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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

'BIRD IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM'

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by

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of my work throughout the year was bird imagery and symbolism. My particular interest was and is in painting. For my previous diploma (in Fine Art Painting) I developed an interest in portraiture. The use of the so familiar face and head, with the added element of distortion evokes an immediate emotional response from the viewer. In the project with the students I decided to once again explore the use of the head, this time using birds as the starting point. Likewise, my personal work was a juxtaposing of bird and human imagery for heightened effect.

CHAPTER I

EDUCATIONAL RELEVANCE

Art is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously and thus on the plane of meaning, the union of sense, need and impulse and action characteristic of the live creature. The intervention of consciousness adds regulation, power of selection and redistribution. Thus it varies the arts in ways without end. But its intervention also leads in time to the idea of art as a conscious idea - the greatest intellectual achievement in the history of humanity. John Dewey. (1)

John Dewey wrote of art as a form of experience that vivifies life, moving one to a height of feeling that makes it possible to identify that experience as a unique event. Artistic endeavour by its very nature, has recourse to the symbolic, and as such becomes something very different from any purely practical activity. Our emotional response to art may vary widely, it may be superficial or profound. If one experiences the latter, it can absorb one's attention to the extent that ordinary awareness is lost and a new experience is opened up. Those who have obtained a peak experience in relation to the arts (any of them) can testify that it amounts to one of life's highest gratifications, which explains the supreme significance of art for all those who are sensible to it. Fyodor Dostovsky, the celebrated Russian novelist, once related how he accidentally stumbled upon a visiting exhibition of German woodcuts and became so transfixed and deeply moved by a particular image of a depiction of the face of Christ, that it provided the inspiration and impetus to write one of his greatly acclaimed masterpieces The Idiot.

One can argue for the inclusion of the art experience in an educational programme by a contextual mode. This mode emphasises the instrumental consequences of art in work and utilises the particular needs of the students or the society as a major basis for forming its objectives. For

example, in a disadvantaged area where some if not all of the children may be from an area which has a history of economic deprivation or members of a minority community, e.g. the travelling community, the art programme could be utilised to develop self esteem.

What we need - and here I will speak only of the teaching of art - are new conceptions of modes of artistic behaviour, new ideas of what might constitute the curricula of the art class. These new curricula must be meaningful and relevant to pupils - to disadvantaged pupils and, by extension, to all pupils. These new ideas must engage the 'guts and hopes' of youngsters and through these excitements provoke intellectual effort and growth. These new ideas must give the art class a share in the process of exploring social relationships and developing alternative models of human behaviour in a quickly changing and at this point in time, quickly worsening social environment. (2)

A second mode of argument for the inclusion of art in the educational curricula, is the essentialist justification. This emphasises the kinds of contributions to human experience and understanding that only the arts can provide. It emphasises what is indigenous and unique to art.

A work of art presents feeling for our contemplation, making it visible or audible or in some way perceivable through a symbol, not inferable from a symptom. Artistic form is congruent with the dynamic forms of our direct, sensuous, mental and emotional life; works of art are "felt life" as Henry James called it, into spatial, temporal and poetic structures. They are images of feeling, that formulate it for our cognition. What is artistically good is whatever articulates and presents feeling to our understanding. (3)

The project I am undertaking with the students will begin by looking at bird imagery in diverse modes, from the real to the illusionistic. In my class project I hope to guide my students to an opportunity to realise, in a visual and three dimensional form, their own personal and creative symbolism. They will then articulate this through their mask/headdress.

They will be exposed to a concrete background stimulus, e.g. the live birds in the zoo, many of rare and exotic species. They will also be shown graphic illustrations of tribal ritual from Papua, New Guinea, the use of

bird imagery from ancient to contemporary times.

What a child learns is mainly due to what he/she has experienced, and these experiences contribute to the development of frames of reference. These in turn give rise to expectations as a result of which children may accept or reject certain aspects of their environment.

I hope the project with the inclusion of dance/song and the use of their own bodies in the "art object" (in performance the physical presence and actions of the artist convey his ideas, and become a piece of "living art" in itself) will lead the students to a realisation of the large and enriching world of art. Not alone in the visual arts but poetry, music, ballet, theatre ... all of which provide foci for wholeness leading to an integrated way of life. Carl Jung wrote of how tapping into such foci can have a healing effect, not only on the individual but on entire societies. This healing exerts not only a localised effect in organic and psychiatric conditions, but in the diseases of group and social relationships (such social relationships as seen in microcosm in the class).

Art is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on a plane of meaning, the union of sense, need and impulse and action characteristic of the live creature. The intervention of consciousness adds regulation, power of selection and redistribution. Thus it varies the arts in ways without end. But its intervention also leads in time to the idea. (4).

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL REFERENCE

The Use of Bird Imagery is Widespread, Ancient and Contemporary

Historical Context

Ancient

We see bird imagery in ancient mythology, Prometheus' creation of men from clay superseded the hatching of all nature from a world egg, laid by the ancient Mediterranean Dove Goddess, Eurynome - a myth common also in Polynesia where the Goddess is called Tangaroa.

In the Egyptian galleries of a museum, you will often see statues and statuettes of gods and goddesses. Sometimes these figures (both male and female) have heads with human features, more often however they are surmounted by an animal muzzle or the beak of a bird. The earliest representations of Egyptian deities appeared about the middle of the fourth millenium long before the first hieroglyphs. At that time the inhabitants of the Nile Valley lived in tribes. Each tribe had its own god, incarnate in the form of either an animal, bird or simple fetish.

(For example, Horus in the form of a falcon with a human arm (delivering 6,000 captives to King Narmer, who brandishes his mace over the defeated Chief), 1st Dynasty, 3200 BC approximately, Cairo). (Fig. 1).

The Egyptians worshipped the great divinities of nature: the sky, the earth, the sun, the moon. The sky in Egyptian is feminine. Thus the sky became a goddess. Nut or Huthor - sometimes they say the sky is the head of a divine falcon whose eyes, which he opened and closed alternately, were the sun and the moon. The earth in Egypt is masculine, the Egyptians saw



Horus, in the form of a falcon with a human arm, delivers six thousand captives to King Narmer, who is brandishing his mace over the defeated chief. First Dynasty, about 3200. Cairo.

Fig 1

the earth as the image of a man lying prone, with all the vegetations of the world sprouting from his back. He was called Gels the earth god.

The sun had many names, Aten, Knepri, Ra, Atum, Horus. He was said to be (among other interpretations) a speckle winged falcon flying through space, or the right eye only of the great divine lord, he was also conceived of being an egg laid daily by the celestial goose.

The moon too rejoiced under many different names, Aah, Thoth, Knons and different incarnations amongst which was that of an ibis and the left eye of the celestial falcon whose right eye was the sun. (For example, Ra-Haralante and Ament, Goddess of the West). (Fig. 2) The god is falcon-headed and wears the solar disk encircled by a serpent on his head with the Goddess of the underworld when 'west' turns to signify the land of the dead. (Fresco from the tomb of Nefetari, 19th Dynasty, 1375-1202 BC). (Fig. 3).

Historical Context

Modern

Within the Surrealist Movement there is a frequent occurrence of bird imagery. Surrealist art was intended to shock the spectator into a new awareness of reality. They were the expression of a revolt against western civilisation and culture, in which works of art were the means to an end rather than an end in themselves.

The Surrealists aimed to use the arts as a counter to the ordered and restricted ways of civilisation, by opening up the super-reality of fantasy, dream and imagination.



Ra-Harakhte and Ament, goddess of the West. The god is falcon-headed and wears the solar disk encircled by a serpent on his head while the goddess wears her emblem, the hawk. Originally the goddess of a Libyan province to the west of Egypt, Ament became the goddess of the underworld when 'west' came to signify the land of the dead. Fresco from the tomb of Nefertari, Nineteenth dynasty, 1375 to 1202 B.C.

Fig 2.

Max Ernst's work draws regularly upon the use of bird imagery. It was in the symbol of the bird that he chose to personify himself. Max Ernst was long regarded by his peers as a pioneer of research into the subconscious. See for example "The Conjugal Diamonds", Frottage, by Max Ernst and "The Origin of the Pendulum", Frottage. (Histoire Naturelle). (Fig. 4). These two picture contain depictions of what are quite obviously bird forms, but they do not stop at being just birds, they are also symbols, a symbol revealing an event occurring in another world, the world of the subconscious, which cannot be compared to any experience in the material world. The technique employed he termed frottage, he explained its development:

In my personal development this method which is based on nothing less than the intensification of the excitability of the mental faculties and which, in view of its technique, I should like to call 'frottage', perhaps played a greater role than 'collage'. From which I truthfully believe it does not differ fundamentally I made a series of drawings from the pieces of wood by haphazardly placing sheets of paper on them, which I then undertook to rub (frotter) with black lead pencil. I emphasise the fact that the drawings obtained in this manner increasingly lost the character of the material tested (the wood) and acquired the appearance of images of an undreamed-of precision which was probably of such a nature as to reveal the primary cause of the obsession or to produce a semblance of that cause. With a wide-awake, wonderstruck curiosity, I tested all kinds of materials ... leaves and their veins, the frayed edges of sacking, the knife strokes of a modern painting, a thread unrolled from a bobbin, and so on ... I assembled the first results obtained under the title 'Histoire Naturelle'. (5).

In 1924 he made the picture relief "Deux Enfants Sont Menaces Par Un Rossignol" (Two children are menaced by a nightingale). (Fig. 5). The painted portion of the picture relief is mysterious and dreamlike, with echoes of the Renaissance. There is also a 'Dada' element of nonsensical assemblage. This affects our attempts to arrive at a sensible interpretation of the pictorial drama, and confronts us with different sorts of reality within one picture. The title of the piece written onto the inner frame adds to the derangement. It inevitably leads us to pose



Fig 4

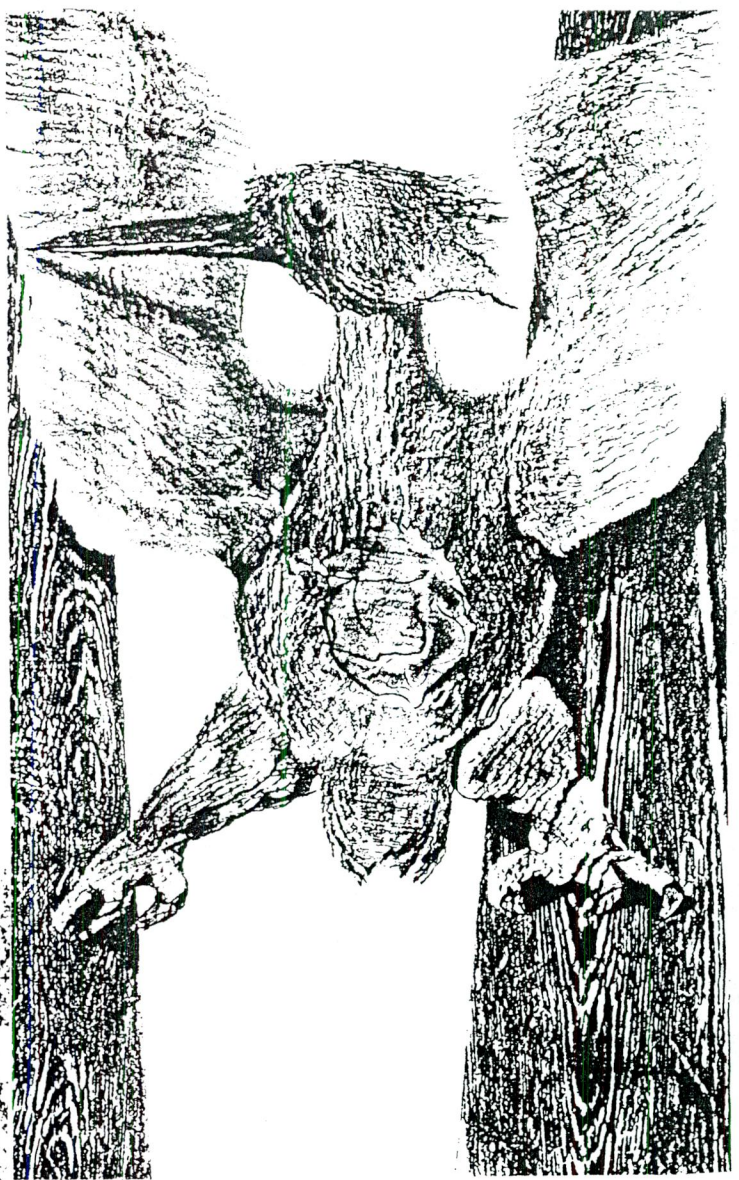


Fig 3

The Origin of the
Pendulum
Frottage
«Histoire Naturelle»

The Coniugal Ditt
Frottage
«Histoire Naturelle»

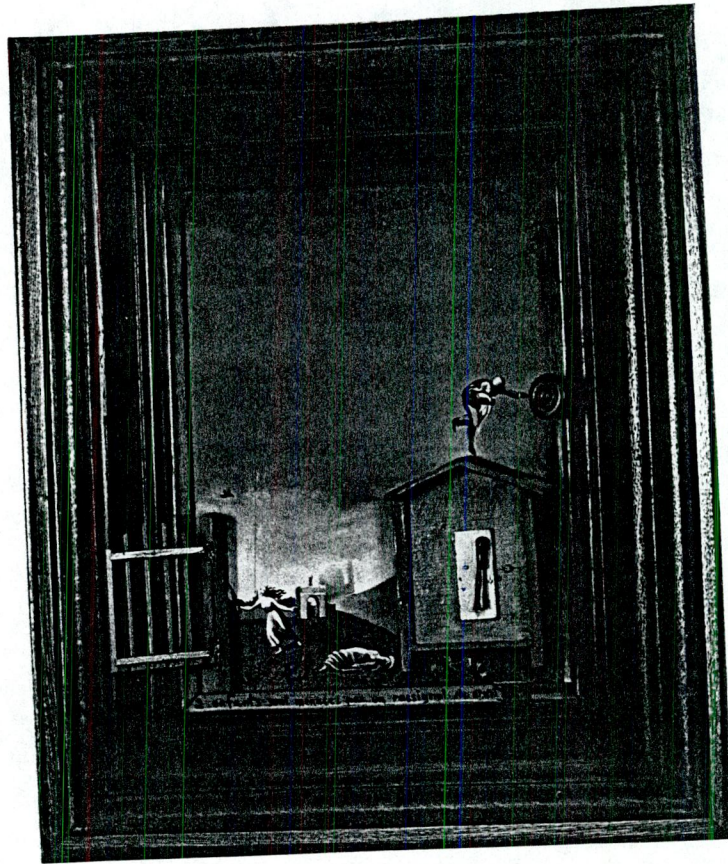


Fig 5

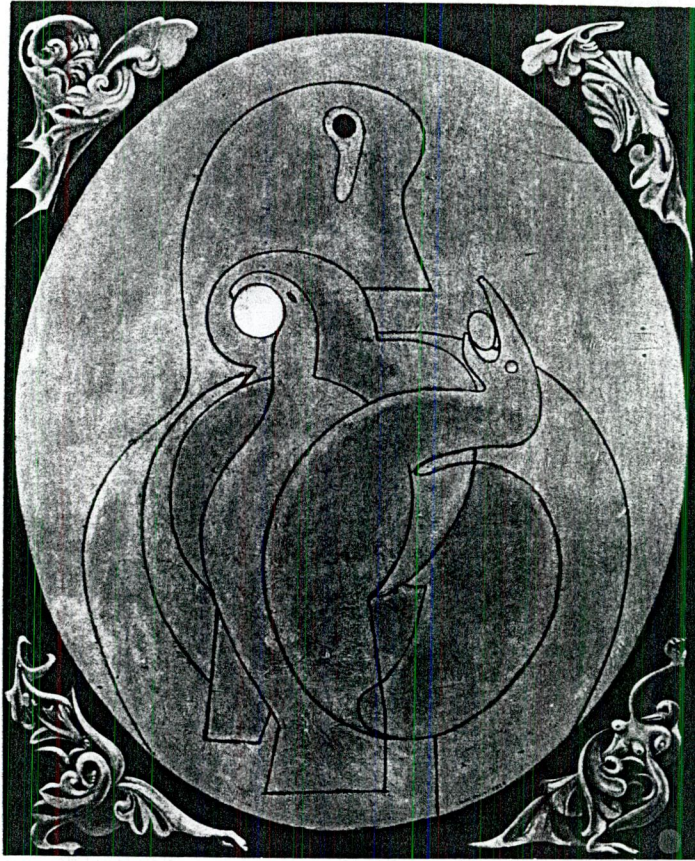
questions, how can a nightingale threaten two children, to whom or what does the third figure pertain?

In his later paintings Ernst often worked more abstractly, using a range of sources and devices, from early photographs recording air-flow patterns to the tracks made on a canvas by paint trickling from a can swinging above it. The oil painting "The Interior of Sight: The Egg", (Fig. 6) painted in 1929 is a glimpse into the centre of an egg, a rich yolk yellow, centre border of black, while in the four corners are possibly mythological birdlike figures, the beginning of the life force, symbols of man and his co-ordinating spirit.

In the painting "After us Motherhood", (Fig. 7) we see these bird forms, having reached a further stage in their development they are painted in rich hues of yellows and reds and almost evolve from the darkness behind. These creatures have sensuous twisting forms - possibly indicative of some inner turmoil within Ernst.

The collage "Une Semaine de Bonte" (Fig. 8) executed in 1934, concerns an act of human violence. The perpetrator of the act is masked with the eagle-like head of a bird. He is pushing a dagger through the foot of a floating, recumbent, unclothed female form. The whole collage has distinctly nightmarish overtones. The presumably male form of the attacker is cast as a predator, striking his vulnerable victim when she is helpless and unaware.

In "Monument to the Birds" (Fig. 9) the images are neither threatening nor threatened, they are soaring upwards through a wide blue expanse, unfettered and so relaxed that two of the figures seem to be sleeping. The



THE INTERIOR OF SIGHT: THE EGG, 1929 Oil 38³/₄" × 31" Collection Menil Family, Houston Texas

fig 6.



fig 7

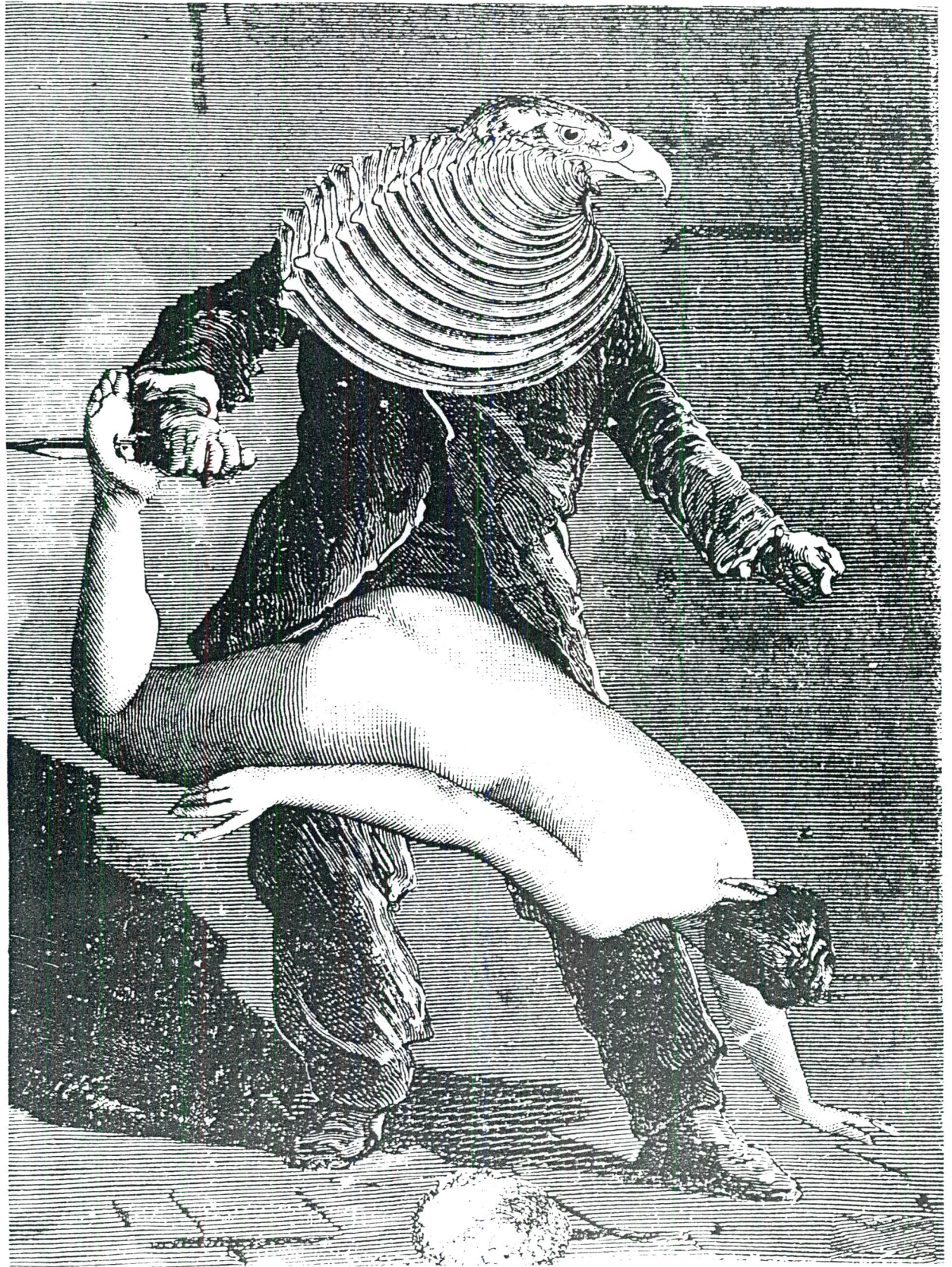
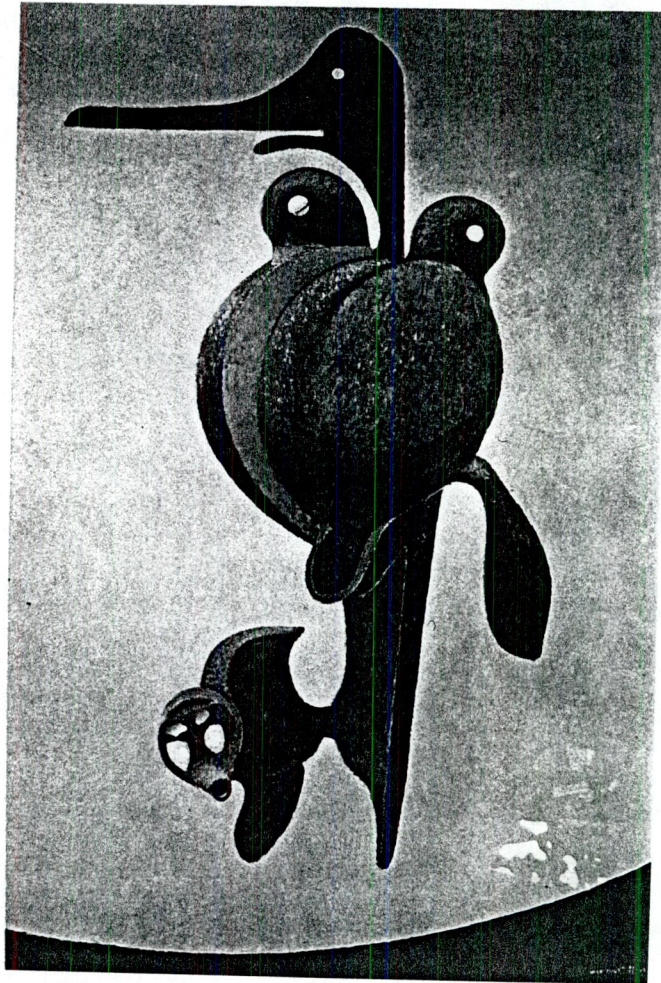


fig 8

Collage from «Une Semaine de Bonté», 1934



MOYUX
THE BI
Oil 57
Private
Paris

- St
Canva

fig 9.

only dark area being a horizontal band of blue running across the bottom of the canvas.

Andre Breton, one of the founder members of the Surrealist Movement, regarded Ernst as his ideal artist. In 1929 he wrote of Ernst that he possessed "the most magnificently haunted brain at work today". Ernst provided unlinked images (similar to those of Surrealist writing), he also occasionally painted detailed dream pictures, which resulted in hybrids consisting of many fragments. An example of this is seen in the vivid painting "The Temptation of St. Anthony" (Fig. 10). Here we see a collection of hybrid animal and bird forms carrying off, and possibly about to devour, their terrified human prey. The painting is peopled with strange and gruesome figures, the products of a fecund imagination. What are these creatures representative symbols of? Are they visual manifestations of fears and uncertainties that assault us on our passage through life? The method Ernst used to arrive at these images is termed "decalcomania" - a form of free association, a variety of oil paint is smeared on glass, this is then placed face downwards onto the canvas, the glass then removed, the eye (with the assistance of the brain) starts to perceive images from the jumble, to make some sense or order, albeit visually of a fantastical nature - the images one arrives at can convey to some degree, the condition of one's psyche at the particular time of execution.

The final piece I am considering by Ernst, is of a much more whimsical and freer nature. "The Birds" (Fig. 11), a drawing using ink and crayons, was a sketch used for the etching "Les Chiens ont Soif" (The Dogs are Thirsty). There is an economy of detail here, one gets a notion of automatism. The most blatant birdlike feature is the beaks, these birds are confident and upright, of indomitable spirit. So many images, each one different,



fig 10



71

Fig 11

symbolic of different facets inherent in the nature of man.

The next piece of work I wish to consider is by the Spanish artist Joan Miro. This piece of work was executed in 1936 and titled "Object" (Fig. 12). It is an assemblage of a stuffed parrot on a wooden perch, stuffed silk stocking with a velvet garter and a doll's paper shoe suspended in a hollow post, a Derby hat, hanging cork ball, celluloid fish and engraved map. At first glance this piece of work seems nonsensical. However, according to Miro, everything in it relates to a logical sequence of associations. The hat stands for the archetypal dreamer, the red plastic fish for the unknown deeps which are the domain of the unconscious, and the map for the universe through which the mind ranges freely. The heightened sexuality which is fundamental to surrealism, is symbolised by the gartered female leg in the high-heeled shoe. The parrot is in this context, the bird of love. The ball which hangs from a piece of string is a familiar surrealist symbol pioneered by Alberto Giacometti, an Italian artist.

Rene Magritte is another artist who frequently employed the use of bird imagery and symbolism in his work. One such piece is "L'Idole" painted in 1965 (Fig. 13). Magritte himself said of his work:

Art as I conceive it is resistant to psychoanalysis, it evokes the mystery without which the world would not exist ... I see to it that I paint only images that evoke the world's mystery; to make this possible I have to be wide awake, which means I have to cease to identify myself completely with ideas, sentiments and sensations. (Dreams and madness on the contrary are propitious to absolute identification). (6).

What we are confronted with in the painting "L'Idole", is a massive bird hewn out of rock, soaring over sea and rocks similar to itself. How can a

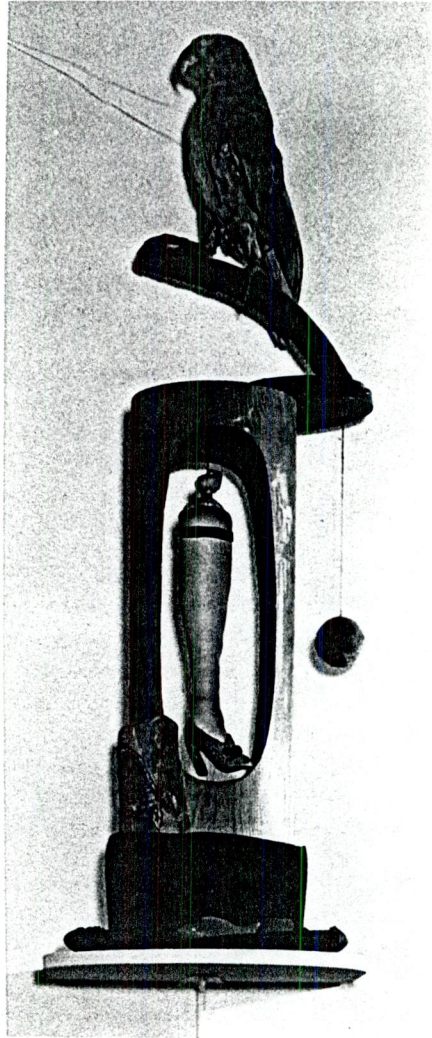


fig 12

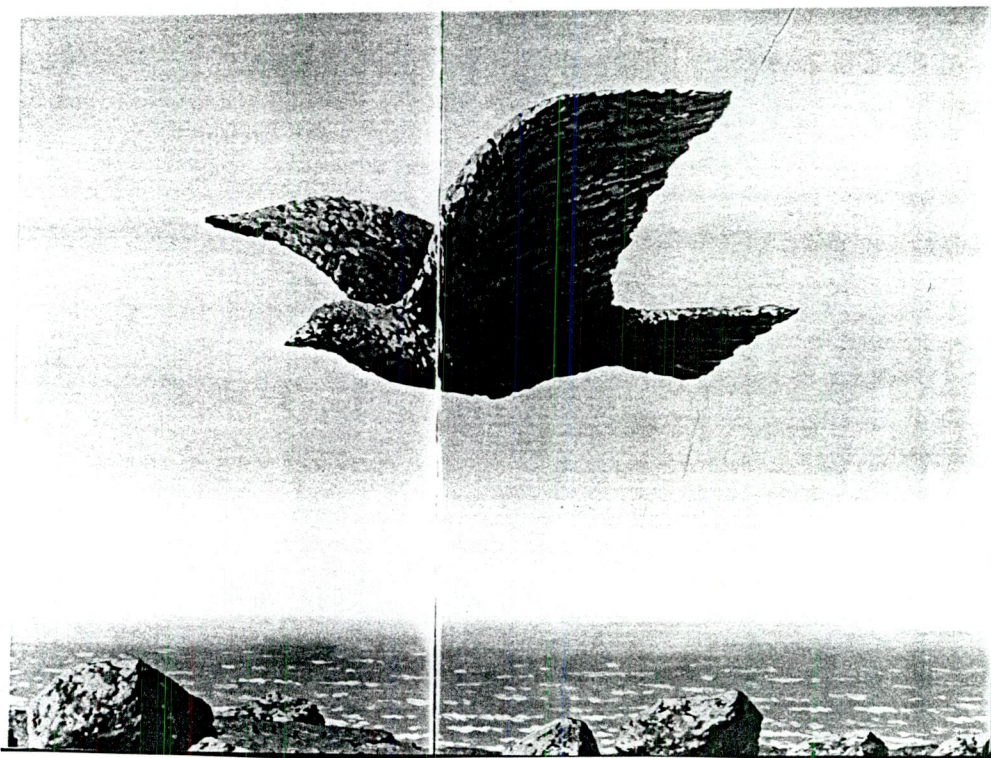


fig 13

lump of rock defy gravity? We are forced to wonder why this bird of rock does not come plunging down into the sea. What does not happen in the painting reminds us of the mystery of what actually does happen in the real world. Space, time and matter are here in suspended animation. The force of gravity which we pay little or no heed to in our daily lives, in this painting becomes a powerful and awesome force. Magritte causes us to question our conceptions of reality and our knowledge of reality. He directs questions at the world of our senses.

Now to Alberto Giacometti whom I previously mentioned, an Italian painter and sculptor. From 1925 to 1933 Giacometti searched and probed the poetics of art to see what kind of magic could be made with objects that were unlike anything that had been labelled with the name art before. In the summer of 1932 Giacometti built and rebuilt, every night, a palace of matchsticks. From this came one of the most influential of modern sculptures, "The Palace at 4 a.m." (Fig. 14). This was a piece of work that was to influence other sculptors, because it explored the idea that sculpture can be open, skeletal, almost incorporeal, i.e. without body. This roofless and wallless palace is open to inspection from every angle. The spinal column in the cage on the right stands for a woman with whom Giacometti had been involved. The figure on the left with the long skirt is a representation of Giacometti's mother "just as she appears", he wrote, "in my earliest memories". The three slats behind the figure of the mother he said was "the very curtain I saw when I opened my eyes for the very first time." Now to the bird imagery. The skeleton bird on the top right "stands for the birds which signalled the approach of a new day at 4 a.m., that summer, and in particular the very night before the morning in which our life together collapsed". (7). Here he refers again to the woman he was entangled with. The object halfway up the broken tower in the middle

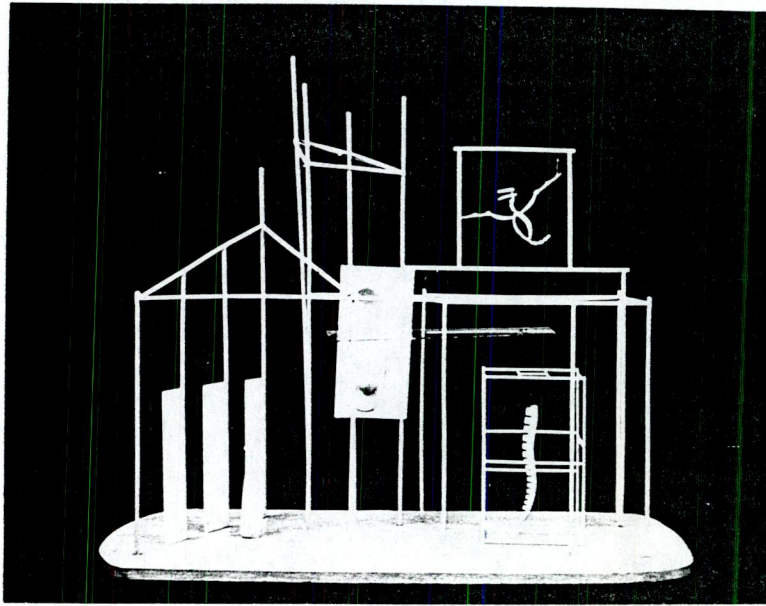


Fig 14

is a spoon man representation of Giacometti himself. Placed close to, yet apart from the two women who meant most to him. Interestingly, Giacometti himself made no claims for these sculptures, he went so far as to name some of them as "disagreeable objects of no value which should be thrown away". (8).

The final piece I wish to consider is by the French painter, Robert Desnos. This is a watercolour painted in 1924, entitled (a contradiction in terms!) "Untitled Automatic Watercolour" (Fig. 15). Automatic painting and drawing was a method of freeing the unconscious mind, the use of the body as the instrument to realise imagery and symbolism freely and purely, trying to minimise the intervention of the conscious and logical mind. They were usually executed in a short space of time, a burst of intuitive drawing. This piece by Desnos conveys that sense of urgency, swirling and entangled. The bird figure has the large beak of a predatory bird, like a vulture; the large area of red behind, like a pool of blood; the human head on the right, with unsmiling face and a victim or harbinger of doom. Is the bird about to feed on this as prey, has it already commenced?

What we have seen in these paintings was an attempt to exteriorize personal unconscious urges through forms and colours, some of these forms took the shapes of birds, some possibly gratuitous, others a concrete part of the painter's visual language and expression of personal symbols and mythology.

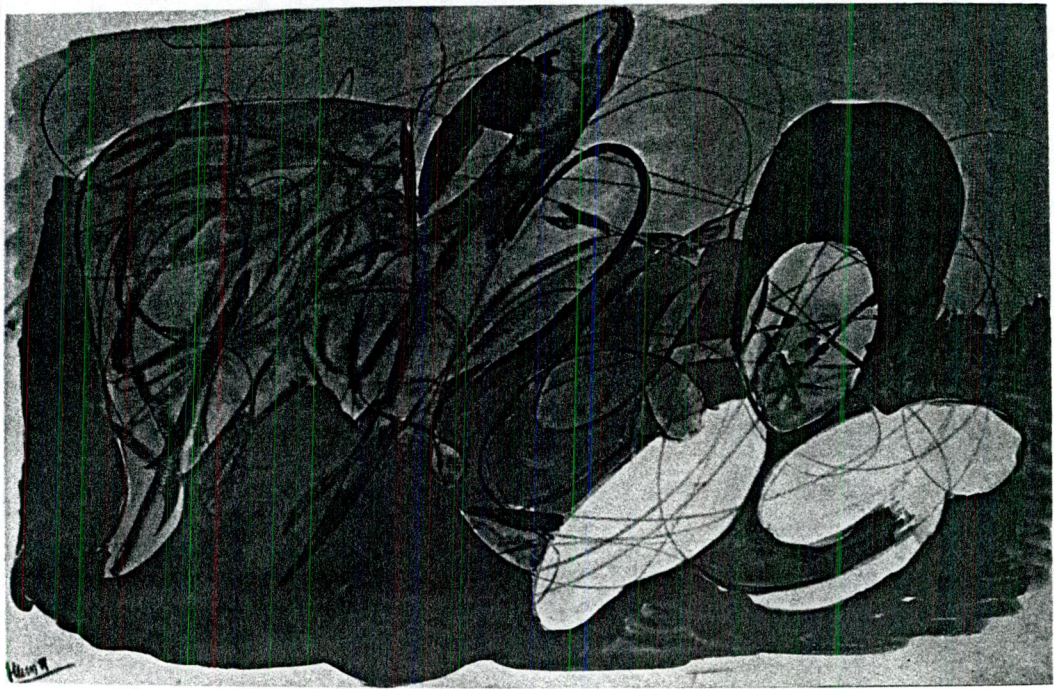


fig 15

CHAPTER III

PERSONAL PROJECT

My own work will take the form of a triptych - using a combination of bird and human imagery to arrive at articulated notions of persona, private and public. The image of a person "en masque": the interface between private and public dealings, what one perceives oneself to be, and how one is perceived by others, how one receives other's perceptions of oneself, endless permutations.

The word 'mask' comes from the French 'masque', which in turn is derived from the Italian 'maschera' which evolved from a root of unknown origin. Mask is also the origin of the mascot - lucky charm.

The mask covers the face, that is the image of person - personality. the word person comes from 'persona', an Etruscan word that refers either to a character in a play or the mask worn by the actor portraying the character. The thing that hides (the mask) and the thing hidden (the person).

In my project I would like to convey what I have described above, in visual terms, with the juxtaposition of human and bird imagery. This will necessarily involve visual distortion, distortion of the human image, which by its nature necessitates a heightened response. Playing around with the familiar, presenting its image in a manner that is not 'usual' gives pause for thought. I want to elicit a personal response from the viewer: Does the image jar, strike a chord? What preconceived notions have we about the depiction of such an imagery?

Andre Virel, a French psychologist, wrote how on pausing to listen to the

voice of a mask, he would hear the echo, of an echo, and was reminded of a young schizophrenic patient he once analysed:

Eighteen years old, she was a tall skinny girl suffering from anorexia nervosa. She seemed to glide over the ground. She wore an intent gaze as she walked in, rarely has a patient's first visit made such an impression on me. Her pale face was so caked with make-up that it no longer had any semblance of life in it, but it was not the face of a statue or a dead person either. The purple circles around her sparkling eyes, the pronounced eyebrows, the shading around those prominent cheekbones that looked as if they had been whitened with chalk, everything seemed to say: No I am neither death nor life, but fleeting death! Upon entering my office she bent her head and turned away. I found out the reason afterwards: her eyes had lighted on my mirror. Later on this schizophrenic informed me that she could look at herself in a mirror without ever seeing her reflection. She claimed that by painting a mask on her face she found a way of making herself invisible to her own eyes. (9).

My work when completed consisted of a triptych of three painted canvases, each of differing size, the canvas on the left I regard as the beginning of the sequence (Fig. 16). Here the subject and origin of all the imagery in the remaining canvases, is contained. He is not alone, perched heavily upon his shoulder is a bird of indeterminate species. What we see behind his back are figures and symbols of fantasy that people his unconscious. Fragments of dreams, a leering mask, shadowy heads. Is it the subject in another guise? A seated female figure with the head of a cockerel - is this the anima, or female counterpart contained in the psychical makeup of every male (the animus being the male equivalent contained in every female) (Fig. 17).

On the exterior presentation the subject of the painting projects an image of seeming normality. However, on delving inwards into his conscious, yet unspoken mind, we find a disparity with the exterior and interior. A delving even further we reach his subconscious mind, and are confronted by the symbols which are visual symbols, or manifestations in reaction to



fig 16.



fig 17

experiences, feelings, emotions, relationships.

The more exotic bird on the extreme right manifests a desire to be looked upon as a 'rare species'. The subject sees an element of this in himself, the bright orange of daring (Fig. 18).

The background work to these paintings consisted of a series of both drawn and painted studies of bird, portrait and figure studies. I decided to confine the triptych to mainly heads and faces, a part of the body so familiar to all, that any element of interference evokes an emotional response (Fig. 19).

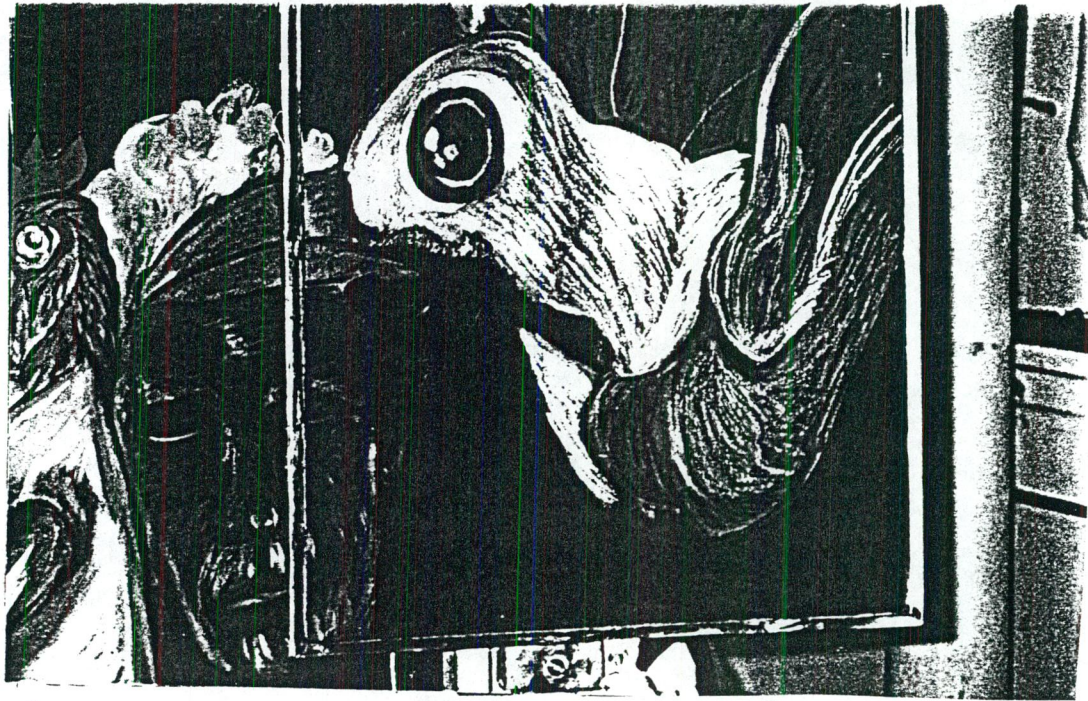


fig 18



fig 19.

LESSON PLANS FOR CLASS PROJECT

Class: St. Gabriel's 2nd Years

Time:

Ability: Mixed

Date: 5 March

Materials Required: Pencils, colouring pencils.

Objective: To experience working co-operatively as a group. To see an idea through from inception to design, to physical realisation in a three-dimensional mode.

Task: To observe birdlife in the flesh (feather) and complete a worksheet based on these observations. These worksheets will be used later when deciding on a design for mask/headaddresses, allied with a performance based on bird movement.

Process: A visit to the zoo and completion of worksheet. (Those with cameras will take photographs).

THE ZOO TRIP

MS. Keegan

Welcome ^{ST GABRIEL'S} To DUBLIN ZOO

You'll HAVE LOTS TO SEE

AND PLENTY TO DO.



As we wander around we will see many different animals all shapes and sizes, and learn lots of new things about them all however keep a keen eye on our feathered friends.



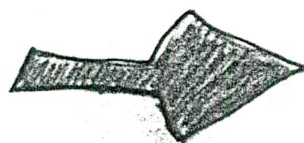
- Look at how they **MOVE**
- Look at their **COLOURS**
- Look at their **FETHERS** (PLUMAGE)
- Look at their **BEAKS** (BILLS)
- at their **LEGS** **EYES** **CLAWS** etc.
- Listen? TO THE **SOUND** they make

The information we collect today we will use back in the art class to make our mask/headress, and to make our own bird song and dance (movement)

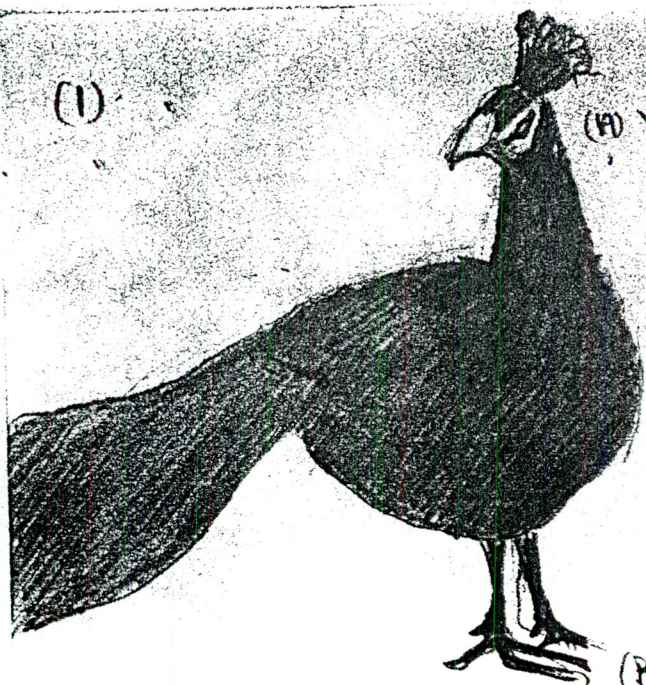
So 's and 's at the ready, and off we go. **ENJOY THE DAY !!**

STUDENTS
NAME _____

P.T.O



(1)



(10) WHAT DO WE CALL THIS PROUD FELLOW WHO YOU CAN SEE FREELY WANDERING AROUND

[Empty rectangular box for the answer to question 10]

(8)

DRAW ONE OF HIS TAIL FEATHERS IN THIS BOX (in COLOUR!)

[Empty square box for drawing a tail feather]

(IF YOU FIND ANY FEATHERS ON YOUR TRAVELS HANG ON TO THEM)

WHAT WORDS WOULD YOU USE TO DESCRIBE

How HE

LOOKS

WALKS

SOUNDS

c)

[Four horizontal lines for writing answers to question 11]

2. (No 6 on your map) (BAT HOUSE) & PARROTS

How MANY DIFFERENT TYPES (VARIETIES)

OF PARROT do you seeⁿ

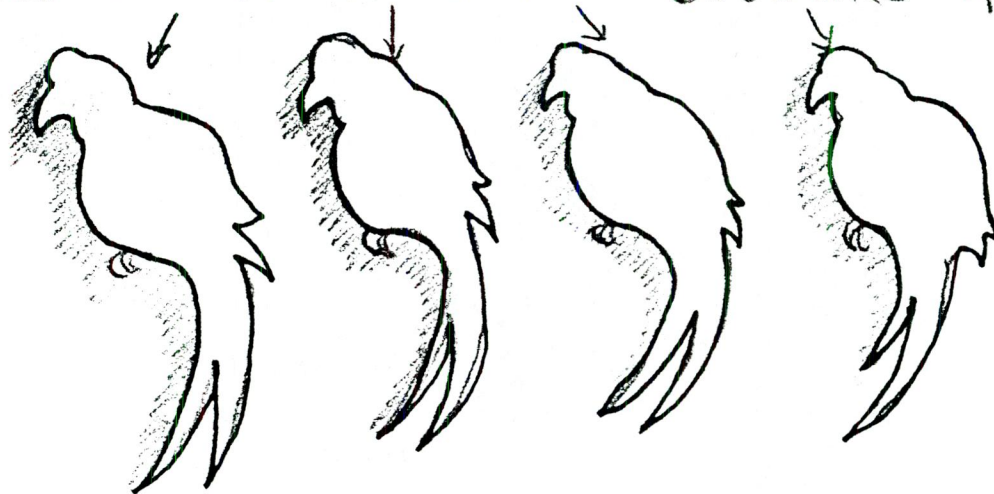
[Small square box for the answer to question 2]

ANSWER IN BOX



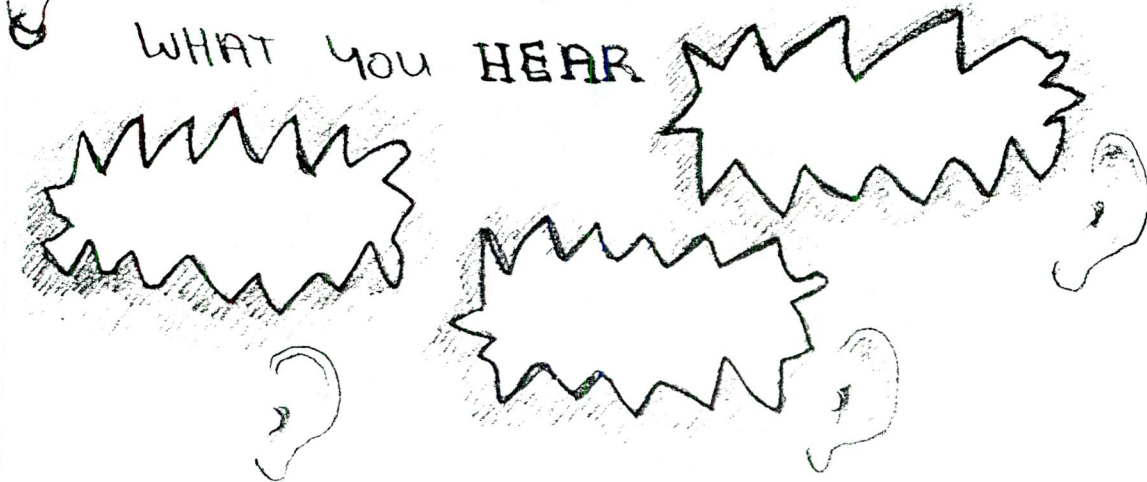
(B) NAME YOUR 3 FAVOURITE PARROTS.

(C) FILL IN THE DIFFERENT COLOURS YOU SEE



(AT LEAST 2 COLOURS)

(D) LISTEN TO THE SOUNDS PARROTS MAKE. TRY TO WRITE DOWN WHAT YOU HEAR

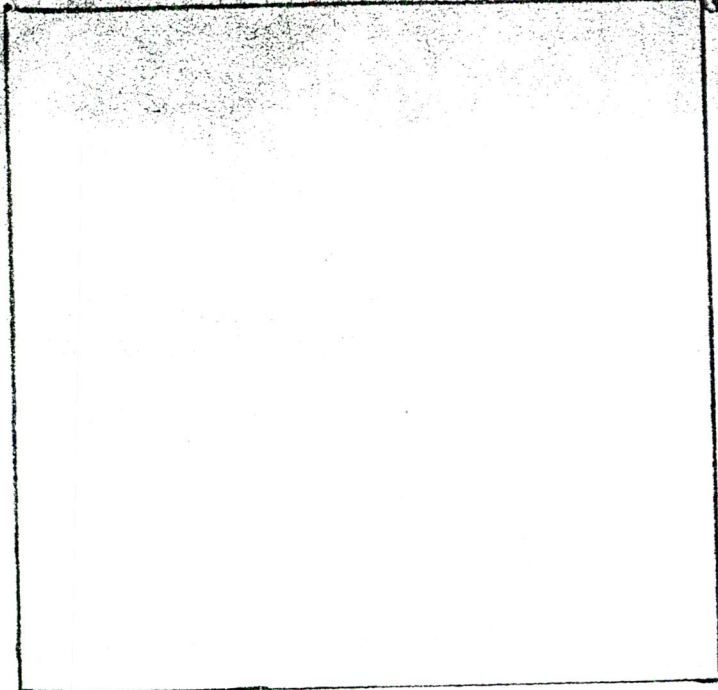


3 (No 48 on MAP) PETS CORNER.

HAVE YOU SEEN ANY OF THESE BIRDS BEFORE? IF SO, WHICH ONES _____
AND WHERE _____



(4) (no. 16 on MAP) PHOENIX



(A) DRAW A PICTURE OF THE **HORNBILL**

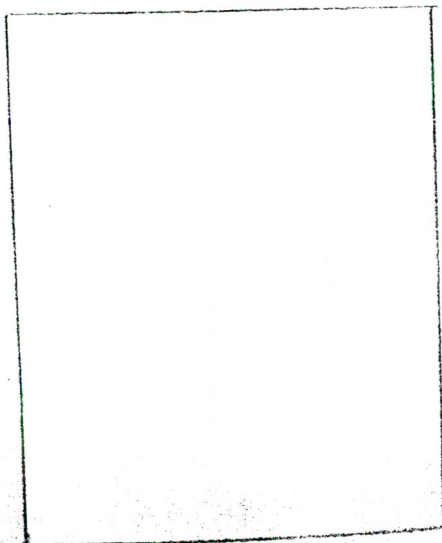


(B) DESCRIBE HOW HE LOOKS (HIS APPEARANCE)




(5) (no. 20 on MAP) CRANES

DOES THE CRANE DIFFER FROM THE OTHER BIRDS YOU'VE SEEN? _____






DRAW THE OUTLINE OF A CRANE IN PENCIL.



(6) FIND THREE MORE BIRDS (DIFFERENT TO THE ONES WE'VE SEEN)  LOOK &

 LISTEN

BIRD ID CARD	NAME OF BIRD
	COLOURS 
	APPEARANCE 
	SOUND 

IF THIS BIRD WAS A PERSON, WHAT KIND OF PERSON WOULD IT BE?



BIRD # TWO

NAME OF BIRD

[Empty box for name]

COLOURS 

[Lined area for colors]

APPEARANCE 

[Lined area for appearance]

SOUND 

[Lined area for sound]

IF THIS BIRD WAS A PERSON, WHAT KIND OF PERSON WOULD IT BE?

[Lined area for answer]



NAME OF BIRD

BIRD OF THREE

[Empty box for name of bird]

COLOURS



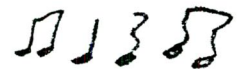
Three horizontal lines for writing colors.

APPEARANCE



Three horizontal lines for writing appearance.

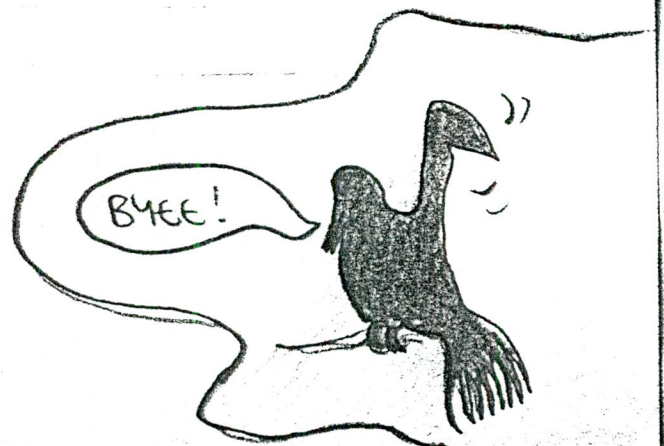
SOUND



Three horizontal lines for writing sound.

IF THIS BIRD WAS A PERSON, WHAT KIND OF PERSON WOULD IT BE?

Five horizontal lines for writing an answer.



LESSON PLANS FOR CLASS PROJECT

- Class: St. Gabriel's 2nd Years
- Time: 2:55 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- Ability: Mixed
- Materials Required: Pastels, sugarpaper, cartridge paper, pencils, worksheet from zoo trip.
- Task: To devise designs for mask/headdress, using bird imagery. Firstly experiment with a variety of ideas, then on master design.
- Process:
- (1) The class will examine the information on their worksheets, also examples of bird imagery, e.g. M. Ernst, Sue McMorran, P. Picasso. Tribal mask/headdress (as a background inspiration I will be playing a tape of birdsound I recorded on the zoo trip), also photographs taken on the trip.
 - (2) The class of 15 pupils will divide to work on three groups of five.
 - (3) Each individual student will draw a variety of ideas for mask/headdress.
 - (4) Each group should have at least five differing design to work from.
 - (5) Using favoured elements from each person's design, one master design is drawn with colour pastels on a large sheet of sugar paper.

LESSON PLANS FOR CLASS PROJECT

Class: St. Gabriel's 2nd Years

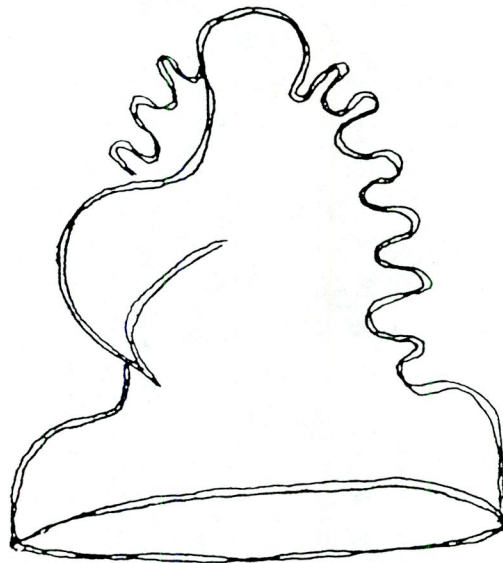
Time: 2:55 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Ability: Mixed

Materials Required: Wire, wire clipper, pliers, mask/headdress design.

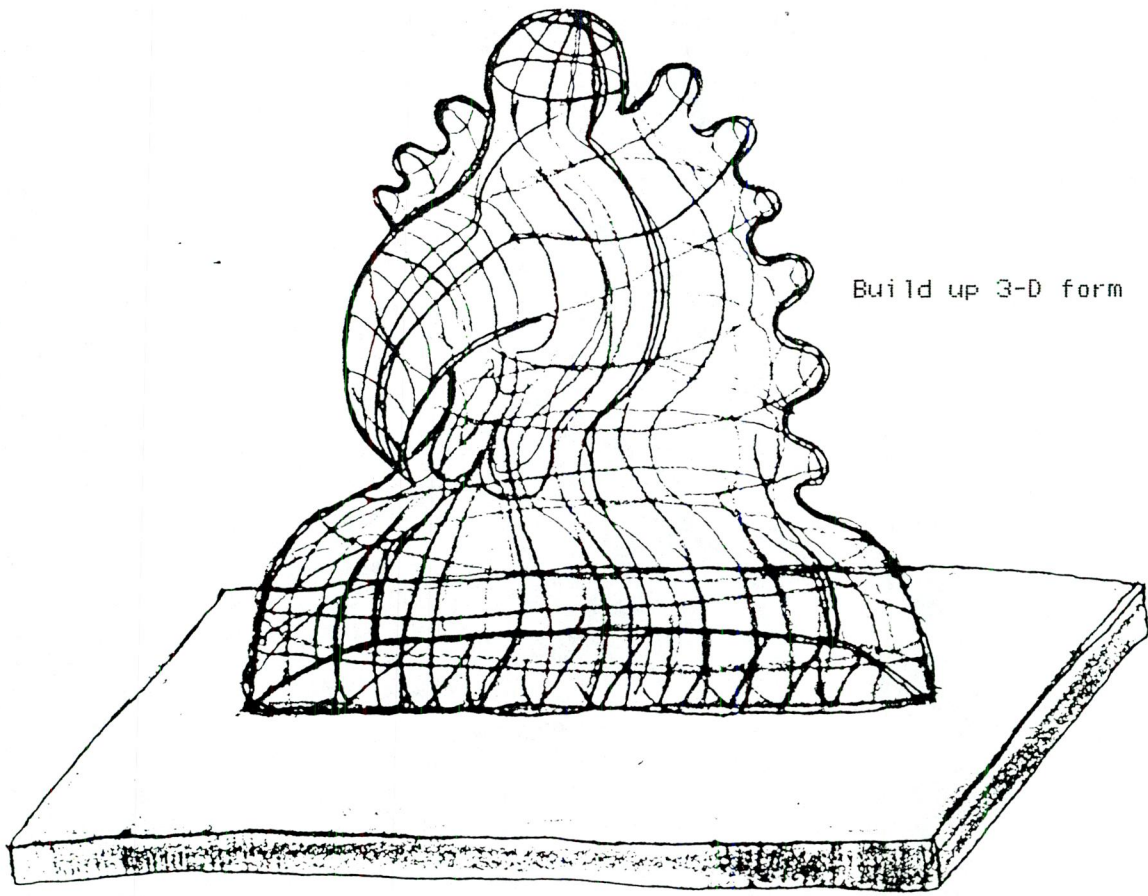
Task: To manipulate the wire into an armature for mask/headdress based on design.

Process: (1) Using the drawing/design as a guideline fashion the wire into the outline.



(2) When the outline is completed continue wrapping the wire around it so as to build up a three-dimensional form.

(3) Where necessary at weak points, reinforce by coiling the wire.



Build up 3-D form



Wrap wire several times
to reinforce weak spots

LESSON PLANS FOR CLASS PROJECT

Class: St. Gabriel's 2nd Years

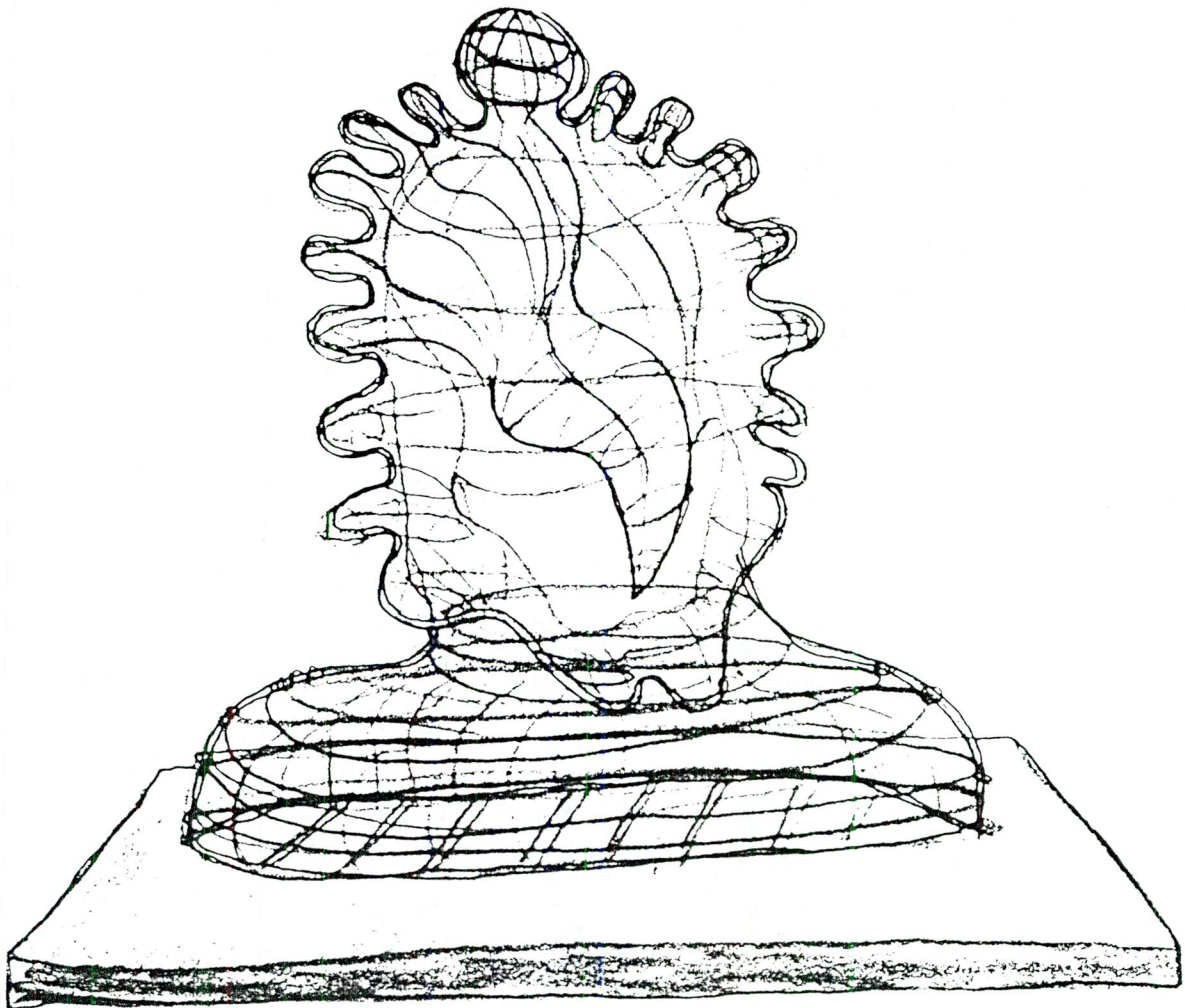
Time: 2:55 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Ability: Mixed

Materials Required: Wire, pliers, clippers

Task: To continue the wire armature (skeletal underfigure to be covered over with papier mache).

Process: (1) Continue as last week, wrapping and coiling the wire, until a sturdy free-standing structure is achieved.



LESSON PLANS FOR CLASS PROJECT

Class: St. Gabriel's 2nd Years

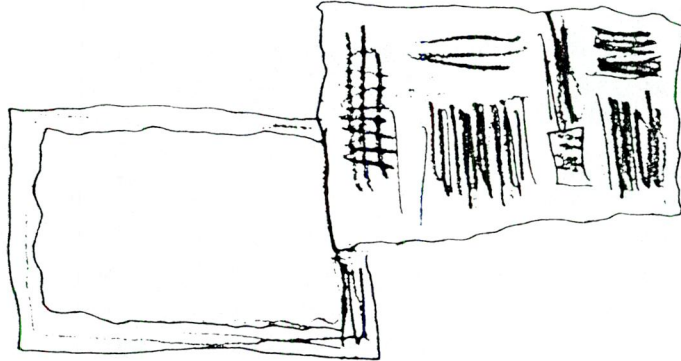
Time: 2:55 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Ability: Mixed

Materials Required: Old newspapers, wallpaper paste, water, containers.

Task: To cover the wire armature with papier mache strips.

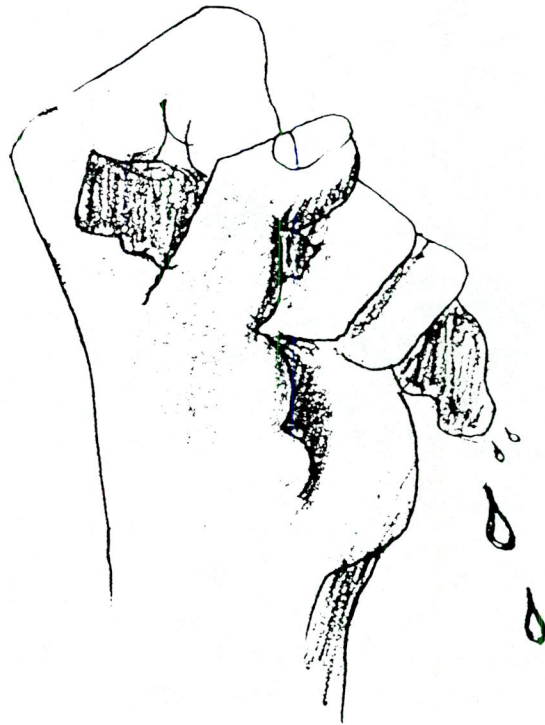
Process: (1) Soak strips of paper (tear off any sharp edges)



in wallpaper paste.



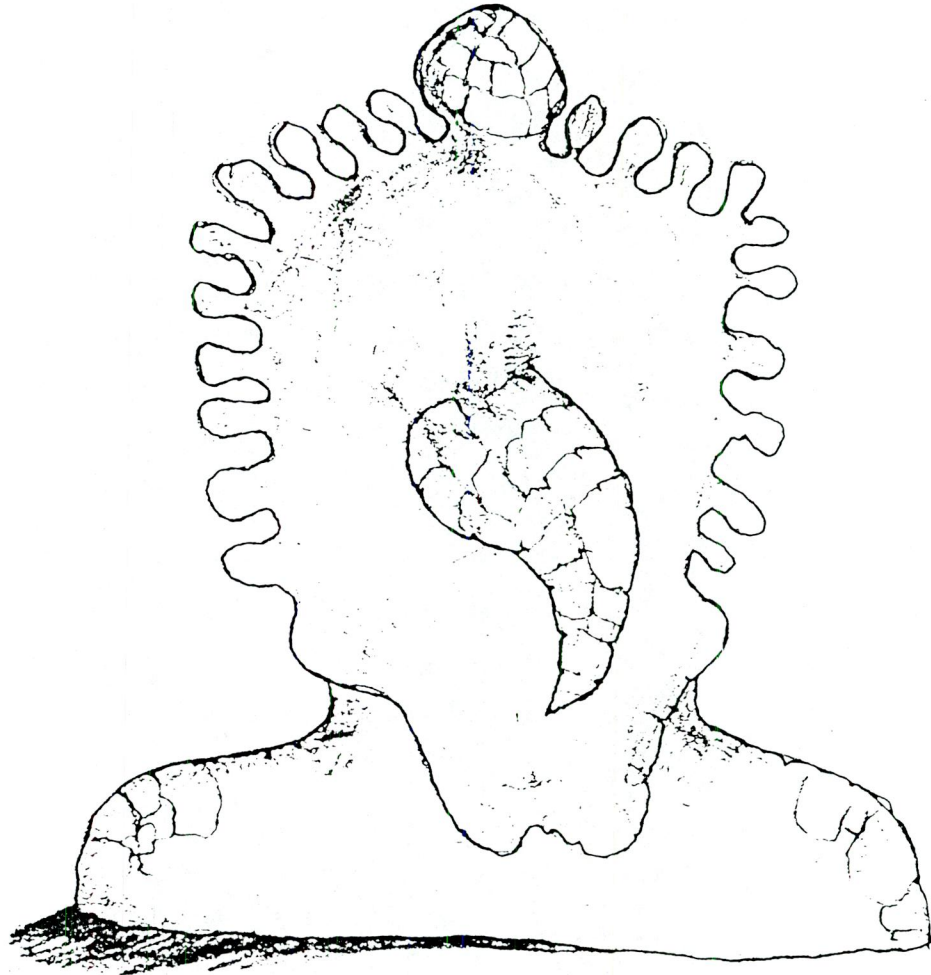
(2) Squeeze excess paste from paper.



(3) Apply in layers to armature.



- (4) Continue application of papier mache until the armature is completely covered in one layer. Allow this layer to dry and then apply next layer.



LESSON PLANS FOR CLASS PROJECT

Class: St. Gabriel's 2nd Years

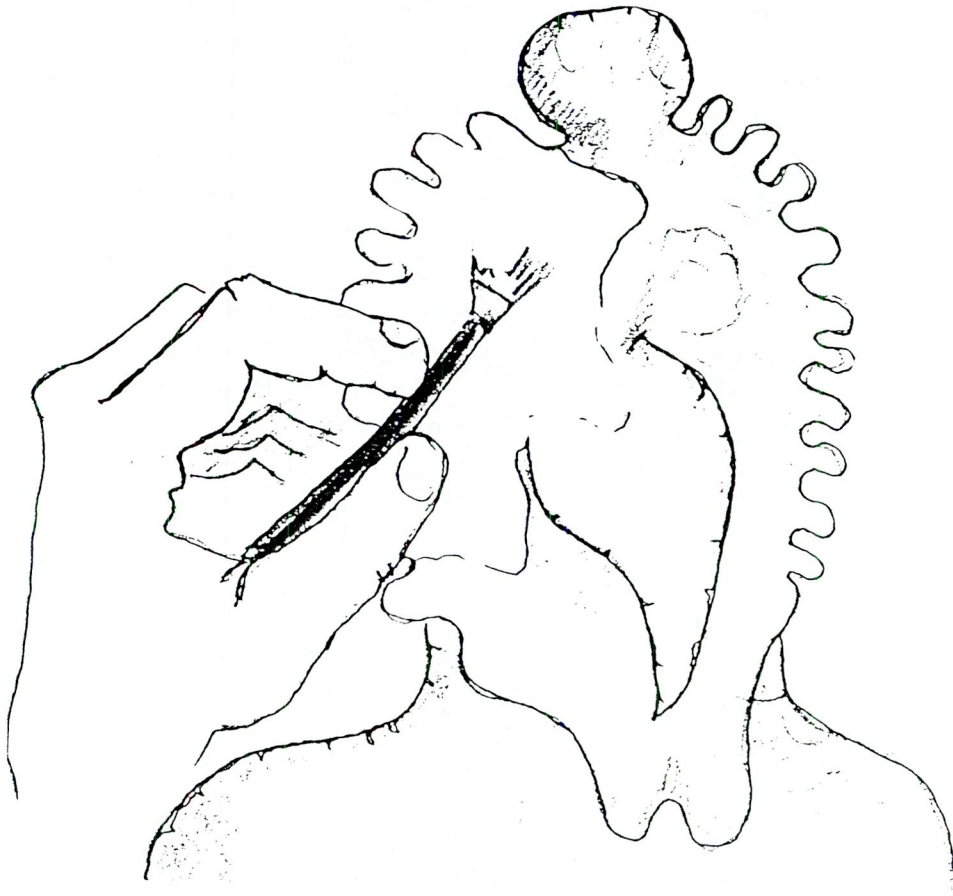
Time: 2:55 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Ability: Mixed

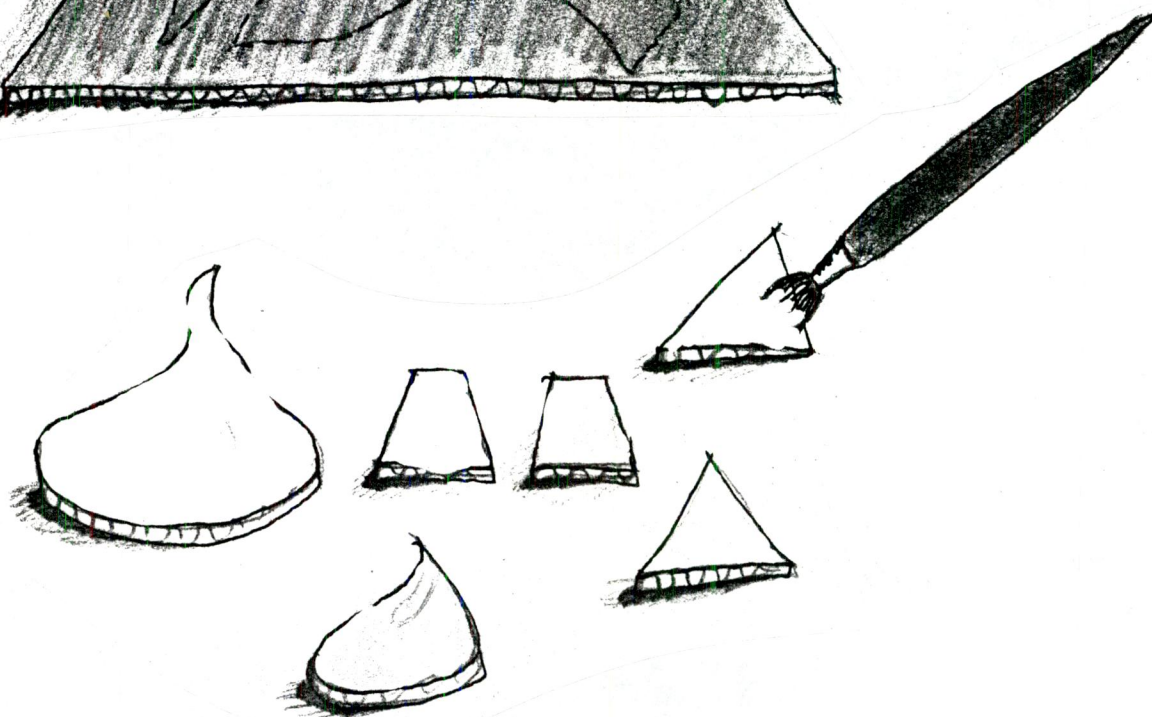
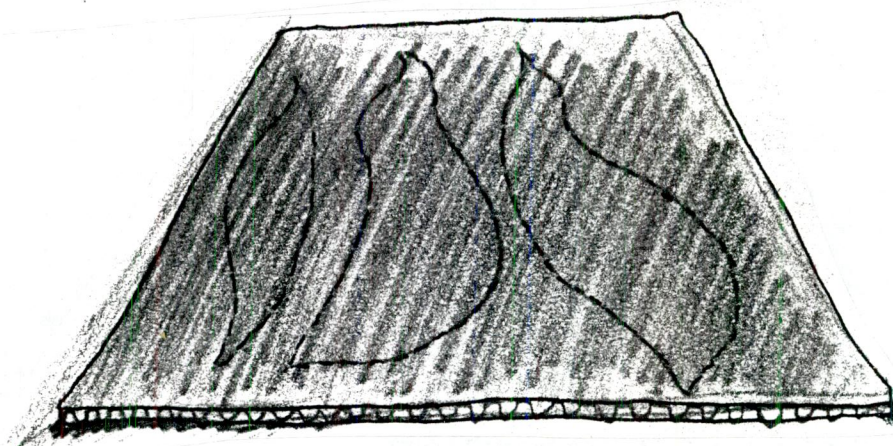
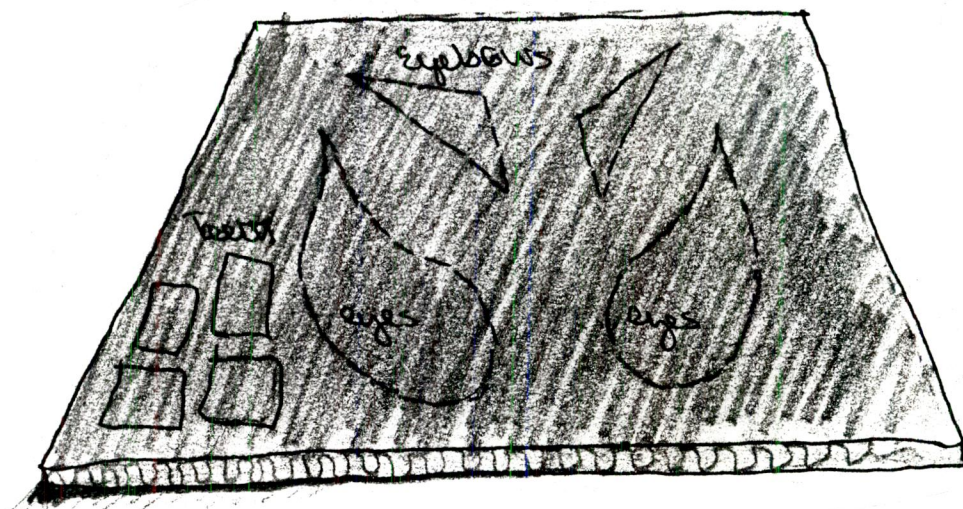
Materials Required: Paint (white), paintbrushes, cardboard, scissors, stanley knives, pencils.

Task: To paint the papier mache covered armature white, as a base to paint the multicoloured designs upon. Also while waiting for the paint to dry, to cut out any additional accessories from cardboard (and paint them white).

Process: (1) Paint the armature white all over.



- (2) When the armature is completely painted white use the cardboard to make a variety of accessories, e.g. feathers.





LESSON PLANS FOR CLASS PROJECT

Class: St. Gabriel's 2nd Years

Time: 2:55 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Ability: Mixed

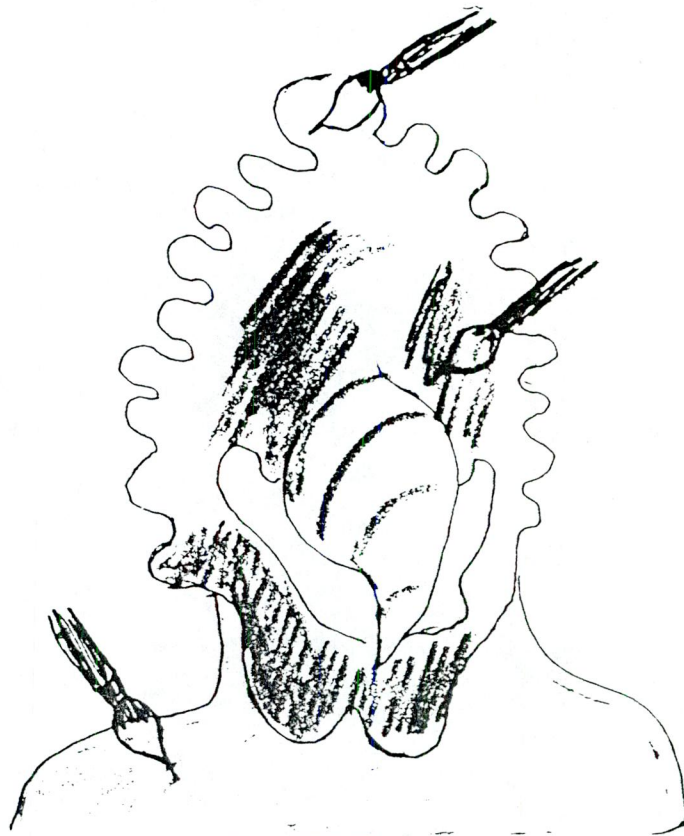
Materials Required: Paint, paintbrushes, cardboard, scissors, stanley knives, glue, masking tape, variety of material, beads, shiny paper, etc.

Task:

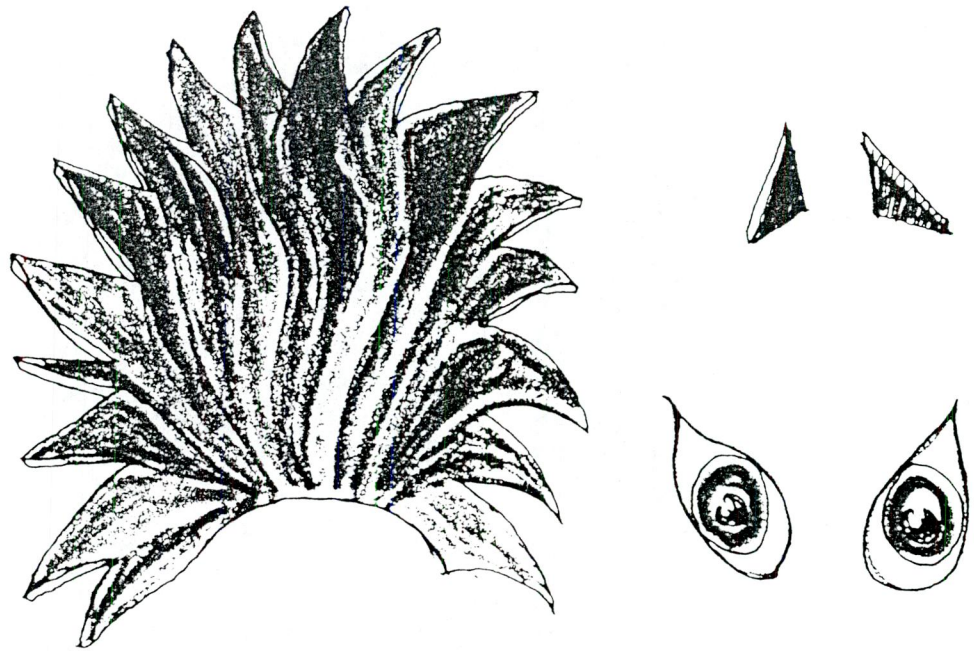
- (1) To continue painting the mask/headdress in colour according to design.
- (2) To continue devising and making accessories to embellish mask/headdresses.

Process:

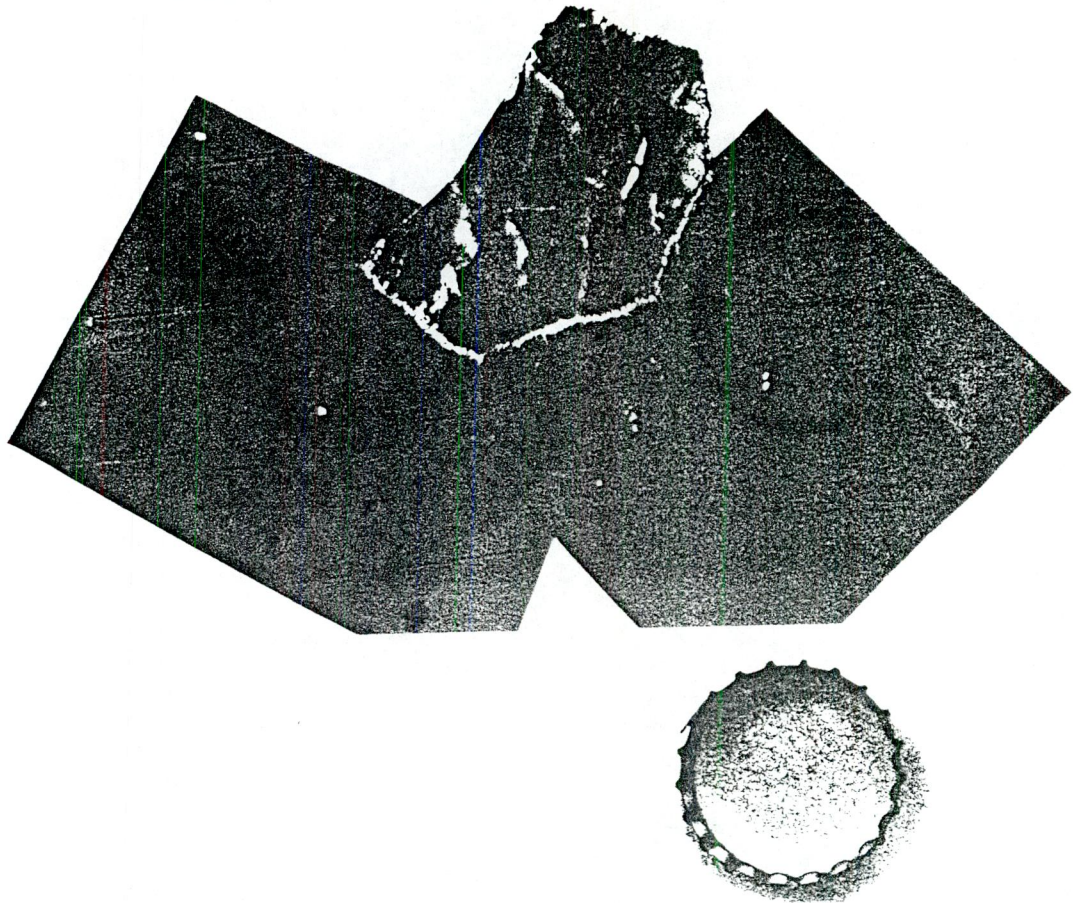
- (1) Half the group will paint the headdress while the other half will proceed with the making (and painting) of accessories.
- (2) Using the original design as a guideline commence applying colour to mask/headdress.

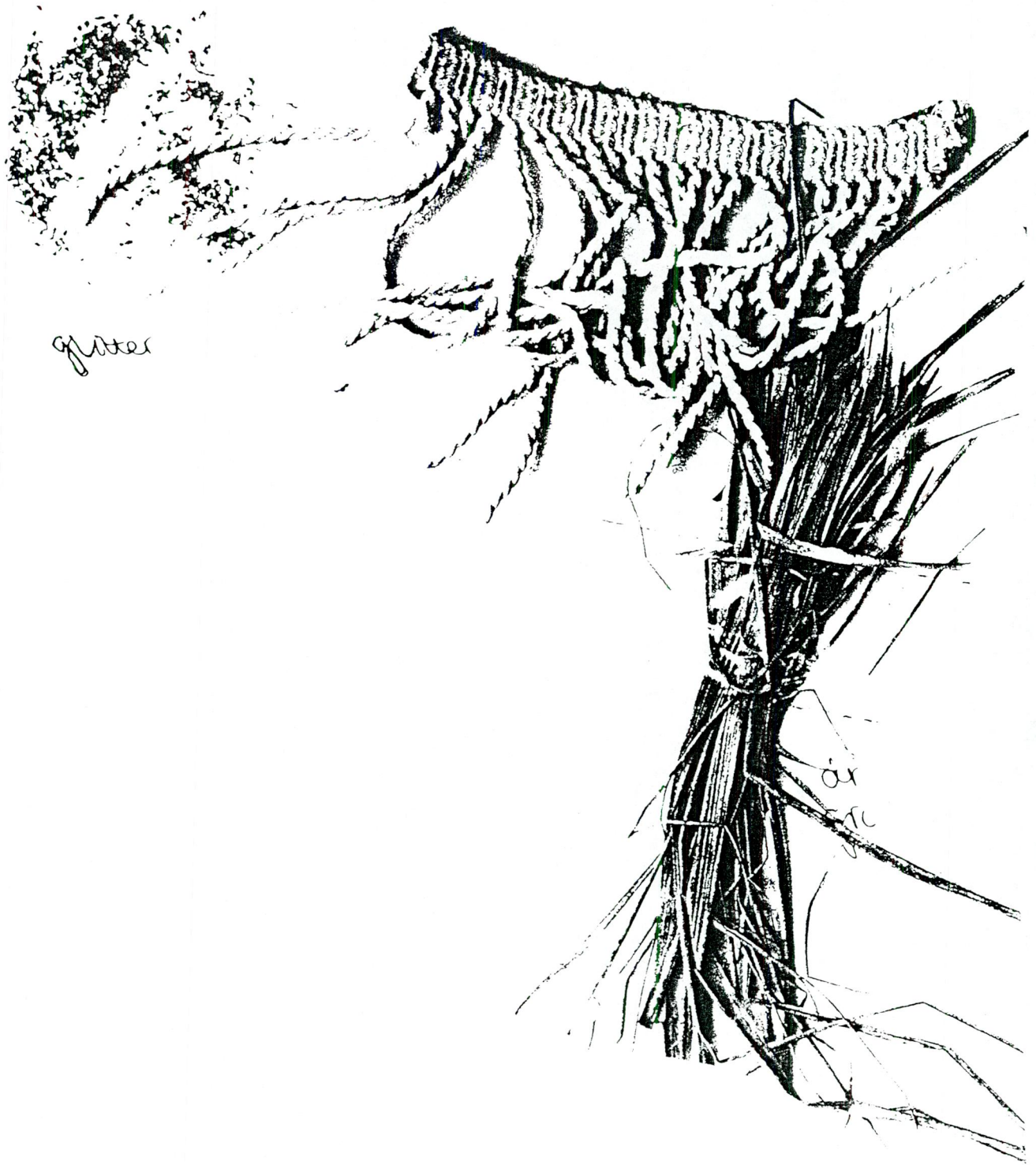


(3) Paint colour on cardboard accessories.



(4) Experiment with a variety of material, e.g. grasses, cloth, beads, papers, coconuts, twigs, leaves, etc. to add to mask/headress for dramatic effect.





- (5) Within the groups they can interchange and take turns at the differing tasks, e.g. painting, cutting, gluing, etc.

CHAPTER IV
CLASS PROJECT

The school where I am undertaking my teaching position is Caritas College Girls Secondary School, Drumfinn Rd., Ballyfermot situated in an area that is predominantly and traditionally working class. There is also a long tradition of unemployment in general in the area. Until quite recently the school leaving age was fourteen although it is now fifteen. This was unfortunately reflected in the school I am based in, until as recently as four years ago, there was not even a full post primary cycle. Classes terminated at 3rd Year, the final exam was the Intermediate examination. The reason for this one supposes was the lack of demand for continued education after fourteen or fifteen years of age.

There is now the opportunity for the students to continue to Leaving Certificate. The school is an all girls convent school, run by the Sisters of Charity of Vincent de Paul, and they are enlightened and aware of the various problems synonymous with the environment and background of the majority of the pupils, and happily place a strong emphasis on the importance and beneficial aspects that result from exposure to the visual arts and the benefits to be reaped thereof. The school is a relatively small one, with 300 pupils.

The class I am undertaking the project with are 2nd Years, 16 students. They are an enthusiastic (noisy) lively bunch. The theme of the project is 'bird imagery' to be realised through the making of mask/headdresses in conjunction with an element of movement and sound, i.e. an introduction to the concept of performance as an art form.

The project will commence with a trip to the zoo (with an accompanying worksheet devised to help the class observe the various aspects of the birds they encounter). These aspects they will utilise in the art class when designing and constructing their mask/headdresses. Hopefully it will be a motivational spur (and help fire their collective imagination!) seeing in the flesh (or feather!) how these exotic creatures move, and sound, and the variety in plumage, colour and mannerisms. I will also be making recordings of the various birdsongs (or in some cases, noise).

I devised the worksheet in such a manner so that the birds we encounter are physically apart, so that in between each bird or grouping of birds, there are plenty of other animals to look at (hopefully minimising the risk of surfeit of bird). The class will be encouraged to collect any stray feathers which they might find around the grounds (30 acres). These may then be integrated at a later stage into the mask/headdresses.

The class following the trip we will examine all the information collected. We will look at the drawings, different descriptions, photographs, listen to the recordings, compare various depictions of bird imagery throughout the history of art, e.g. Max Ernst, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro, Ancient Mythological depictions, Archimboldo, Sue McMorran, tribal art involving bird imagery.

The class will then be divided into three groups of five. Firstly they will work on individual designs of masks, this completed the five members of each group will pool their ideas and devise one single design for a mask. The result will be the design and construction of three different mask/headdresses. When the mask/headdresses are completed they will devise a dance/ritual performance in keeping with the movement and mannerisms they have observed (as well as an amount of spontaneous freeform movement) to

the accompaniment of remixed birdsong).

The zoo trip took place on 5 March, a day when luck in the form of a beaming sun shone (Fig. 19). We arrived at 1:00 p.m., whereupon the class decided to partake of their midday repast, i.e. a bite or two of a sandwich followed by copious amounts of E numbers. Their appetites duly sated we set off to start the real business of the day, 'BIRDWATCHING'. The worksheets were distributed with a short runthrough on the format and what they were expected to do. Also the advice that any major queries about the birds (or indeed any of the other animals) would be answered by any of the keepers they should come across, with great delight and a wealth of information.

The first major stopping point was the parrot house. These colourful and friendly creatures proved to be a major attraction, with their cheeky wolf whistles and imatatory sounds. Some even proffered their heads for a scratch (the parrots, that is!) (Fig. 20). The questions on the worksheet were mainly concerned with colour and sound. (I was taking recordings of the sounds as they filled in the worksheets).

The next area we stopped at was the pheasantry. Here the students had a look at a bird of endearing quality, the hornbill (Fig. 21). They were required to do a colour drawing of the bird and write a short passage describing his appearance, taking into account his/her colour, the way it moved, body and head, and the sounds of communication.

After this we had a look at the cranes and considered if they were any different from the other birds already looked at. The final stage in the worksheet provided an opportunity for the students to choose three more different birds, draw them and write a short account on a variety of



fig 20.

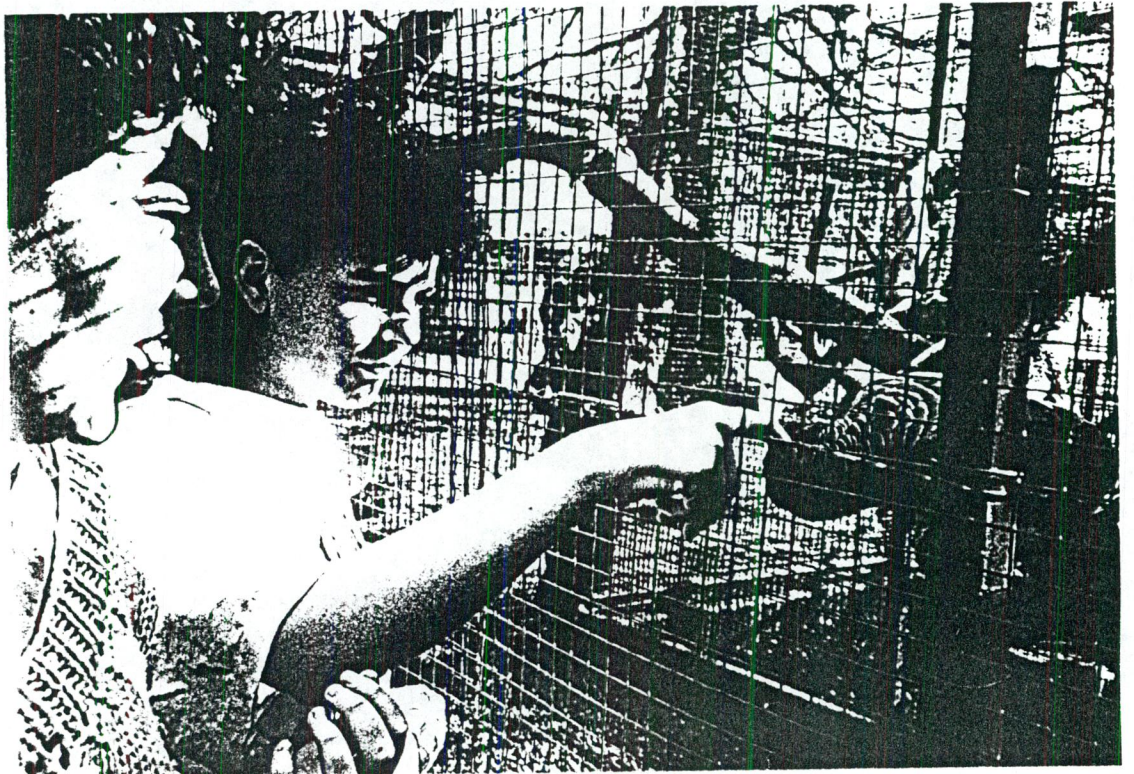


Fig 21

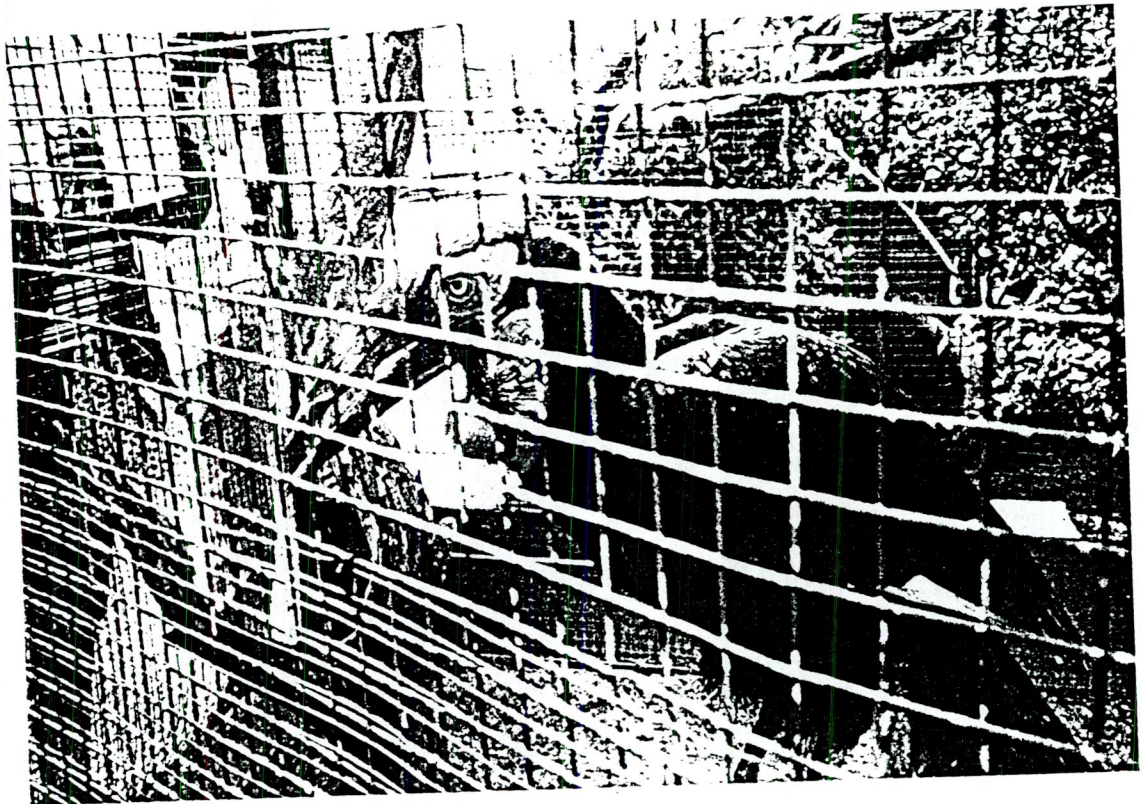


fig 22

aspects pertaining to the particular birds they chose.

The next step back in the class involved looking at all the information collected, including drawings/photographs/recorded bird sound. The class also considered depictions of tribal headdress, and images of birds as depicted by Max Ernst, Pablo Picasso, Renee Magritte, Bill Woodrow, A. R. Penk and nine worksketches for sculpture by Alexander Archipenko. Each individual within the three groups then sketched ideas in colour for a headdress based loosely on birds. The groups then considered the variety of aspects portrayed and decided which of these aspects would be incorporated in the master drawing of a mask/headdress. The master drawing was done on a large sheet of black sugar paper using chalk pastels. One student was chosen to draw the outline under direction from the remainder of the group. Then the entire group participated in the inclusion of detail and colour. (This was done to the accompaniment on tape of the recorded birdsong, as a spur to the imagination!).

When the groups were finished the results were three very different brightly coloured images (Figs. 22, 23 and 24). Now to realise the two-dimensional drawing into a three-dimensional form. A skeletal understructure or armature was constructed using wire. The basic outline of the design was shaped first, and then this shape was reinforced and broadened. (The armatures are 1.5 feet approximately). The tools used were a wire snips, stamina and pliers to manipulate the tougher areas that eluded the fingers. They took it in turns to turn and manipulate the wire (Figs. 25, 26 and 27).

The next step in the process was the covering of the armature in papier mache. The making of the papier mache was a process the class were already familiar with, i.e. a bucket of wallpaper paste, strips of discarded



Fig 23



fig 24

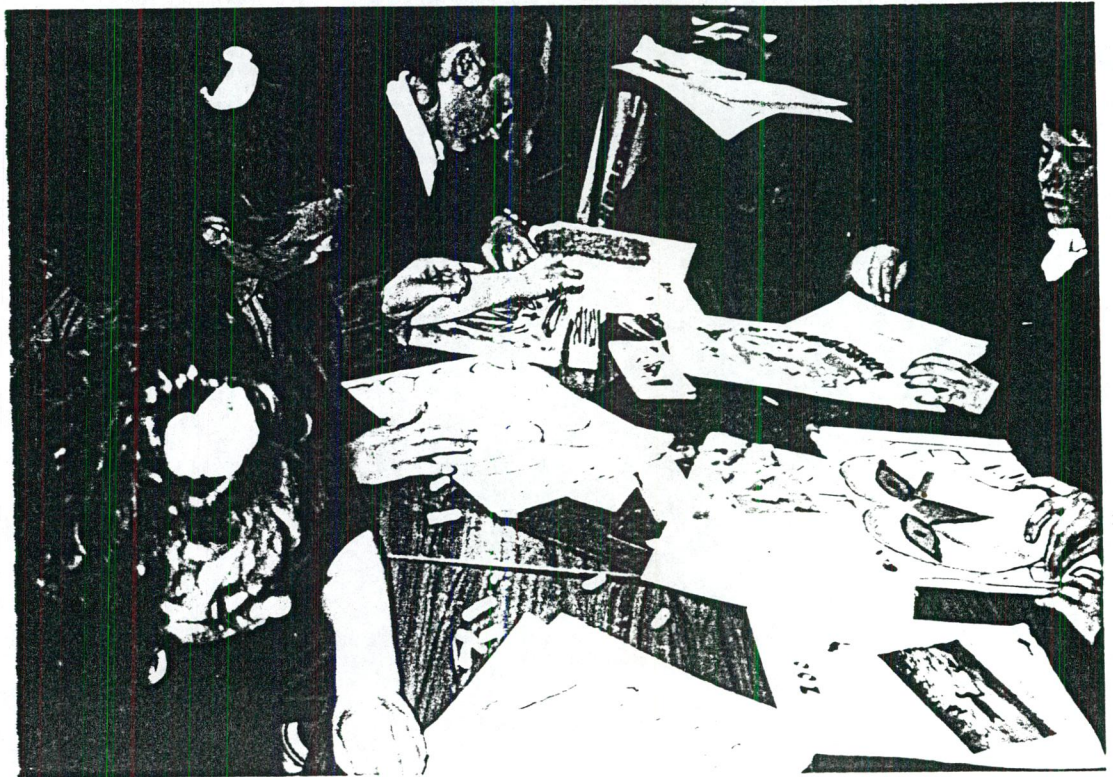


fig 25



fig 26



fig 27



fig 28

newspaper. The strips are soaked profusely in the paste, squeezed out, then laid over the wire. Three-quarter layers were sufficient (as the pieces were destined for wear, it would be impractical to have them too heavily laden for the wearer). These were then left to dry in preparation for priming.

The covered armatures were primed with white household emulsion. This was done in order to provide clear undistracting surface to work upon. The dry mask/headdress were now ready to work upon in painted colour. The master drawings were used as the guideline for painting the mask/headdress. The members of individual groups divided up for differing tasks, one of two painting while the remainder set about constructing, cutting out, painting accessories for addition to the headdresses (Figs. 28, 29 and 30). (These included the use of coconut shells, coloured paper, twine, sinu stoppers, glitter, dried grass, bottle tops, material, cardboard, etc.). This stage took two weeks to complete and led us unfortunately to the last day of my teaching practice in Caritas. Thus there was not the time necessary to instigate and see to fruition a performance, integrating the headdresses and observed bird movement and sound.

The resulting three headdress/masks, were highly individual in character, see for yourself (Figs. 31, 32 and 33).

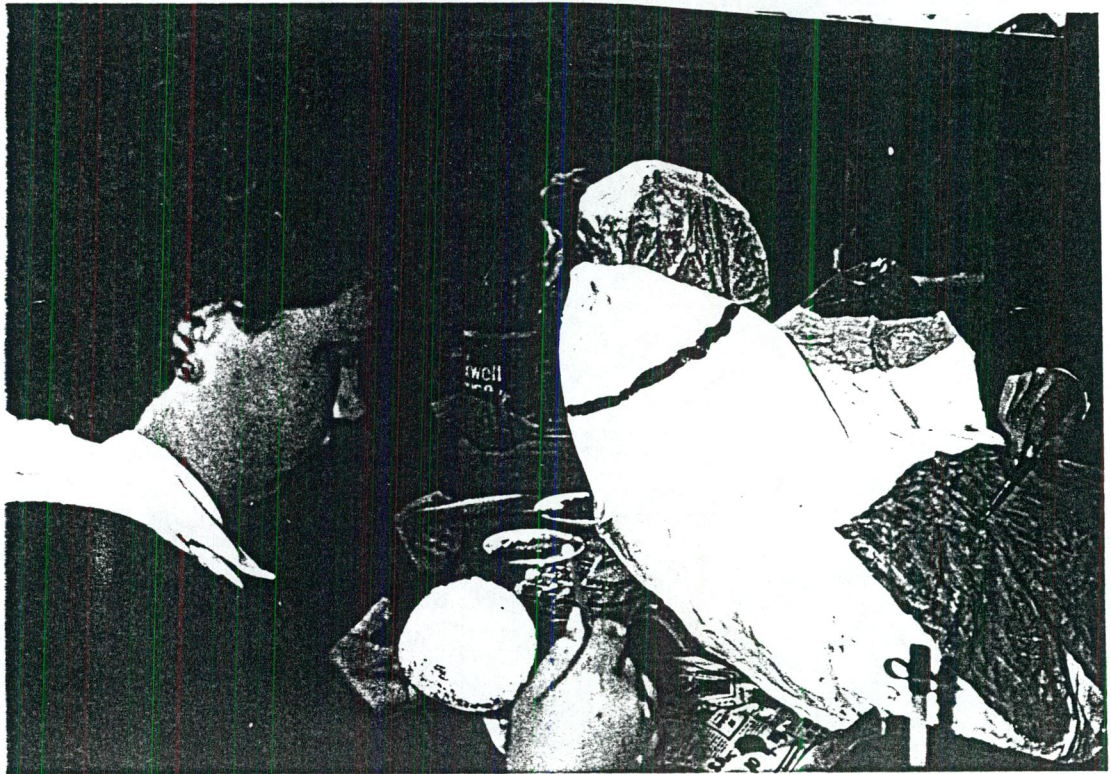


fig 29

PC prt



fig 30

05 117

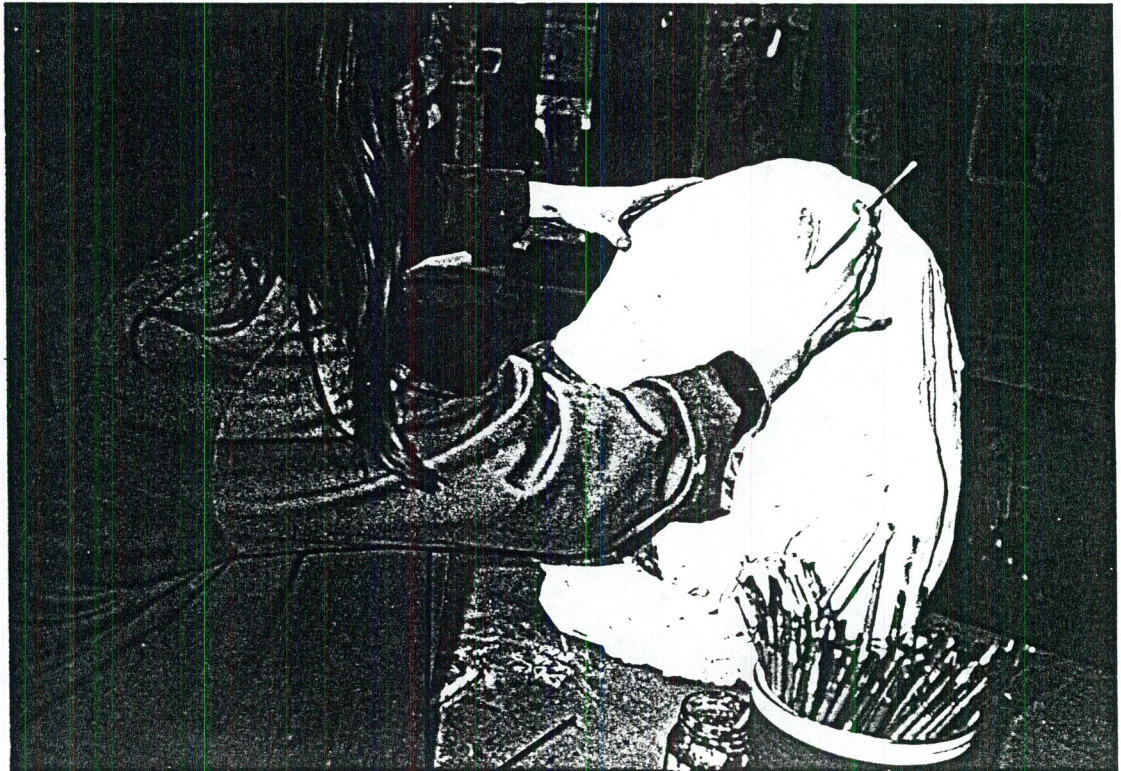
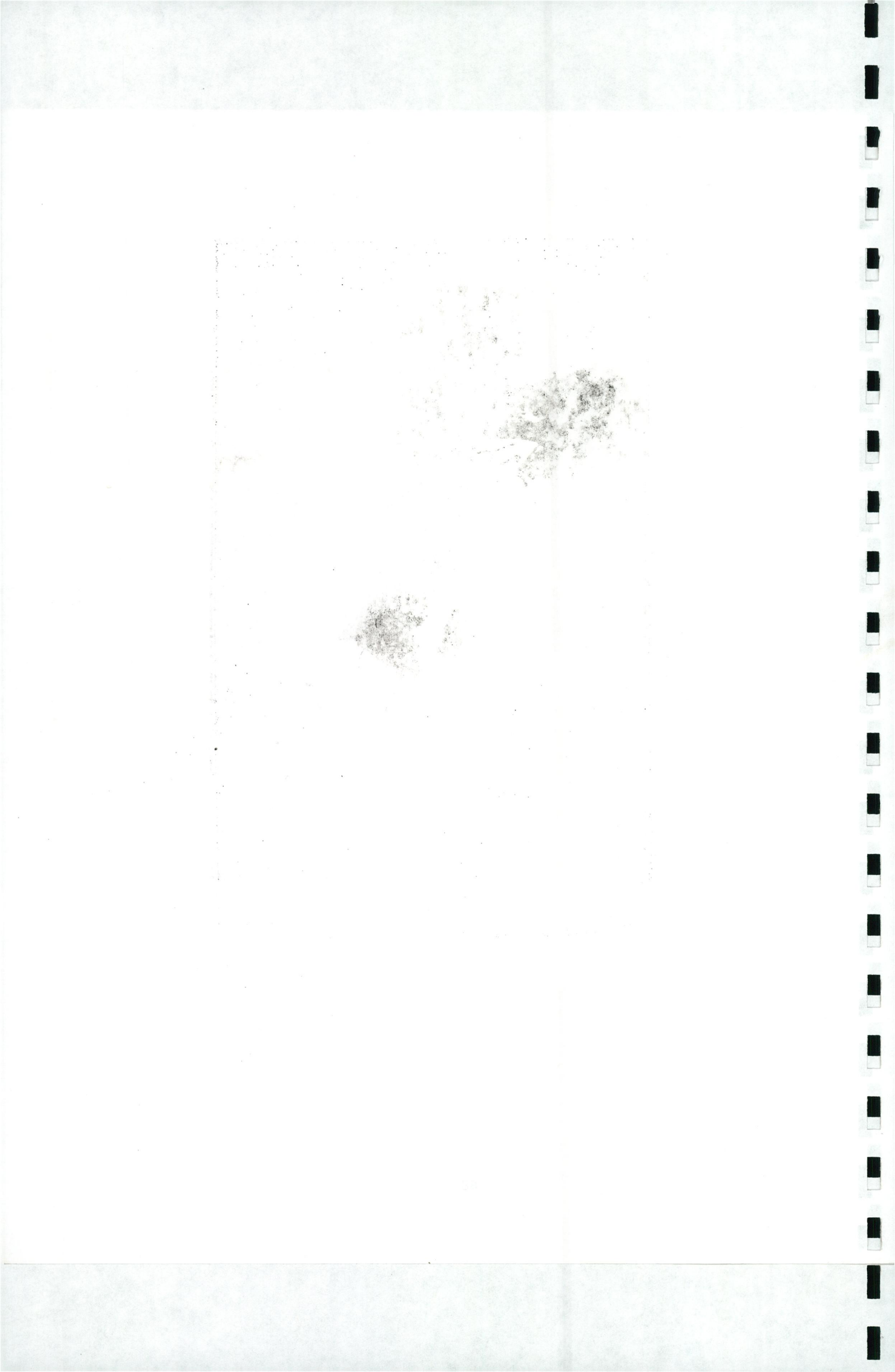


fig 31

15 p2



Fig 32





18 B1

ONCLUSION/EVALUATION

The students greatly enjoyed the visit to the zoo, for some of them it was a first time visit. It was a change to see at first hand many unusual non-indigenous species of animal, while also paying particular attention to the birds. It was also a time for an informal and relaxed integration with the students.

The time I allotted for the duration of the project was not enough for the amount of work involved. The mask/headdresses however were completed. I feel it was a beneficial experience for the students to see the translation of a two-dimensional drawing into a three-dimensional structure.

Working together as groups meant that the students had to make co-operative democratic decisions. I found that this particular class pulled together very well and consultation was made between the individual members before coming to final decisions.

The project provided a chance to work on a larger scale than usual and to get away from sit down artwork at a desk. Their imaginations were fired by having to design the mask/headdresses (utilising what they had observed and recorded from the zoo) and the use of all sorts of oddments as accessories to further enhance the mask/headdresses.

To conclude, I would like to add that I was very pleased with the resulting artworks and the enthusiasm shown by the pupils before and during the project.

FOOTNOTES

- 1] Eister, Elliot, Elliot W: Educating Artistic Vision, New York, Macmillan, 1972.
- 2] Ibid.
- 3] Ibid.
- 4] Ibid.
- 5] Diehl, Gaston: Max Ernst. 1977, p.160.
- 6] Torczyner, Harry: Magritte - The True Art of Painting. Thames & Hudson, 1979. p. 120.
- 7] Short, Robert: Dada and Surrealism. Octopus, 1980. p. 191.
- 8] Ibid, p. 24.
- 9] Virel, Andre: Corps en Fete. Drageur Editeur, 1973. p.p. 30-31.

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