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"THE FIGURE IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT"

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INTRODUCTION

The figure in art has been a prominent theme employed by artists of every nation for many centuries. It is a theme which has featured in my own work for the past three years proving, at times, to be very flexible. The variety of styles and media I have undertaken using the figure as my theme are numerous. Naturally on entering this diploma for art and design teachers course I continued working from the figure and subsequently introduced my pupils to this theme, encouraging the exploration of the many creative possibilities it offers.

The following text documents the development of a selection of my personal work produced during the course of the year plus the work produced by my fifth year pupils in Ballinteer Community School who worked on the theme through a different media.

Chapter I, The Educational Rationale, outlines the theories and justifications for the teaching of art as seen by numerous educators, plus my own personal theories. It underlines the educational benefits received by the pupils from the particular project I instructed.

Chapter II, The Historical Context, discussed the works of two artists, namely Edward Munch who for some time has influenced me in relation to my personal work; and Locky Morris whose theory involving the production of works of art encouraged me to undertake such a project with my pupils.

In Chapter III, I have documented a step-by-step account of how I introduced the theme of the figure to my pupils and subsequently instructed

their main project. The developments that occurred throughout the six week period of work on this theme has been recorded and illustrated.

The final chapter discusses the development of my own personal work throughout the past academic year. It outlines the reasons for my working from the figure and illustrates my final conclusions.

EDUCATION RATIONALE

We should provide our pupils with various means with which they can identify, which take them beyond the mere acceptance of the immediate and provide for very creative projection (1)

In teaching art the main aim should be to lead each child to realise that art is the vital link between them and their environment. Art helps them to see, to understand, to care about and to enhance their sensitivity to their world. It helps them to relate to it and to express themselves about it. In doing so it is important that they learn and gain from the process, whether it be haptic or visual, self-expressive or historical. The students will learn how to think constructively for themselves and solve problems independently of the teacher.

According to McFee and Degge it takes a great deal of learning from infancy onwards to learn to identify and interpret the things we see, what they are and what they do. Many people's perceptual learning stops there. Artistic expression, in particular drawing, is also a method for recording. Academic learning is similar. One studies, records and analyses what one learns in writing and subsequently learns in greater detail. The ability to remember what one has read is helped by taking notes. Similarly, the ability to remember what one has seen is helped by visual note-taking in the form of drawing. If the students are to learn to understand their experiences they must do both kinds of analysing and recording; that is both drawing and writing; and from these, create pieces of art that are individual and personal to themselves. (2)

If we study the theories of Elliot Eisner we see that he feels there are two major types of justifications for the teaching of art. They are the

contextualist justification and the essentialist justification. The former emphasises the consequences of art in society and utilises the particular needs of the students or the society as a major basis for forming its objectives. The latter emphasises the kinds of contributions to human experience and understanding that only art can provide; it emphasises what is indigenous and unique to art. (3)

Eisner provides us with valid arguments supporting both justifications. I see the validity in both theories but I feel that in practical terms, and in the educational system in operation at present, the contextualists provide an important element which the essentialists omit.

In many educational institutions today, a good art education can provide the foundations necessary for building up confidence and encouragement in the pupils. Using the contextual frame of reference the school uses art to develop self-esteem. The art programme takes as its starting point not art, but society, and takes from the arts what is appropriate for this, giving some set of educational values. Eisner argues that artists are moved by the social character of the society and world in which they live. (4)

Locky Morris's 'In their Place' (see Chapter II) is a sculpture project aiming to depict the oppression and denial of personal freedom in the North of Ireland. He was also attempting to show in human terms the consequences of a repressive political system. These works of art serve to criticise the society in which they were made and thus present to our attention visual metaphors through which values are subsequently conveyed. They could be interpreted as either positive or negative; the works could praise or condemn; but they comment on the oppression and encourage us to

sympathise with the society they depict provided we have learned, through a well-structured art education, to 'read' their message.

An art programme in a Derry school could use Morris's "In their Place" to develop in their pupils an awareness of social issues. His work could give the art class a chance to explore social relationships and develop alternative models of human behaviour within an environment through a different media. The art education would then depend on who the students were, what types of needs the locality had and what problems the larger society was facing.

Although in theory I tend to agree with the contextualists' justification for the teaching of art, and in reality I find it dominating my practice, this does not rule out the more intrinsic benefits of teaching art as proposed by the essentialists.

In the learned opinion of John Dewey the greatest artists are those who have discovered a personal mode of expression that suits the reaction to the experience they wish to convey. (5). In the individuality of the work rests its timeless and universal appeal. We see therefore that art results from an act of self-expression involving emotions and intellect. Thus we may say that "art is a form of expression giving order to a human being's reaction to the environment". (6)

I feel it is of crucial importance, especially when dealing with pupils in a second level institution, to emphasise individualism and encourage the creation of art as a form of expression. Children in this age group tend to become preoccupied with photo-realism. Once they reach this stage, the individuality of their work diminishes. They simply want their creations

to resemble something realistic or look like somebody else's. They become very sensitive to the attitudes of others towards both themselves and their work, sometimes aiming to 'please' rather than create.

It was for these reasons that I chose to work with a small number of 5th Year students (see Chapter III). Being such a small group, and obviously influenced by each other, I felt this was a chance to break away from the realistic mode of thinking. By introducing them to a variety of contemporary sculptors, they realised that the photo-realistic elements which predominated in their previous art history education was overlapped by individual interpretations and a great deal of artistic licence. This increased their confidence so as they could produce a piece that would be both individual and personal.

A further reason for choosing to work with this particular group was due to the fact that I noticed from the initial stages of my teaching practice how self-conscious the pupils were towards their two dimensional studies. The embarrassed or shy feeling that so often exists when adolescents become critically aware of the immaturity of their drawings was evident. I realised that to place emphasis on the acquisition of a number of skills particularly in the tactile sense and the learning of a craft would be beneficial. "To be in control of their work, people must enjoy a high degree of freedom in the choice of both subject matter and manner of expression". (7)

If we accept the need for teaching art we must then teach it in a manner most effective for the pupils. We hope that as a result of instruction the pupils will eventually be brought to view life in personal, expressive and visual terms. Moving at various times from observation to intuition, from feeling symbols to meaningful responses to the works of others, the art

education received at second level will influence the pupils far beyond their years of timetabled study. "To study art out of inner enthusiasm is the opposite of a mere pre-planned method of instruction". (8)

It is in relation to an enthusiastic teacher that a pupil's interest in art is most likely to arise in the school setting.

FOOTNOTES: EDUCATIONAL RATIONALE

- 1] Lowenfeld, Viktor: The Lowenfeld Lecturers. Macmillian Publishing Co. Inc. N.Y. 1970, p. 340.
- 2] McFee, Degge: Art Culture and Environment - A Catalyst for Teaching. p. 170.
- 3] Eisner, Elliot W: Educating Artistic Vision. Collier Macmillian Publishers, London, p.2
- 4] Ibid, p.4.
- 5] Archambault, Reginald D: John Dewey on Education, Selected Writings. The University of Chicago Press, 1964, p. 430.
- 6] Ibid, p.431.
- 7] Gaitskell, Charles D., Hurwitz, A.L: Children and their Art, Methods for the Elementary School. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1975, p. 27.
- 8] Ibid, p.14.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

EDWARD MUNCH WITH REFERENCE TO 'WORKERS ON THEIR WAY HOME' AND 'STREET WORKERS'

It was the December of my final Diploma year while in college in Sligo that I began working from the figure, exclusively. At the beginning of that month, a site was cleared opposite my studio and eighteen men arrived to construct a block of offices. I was, from that day, presented with a permanent life drawing class, changing angles every five to six weeks as the workmen completed each floor. I managed to organise myself into a routine - making quick and informative sketches adapting to their timetable, resting when they rested and only ceasing to sketch when they had gone.

I became familiar with the appearance of each worker and created imaginary personalities for them, inventing a social background for each one. For me, these men resembled television personalities - so close and visually familiar but yet unknown to me at a personal level. The smallest change in their appearance or their environment did not pass unnoticed. A shower of hail which sent each worker running for shelter and subsequently a 'chat'; a blast of sunshine which urged each man to remove his shirt, or the arrival of an unwelcome official. All such changes kept me busy! (Figs. 1 and 2).

It was a number of months after I began studying and drawing these builders that I was introduced to the works of Edward Munch on the same topic. I was delighted with this discovery and greatly inspired and soon began studying his work in greater depth.



FIG. 1

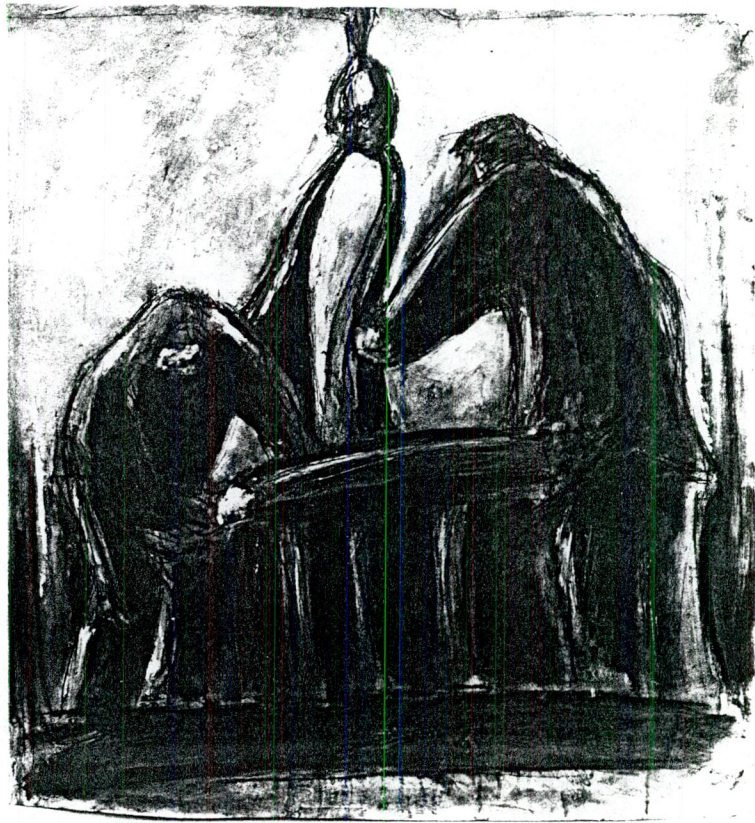


FIG. 2.

Munch began his 'worker paintings' in the early 20th century. He had always liked to sketch farmers, weavers and working men in general. Like Van Gogh, such subjects were close to his heart. From 1910 onwards he identified himself even more closely with this motif, and from 1920, he devoted himself almost exclusively to the representation of work and workers. Munch always felt himself an outsider, excluded from bourgeois society and felt a closeness with the working classes. He saw men who were on his own level, disadvantaged as he was. He notes:

A sense I had since childhood of being the victim of a deadly injustice was the foundation for the activist tendencies in my work. (1).

He incorporated his unfulfilled dreams of greater equality in life into his paintings of the workers. Above his painting "Workers on their way Home" (Fig. 3) he wrote: "Do you know who is walking here? It is me. The bourgeois mob has tried to force me, too, to my knees". (2).

He later went on to say:

As long as I have been working in this country, I have had to fight with clenched fist for every last toe-hold for my art. I have also put a man with clenched fist as the central figure in my big worker painting. (3).

This is more than just a straight-forward representation of people about their daily work. Munch must somehow have sensed the inexorable progress of a class on the march and judging by his many preliminary sketches and drawings on the topic, he had been exploring the possibilities of this subject for a long time.

Munch has succeeded in revealing the underlying significance of the dark mass of workmen who stream relentlessly out towards us. The figures nearest us have been dramatically foreshortened, they are seen from above



FIG. 3

so that the lower parts of their bodies seem much smaller, while their faces take on an almost frightening prominence. The men are powerful in their plentiness, moving with a determination that merits recognition. Our eyes are lured into the distance by means of an irresistible perspective. The power dominating in the foreground is swallowed by the desolation of a sunless back street where the men drop themselves through the cold blue shadows of the houses. Their faces become vague, devoid of the powerful expressions but animated by the atmosphere the painting induces.

We do not know for certain what Munch's politics were. His remark to Ragnar Hoppe in 1929 "Now it is the turn of the workers" (4) could mean that he was at least interested in the working class movement. He was always aware of contemporary events and had developed a strong social conscience.

Working men began to appear more and more frequently in Munch's paintings. His admiration for the feeling of strength and power that they projected and the respect he had for the working people became apparent through his many sketches and paintings on this theme (Figs. 4 and 5). He kept his sketches as material for future paintings and prints but I feel they were masterpieces in themselves. A particular favourite of mine is "Street Workers" (Fig. 6). The scene with which we are presented is that of three men busy at their work. The composition has been cleverly divided into four diagonal stripes representing the road, the roadworks and the section of street houses we see in the background. This composition is broken by the three figures with which our eyes inevitably focus. With a few lines Munch has invented a perfect handsome composition. It is not the composition that gives me reason to love this drawing, although admittedly I feel it perhaps added to the fact, but the freedom I see in the lines and tones used. This drawing was obviously created at the scene and its

spontaneity has been captured through the pencil lines and charcoal tones that I see searching the page in order to portray the busy and uninterrupted scene.

The working people of both town and country occupied a prominent place in Edward Munch's art. They were part of the surroundings which he drew and painted, they became part of his pictures just as houses and trees did. His art was neither programmatic nor reforming but above all things and first and foremost realistic. He depicted reality as he saw and experienced it.



FIG. 4



FIG. 5



FIG. 6

LOCKY MORRIS WITH REFERENCE TO "IN THEIR PLACE"

It was after my students and I had decided to construct plaster figures from drawings taken from the Ballinteer Superquinn Centre that I came across the works of Locky Morris. I had been browsing through a book A New Tradition: Irish Art of the Eighties, and saw a small photograph hidden away from the main contents. It was a photograph of what looked like a life-sized, plaster figure resting against a street wall. The piece was named "Shopping Figure Resting" (Fig. 7) and on closer examination I saw evidence of a shopping bag in the figure's hand. I was very impressed by this piece and the resemblance between it and the type of project I intended to do with my students.

I wrote to Locky Morris and he very kindly sent on information, reviews and slides of the sculptures in progress and as they now stand.

Locky Morris is a young artist from Derry. His work is mainly three-dimensional and he uses a variety of mixed media. It can be seen from his sculptures that he is deeply concerned with the political troubles in the North of Ireland and more so with the people who are directly effected by this trouble.

It transpires that the "Shopping Figure Resting" is one of nine figures collectively titled "In their Place" (Fig. 8), which were exhibited in various locations around Derry City for a period of six months in 1987.

Like concrete versions of the victims of Pompeii, these figures hung around the city walls, frozen in time and motion. (5)

They were rarely ignored by the passers-by as they stood waiting for buses or staring vacantly over the Guild Hall Square. For many, these figures



FIG. 7

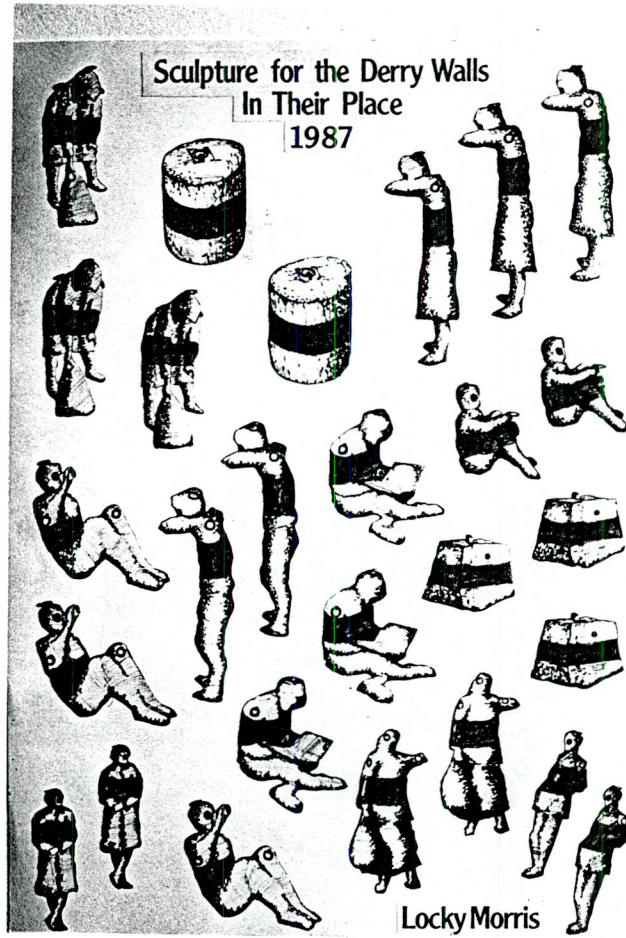


FIG. 8

were eye-catching with their coats of red and white paint against the dull stone of the walls (Fig. 7).

These statues were made by Morris over a three month period using concrete [not plaster as I had thought initially] reinforced internally with steel, metal rings, reflectors and red and white paint. Basically the figures are constructed from the same materials used by the British Army and the RUC in the bollards found all round the North of Ireland, whether blocking streets, around police stations or on border roads. In this respect the materials were a crucial part of the project and formed part of the statement made.

The process involved moulding chicken wire around the bodies of the models in their various poses (Fig. 9). These models were all local Derry people, thus adding personal character and local flavour to the figures. The wire frameworks (Fig. 10) were then covered with scrim and plaster which, when set, provided the casts into which the concrete and reinforcement were placed (Fig. 11). Once solidified the plaster and scrim were chipped away revealing the bare concrete figures (Fig. 12) onto which the paint and reflectors were finally added.

It was the concept behind these figures that forced me into realising how significant they were to the people of Derry in particular and to anyone else viewing them. Despite the alien outward appearance of the statues, they possess a strong sense of realism. People shopping, drinking or standing watching the world go by are all common sights around the walls of Derry, thus the pose of each of Morris's figures mirrors everyday realities. The sculptures are also realistic in the sense that they were modelled 'real' [i.e. local] people. Locky Morris constructed the statues in a series of workshops so that the locals of Derry could actively take



FIG. 9

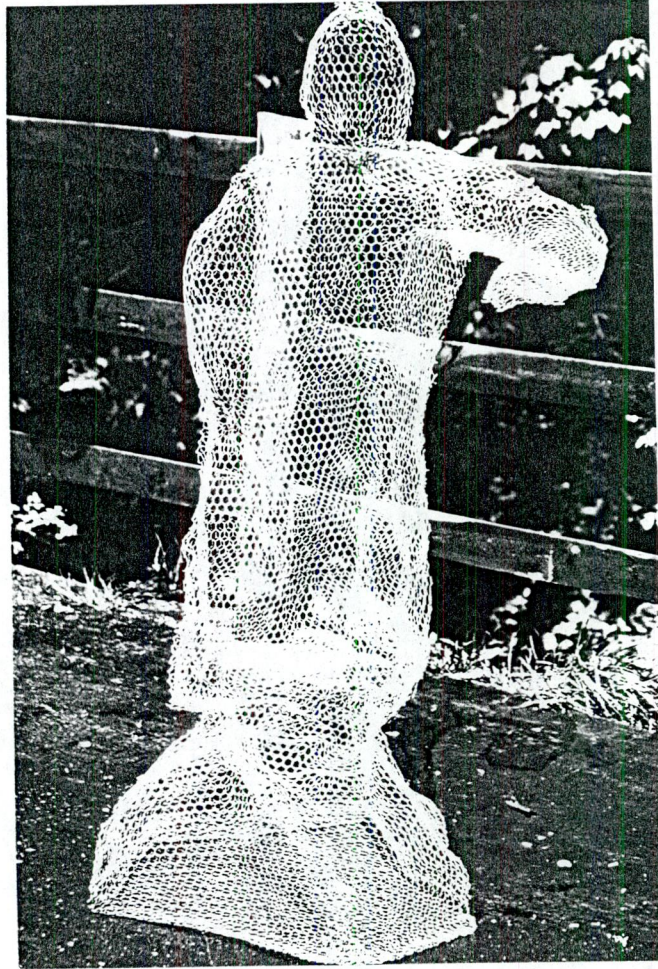


FIG. 10

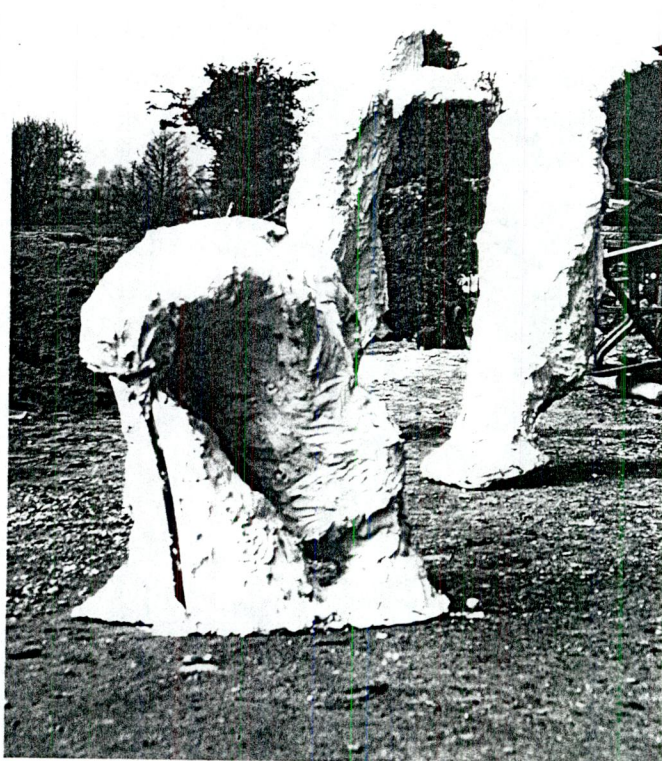


FIG. 11



FIG. 12.

part in the making of his work. These workshops were not simply a means of making the sculptures accurate but an attempt by him to break down the barriers which exclude all but an elite few from producing or taking pleasure in art. I had been trying to prove this theory in relation to my own students. Through the workshops Morris hoped to encourage others to see sculpture-making as a skill which they could learn and thus make works independently of him.

Aside from the way they were produced, the statues are openly political in the way they look and the meaning behind them.

One cannot but question the choice of materials and eventually make the connection with red and white bollards used by the police and army as a temporary means of sealing off areas of the city. But why, they might wonder, did Locky Morris fuse the human figure with the visual elements of the bollards. He used the bollards to symbolise the oppression and denial of personal freedom in the North and was attempting to show in human terms the consequences of a repressive political system. The statues are a visual metaphor to indicate how people are being kept "In their Place".

Many features visible in the statues are open to interpretation. The lack of identity or individuality in the roughly-cast figures creates an anonymity, or secrecy. They do not want to be recognised, perhaps protecting themselves. This also suggests the idea of collective repression .. that they are all being kept in their places. This is reinforced by the band of red paint. I have tried to visualise the statues in plain white, devoid of the red band and feel that somehow they look heavier with the band. It acts as an anchor ... rooting the figures to their places, removing their freedom. The weight of the statues echoes

this theory and suggests that they are being weighed down both physically and emotionally.

The metal rings found on the statue's shoulders further emphasises the lack of freedom. In order to move they must be 'lifted' - removing the decision from the individual. The rings are also politically significant as similar rings were used as an early form of anti-riot device to protect the inner city, or in old dungeons for tying people up.

In making the statues for the walls, Morris has been able to challenge the political practices in the North on a larger scale and to a larger audience than a gallery would allow. The visual and emotional impact the statues created was huge. People were undoubtedly drawn to them or questioned them. Some modelled, others helped construct. Then again, a few might walk past the police station and think to themselves ... "them bollards look like them statues up the town". (6).

FOOTNOTES - HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- 1) Amann, Per: Edward Munch. Artline Editions, p. 14.
- 2) Ibid, p. 15.
- 3) Ibid, p. 15.
- 4) Stang, Ragna: Edward Munch, The Man and The Artist. Gordon Fraser. London, 1979. p. 257.
- 5) Gallagher, Mary: 'Them Statues...' Article in Finger Post, 1987, p. 27.
- 6) Ibid, p. 31.

PUPILS PROJECT

It was in the early weeks of my teaching practice in Ballinteer Community School that I became acquainted with the extreme diversities in the attitudes my pupils held towards art and artistic education. These diverse attitudes were more prominent amongst the senior pupils. This surprised me, as the senior class I was directly involved with consisted of six people, which not only provided an opportunity to create a warm and intimate atmosphere amongst themselves, but also the chance to take advantage of the absence of fellow pupils by exploring a variety of materials and media.

Contrary to my expectations, I found that the unusually small number inhibited exploration and the pupils became increasingly self-conscious towards their art work. Only three out of the six pupils had previously studied art and this created an obvious division in the class. I realised that to introduce a process that was new to each pupil would provide equal opportunities and subsequently decrease the division. It was due to these reasons that I selected this 5th Year class to work with.

I wanted to offer the pupils a creative challenge by providing an everyday source of inspiration and encouraging them towards making a group installation that had visual impact, contradicting its reality. I also felt that to introduce them to the human figure in three dimensions, and thus develop their tactile skills, would be beneficial. But concerning this particular group, I wanted to dispel the myth that producing sculpture was a divine talent, or that it bore no relationship to real human conditions. The learning objectives in this project were various and numerous and shall become apparent in the course of this chapter.

THE PROJECT

I was interested in the idea of working from a source that would be familiar to each pupil but also one that would appear, at first, to be slightly uninteresting and banal. This would challenge the pupils with the opportunity of creating a metamorphosis between a once banal environment and a dynamic form of art. I wanted to keep to the 'Figure in an Urban Environment' theme as it is an area of study that maintains my interest. Bearing in mind the feasibility of taking the pupils out on a field trip to a place not far away, I decided to bring them to the Ballinteer Superquinn Centre. From there they could absorb and record the working, shopping and strolling figures both visually and in written form. The trip was scheduled for Monday, 4 February 1991, and on that day (windy and quite wet) we set off to conquer the shopping centre and its inhabitants. I knew beforehand that we would be in the shopping centre for approximately thirty minutes and so devised a worksheet that would keep each pupil busy and constructive for this time. (Figs. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18).

I had emphasised the fact that what I was looking for was a number of informative gesture drawings; drawings which could be worked on and developed back in the art room. The pupils could write descriptions of the particular figure they were studying as well as making gesture drawings of it. They were merely recording information. Each pupil was allocated a specific department in the supermarket and they set off working. Their drawings were, as I hoped, not pictures or masterpieces ... but informative.



Fig. 13

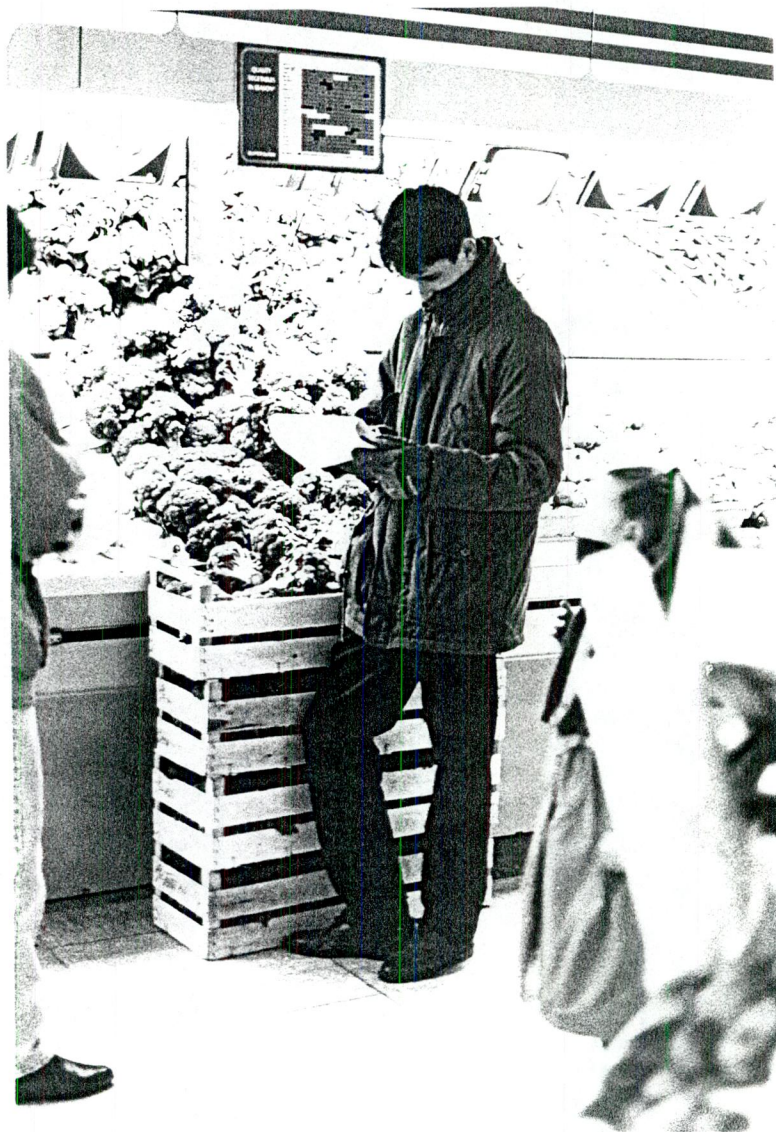


FIG. 14



FIG. 15



FIG. 16



FIG. 17



FIG. 18

The following Monday I introduced the work of the pupils to a number of figurative sculptors (many of whom are contemporary) in slide form.

The Figure in Sculpture (Slide Show)

Introduction

The figure in sculpture has been a prominent theme employed by artists of every nation for hundreds of years. The actual interpretation of the figure is a feature that has varied greatly, changing at different times for numerous reasons. If we consider the different sources of artistic inspiration and the difference in purpose and technical ability, the variety of figures interpreted throughout the ages will be slightly clarified.

Slide_1

This figure called "Man Holding a Bowl" was carved by a Filipino in North Luzon in the 15 century. It is 16.5" in height and carved from wood. It was probably created for practical use as well as a piece of sculpture. The bowl held by the squatting figure might have been used for holding offerings. The facial features, hands and feet have been simplified, creating what we call ... "the primitive look". This piece is representative of the early treatment of the figure when skills and techniques were limited.

Slide_2

Contrasting this, we see a figure sculpted by French artist August Rodin. Rodin was one of the foremost sculptors in the 19th century, influencing many sculptors who came after him. Here we are presented with a realistic portrayal of a bronze figure. The realism in this figure echoes the development in skills and techniques and yet another interpretation of the

figure in sculpture.

Slide_3

This piece which was created from whalebone and hair is by an unidentified Eskimo artist. We are unaware of the exact date but are informed that it was made around 1950. It was shaped with both primitive tools and modern implements from whalebone. The basic Eskimo aesthetic principle is to create a likeness of real or imagined subject. This is a real image of a mother carrying her child on her back. The interpretation of the figures have regressed to the simplified imagery, thus enabling us to read more through their expressions than that of a representational figure.

Now I want to take a look at the many ways in which the figure has been interpreted in our contemporary Irish society.

Slide_4

This piece by a Welsh artist called Gordon Young is called "The Fisherman". It is part of the Hazelwood Symposium in Co. Sligo which proposed the notion of making sculpture from wood and putting it back in its indigenous setting, thus creating a sculpture trail in nature trails and forest walks.

The fisherman is carved from oak and is 6 metres in height. Gordon Young is committed to work which is realist, humanist, communal and active so he portrayed a wooden statue of a fisherman who is taking hold of a caught fish. It is very much for the place where it stands which as we can see is by the banks of a lake. It reflects the activities that would normally occur in this particular area and so blends in with the environment. The process involved carving from a block of oak, eventually revealing a mass of curves, lines and shapes which we see in the form of a fisherman.

Slide 5

This is another piece in the Hazelwood Symposium. It is by an artist called Jakki McKenna. She titled this figure "Wood Gatherer". It is based on a woman from her hometown in Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim who spent many hours dragging large branches and driftwood for her fire. We can tell from the stance of the woman that she is tired and weary and perhaps old. The process involved in the carving of this piece is similar to that of Gordon Young, beginning with an initial block of wood and carving and chipping to find the shape within. The "Wood Gatherer" is situated at the entrance to the forest walk, hidden in between a mass of trees visible. Jakki McKenna used beech wood to carve this figure and it is 1.8 metres in height.

Slide 6 (Detail 7)

This is a piece by the same artist. It is situated outside the Dublin Woollen Mills on Eden Quay and is called "Two Shoppers Resting". It portrays two women resting from their day shopping engaged in conversation. The materials used in the figurative sculpture is bronze. This is a more complicated method of working than the carving process involved in the two former pieces. Here the figures are initially moulded in clay and then divided into segments from which the bronze casts can be made. The bronze segments are then re-assembled and soldered together.

The portrayal of women in sculpture is a theme that runs through Jakki McKenna's work, usually portraying women that she knows well enough to reveal a particular trait in their personality, thus giving the viewer a little more than a visual image, allowing us to read something more intimate about them. The figure on our left is said to be a portrait of her mother, who visited Dublin frequently on shopping visits.

Slide 8 (Detail 9)

This piece titled "The Kiss" is situated on the corner of Hatch Street and Earlsfort Terrace. The artist Rowan Gillespie employed a similar process to that of the "Two Shoppers Resting" in so far as he modelled the figures in clay, divided them into sections and subsequently had these sections cast in bronze. But visually the two pieces are very different. Rowan Gillespie stylises his figures; they are elongated, soaring up to the sky. The two bodies are very thin and both have wing-like arms. The surface of the bronze is textured, almost looking like rough rocks ... the raised areas appearing shiny and the lower areas ... resembling cracks, being duller. The stylised bodies are contrasted by the realistic heads, where the surface becomes smooth and shiny and the faces realistic.

Slide 10 (Detail 11)

This figure titled "Mr. Screen" is by an artist called Vincent Brown. It is situated in an appropriate position outside the Screen cinema in Hawkins Street. It portrays a man, obviously an authoritative figure in the cinema itself, holding a torch which seemingly directs the punters to their seats. The figure resembles a caricature of a sergeant major, half-smiling, half-growling - either way, proudly displaying his largely emphasised bronze teeth.

This piece is made from a combination of bronze and copper and on first viewing would perhaps suggest to us a process similar to the moulding and casting involved in the previous two sculptures, but in reality it is constructed from cut-up hot press cylinders, which have been stretched over an armature to create the basic form of the figure. The ornate buttons and lapels were added to the bronze cylinder and are composed of twisted copper wire.

Vincent Brown works from materials that we might find in every day situations. He cuts them, bends them, adds to them and shapes them to cleverly form his figures that are both visually and economically contagious.

Slide 12 (Detail 13)

This piece called "Necromacy" is another fine example of how Vincent Brown used scrap materials to create a figure. Located at Marlay Park, Rathfarnham, one cannot help but notice and subsequently be lured into examining this huge and fierce looking 3 metre figure. It was constructed from strips of steel which were soldered together. A basic armature, similar to that used in "Mr. Screen", was constructed and the soldered strips of steel placed around this to form the figure. If we examine the steel used we might recognise areas as the lids of man-holes usually found on the road, but in this case forming a bulky belt.

Slides 14, 15 and 16

The two figures that we see in this slide were created by Derryman, Locky Morris. They are two of nine figures collectively titled "In their Place", which were exhibited in various locations around Derry City for a period of six months in 1987. They were made over a three month period using concrete reinforced internally with steel, metal rings, reflectors and red and white paint.

The process involved moulding chicken wire around the bodies of the models in their various poses. The wire frameworks were then covered with scrim and plaster which, when set, provided the casts into which the concrete and reinforcement were placed. Once solidified the plaster and scrim were chipped away revealing the bare concrete figures onto which the paint and

reflectors were finally added. Despite the alien outward appearance of the statues, they possess a strong sense of realism. People shopping, drinking or standing watching the world go by.

The materials used in the making of these statues are similar to the materials used by the British Army and RUC in the bollards found all round the North of Ireland. Locky Morris fused the human figure with the visual elements of the bollards to symbolise the oppression and denial of personal freedom in the North and he was attempting to show in human terms the consequences of a repressive political system.

CONCLUSION

Slides 4, 6, 8, 10 and 14

We have looked at numerous interpretations of the figure in sculpture. Some dramatic, some comical and some portraying important messages for us to read. We can see that each figure blends in with its environment adding a hint of atmosphere to the surroundings, whether they be rural or urban. The treatment of the figure varies in each sculpture from carving to modelling or construction, and from realism to caricatures or stylised images. We can explore the many ways of creating a three-dimensional figure which would be relevant to ourselves and our own environment.

Finally, after discussing various approaches to the project a process was decided upon. We were to construct wire armatures which could be animated into selected positions and covered with plaster-dipped scrim. These could then be moulded and carved into individual "personalities". When the figures were completed, an environment suitable to both the source and the individual figures would be constructed to create a type of installation. An entire double period was devoted to the construction of the armatures.

The wire we used was quite strong and difficult to manipulate but with the help of a pliers and a few pairs of hands this problem was overcome. The students seemed to have no problem understanding the purpose of the armatures, and worked enthusiastically on their figures. Once they had the basic armatures made and nailed at one point into a wooden base, they were free to animate their figures into their chosen positions and begin the early development of their characters' personalities based on their drawings.

Previous to the actual application of the plaster, the pupils were required to stuff their individual armatures with newspaper in order to create the basic form of their figures (Fig. 19). I had underestimated the length of time this would take and was quite surprised to find half-stuffed figures at the end of a double period. This exercise was valuable in so far as the pupils were forced to look at the basic forms of the human figure such as the torso, buttocks, leg muscles, shoulders and arms, which might be overlooked in two-dimensional work and its application had to be controlled.

When the figures had a substantial amount of stuffing suggesting the basic form, the application of the plaster dipped scrim began. And so, unexpectedly, the following three double periods occurred in the midst of plaster dust and white everything! (Fig. 20). Despite the few mistakes and obstacles that occurred in those three weeks, I feel the pupils gained a lot of valuable information through the application of the plaster, which could only have occurred through direct involvement with the material. The actual manipulation of a new material was a key motivator plus it provided an element of fun, which is crucially important in an art class. The largest obstacle was the rate at which the plaster dried. This created problems for the pupils and caused areas of the figures to crack and



FIG. 19



FIG. 20

crumble which, admittedly, became frustrating as the time given in a double period is severely limiting.

The next stage was that of sanding or shaving the plaster figures in order to vary the surface texture and if needed provide specific details. At this point .. mid-April .. three new pupils joined the art class (I have no idea why) and so they began work on the environment needed for the installation. This environment had been discussed previously amongst the pupils and myself and due to time limitations plus the progress of the figures to date we decided that it should consist of boxes of various sizes which would be quick to create and relevant to the figures. These would bear designs taken from items found in the supermarket applied by means of collage and placed at random throughout the display of completed figures.

The process involved observational drawing from a selection of fruit and vegetables, simplifying these drawings and subsequently cutting the flat and simple shapes from coloured paper. Each of the three pupils had then to think of an item that would tally with their specific image and use appropriate lettering that would compliment both the image and the box. The class was now divided into two workshops, six pupils adding the final touches to their three-dimensional figures and three pupils designing the boxes.

The final class in this project consisted of a lengthy discussion on how and where the figures would stand and where the boxes would be placed in order to compliment the figures. After numerous variations and swapping we finally decided on a permanent pose. They were to stand with four figures close together and two on the perimeter. The base of each figure was to be covered with hessian sacking to create a continuity perhaps suggestive of the supermarket floor. The boxes, rather than being placed

at random throughout the figures, were to be stacked on top of one another thus dwarfing the figures in the same way that shelving dwarfs the shoppers. .

In conclusion, the project was quite successful in so far as it familiarised the pupils with the human figure in both two dimensions and three dimensions, plus it created various problems that required immediate solutions which forced them to act in a responsible manner. The various tools used in the shaving of the plaster surfaces were constructed by the pupils from found objects thus demonstrating the economical value of such objects. The manipulation of new materials provided endless motivation and enthusiasm on the pupils' behalf. I was pleased with the final result and felt the lack of rapore I developed with the two cleaners in Ballinteer Community School was worth it! (Figs. 22, 22, 23, 24 and 25).

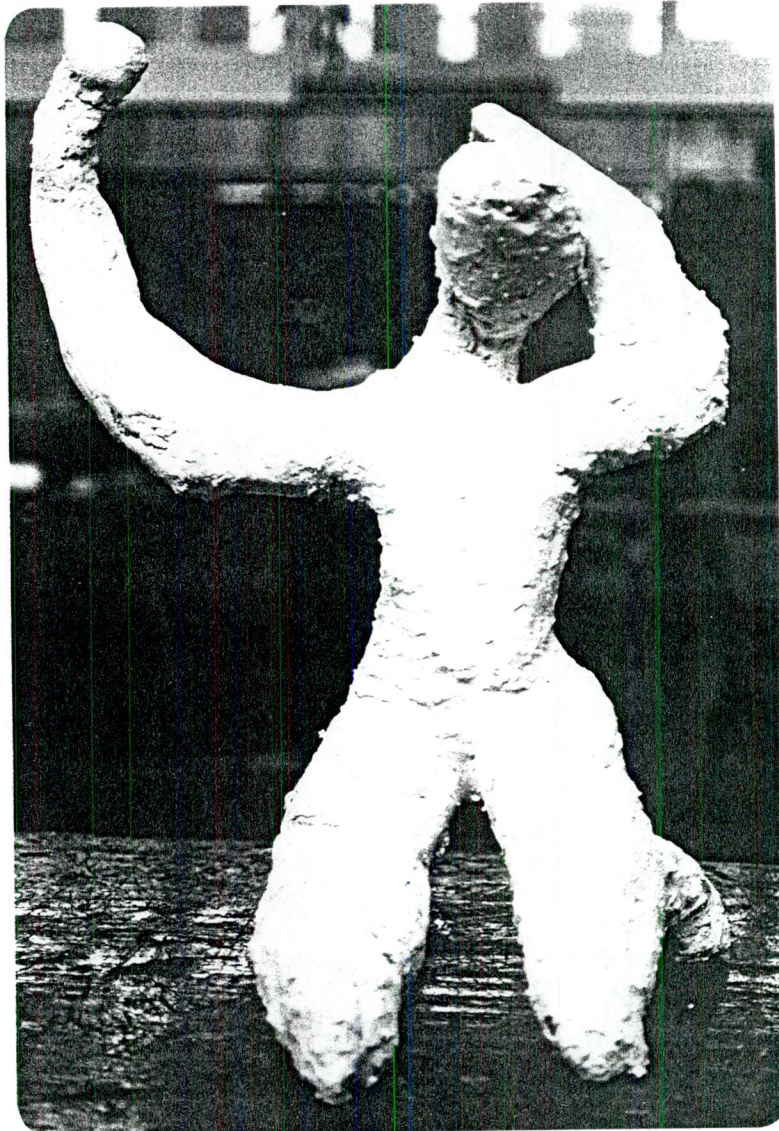


Fig. 21



FIG. 22

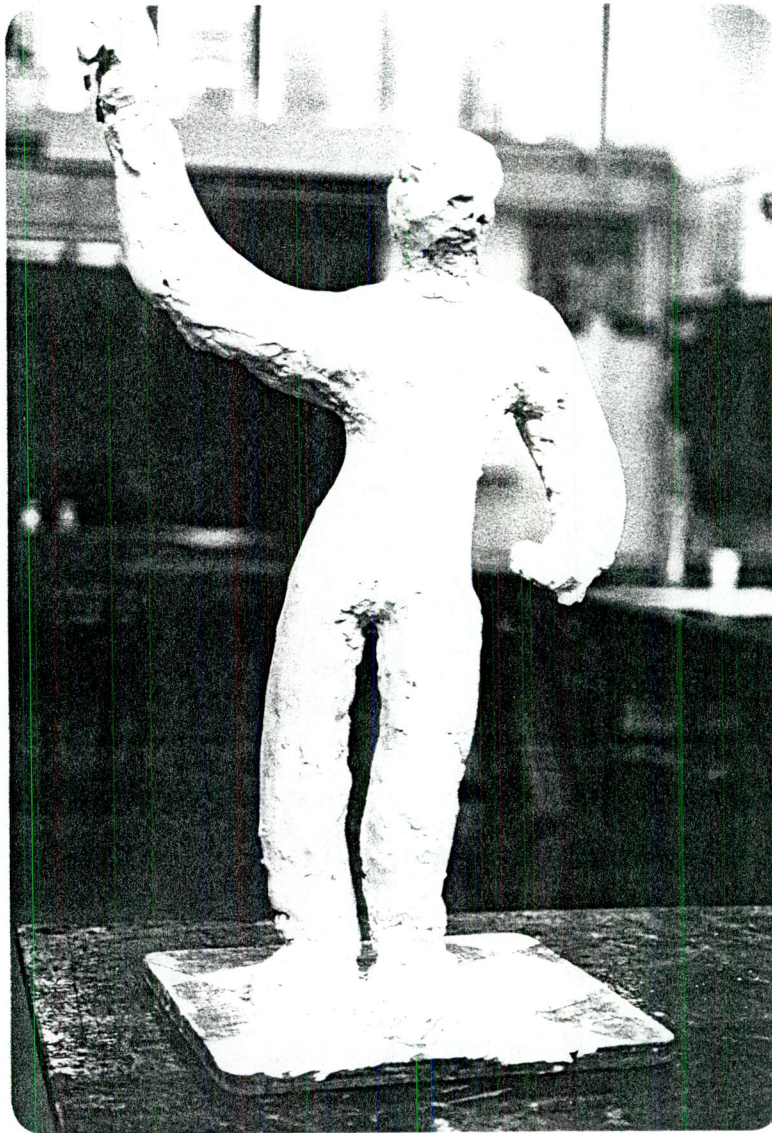


FIG. 23



FIG. 24



FIG. 25

PERSONAL PROJECT

'Why does it fascinate me to watch other people work?'

When asked to submit a description or statement concerning my own work, for an exhibition in which I was a participant, in July 1990, this is what I wrote. I still do not know how it was interpreted! I think what the Gallery co-ordinator might have been looking for was an in depth explanation of what my work meant to me, what media I explored and what I was inspired by ... but as I have forever maintained - you could talk about other artists' work forever but when it comes to discussing your own you are tongue-tied. I had thought a lot about what to write and began countless paragraphs on the technical aspects of my paintings ... but somehow they all seemed slightly superficial and did not echo reality.

I reminisced over my painting diploma year's work, detaching myself, trying to capture one overall feeling and get it down on paper. I saw the builders in numerous different contexts, exploring a variety of media, suggesting contrasting scenes - some sodden with atmosphere, others capturing movement. One could not help but notice the recurring element present. The worker was this element, the workers were the theme and I realised - probably for the first time - what I had been trying to capture.

I was obviously quite intrigued by the busy and active scene that situated itself opposite my studio. At a glance, the site offered a constant stream of anonymous figures bustling about and leading an extraordinarily constructive day ... everyday. The figures were alien to me, almost mechanical ... repeating their duties as the building grew. After a substantial period of unconscious 'character analysis' (due to many days of

gazing relentlessly out the window), I began to recognise particular traits; the stance of a builder or the laugh of his friend. The individual personalities were emerging and human characteristics shining through. I began drawing and painting these men capturing their rapid movements and painting the atmosphere that they as humans suggested.

On moving to Dublin in the October of 1990 I found I was surrounded by these 'anonymous' figures, particularly when strolling through the city's main streets. Pausing to appreciate the many buskers and performers that are dotted at intervals throughout Grafton Street, I found it was the onlookers who undoubtedly captured my interest. The crowds of alien beings surrounding me began to monopolise a large part of my thoughts and subsequently my art.

I invested in a pocket sized sketch book and carried it with me at all times, taking it out at every possible opportunity to record a particular scene that caught my eye. It was a miracle that even I, the creator of the sketches, could actually work from the recordings as some of them resembled nothing more than a mass of lines and perhaps an odd word telling the colour or mood visible.

I remember one occasion whereby I was pedalling furiously from Thomas Street to Leinster Lane. At the traffic lights by Christ Church I spotted two men digging at the side of the road. The day was hot and sunny yet these men were wearing hats, earmuffs and heavy overcoats. I watched them as they worked chatting to one another both happy and busy. I was observing each detail and convincing myself that I would recall the specifics when, at a later date, I would attempt recording the scene again with paint. I knew I wouldn't! I searched my pockets for paper ... any

bit of paper and found an old bus ticket with which I made a few lines and curves hopefully to act as a skeleton to work from later. I am presently looking at the ticket, wondering what the developed piece will resemble when completed, but knowing it will at least remind me of the intimate scene I observed on that sunny day, while awaiting the red light to turn green thus allowing me continue with my busy life!

"Tweed Coats and Silk Scarves" was developed from a sketch constructed in a similar manner. The elderly couple simply walked by me on Nassau Street and the sketch, little more than a few lines, formed in a matter of seconds. Back in the studio these lines were enough to jog my memory and begin the painting.

I worked on canson paper using a compressed charcoal to decipher the composition and acrylic paints to create the colour. Acrylic, I felt, was a suitable medium in so far as they were quick-drying yet allowed for a great deal of texture. This painting was one of the first I had tackled since late October (with the exception of life painting classes whereby we painted directly from a model) and thus provided a wealth of enthusiasm and excitement on my behalf. I worked on the piece for two weeks on and off, changing the colours regularly, painting washes over specific areas or adding extra details. I found the immediacy of working with acrylics particularly satisfying with the overlaying of two or more colours creating subtle textures and achieving appropriate atmosphere.

I was never quite sure whether the painting was finished or not and knowing myself I might work on it for a further two weeks and still find it not complete. I had to discipline myself. I worked over the painting with pastels, adding specific details to their faces and hands and pronounced it finished. (Fig. 26).



FIG. 26

"Tweed Coats and Silk Scarves", although not a representational painting by any means, has captured a moment in time for me. I can see the elderly couple walking hand in hand through the bustle of Dublin City. It was a Tuesday, a busy Tuesday. The street was full of bodies, alien beings. The couple stood out.

I had decided earlier in the year to do a number of ceramic pieces, working from the same theme as that of my two-dimensional work. I knew this would be challenging as the facilities in which I was to work consisted of a kitchen floor and a piece of scrap wood. The clay was transported from Thomas Street to my home on the South Circular Road on the carrier of my bicycle and the finished pieces in their raw clay state transported back to NCAD in the same way.

I was working on bowl-like shapes which I modelled initially over balloons and pressed into shape when the clay hardened. I wanted the exterior to have a smooth and burnished texture emphasising the roundness of the bowl and the interior, in total contrast, to be of a rougher texture bearing figures that the gentle curve suggested.

These figures were taken from a combination of several drawings I had made at various stages during the year, perhaps altered slightly to suit the material. They were added to the interior of the bowls and subsequently carved into their specific shapes and forms as they now stand (Figs. 27 and 28). The subtle colours were achieved by the use of various oxides and body stains which were rubbed on with a sponge. I felt this method of staining would be more successful than an overglaze as I wanted every detail in the figures to be emphasised. To support these two dancing figure bowls I moulded three bowls from coconut shell on a smaller scale.

These were treated in a similar fashion in so far as I burnished the exterior to create a smooth surface and etched the interior to create a rough surface. The shapes achieved in these pieces were derived directly from the coconut shells and echoed the shell in a different medium. The colours, again, were achieved through the use of oxides and body stains.

The five pieces I did find challenging to make, I had been right about that, but I also found it quite frustrating. Working outside of a workshop environment with little access to kilns, glazes and oxides was very limiting in both the scale of the pieces and the quantity of work produced. I was, however, satisfied with the results and felt they complimented my paintings.



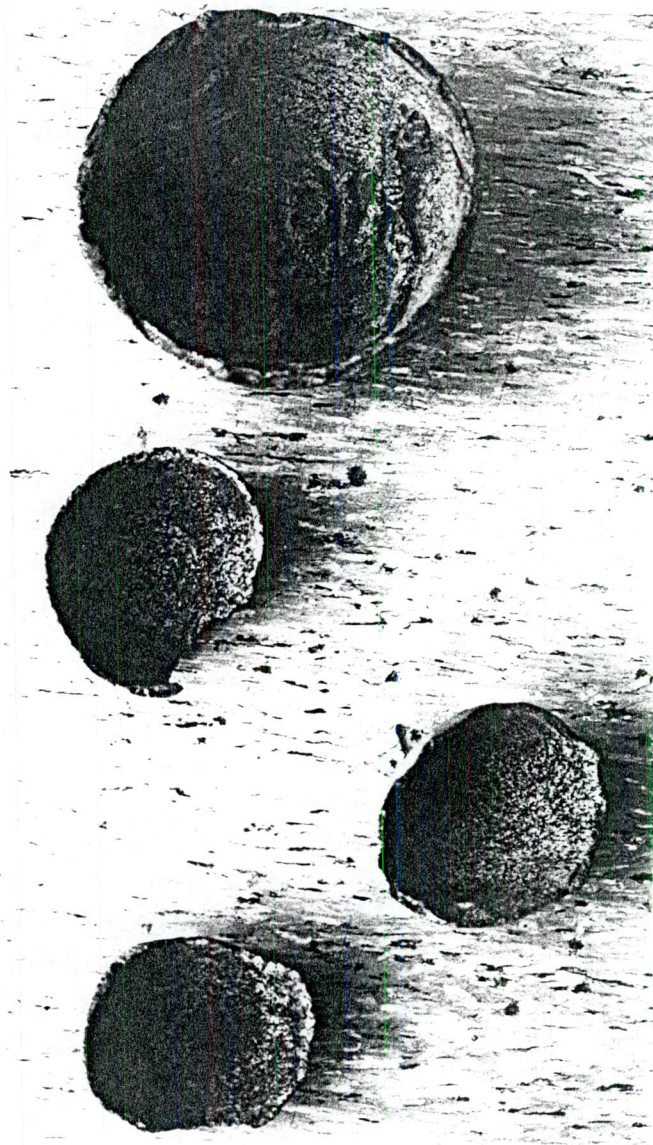


FIG. 27



Fig. 28



CONCLUSION

The project is an exploration of the figure in an urban environment and the mood and atmosphere that these figures conduct. It runs on two parallels both of which influence each other. They are the personal project and the pupils project.

The personal project stemmed from my interest in people and the challenge of capturing their movements and transferring them into another medium.

While developing the project I made a number of sketches which resembled nothing more than a few lines and words. These were studied and subsequently transferred into paintings on a larger scale which, in some way, echoed the scene from which they were created.

I made a number of ceramic pieces based on the figure theme whereby the clay figures echoed the shapes and curves of the bowls into which they were etched. These figures were not taken directly from life but from a number of drawings I had made in the course of the year.

The pupils project began with a trip to the local Superquinn centre. They made a number of gesture drawings of the various working and shopping figures they observed. From these drawings they developed three-dimensional figures composed of a wire armature and plaster. The completed figures were arranged together to form a shopping centre environment and atmosphere.

I was satisfied with both the results of the pupils project and my own project. Although executed in different media both are personal

representations of the figure in an urban environment and demonstrate the possibilities available through the exploration of this theme.

The motivation I witnessed on the behalf of my pupils was refreshing and encouraged me to continue with my personal work, exploring numerous media.

Perhaps I was learning more than they!

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