted in ceramics. Some experts believe these designs came from man's conscious efforts to reach infinity. 14

Further west, Australian aborigines have their share of spiral motifs. They have been carved into rocks, bone and wood and painted on rocks and tree-bark. The symbols have been used since ancient times and are thought to belong to the "Dream-time" beliefs which say that to "represents the path of the man or animal, represents the actual man or animal". 15 Again a symbol to represent a life cycle.

In neighbouring New Zealand, the Maori people also use a spiral as a symbol of life and eternity; and its "ahua" (form or appearance) is derived from a common fern and it is known as "koru".

Also in the book 'Te Maori' we are told how Maori people (who originally travelled from centuries ago) scar and paint their faces. 16 A person who died without a tattoo would be blinded by a great spirit and their soul would be destined to wander aimlessly





9. Maori face tattoo

1. The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the position of the various groups of the population. It is a very interesting and informative study of the social and economic conditions of the country.

2. The second part of the report deals with the political situation of the country. It is a very interesting and informative study of the political conditions of the country.

3. The third part of the report deals with the economic situation of the country. It is a very interesting and informative study of the economic conditions of the country.

4. The fourth part of the report deals with the social situation of the country. It is a very interesting and informative study of the social conditions of the country.

5. The fifth part of the report deals with the cultural situation of the country. It is a very interesting and informative study of the cultural conditions of the country.

6. The sixth part of the report deals with the educational situation of the country. It is a very interesting and informative study of the educational conditions of the country.

7. The seventh part of the report deals with the health situation of the country. It is a very interesting and informative study of the health conditions of the country.

8. The eighth part of the report deals with the housing situation of the country. It is a very interesting and informative study of the housing conditions of the country.

9. The ninth part of the report deals with the transportation situation of the country. It is a very interesting and informative study of the transportation conditions of the country.

10. The tenth part of the report deals with the communication situation of the country. It is a very interesting and informative study of the communication conditions of the country.



for eternity. 17 The number of spirals on a man's face show his "Mana" (psycho force, authority). Therefore, the greater the number of spirals the greater the man's relationship with and understanding of life. The symbols are most frequently found carved into or painted on wood.

Maori people talk of retaining their art's "Wairua Maori" ie, the soul of their ancestors. To the Maori people their "Wairua" is neither fiction nor myth, but a real and natural spirituality.

The relationship between the spiral and the essence of time seems indisputable. Throughout different cultures and times the spiral has been used to denote infinity, mortality and immortality. The existence of this international system of meaning leads me to Jung's idea of a universal consciousness and Mandala symbols;  
18

These are circular patterns symbolizing dreams, aspirations and fears. Jung found that similar symbols were used by different age groups with diverse cultural back-grounds and from different times. I will refer to Jung later in reference to his psychological influence in education to-day.



Jose and Miriam Arguelles say that the earth is a living Mandala, that is,

"a structural matrix through and from which flow a succession of changes, elemental forms, and primal surges, each surpassing the other in an infinite variety of organic structures and impulses, crowned by the supreme attribute of reflective consciousness."

Mandalas often assume a spiral form and one which is familiar is the Chinese Yin Yang sign. 20 This symbol is made up of equal shapes, one black and one white, they are opposites which fit together harmoniously. It is a representation or symbol of Chinese philosophical thought on perfect harmony.

The Yin Yang and spiral configurations have been adapted to form modern day company logo types in graphic form. I will deal with the modernisation of symbols later in this chapter, there is a middle link, however between primitive and modern spiral symbols;

Returning to Ireland at the height of the Christian period, we can see the use of spirals again in sculptural and manuscript work. Other countries also saw the adoption of primitive mandalas for religious purposes eg. Rose windows are a predominant feature of Gothic churches the symbol was derived from



10. Jung's mandala painting by young female patient

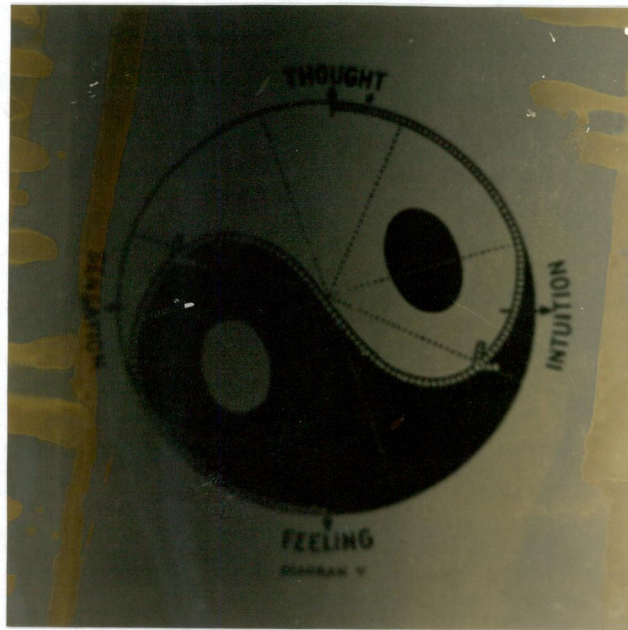


11. J + M Arguelles mandala

12. Boddy's paintings of 1782

13. Rose window, Charles Cathedral





14. Yin Yang Symbol



15. Starry Night by Vincent Van Gogh





the 'Eastern Lotus flower which represents spiritual knowledge and enlightenment 21. Indian Buddhists also represented the "pearl" of enlightenment in the form of a spiral. This is expressed in paintings from 18th century as illustrated. 22

One hundred years later in France the Dutch painter Van Gogh (1853-90) painted to reach a union between inner self and outside world. When talking about his painting "Starry Night with Cupress Trees" (1889) he said,

"First of all the twinkling stars vibrated, but remained motionless in space, then all the celestial globes were united into one series of movements... Firmament and planets both disappeared, but the mighty breadth which gives life to all things and in which all is bound up remained". 23

In the painting clouds spiral into Yin Yang formation, and the opposing forces of sun and moon are unified.

Van Gogh has been referred to as an early independent symbolist . 24

Symbolism was an artistic movement in itself which involved artists who worked from 1904 to 1922 approximately. Symbolists were both literary and visual artists. The art has been seen as frivolous



but in fact was intended to be very meaningful and to draw people into a more abstract way of thinking. They attempted to bridge a link between the "here" and the "beyond". In his book "The Symbolists", Michael Gibson puts it thus; " ... in art, as in mathematics, a symbol makes it possible to discuss a function or an unknown quality, such as the ultimate meaning of life"

25

In Gustave Klimts 1907 painting "Danae" he composes the body into a spiral form and uses an actual spiral motif on the fabric on which she lies.

Symbolist art attempted to join the world of visible events, the world of phenomena, with the world of intelligible meaning. Symbolism in literature is best seen in the works of Charles Baudelaire, Walt Whitman, Stephanie Mallarme, William Butler Yeats and Oscar Wilde - all contributed to the exquisite and often romantic verse of the time. Wagner and Strauss were musical influences and Sarah Bernhardt was the supreme thespian symbolist. 26

From stage to cinema Symbolism continues; an example is Carl Dreyer's "Passion of Joan of Arc", in which Joan, summoned to recant or die sees in quick



succession, flowers blowing in the wind and then a skull that a hidden grave-digger has sent tumbling out of the ground.

The books of Stephen King have been made into films with the mutant characters having affinities with the terrors of a Redon or Kubin. Francis Ford Coppola begins his 1990 film; "The Godfather Part 3" with a scene showing withered Autumn leaves being buffeted across the screen from left to right as a symbol of the passage of time, since we last visited the Corleone clan.

This film also shows the influence of the Italian culture in America and the resulting new "Family/Mafia" culture in New York. Another example of how cultures borrow from each other can be seen in the whirling log or swastika symbol. This symbol long used by native Americans, has gained a distorted meaning in the 20th century, because of its adoption as the predominant symbol of the Nazi party of Germany during World War 11. The centuries old meanings for the whirling log or swastika, immortality, and a representation of the four great travels undertaken by the Hopi before settling permanently in the four corners region of Arizona. 27







16. Danae Gustave Klimt

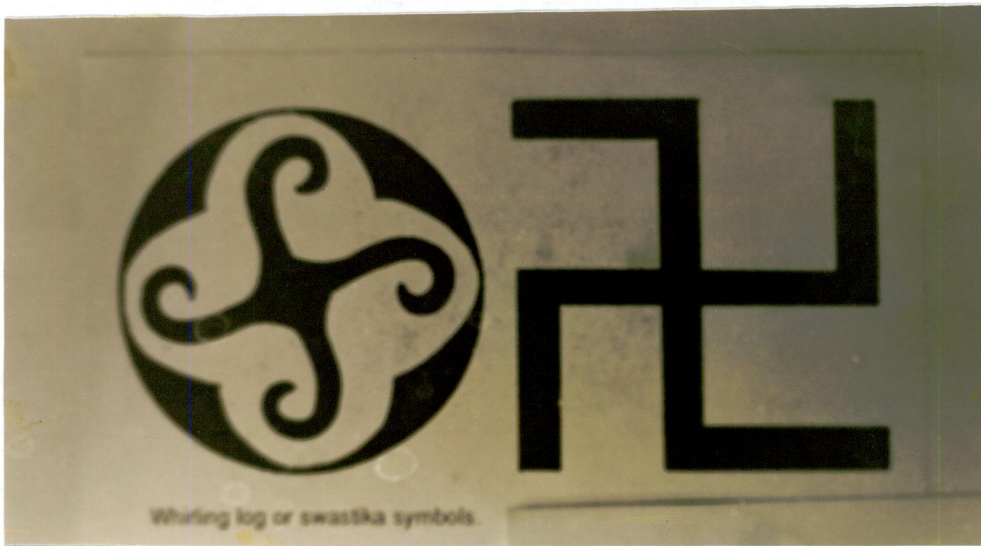


17. Expectancy by Gustave Klimt









18. Swastika/Swirling log



19. Censored by Kurt Schwitters

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the transparency and accountability of the organization. The text also mentions the need for regular audits to ensure that all financial data is correctly recorded and reported.

2. The second part of the document outlines the procedures for handling financial transactions. It details the steps involved in processing payments, including verifying invoices, obtaining necessary approvals, and ensuring that payments are made in a timely manner. The text also discusses the importance of maintaining proper documentation for all transactions.

3. The third part of the document addresses the issue of budgeting and financial planning. It explains how the organization should develop a realistic budget that takes into account all expected expenses and revenue. The text also discusses the importance of monitoring the budget regularly to ensure that the organization is staying on track financially.

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As illustrated, there are two distinct symbols, one clockwise with tails bent backwards, which is the sun or good symbol. The other rotates counter-clockwise, is the black symbol of the night, and became the Nazi symbol. The swastika is also a form of quadra-mandala, symbolising four stages of life - childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. Kurt Schwitter's collage "Censored" (1980) makes use of this and other symbols to portray Nazi oppression 27.

We may also see symbols used as a part of advertising and in corporate logos. We have to be visually literate to deal with the dominance of visual symbols. As a teacher I will be dealing with pupils who have a 'primitive' level of visual literacy - this is my reason for concentrating on primitive art. Modern symbols would constitute a further study of their own.

In my next chapter I will explain how I hoped to achieve this visual literacy through my personal project.



## Footnotes

1. Richard L. Anderson; Art in Primitive Societies, page 53.
2. Michael Gibson; The Symbolists.
3. The Educational Company: The Educational Dictionary, page 277.
4. Richard L. Anderson; Art in Primitive Societies, page 54.
5. Ibid, P.79.
6. Carl G. Jung; Mandala Symbolism, translated by R.F.C. Hull, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, U.S.A, 1972, P.18.
7. L. Pericot Garcia etal; Prehistoric and Primitive Art, Thames and Hudson, Ltd, London, 1969, P.106.
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9. P.A O'Siochain; Ireland - A Journey into Lost Time,
10. Henry J. Sharpe, Art History and Appreciation Dublin 1978.
11. A.R Wilcox; The Rock Art of Africa, Croom Helm Ltd., Australia, 1984, page 48
12. Ibid, P.78.
13. Evan Hadingham, Circles and Standing Stones, Heinemann Ltd, London, 1975, P.88
14. Maria Reiche; The Mystery of the Nasa Lines
15. A.R Wilcox; "The Rock Art of Africa" P.44.
16. Sidney Moko Mead, Te Maori, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, New York, 1984, P.33

17. Jill Purce; The Mystic Spiral - a journey of the soul, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, P.47
18. Carl G. Jung; Mandala Symbolism, translated by R.F.C. Hull, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, U.S.A, 1972, P.43
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21. Malcolm Miller, Charles Cathedral, Aldus Books Ltd, London, 1974, P.14.
22. Purce; The Mystic Spiral, P.53.
23. Bruce Bernard, Vincent by himself Orbis Publishing Ltd., London, 1985, P.269.
24. Jean Cassou; The Concise Encyclopedia of Symbolism, Omega Books Ltd., London, 1984, P.35.
25. Gibson; The Symbolist, P.12
26. Ibid, P.153.
27. Elliott Eisner; Educating Artistic Vision, Mac Millan Publishing, New York, 1972, P.108

III                    THE ETERNAL IMMERSION IN PAST, PRESENT AND  
FUTURE PERSONAL PROJECT

Research for my personal project in painting began through looking at visual symbols as used by a variety of ancient cultures. I have dealt with these in greater detail in my previous chapter. As I have been attempting to find similarities in symbolic forms, I felt that restricting myself to sources from one pre-historic culture would be more than sufficient to express my thoughts.

The common element which has appealed to me most throughout my historical research is the notion of an eternal life cycle; As a student I am in a state of flux and as an artist I am struggling with my past art heritage, my present learning and my future ideals. As a teacher I am anxious to explore the possibilities for visual literacy. I want to express this endless immersion in past, present and future which corresponds to life.

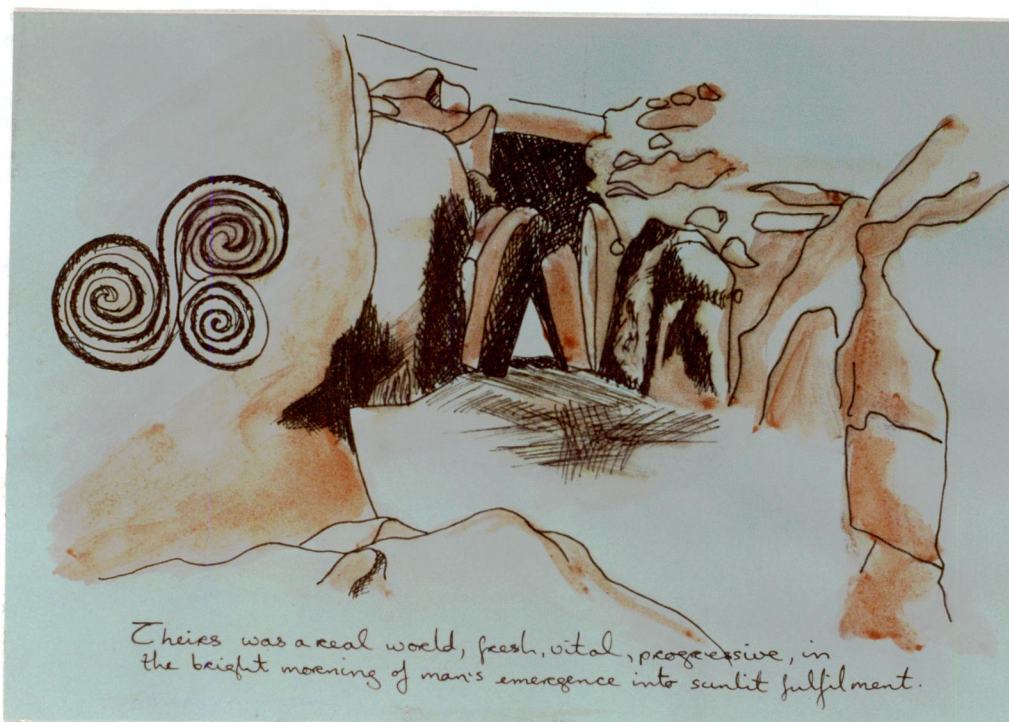
Ireland has an ancient tradition which is unique, due to the fact that it is an island and was relatively free from influence for many centuries.



This implies that our ancient Megalithic symbols have a purity of meaning which only requires solving.

As I see the spiral as being part of universal consciousness, I took it as my starting point. On a worldwide scale I believe that the fundamental idea of the spiral is one of Eternity i.e. past, present, future; this is not wholly conducive to any theoretical premise. Later I will return to the spiral/mandala connection.

I began my research from the direct source of motifs at Newgrange but found (as illustrated) that this starting point was far too literal. I needed to find an alternative way of expressing the ethos of the spiral and was consequently led to study the notion of a triple goddess. In my major study work in Third Year I dealt with Brigid as a woman. As this year's work is based on symbolism I wanted to continue on the theme of Brigid, but, in a more symbolic way. Her symbol is the swan. As mentioned in the previous chapter I saw the curvaceous neck and body of the swan as reminiscent of the spiral also. I explored this through drawing swans and the female figure through observation but found I was still being too literal.



20. Personal Drawing



21. Personal Drawing









22. Personal Drawing - research drawing



23. Personal Research Work

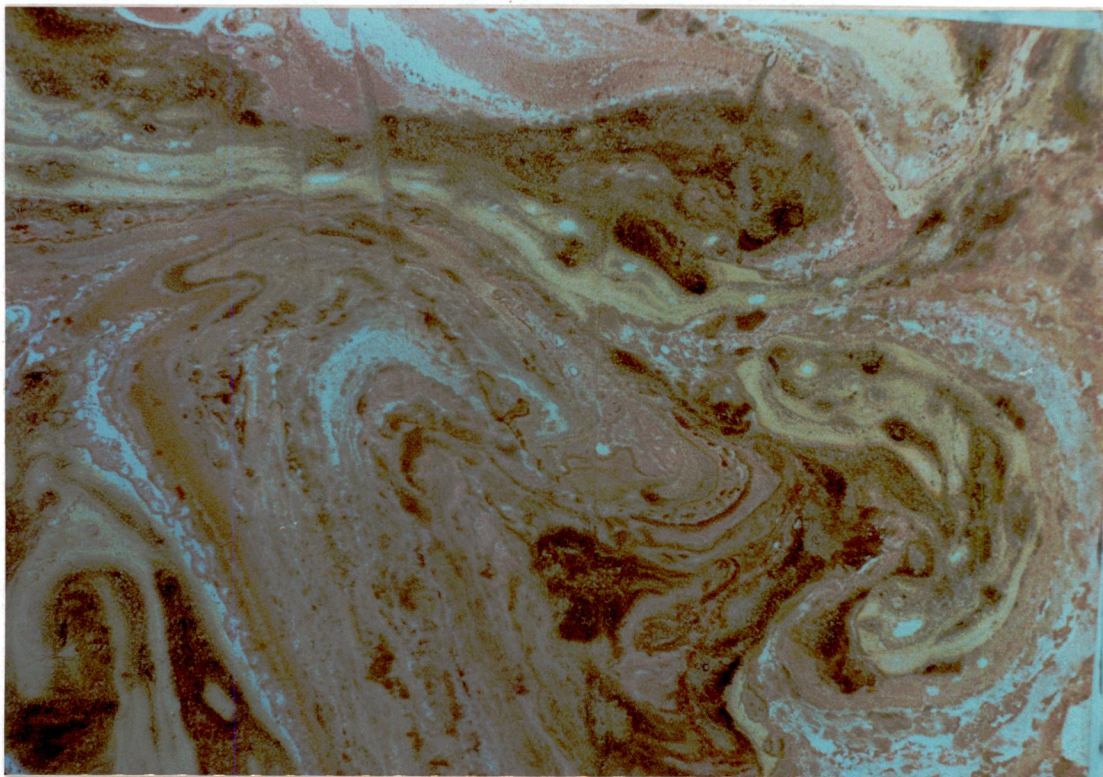








24. Oil-paintings of tree-bark



25. Marbling, Personal Project



1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the transparency and accountability of the organization. This section also outlines the specific procedures for recording transactions, including the use of standardized forms and the requirement for double-entry bookkeeping.

2. The second part of the document addresses the issue of financial reporting. It details the frequency and format of reports, as well as the responsibilities of the accounting department in preparing and reviewing these reports. The text also mentions the importance of timely reporting to ensure that management has the most current information available for decision-making.

3. The third part of the document focuses on budgeting and financial planning. It describes the process of developing an annual budget, from initial estimates to final approval. It also discusses the importance of monitoring actual performance against the budget and the need for adjustments when necessary. This section includes a brief overview of the tools and techniques used in financial planning.

4. The fourth part of the document covers the topic of internal controls. It explains how a strong system of internal controls is crucial for preventing fraud and errors, and for ensuring the integrity of the financial data. The text provides examples of common internal control measures, such as segregation of duties and regular reconciliations, and discusses how these can be tailored to the specific needs of the organization.

5. The final part of the document provides a summary of the key points discussed and offers some concluding thoughts on the importance of sound financial management. It encourages the reader to take the time to review and understand the information presented, and to apply these principles in their own work.

6. The first part of this section discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the transparency and accountability of the organization. This section also outlines the specific procedures for recording transactions, including the use of standardized forms and the requirement for double-entry bookkeeping.

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8. The third part of this section focuses on budgeting and financial planning. It describes the process of developing an annual budget, from initial estimates to final approval. It also discusses the importance of monitoring actual performance against the budget and the need for adjustments when necessary. This section includes a brief overview of the tools and techniques used in financial planning.

9. The fourth part of this section covers the topic of internal controls. It explains how a strong system of internal controls is crucial for preventing fraud and errors, and for ensuring the integrity of the financial data. The text provides examples of common internal control measures, such as segregation of duties and regular reconciliations, and discusses how these can be tailored to the specific needs of the organization.

10. The final part of this section provides a summary of the key points discussed and offers some concluding thoughts on the importance of sound financial management. It encourages the reader to take the time to review and understand the information presented, and to apply these principles in their own work.

I found that I needed a triple goddess source which allowed for a variety of interpretation. Through my continuing research of Irish legend I discovered that Queen Maeve, was and is known as the eternal queen of Ireland; 1 because of this she would encompass past, present and future as a life cycle. But, to represent Queen Maeve through the painting of female figure would be more literal than symbolic. I therefore, needed to find a visual source which could represent a natural cycle and would be reminiscent of the female form. Through drawing the female figure I resolved this design problem. The physical form of a tree reflects the female form. I visualised Queen Maeve as standing over her land with arms outstretched. The tree also has the properties of past (roots), present (trunk) and future (buds).

I did observational drawings of trees which are Y-shaped. The three points of the Y-shape reflect the three points of a triple spiral. I have made studies of the physical formation of the texture of trees and the structure of bark. The reasons for my colour choice are two-fold.





26. Goethe's Theory by J.M.W Turner, 1838



27. Fisherman of Naples by J.M.W. Turner, 1846

1. The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the general situation and the second section deals with the progress of the work.

2. The second part of the report deals with the results of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the results of the work in the field of research and the second section deals with the results of the work in the field of education.

3. The third part of the report deals with the conclusions of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the conclusions of the work in the field of research and the second section deals with the conclusions of the work in the field of education.

4. The fourth part of the report deals with the recommendations of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the recommendations of the work in the field of research and the second section deals with the recommendations of the work in the field of education.

5. The fifth part of the report deals with the summary of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the summary of the work in the field of research and the second section deals with the summary of the work in the field of education.

6. The sixth part of the report deals with the appendixes of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the appendixes of the work in the field of research and the second section deals with the appendixes of the work in the field of education.



It occurred to me that as trees are very much rooted in the earth, the colours, should reflect this relationship.

Throughout the last four years I have admired and been influenced by J.M.W. Turner's strength of colour in his oil paintings. Orange, red and brown dominate his later paintings e.g. "light and colour (Goethe's Theory)" 1843. 2 He also uses swirling forms to portray the passion and fury of storms etc. eg.; "Undine giving the ring to Masaniello; fisherman of Naples, 1846" 3. Orange also seemed appropriate to the eternal queen as in Dutch 17th century painting it symbolises pride and ambition. 4

So called "earthy" colours also remind me of the fact that pre-historic man had a restricted palette which came straight from nature. 5 I found technical difficulty in achieving a satisfactory blend of oil colours. I wanted my tree form to be one with the background.

I wanted to paint the tree so as to be behind, in and in front of the "background", this will indicate the fact that we are made from our past, existing in the present and always looking forward to the future.

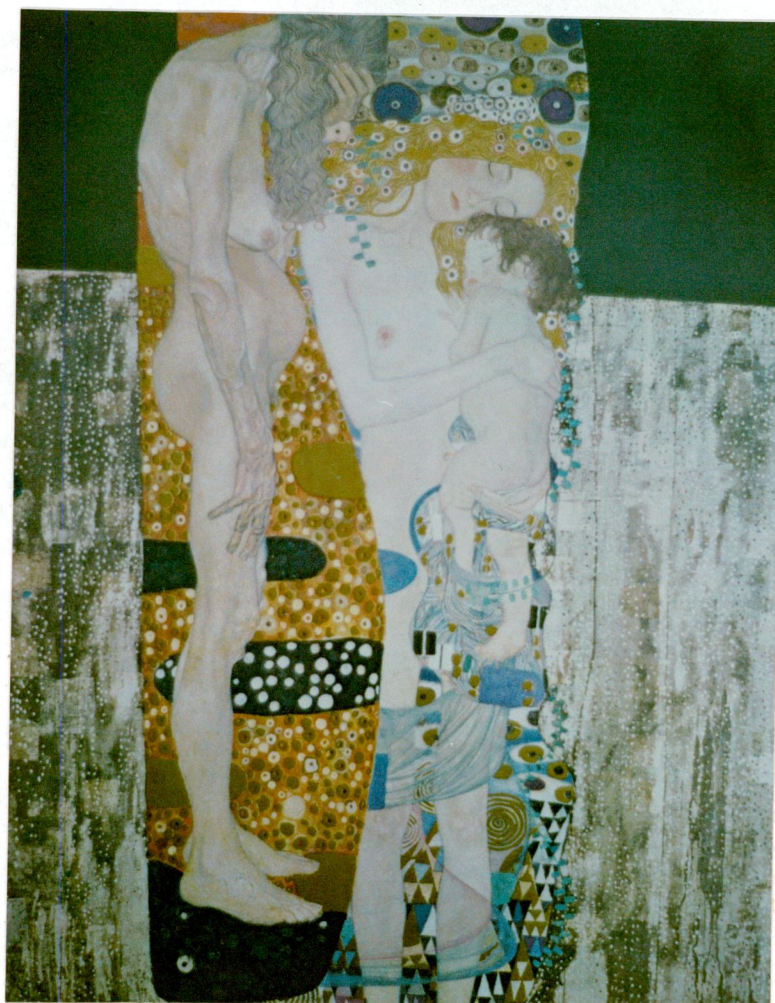
We are eternally immersed in time. An image-making technique using oil-paint is that of marbelling; 6 a mixture of oil paint, water and white spirits allows for a natural process of blending colours in spiral forms. The natural phenomenon of oil and water resisting each other allows this to occur. I used this technique to achieve a spiralling background for my symbolic tree.

Van Gogh painted to reach a union between inner-self and outside world.

Besides this my fundamental aim is to create an awareness of symbols for myself and for others as a means of achieving greater visual fluency, combined with a content of personal expression.

I admire the work of Gustave Klimt (1862-1918) who was a Symbolist painter in Austria, at the turn of the century. His work is very decorative and contains many of the motifs already mentioned in particular the spiral. My second painting will be a small scale mandala, the flat ornamental surface of which is reminiscent of the work of Klimt.





28. Three Ages of Woman by Klimt





As the requirement of visual literacy is an ongoing task, I wish my mandala painting to express this never-ending upward 'spiral'. I am hesitant about calling my painting "my final piece", as I have only begun to explore the purely personal side of my art work. It is important to me that I express this state of flux. Although I have gained much knowledge as a student teacher and student artist, I look forward to the learning that experience will bring.

The fact that I have done a parallel project in the classroom has given me a greater understanding of the problems my pupils will encounter in their personal quest for visual literacy. If visual fluency is necessary in painting - many kinds of fluency should be the result of a rich educational system. This will be discussed in the chapter that follows.

## Footnotes

1. John Sharkey; Celtic Mysteries - The Ancient Religion, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, P.7.
2. Horst Koch; Turner, Berghaus, Verlag, Germany 1988, P. 131.
3. Ibid, P.116.
4. Fernand Saint-Martin, Semiotics of Visual Language, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1987, P.221
5. Geoffrey Hindley; World Art Treasures, Spring Books Ltd, London P.7.
6. Einen Miura, The Art of Marbled Paper, London, Zaehnsdorf Ltd., 1990.



#### IV THE EDUCATIONAL RELEVANCE OF VISUAL LITERACY

"If one tells the truth, one is sure,  
sooner or later to be found out."

Oscar Wilde.

In the Irish Educational system today verbal and numerical proficiency are seen as symbols of being 'educated'.

This is far from being true; whereas our eyes are always verbalising or calculating numerically, even when we are doing the above our brain is continuously receiving visual messages.

This makes visual literacy a practical concern for the educator. Increased visual intelligence means easier understanding of all meaning which takes visual form. Visual decisions dominate a great deal of that which we examine and recognise even in reading. Verbal language has an accepted visual format. Visual intelligence is crucial to all education as it extends creative capacity; "Art, Craft, and Design education develops a number of important personal qualities, particularly those of initiative, perseverance, sensibility and self-reliance".

I agree with Eisner when he says

"the scientific study of human experience and behaviour is relatively new, only about a hundred years old, and the degree to which one can find scientifically confident answers to the problems of educating others is small. Because artistic learning and aesthetic experience are among the most sophisticated aspects of human action and feeling, we should not expect more than that which can be provided." 2

As already stated education today places an emphasis on verbal and numerical skills. But, if we are to reach the "ideal" with a truly holistic education then visual literacy must be equally important. We have an obligation as educators to maximise the pupil's ability both as makers and receivers of visual messages.

According to Dondis to be visually literate involves the capacities to, "..... perceive, understand, watch, observe, discover, recognise, visualise, examine, read and look". 3

Although the first learning experience of a child is through tactile awareness, we are also given the ability to see and we accept seeing as we experience it - effortlessly. But, having said that, we have a need to visualise information to accept it; could man have accepted the fact that we had reached the moon if



were only given a written factual report? The term "seeing is believing" holds more than a modicum of truth.

In the initial drawings of an infant we see a need to examine rather than communicate visual experience for themselves learning begins i.e. with these haptic symbols.

Children have an opportunity to demystify their environment through symbols. If visual symbols, and art elements, line, shape, texture, colour, form etc. constitute an alphabet, then we have the freedom to rearrange 'words' to form new sentences and thereby tell visual stories.

Although it is acknowledged that children should be allowed to draw and paint freely, it is too often seen as merely a pleasant activity which is additional and not integral to the primary curriculum (Maureen V. Cox; "Children's drawings") 4

Proficiency in drawing has no recognised standard at this level, whereas 'remedial' tendencies in reading, writing and arithmetic are corrected with

great expediency. Is this a prejudice against the visual arts or merely visual ignorance on the part of the educator? I would think the latter holds more truth. It is virtually impossible to see children's art as the child artist sees it, therefore, if we were to analyse the art we would be doing so very much as an outsider.

In the Language of Art and Art Criticism, Joseph Margolis states, "A work of art is an artifact considered with respect to its design." 5 Therefore if we are to educate children visually we must have a fundamental standard on which to build, which is relative to the child's age and other such factors. I would like to show that, with care and consideration, an educator can indeed learn to recognise artistic progress in children and nurture that progress.

I think that Cox's words would hold true in primary education in Ireland today when she says ".....many people argue that we should not teach children how to draw, that to do so would be to interfere with the child's 'natural' self-expression and that such direct teaching would lead to an undesirable uniformity." 5



She goes on to say, "It seems to me, however, that the teaching of basic skills in art would no more lead to uniformity in children's drawings than the teaching of letter formation, spelling and grammar leads to uniformity in their writing of stories and poems". 7

If we wish to represent something three-dimensional on piece of paper which is two-dimensional, we must make a decision about which parts of the object we will represent. We then have to decide what type of mark is most suitable to represent each particular part. We also have to decide how those marks should be related to each other etc. therefore, the process of drawing is an intellectually demanding, problem-solving activity.

A symbol in itself is also a problem-solving device; although this is not conducive to any theoretical precedent, consider if you will, a child's use of the word "sore". An adult on hearing the utterance of this word will deem it sufficient to warrant further investigation, asking "where?" "When?" and "How?". Adult vocabulary allows us to make such grand statements as "I have migraine.....muscle spasm.....a burning sensation" etc. A child might

only have this one word to represent a variety of feelings. Therefore, from the child's point of view, the word "sore" is a verbal symbol for many types of pain they are unable to express.

An infant who has not yet learned to speak can only cry to express the fact that they are uncomfortable. Consequently, acquiring the word as a symbol has solved a problem of expression. I believe that visual symbols represent an alternative way to solve a problem.

According to the Curriculum and Examinations Board Discussion Paper on the Arts in Education;

Most human interaction takes place in and through symbol systems. Human meaning is created and embodied in symbols, and it is the agreed social use of symbol systems that leads to shared meaning. The creation and sharing of meaning is a necessary condition for personal and social development. An important aim of first - and second-level education should be to enable young people to develop the skills necessary to participate actively and meaningfully in the living culture of which they are a part." 8

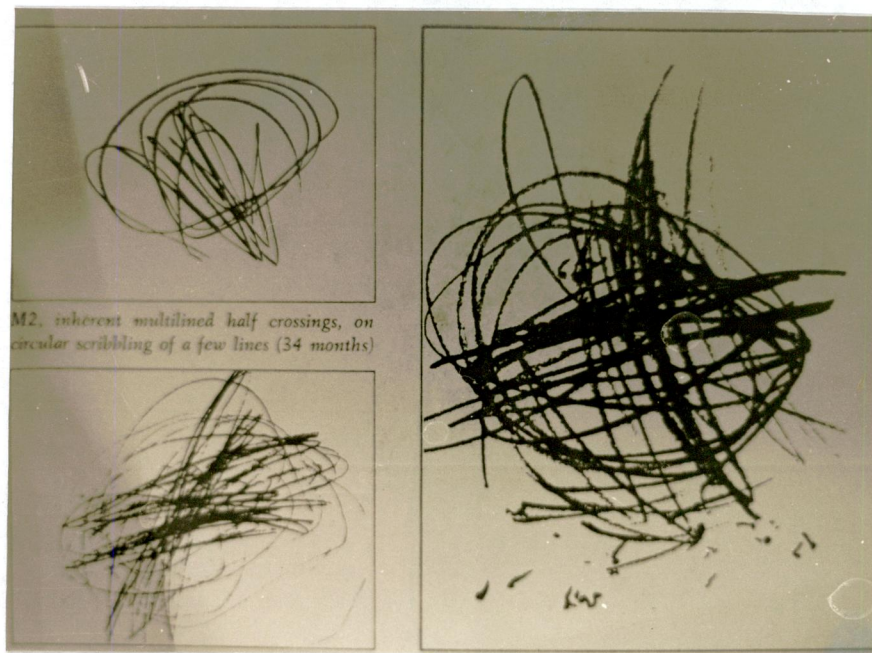
Any such symbol system is an invention of man 9. The symbol systems we call language are inventions which replace visual systems (such as early Egyptian hieroglyphics) of picture-strip mentality. Art,



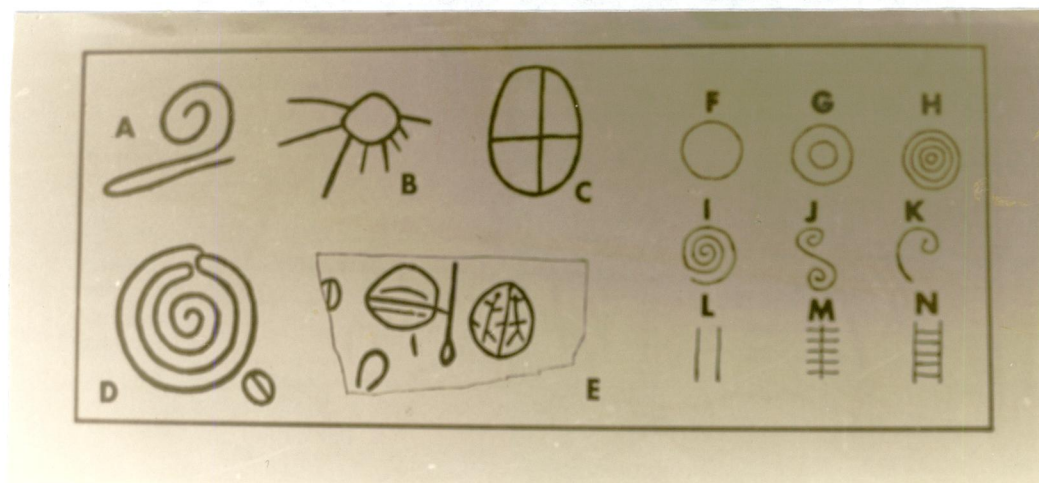
Craft and Design can be seen as supporting the realisation of personal symbol systems which will enrich an individual's "shared meaning" with their society.

In Analysing Children's Art, Rhoda Kelly observes that; "The archaic work in which one can see the carry-over of the child mind in art often seems to disturb the art historians." 10 Kellogg makes a case for interpreting prehistoric symbols using the same formulas as Gestalt psychologists would use. Her studies show a uniformity in children's art throughout different cultures. The types of symbols she has investigated have a parallel link with the primitive adult symbols I have researched. (We can assume prehistoric art was executed by adults as a child's musculature and stature would not permit carving into rock and painting on the ceilings of caves).

Kellogg begins by documenting the usual steps in children's art. She begins with circular scribbles that she believes occur spontaneously and constitute simple Mandalas. Some, as illustrated are divided into quarters by a simple cross, and are made by children aged 2 - 4 years.

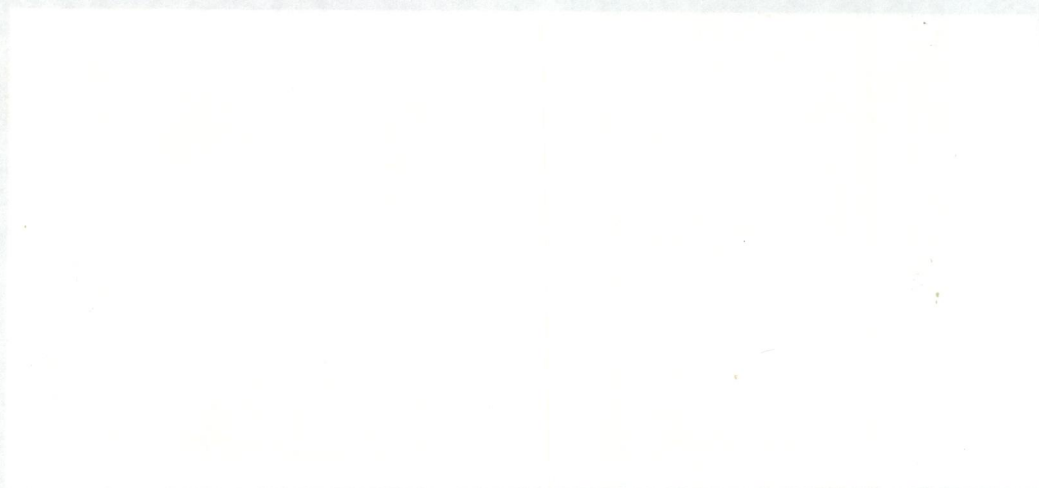


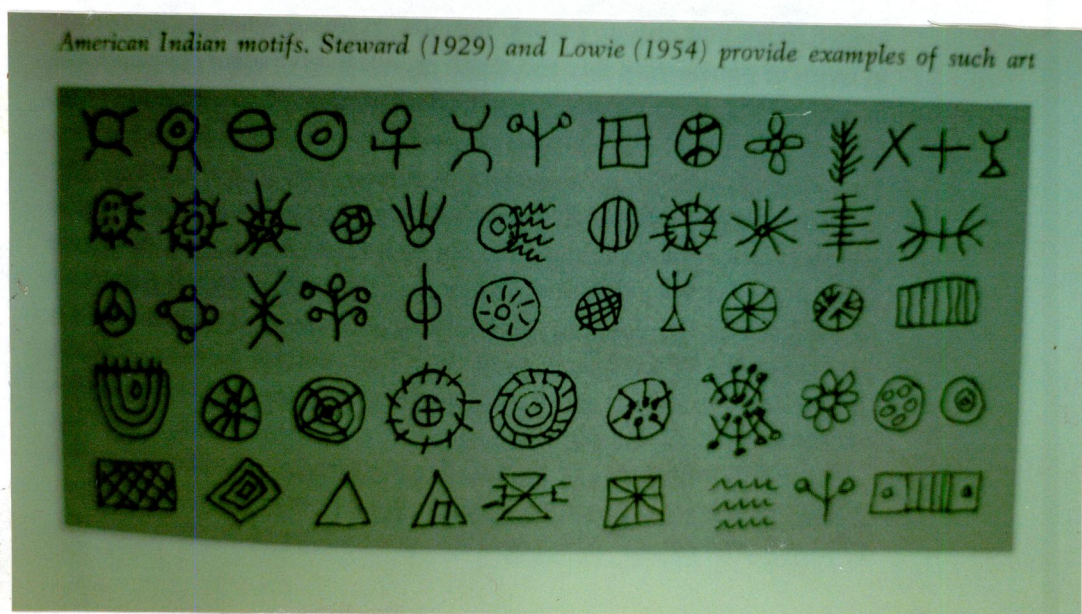
29. Children's scribble drawings



30. Universal motifs drawings







31. Universal motifs drawings



32. Children's Suns and Mandalas



1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the transparency and accountability of the organization. The text also mentions the need for regular audits to ensure that all financial data is correctly recorded and reported.

2. The second part of the document outlines the procedures for handling financial transactions. It details the steps involved in processing payments, from the initial invoice to the final payment. The text also discusses the importance of obtaining proper documentation for all transactions, such as receipts and invoices, to ensure that all financial activity is properly recorded.

3. The third part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the transparency and accountability of the organization. The text also mentions the need for regular audits to ensure that all financial data is correctly recorded and reported.

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The next stage consists of suns which are oval or circular shapes which radiate from a central point and form a spiral pattern. Almost identical forms occur in American Indian and African motifs as illustrated. The child proceeds from Mandalas to Suns to Humans. Mandalas offer proof that adults share the aesthetic vision of child artists.

Why is the mandala so appealing? In Rudolf Arnheim's The Power of the Centre he makes the following case for this appeal;

Physically the world of our daily activities is pervaded by one dominant force, the force of gravity. Everything is constantly being pulled downward to the centre of the earth.... Through the ages and in most cultures, the central position is used to give visual expression to the divine or some other exalted power... which dwells above the pushes and pulls of the milling throng. He is outside the dimension of time, immobile, unshakeable.

11

In other words safely cocooned in the security of a spherical womb.

Kellogg believes it is because of its overall balance. I would suggest that it is also related to 'personal space'. If one stands with arms outstretched to the sides and turns 360 degrees we have travelled within the limits of our personal circular domain.



As mentioned in chapter 2; in Oriental religion, the mandala is regarded as a symbol of the cosmos. In Jungian psychology, the mandala is representative of the unity of the psyche, which is ".... simply the psychic expression of identity of brain structure irrespective of all racial differences" as Jung has phrased it. 12

The ability/needs to symbolise is inherent in humans and is a basic capacity for visual communication, as we also have the inherent capacity to phoneticize. Therefore, I believe that as language can be taught at an early age so too can visual ability be developed without destroying the child's individual expression.

Primitive art is studied so as to discover more about Man's social behaviour and development. As Rhoda Kellogg stated, art historians have difficulty in believing that there is a connection between prehistoric and child art. Why is this?

I would say we need to apply a 'deep meaning' to their abstract art so as to support our romantic notions about the origins of religion and philosophy. Why? Well, if the motifs are simply unintelligent

marks this would negate the study of ancient man's beliefs. But, as I am a supporter of Jung's theories on the power of the subconscious, I have to admit to supporting the 'deep-meaning' theory. The fact that prehistoric man put so much time and energy into the making of these symbols validates my belief.

But, why are they so similar to children's spontaneous scribbles? Perhaps ancient man appreciated the value of these initial childhood drawings and decided they were receiving messages from 'above' and were therefore obliged to use these subconscious symbols.

If this is true, then surely children's drawings have the same depth of thought. We are, therefore, obliged as educators to continue from this primitive foundation and build a fluency of visual language for young people. Prehistoric man became modern man through a natural process of self-discovery and learning, could we not speed up this process of learning for the child? If we can give the child the means to improve their visual expression, he/she will be less inhibited to express these thoughts. Perhaps then we can rid the child of the "I can't draw"





33. "I can't draw" syndrome - low self-esteem.

1. The first part of the report is a general  
description of the project and its objectives.  
2. The second part is a detailed description  
of the methodology used in the study.  
3. The third part is a description of the  
results of the study.  
4. The fourth part is a discussion of the  
results and their implications.  
5. The fifth part is a conclusion and  
recommendations for future research.



syndrome, which is so prevalent in Irish secondary schools today.

The necessity for greater self-esteem is evident here. Self-esteem is what a child feels about the discrepancy between what he/she is and what he/she would like to be. Self-concept is the sum total of an individual's mental and physical characteristics and his/her evaluation of them. Because of the way in which self-concept develops, teachers are in a very strong position to develop self-esteem. 13

Pupils with low self-esteem will show a lack of confidence in their own ability to carry out a task. For such a pupil, it is often times easier to avoid a task rather than risk failure which, would continue this 'vicious circle'.

If visual fluency is built up by the teacher in a practical way, the pupil will, at least have a greater capacity of expression and therefore gain confidence in their actions.

Maureen Cox has shown that verbal clues for improved drawing work better than visual clues on young children. Obviously because an emphasis has

been placed on listening rather than looking. She says; "Innovation is generally based on a firm mastery of basic techniques." 14

What are the advantages for non-artists in developing their visual activity and expressive potential? The Curriculum and Examinations Board Discussion paper provides a rationale for the Arts in Education:

"The arts constitute a small industry. Several hundred people are employed in advertising, graphic design, public relations, the media - particularly the broadcast media - and as art teachers at all levels. Those employed in libraries, museums and galleries are also part of this industry... Ireland's record in this (design) area is poor. Improvement depends on greater emphasis on artistic education and aesthetic values in our education system. 15

We are continuously being bombarded by advertising and a variety of propaganda through the media. It is important that young people make critical decisions about what they see instead of becoming passive viewers.

The Arts can also be described as a means of developing the self. This development is something that is not encouraged in Ireland. It is regarded as an "airy-fairy" notion with no realistic foundation,



if not considered actually harmful, however it is precisely this attitude which is our downfall. No society can develop as a whole if we are all merely workers on the great industrial conveyor belt.

"Only those who are visually sophisticated can rise above fashion and fad to make their own choices and judgements of what is appropriate and aesthetically pleasing. In effect, visual literacy procedures the "Emperor's clothes" syndrome and makes of judgement a higher action than acceptance (or rejection) of a visual statement based on intuition alone." 16.

How do I hope to achieve this visual literacy both for myself as a teacher and artist and for my pupils?

I have found that through my personal historical research it was extremely beneficial to have a theme. I am sure that any theme, other than that of 'symbols' could be used to explore many periods of art and diverse cultures. A theme to be followed makes for a sense of adventure in learning art history and I have found in my own class-room work that it is a great motivator.

As I discovered that most spiral/mandala motifs symbolise life cycles of a sort, I decided to choose a source for my classroom project which could

represent a natural cycle. In terms of literacy, 'cycles' afforded a 'step by step' way to learn art elements. As pre-historic man only had his natural environment as source material, I decided to choose a source which was both natural and organic. The visual source of "Fruit" also reflected the roundness of a mandala. Pupils studied the fruit through a variety of art elements to improve their visual literacy. Finally, pupils had to use their research to solve a design problem i.e. using the fruit as a symbol in a screen-print. The project is described in greater detail in the next chapter.



# Footnotes.

1. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, The Junior Certificate, Art, Craft and Design syllabus, An Roinn Oideachais, Dublin, 1989, P.2.
2. Elliott Eisner Educating Artistic Vision, Mac Millan Publishing, New York, 1972, P.34.
3. Donis A. Dondis; A Primer Of Visual Literacy, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachussetts, 1974, P.182.
4. Maureen Cox; Children's Drawings, P.43.
5. Joseph Margolis; The Language of Art and Art Criticism.
6. Maureen Cox; Children's Drawings, P.43
7. Ibid, P.56.
8. Curriculum and Examinations Board; Discussion paper on the Arts.
9. Donis A. Dondis; A Primer Of Visual Literacy, P.9.
10. Rhoda Kellogg; Analyzing Children's Art, Mayfield Publishing Co, California, 1970, P.62.
11. Rudof Arnheim; The Power of the Centre, University of California Press, California, U.S.A, 1982, P.10.
12. Carl G. Jung; Mandala Symbolism, translated by R.F.C, Hull, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, U.S.A, 1972, P.43.
13. Denis Lawrence, Self-Esteem.
14. Cox, Children's Drawings, P.56.
15. Curriculum and Examinations Board, Discussion Paper; The Arts
16. Dondis, A Premier of Visual Literacy, P.185.





#### IV

#### CLASSROOM PROJECT

My overall aim for the classroom project was to create an awareness of visual language. Other aims include: to explore art, craft and design as an alternative visual means of communication in order to increase pupil's awareness of the different symbol systems which exist worldwide; to provide meaningful connections between the environment of the pupils and their artwork so they can develop an appreciation and understanding of the relationship between art and the environment; to develop in the pupil the ability to make judgements about their own work and the work of others. This evaluative criteria would also foster a sense of responsibility for the design in their natural and built environment.

I believe the above points require greater emphasis in Education in Ireland today.

Cognitive objectives include: to develop an awareness of the basis concepts of the visual language such as line, shape, colour, texture and form; to begin to understand art as an alternative means of communication through exploration of these concepts; to understand the difference between recognition and





perception through observational work; to develop the skill of appraising one own work and the work of others. The main crucial objective of this project however is to develop pupil ability to translate research drawings into a design suitable for a particular craft: - The craft being screen-printing.

I believe that the best way to test the feasibility of a symbol is to take a two dimensional objective and make a representation of it.

In order to bring my educational implications into realization I had to find a means of improving visual literacy. Man's artistic expression began with the need to express through symbols based on nature. Art heritage has shown a vast advancement from these primitive motifs, therefore nature and symbols would appear to me to be obvious vehicles through which to advance visual literacy.

It was necessary to choose a source which offered a wide range of possibilities for interpretation through a variety of media. An organic object which could change and yet retain its essence as that same object, even through the change would suit. As I also discovered that most spiral/mandala motifs

symbolise life cycles of a sort, I decided to choose a source for my classroom project which could represent a natural cycle. The chosen visual starting point of "Fruit" also reflected the roundness of a mandala. Pupils would have to use their research to solve a design problem i.e. using fruit as a source from which to design a symbol for a screen-print. I believe that the best way to test the feasibility of a symbol is to take a two dimensional object and make a three dimensional representation of it.

My teaching practice school for this year is St Dominic's Convent in Sutton. The school is situated in an affluent residence area of the city and the majority of the pupils live locally. Parents are very much involved in their daughters' school life. All subjects areas are very well equipped in this school. These and other factors imply few discipline problems.

I introduced the project to a group of twenty two second year pupils on the 24th January 1990. The group is of diverse ability and has an average age of 14 years. I had taught the group since October for 90 minutes per week, and therefore know them reasonably well. The reasons for choosing the particular project for the particular group go hand in

hand.

A junior group would benefit from this project for a number of reasons; firstly, I believe the relative naivety of a younger group would offer a fresher start to develop visual literacy. And secondly, because of my research, I wanted to challenge a younger group with a sophisticated design problem so as to enhance their self-esteem through high achievement.

Also, this group will be the first cohorts to take the new Junior Certificate examination, and therefore, the benefits of this project will be two-fold. This group welcomes challenges and so I had to challenge my ability as a teacher in order to motivate them sufficiently.

As a motivator for my first class, I brought pupils to work outside. My learning objective was to explore structure and texture through drawing natural found objects. I began with a slide show, the purpose of which was to show the diversities in our (Irish) natural environment. I then showed examples of how various artists have dealt with different





aspects of nature through history. References included J.M.W. Turner, J.A. O'Connor, Franz Marc, Pieter Claez and Vincent Van Gogh.

Working outside added enthusiasm and curiosity to making observational line drawings of organic objects. Pupils also took rubbings from the bark of trees and leaves etc.

The following week I introduced pupils to 17th century Dutch still life paintings - especially those which are to be seen in the National Gallery - through a slide show. The paintings show food and animals which appear purely decorative to us, but are in fact symbols for various stages in life. These symbols would have been understood by the people of the time. Fruit symbolised life, death, and rebirth. After a discussion, pupils chose a piece of fruit from a large selection we had gathered. Pupils drew the whole fruit with dry media (pencil, coloured-pencil, pastels). Then the fruit was opened and pupils concentrated on sections.

One week later the fruit was beginning to decompose. Pupils observed colour and texture through colour-mixing with paint. The novelty of







34. Pupils drawing of fruit



35. Pupils drawing of fruit







36. Pupils drawing of fruit



37. Pupils drawing of decomposed fruit









38. Pupils 3D Still Life



39. Pupils 3D Still Life



1. The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year, and the second section deals with the specific results of the work.

2. The second part of the report deals with the specific results of the work. It is divided into three main sections: the first section deals with the results of the work in the field of agriculture, the second section deals with the results of the work in the field of industry, and the third section deals with the results of the work in the field of commerce.

3. The third part of the report deals with the conclusions and recommendations. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the conclusions and the second section deals with the recommendations.

4. The fourth part of the report deals with the financial statement. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the income and the second section deals with the expenditure.

5. The fifth part of the report deals with the balance sheet. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the assets and the second section deals with the liabilities.

6. The sixth part of the report deals with the cash flow statement. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the cash and the second section deals with the cash equivalents.

7. The seventh part of the report deals with the notes to the financial statements. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the notes to the income statement and the second section deals with the notes to the balance sheet.



rotten fruit is a good motivator!

They attempted to portray the essence of decomposing in showing the fruit slowly beginning to change. We discussed how this withering related to old age in a life cycle.

The fact that the fruit was rotting meant that they could have no pre-conceived ideas about the colour or texture e.g. instead of a grape-fruit being yellow and shiny it was now blue and furry. Close observation was required in order to achieve precise colour matching.

The next step was to study the structure of the fruit. Some pupils worked from fresh fruit and others from decomposed fruit. Pupils made three-dimensional representations through papier-mache. these were painted accordingly, and used to make up a modern symbolic still-life which reflected 17th century still-life work.

The following lesson was based on media images. Pupils looked at the portrayal of fruit in advertising. The class divided into four teams and each made a collage chart of photo images. Each chart



40. Screen-print by pupils







had a different symbolic theme.

Finally having drawn from all work to date, each team designed a symbol of a cycle. Stencils were cut for the designs so as to allow for various stages of colour printing including overlaps. Four group screen-prints were made - each using the primary colours, red, yellow and blue in various combinations.

In the following chapter I will evaluate and discuss the various outcomes of this school project and my own personal project.



## VI

## CONCLUSION

"One morning we depart, our minds full of  
passion,  
Our hearts heavy with resentment and bitter  
desires,  
and we sail forth, swinging with the rhythm  
of the waves,  
cradling our infinity in the finiteness of  
the seas."

Baudelaire

Thankfully, any heaviness was lifted from my heart as the classroom project came to fruition. I felt that pupils met the challenge of a design problem fully.

As already stated, I was working with a very young group of limited experience and I believe they dealt with a sophisticated problem in a mature and thoughtful way.

The chosen source offered a wide range of possibilities for interpretation. The fact that the source was organic also meant that it was always changing and therefore constituted a relatively new source each week. This changing factor acted as a good motivator.

The most valuable lesson I learned as a teacher was that pupil motivation is crucial to full



participation in a class. It was evident that pupils were eager about the project. I believe focused enthusiasm is important for a good learning atmosphere.

Screen-print is not my favourite medium, perhaps because as a painter. I prefer the 'hands-on' experience. Therefore I too needed to be motivated so as to create an atmosphere of enthusiasm. I found that the interesting quality of the project provided the desire to do justice to the ideas.

I conclude from this that any craft or technique can be taught in a lively way if the subject and problem are 'weighty' enough. Obviously, the need for good planning and careful thought is evident.

The very essence of a project structure allows for an increase in self-esteem. Pupils were given many opportunities and different ways to deal with a problem and skills are improved with each step. Each pupil got a chance to 'shine' at some point. Group work also helped to boost together and contribute. Each contribution was noted and used at some point, and so each of work represented a part of each individual.

Ideas changed and improved with each class and so there was no panic about creating the perfect finished product. This fact impressed me very much. I came to realise that with encouragement pupils' quality of idea improves. I expected a high standard and they worked accordingly.

The pupils took particular interest in the advertising part of the project. They discovered that they had never really looked at or thought about the familiar images before. This was one area I saw a very obvious change toward discernment in their attitude.

I would say that the main difficulty of the project was one of frustration as the pupils struggled to express visually that which they wanted to say. This fact only confirmed my notion of the need for development of visual literacy and manual skills in education. Because of the nature of problems set, pupils were able to explore visual language through a variety of art elements and media.

Through my personal project I also had the opportunity to explore variations of the paint medium, and thereby increase my visual vocabulary. I gave

myself many rules and restrictions so as to exploit my discoveries and knowledge to the fullest; With a restricted palette I had no choice but to test as many combinations of tones and methods of application as possible. It was as though I had to prove the 'less is more' concept.

I enjoyed the challenge, and although I have greater confidence in my painting abilities, I feel my project could continue indefinitely; especially as regards symbolism. My research has introduced me to a world of symbols which offers endless exploration.

I have also been tempted to revive an awareness of our rich Irish art heritage and legend, through my paintings. My fundamental objective was to paint a new symbol, which had both personal expression and the flexibility to be interpreted.

Finally, I will allow Oscar Wilde, the poetic Symbolist, to have the last word;

"A school should be the most beautiful place in every town and village - so beautiful that the punishment for undutiful children should be that they should be debarred from going to school the following day."



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