THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FACULTY OF FINE ART

PAINTING DEPARTMENT

CHILDREN'S ART

THE WORLD THROUGH A CHILD'S EYE

BY

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SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN

AND COMPLIMENTARY STUDIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF B.A.

MARCH 1992

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my tutor, Paul O'Brien, for all his patience and assistance. I wish to thank Helen O'Donoghue, for her help and use of her material. I would also like to thank Blackrock National School, Dundalk, for their co-operation and in particular the pupils, Steven, Aoibhinn, David, Shane, Eimer, Sean, Hazel, Catriona and Louise.

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INTRODUCTION

Picasso stated "When I was sixteen I could paint like Raphael but it has taken me all my life to learn to paint like children" (1)

It is almost impossible to think of a child who doesn't play and draw. It is also impossible for adults to experience again the outlook and expectations of two, three and four year olds. We can only endeavour to close the immense mind gap between adults and children. Children, quite independently, allow us into their world of artistic activity. They love to see their pictures hung in the kitchen of their home or another place of public viewing because of their pride that they have made a "picture". It is something to be praised - "I did that, isn't it lovely?" Even in the pre-school child this relationship between her creativity and public viewing has been formed.

In order to continue this relationship we must begin to see the world as they see it. For children the world is a fresh place to be explored. Their lives are full of spontaneous free activity, movement, curiosity and energy. They play to explore - climbing trees, riding bicycles, pretending to be cars, animals or anything they want to be. Their world is full of constant discovery and exploration.

"They play to explore and continue to explore through their art. Imagine the wonder of coloured lines emerging from the end of a stick". (2)

The child has discovered that she can create something on paper that wasn't there before. She can use this to express her ideas and fantasies. She can win a race in her picture or be a queen in a castle. She can pretend, explore and fantasize as she does in play. While play is usually a private activity on which adults can only spy, through their art, children allow us a window to look in on their lives.

Children pass through all kinds of environments and new experiences are constantly stimulating them. They are not passive onlookers on the world but instead active participants. Their world is full of noisy activity. A simple ball of clay becomes full of life for a child and anything can happen. He can put his ball of clay on a lollipop stick and make the action of it flying through the air. Then, "watch out, 5-4-3-2-1, crash", and it crashes onto the table. Imagine how exciting colour is for a child. A child can lay one colour on top of another thus changing it and exclaim, "that's what I call my magic". Art has an essential place in the child's life. Let us look into the child's eye and discover the "magic".

INTRODUCTION - FOOTNOTES

1. Woods, Gordon. "Circa", No. 57, 1991, p. 30

2. O'Donoghue, Helen. "Childscapes", 1984

CHAPTER 1

THE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS

We must look at the first pictures that children make. Their creative activity begins with pre-school "scribbling" pictures, consisting of marks, pattern, colour and line formations. There are two theories concerning these first marks. It has long been assumed that the primary pleasure young children derive from scribbling is that of movement or "motor pleasure". It could equally well be assumed that visual pleasure is primary. Do children simply enjoy the action of "doing it" or is it the delight in seeing that they have made a mark that is important to them? However, such scribbling movements must also stimulate the child's eye and mind. Why else would a steamy window only remain attractive as long as the steam lasts to show the lines the finger traces? Why does a child soon stop his scribbling motions if they do not produce marks, for example, if the crayon breaks into unusable pieces? It cannot simply be a meaningless result of a muscular activity. Visual interest is an essential component of scribbling whether or not it is primary.

However, we cannot separate the product from the activity. Through her hands the child first becomes awake to the world. Helen O'Donoghue has spent many years studying

children's art. She looked at what happened in the early days of painting and found that "hands and fingers become alive to the possibilities offered by water, paint, colour, sponges, brushes and paper. Fingers, hands, feet, cheeks, eyes, ears and nose all find their way into the material to find its effects. When children begin to draw, they explore chalk and crayons on their hands and fingers, from their earliest days, and they examine their hands and use them to construct and reconstruct their ideas about the world". (1)

Children seem possessed by rhythm and movement and much of what they do is repeated over and over. They will often play with paint, putting their hands in and seeing what it feels like. They can use their hands directly in finger painting or use paint or chalk simultaneously on the paper and on their hands. It is an important discovery that their hands are the tools from which their pictures are created. The product and the "doing of it", so to speak, are not separated for the child. Thus the "scribbling" pictures can be attributed to both motor pleasure and visual pleasure, both being of importance to the child.

The other common mistake is to prevent or discourage the child's scribbling as far as possible. Some adults remember being punished in their own childhood for scribbling destructively on walls, floors or furniture. It is not surprising that these adults have mixed feelings about

Fig. 1: This is one of my own early "scribbling pictures" which I discovered.

letting their own children scribble at any time. Adults can feel the activity is worthless, if not destructive. However, the scribbling activity is most important as it is the beginning of a natural developmental process. Adult opposition to scribbling cannot prevent a child from doing some work if only with his fingers on a dusty or frosty surface or with a marking instrument on the ground or in sand and so forth.

Cyril Burt in his "Mental and Scholastic Tests" sets down his observed stages of children's artistic development. He describes a stage of "purposive pencilling in which the child takes pleasure in both his arm movements and in the visible trace of the movements which are left on the paper". (2) James Sully, an English psychologist, looked at what happens when the child begins to draw, in his "Studies in Childhood", 1895. He regarded their art activity as continuous but not identical with play activity. He stated: "The play impulse becomes the art impulse when ... it becomes conscious of itself as a power of shaping semblances which shall have values for other eyes or ears and shall bring recognition and renown" (3).

There is an inbuilt desire to leave their mark and create visual images for others. Children will ask, if not demand, that you look at their pictures. Who can tell how much pleasure a child gets from seeing a drawing that they have

created themselves? Their art is a noisy activity of body and mind, in which producer and product are inseparable. We cannot dismiss the early "scribblings" as undisciplined or the mere result of moving their hands. If they are undisciplined this should not be seen as a fault. Children's paintings defy an ordered scheme that many adults seem to feel a need for but surely there is little scheme and order in a child's world where everything is a new discovery. Their world is one free of responsibility and their art reflects that.

The developmental pattern continues and around the age of three a child begins to make images which he connects with human figures. These figures are often incorporated into an overall scribble picture. Now the child is beginning to produce images which adults can recognise as definite forms, often naming these forms as a "man" or a "daddy". However, an image that a child points out as a man, can be totally unrecognisable as such to an adult. There are definite signs of this turning point in the child's development at three years old. The evolution of a circle appears with the child's first man drawings. It can be a big circle, an oval shape or irregularly shaped outline. In these early representations of a person the circle seems to incorporate both head and body. For the child minimal forms suffice for many objects and this is, so to speak, their "shorthand" for the human figure. While the large circle becomes the whole

person, smaller circles inside serve for the eyes, nose and mouth as in Fig. 2. For example, in Claire Golomb's research "Anath, aged four years, drew an incomplete outline of a circle and inside drew eyes, nose and a mouth. When asked for a second drawing and instructed to draw the whole person - 'this time make a mummy, all of her', Anath used the same model, only this time twice as large. When asked if the drawing had a body she pointed towards the circular outline and stated that was the body. Another girl, Sara, aged four years, also drew a circle and stated 'This is his whole big body; I'll draw the eyes too'". (4) The child has discovered the invention of simple forms of equivalence, the circle and the line.

The child's three-dimensional models using clay are not as sophisticated as his drawings at this stage. The clay versions of human figures can often be a mere ball or a flattened blob, with sometimes, although not always, facial features scratched onto its surface, poked out or separately formed and attached to the global structure. Thus, successful treatment of a figure in a three-dimensional form is rare at this stage. When given a piece of clay, children will usually flatten it and use it for drawing their circular image onto, as they do on paper. Claire Golomb found an exception in a boy, aged four, who made a global man with facial features, then turned his man over and said: "now his back on - that's all done". The child seemed to

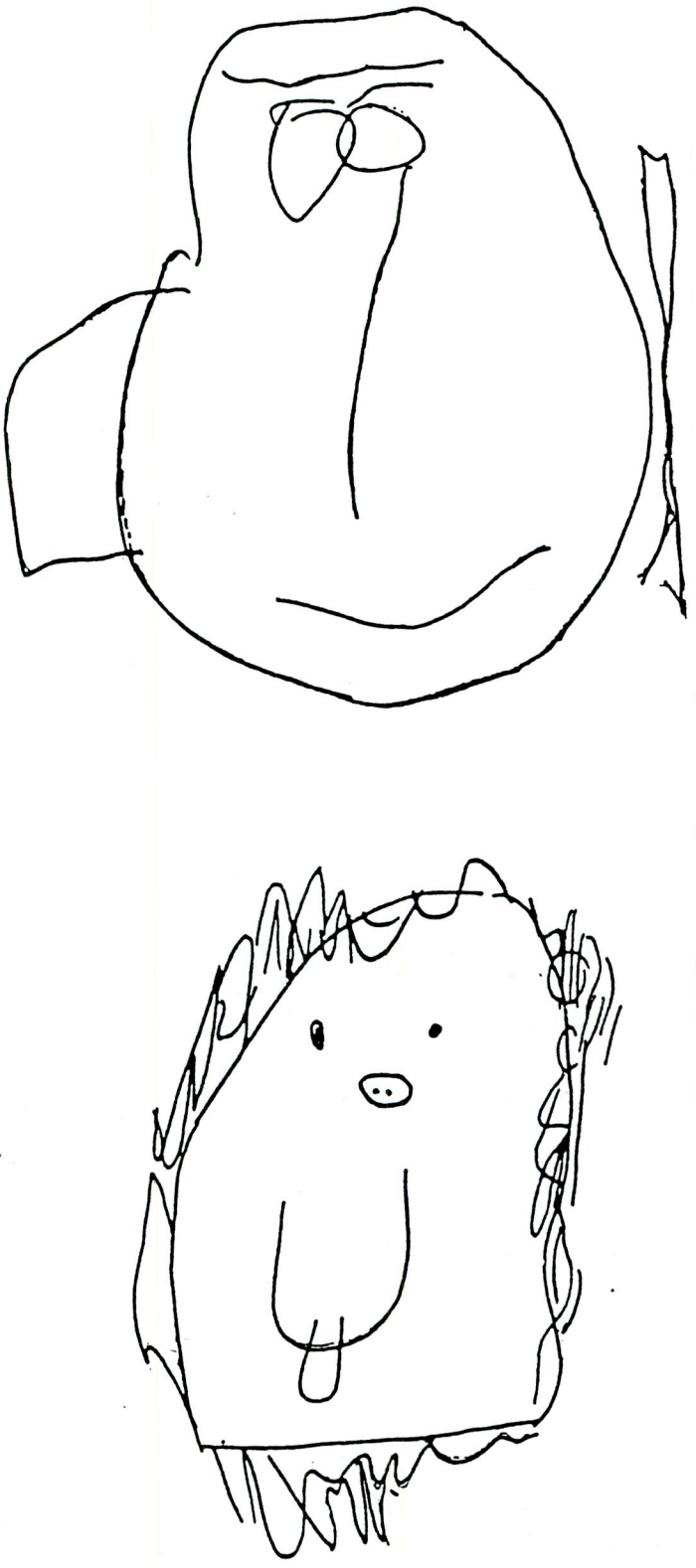

Fig. 2

recognise the three-dimensional qualities offered by the clay. Other children use actions as an aid to representation. Often when presented with clay they don't use it in order to create a likeness to an object but rather imply the object by imitating one of its functions with the clay. For example, a child will move a blob of clay across the table like a car or walk it across like a man, without previously making the clay into the object. These actions will often be accompanied by stories and noises related to the action. Children will regularly flatten the piece of clay and proclaim "a pancake", happy that they have made something with a likeness to the object they say it is, however simple it was to do, in comparison with the complex structure of a man.

It is with these first human figures, whether on paper or in clay, that adults become newly interested. While before "scribbles" were treated as meaningless, now the adult treats these human images as important and "meaningful". Scribble drawings were not questioned for their content but now the adult is shown something he recognises as a representational form and can question too much and push the child to reason out his picture. Claire Golomb recognised this in her research and found that children "make up stories" when pressed too much to account for their drawings. She calls this "romancing", for while children love to talk freely about their work and tell you what their

drawing is, for example, "a man", if asked much more in a way that debases their image as that of a human figure, they will tend to go off into a long fantastical discussion totally apart from the drawing. The child can be distracted by the adult's discussion of what the child sees simply as "a man".

For a three year old child it is a daunting experience to be faced with the task of drawing a man, not knowing what the crayon will produce. When Golomb asked one girl, Gina, four years old, to make a man, she simply replied "'I can't, too difficult' and instead said 'I'm gonna make a baby, one year old and then it grows to be two', adding more clay to the lump in her hand to indicate the growing baby". (5) Perhaps Gina could really see that this was what she was making and that by simply adding more clay she made the "baby" bigger, therefore older. Although maybe Gina felt she must "romance" about the lump of clay because of the inability she felt in representing the form she had been asked to make.

Many children when confronted with an outright representational task feel quite helpless and complain that it is too hard and that they can't do it, for example, they will say: "I want to learn, I don't know how". Some children hold out altogether saying: "it's gone", "I made it already" or "it's hidden", when faced with the request to

produce a man.

> "One girl, Hilary, aged three, pointed to rather indistinguishable forms and enumerated a list of several body parts including eyes, nose, mouth, body and legs". (6)

While Hilary might have seen her forms as such, she might also have felt the need to "romance" in order to make something out of her drawing. Asked what he had made, one boy simply replied "something". He was not about to admit that his image was anything definite so that the adult could question it. Regularly children will rename the object after it is drawn. One girl, aged four, set out to draw her father but renamed the oval shape she ended up with as "Daddy is now Humpty-Dumpty".

Statements such as, "I'll make a person with no eyes", show that the child is not primarily interested in representing exactly what he sees. Claire Golomb looks at the figures children draw not for what they lack but for what they offer. She states:

> "If we realise that the incompleteness of these representations does not derive simply from inability and ignorance but from a child's awareness that a picture can be valid even though it is not mechanically

faithful, our respect for children's intelligence will be newly increased and enlightened". (7)

As one child says himself, "it needs feet, but I won't make them". This child does know that his human figure should have feet but he decides not to give it any. The interest lies in the imagination of a child who controls his own representation of a human and does not want to be dictated to by what is factual and correct. An adult can become confused that if he knows "it needs feet" why doesn't he give the figure feet? But why should he? Children are very inventive, representing in a minimal fashion. They will often give an intricate description of their intentions but the result will be a simple circular figure. Although most children draw the same basic model, the variations in each child's drawing are extensive. No two drawings will be the same.

The next stage comes with the child's extension of the human outside the circle. While the child still sees the whole person as the head, legs and arms now extend from it. These figures are called "Tadpole Men". The child still ignores the torso and the human consists of a huge circle combining both body and head with dangling legs and arms, sticking straight out instead of directed downwards, attached to it as in Fig. 3. Teachers will often begin to show children "how" to draw a "man". Both boys and girls are interested in

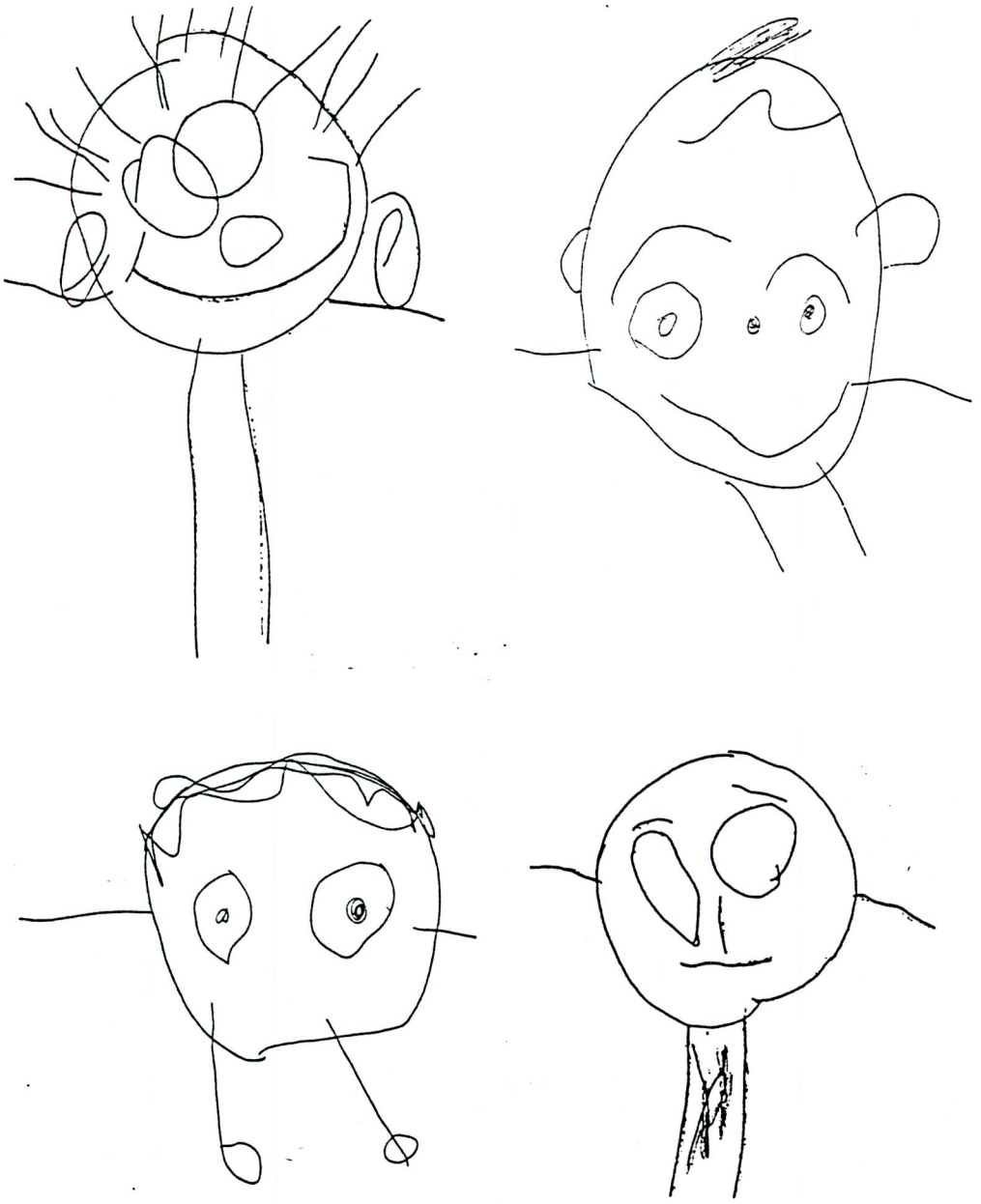

Fig. 3

Fig. 4: This is one of my sister's early drawings which I discovered. It is a depiction of our family. Note the two suns in the sky.

"learning" to draw and are quite willing for a time to do "copywork". The child makes the adult formula a few times and then forgets the learned model and goes back to his own natural system of structuring circles and lines into humans. Usually, at five years of age, a child begins to recognise the torso, expanding on their idea of the circle as the whole body. Triangles, rectangles, circles and oval loops are added, as a torso, to the circle head. Legs and arms now extend from this attached torso as they once did from the circular outline which combined both head and body. Up to eight years old, children will still show no reference to the neck, and the torso will be attached directly to the head.

At this stage, height is achieved in the human figures in a charming way, by either excessively long dangling legs attached to a small torso or a very elongated torso with tiny legs attached. Thus proportions are often so distorted that an adult can become dismayed when seeing the relative sizes of body parts that are drawn by children. For example, the head can be huge, bigger than the torso and the legs combined or on the other extreme, a tiny "pinhead" in comparison with a huge torso. Showing sex differentiations in humans at this stage is neither easy for the child to do nor for the adult to determine. Such differences are often determined by hair length or clothes such as a female with a triangular skirt or a male with a hat and short hair. Often the figures are sexless humans but when they are, they are

usually referred to as "a man". However, such representations of hats, hair and so forth, like hands and feet, tend to be more of a decorative rather than realistic intention and such complexities depend on the individual preferences of the child. All this shows the difficulty in looking for "pictorial realism" in children's art. In 1942, Henry Focillon spoke of form and pictorialism:

> "... the logic of the eye with its need for balance and symmetry is not necessarily in agreement with the logic of structure. Do not these forms that live in space and in matter live first in the mind". (8)

Focillon's view of art allows a place for the art that children create.

CHAPTER 1 - FOOTNOTES

1. O'Donoghue, Helen. "Childscapes", 1984

2. Read, Herbert. "Education Through Art", 1945, p.125.

3. ibid. p.117

4. Golomb, Claire. "Young Children's Sculpture and Drawings", 1974, p.16

5. ibid. p.13

6. ibid. p.20

7. ibid. p.6

8. Kellogg, Rhoda. "Analyzing Children's Art", 1970, p.240

CHAPTER 2

HOW ADULTS INFLUENCE CHILDREN'S ART

We must begin to look at the overall purpose of education. In 1945, Herbert Read set down at least two possibilities:

> "one, that man should become educated to become what he is, the other, that man should be educated to become what he is not" (1)

His first view assumes that each individual is born with a certain potential and that it is his proper destiny to develop his potential with a society liberal enough to allow for an infinite variation of types. The second view assumes that whatever individuality the child is born with, it is the duty of the teacher to eradicate it unless it conforms to a certain ideal of character determined by the traditions of the society of which the individual has involuntarily become a member.

Read's theory sees the purpose of education as a choice between individuality and uniformity. Should education be directed towards encouraging the growth of each person's individuality or towards the elimination of all eccentricities and the production of a uniform mass? It is basically a choice between a totalitarian or a democratic

theory of education. As we live in a democratic society the ideal is not and could never be an ideal of uniformity, for the essence of democracy lies in individualism and variety. However, each individual is part of society and therefore education should not be a process of individualisation alone but also one of integration, which is the reconciliation of individual uniqueness with social unity.

Plato's theory of education assumed such principles of freedom:

> "Avoid compulsion and let your children's lessons take the form of play. This will also help you to see what they are naturally fitted for". (2)

After Plato came Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori, all of whom contributed to the growth of freedom in education. Froebel stressed the importance of play, as Plato did, and it is significant that he defined play as "spontaneous self-instruction". Though it seems obvious that in a democratic society, the guiding principles of education should be freedom and the purpose should be to foster individual growth, problems arise when we begin to consider what methods we should adopt to this end, as growth itself is a process which is hard to define. It is usually regarded as a process of "gradual physical enlargement of maturation accompanied by a corresponding development of

various mental faculties such as thought and understanding". Read see this as a totally inadequate view of what he sees as "a very complicated adjustment of the subjective feelings and emotions to the objective world and the development of mental faculties such as thought and understanding depend to a large extent on the success of this adjustment" (3). He sees the most important function of education as concerned with this "psychological orientation" and for this reason the recognition and development of aesthetic sensibility is of fundamental importance to the individual. Thus, he sees self-expression as vital to a child's growth. However, while the general purpose of education is to foster the growth of what is individual in each human being, Read also recognises the need to "harmonise the individuality thus educed with the organic unity of the social group to which the individual belongs". (4) This is essential if an individual is to function as part of a society.

However, art education does not always work like this. The philosopher, Martin Buber, spoke at an International Conference at Heidelberg in 1925 to consider the "unfolding of creative powers in the child". He examined the concept of creativity and stated that a distinct impulse to create was present in all children. He pointed out that "it is not the free exercise of the instinct that matters but the opposition it encounters, for example, in a lesson a teacher using the old methods of constraint begins with prescripts

and approved models which lay down what is unquestionably beautiful and all he has to do afterwards is to decide how nearly his pupils have approximated to these standards". (5) Buber claimed that the theories of education which emphasise freedom do not see the importance of the teacher's function, whilst those which are based on the principles of authority neglect the importance of the child's experimental activity. However, freedom should not be considered in a negative sense as freedom "from" certain wants or restrictions. It is a state of being with positive characteristics in all their self-sufficiency. Theories of education which emphasise freedom do see the importance of the teacher's function. The teacher has a vital function in encouraging this freedom of self-expression and recognising the child's own experimental activity.

Gordon Woods agrees with Read's theory of art education as fundamental and he states:

> "... it would lead to a wonderful change in curriculum development at all levels and place art and design education at the centre of the system as fundamental and indispensable". (6)

However, his experience of art education in his childhood is probably similar to that of many people.

> "In my grammar schooldays, only stupid pupils did art, being 'good with one's hands' was a grammar school euphemism for stupidity". (7)

It was back in the 1940's when Gordon Woods experienced this attitude at school. However, little has changed for this was also my experience in the 1980's.

Rhoda Kellogg sees "every child as a 'born artist' who should be allowed to work without oppressive guidance in 'art education'". (8) Thus, she too shares Read's theory of freedom in education. However, in her years of research of children's art she found that many children did experience such oppressive guidance and abandoned art in school because lack of teacher approval was taken as a personal affront. Buber was correct in saying that it was not the free exercise of the creative instinct that mattered but the opposition it encountered. Kellogg discovered that teachers placed too much stress on pictorial realism and it became evident that they saw children's art as being most successful when the child's observations of the environment were "recorded" in a pleasing form that adults could enjoy. Children can soon learn to please teachers by using certain symbol combinations in art which promote adult concepts of realistic pictorialism: for example, only one sun drawn above a house whereas more suns are often more pleasing to children but are factually incorrect. If a drawing is not

clearly pictorial, then teachers prefer it to be a pure design. A mixture of the two kinds of work (which children naturally do) is confusing to adults.

Whatever art the teacher likes, the child somehow manages to produce or gives up trying. Kellogg believes that "teachers should accept everything made with good grace and should not try to evaluate its worth". (9) No questions need ever be asked and comments can be restricted to such constructive ones as "very interesting", "nice colours", "I like that" and so forth. A pleasant smile from the teacher is best for preventing the child from drawing to please the teacher rather than to continue his own experimental development. Much of the child's natural spontaneity can become lost under adult pressure to try to draw factually. The demand for a restricted kind of pictorialism in school art is one important influence that causes many children to give up art. Children can lose interest because the methods of art instruction are frustrating them. The only way they can achieve success and approval is by restricting their art formulas to those which adults appreciate. Often children will use one system of work at home and another at school. At home they can work freely without "oppressive guidance".

The child's natural progression is totally opposite to the adults idea of progression. A child of five or six years old progresses by using less detail for features than

before. For example, eyebrows, eye pupils and eyelashes are viewed by teachers as desired added details in child art, showing a definite progression. However, the origin of these eye features goes back to the ages of three and four when the child uses a sun image to represent an eye. As the child matures a simple circle suffices as an eye. Thus the child simplifies as he grows older. Correction of "faulty" representations and teaching children the proper placement of body parts and the significance of counting the fingers and drawing the right number of limbs can be over-stressed. Such details seem irrelevant to the child rather than misunderstood and the child favours aesthetic qualities over factual representations. The fact that there are four fingers and a thumb on a hand is often of no relevance to a child who discovers that he can control how many fingers there are and decides to draw only three. Such spontaneity and independence is too often mistaken for incompetence. Learned ability seems valued at the cost of imaginative fluency. The result of the teacher's influence can be that a kind of art evolves in schools which fulfills the expectations of the educators but discourages what children really want to do, so that they often do what they wish at home instead.

The words of the children speak for themselves. Hilary, aged three years, explained her drawing of a person as "It's a person with a lot of hair, he is having a shampoo".

Unwilling to admit defeat another child took some clay, pressed it a bit and when questioned about his work stated with great conviction "It's a bed for a dolly, the doll's inside". Another child, aged four, drew an outline figure resembling a mountain - "I made a big boy but without a head. One child set out a definite criteria before he began - "It's going to be a little man with no face, its not going to have eyes or a mouth, its just going to have hair". In 1886, Sully wrote that he considered children's drawings mere symbols for reality. I would agree more with Ricci, who said the child draws only the parts important to him. He remarked that: "a child draws all he needs, a head for eating and seeing and two legs for walking". (10) This is a rather sensible and incisive view of "tadpole drawings".

It is evident that the child must be allowed the freedom to develop through the impact of his own imaginative fluency. An Austrian teacher, Franz Cizek believed, in his experience, that "basic art abilities are inherent and develop naturally in childhood". (11) The one drawback to the child's satisfaction is a fear of adult disdain. When adults have a consistently approving reaction to all the work made without over-emphasising appreciation of what they like best, the child functions best in art. The teacher's influence need not be blatant to be effective.

CHAPTER 2 - FOOTNOTES

1. Read, Herbert. "Education Through Art", 1945, p.2

2. ibid. p.6

3. ibid. p.7

4. ibid. p.8

5. ibid. p.280

6. Woods, Gordon. "Circa", No. 57, 1991, p.27

7. ibid. p.28

8. Kellogg, Rhoda. "Analyzing Children's Art", 1970, p.52

9. ibid. p.220

10. ibid. p.250

11. ibid. p.236

CHAPTER 3

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Helen O'Donoghue, arts education officer for the Irish Museum of Modern Art, has spent many years watching children drawing and painting and has documented her findings in video form. Her video called "Look at my Hands", looks at the experience of a group of children and how they use creative opportunities and art materials. It begins with two children painting their hands - "paint your hands, paint your whole hands, look at my hands, look at my two hands". O'Donoghue found that the children became totally involved in the paint - hands, faces, feet, etc. were all used as surfaces on which to put paint. In painting their faces they wanted to see the effect. One girl demanded "a mirror for myself" and then said "I wonder if my dad will kill me". Through such actions, repetition and practice they gain confidence, control and discover the properties and qualities of the material.

With clay it's fingers in, hands on, moulding, pushing, kneading and spreading. She found working with clay was an exciting time for the children when problems were set and solved and new ones such as balance, created by the children themselves. Such experience with clay can lead to an understanding of form, size, length, weight, texture and

dimension. Children find meaning and expression in what they make. One child flattened his piece of clay and then stuck lollipop sticks into it. To him it became a birthday cake and he stated: "that's very dangerous - the candles", he then proceeded to blow them (the lollipop sticks) out and sang "happy birthday". Another section of dialogue of several children shows the social interaction which can evolve out of the activity. "One child made a hole right through his lump of clay - 'look at that big hole - I have a big huge hole too - I can see through the other side - its very dark in my hole - its bright in my hole - its bright in mine too - come over here, see in mine'". (1)

Children explore colour for its own sake, laying one colour on top of another, changing the shade and the tone and watching what happens. "Paul played through his creation, acting, testing, feeling and imagining: 'look what I made - a dinosaur's tummy, can you do a dinosaur's tummy? - I do it red and pink'". (2) Then he stated: "now I'll draw Paul, a small head, legs, there's my hands and fingers - there's Paul". Helen asked "Where's Paul going to?" and was told "the circus - there's his eyes". Helen asked: "so he can see the circus?" to which Paul replied "I cover them" and he put paint over the eyes. Helen queried "has he got his eyes closed?" and Paul answered "so the circus can't see him".

Great confidence was expressed in statements such as "that's

the way I paint - see my hands". O'Donoghue states that

> "children need the language of drawing, painting and clay modelling for the free expression of their experiences". (3)

Adults can provide materials and opportunities to explore this language and a knowledge of the art process is essential. Children have a time of sensation and exploration, of rhythm and practice, of discovery of form, colour, pattern, line and shape. These stages should not be denied or interfered with. O'Donoghue clearly states the teacher's function - "Observation is the key to what you can do. Always begin with the child. Each one comes with a unique potential, individual needs and preferences". (4) Here Read and O'Donoghue agree.

She looks at four children to show such individual needs. The first child, Sinead, was a reserved, gentle little girl who approached her first day at school with caution and sat quietly for twenty five minutes with the materials without using them. Helen gently encouraged her to feel the colours and begin using them "would you like to touch the red paint and see what it feels like?". Sinead reluctantly did so and then said "I've got a red finger". As the sessions progressed a new confidence emerged and soon she showed no hesitation in adventurously exploring paint and clay and

later she began to interact with others. Adults should respect a child's readiness for the art process. Some children take their time to familiarise themselves with the materials and the environment. It is important to be aware of this newness and to direct the child sensibly. The second child, Keith, didn't like clay. Sometimes an activity might simply be of no interest to a child. Keith did not participate in any activities for six months until the last day when he set up a series of trays and painted with his feet. Elaine, on the other hand, spent a lot of time at each activity offered to her. She showed no preference for any particular material but explored every aspect of each one and provided with suitable materials she guided herself without interruption. Debbie had a particular interest in art and used mixed media to develop her ideas on paper. Her pictures began to tell stories which she related verbally quite independently of any inquiry. Helen O'Donoghue sets out clearly the teacher's function: "You can be a positive force to the child, encouraging effort and giving help when asked, sharing their discoveries with enthusiasm. Children have individual needs and art can meet these needs. There are neither rules nor limits and each child finds their own personal expression in their own way, it comes quite naturally to them. It is important to observe the child's personality, preferences and readiness for the art process. Art has an essential place in the child's life, be sensitive and encourage this

self-expression and creativity". (5)

In another of her videos "The Clay Tape", O'Donoghue explores the natural sense of touch that children are born with. She believes that if children lose contact with natural materials, they will lose contact with themselves. Clay as a material offers rich opportunities for learning and expression, providing an essential experience where space and solidity can be explored. The transition from feeling unsure to a new confidence is natural and adventurous. Clay is not regularly used in schools and too often the ability to make form is lost with the development of graphic forms of communication which are stressed in our education system. If children don't have such opportunities to build or model, they flatten clay rather than explore its intrinsic qualities. This new material requires an openness and confidence from a child. The child must be allowed an initial period of playing with clay and exploring its qualities as a material.

However, older children, aged between nine and twelve years, who have never used a three-dimensional material often need help in reawakening their sense of touch and the overall idea of form. In her work with children, O'Donoghue approached this through a series of tactile experiences, encouraging the children to verbalise about how things felt rather than how they looked. The children were blindfolded

and asked to feel feathers, leaves, clay and their own faces, neck, hands and so forth.

> "A new confidence began to emerge naturally and spontaneously and within six days their understanding of the clay and their enthusiasm to explore it was highly stimulated". (6)

It is a primal instinct to touch and explore forms close to nature. To reach their fullest potential, it is profoundly important that children get the opportunity to develop these instincts.

John Dewey wrote in 1916 that "a very humble experience is capable of generating and carrying any amount of theory (or intellectual content) but a theory apart from experience cannot be grasped even as a theory. An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance". (7) I went back to my old primary school to obtain "an ounce of experience", so to speak, by watching the way the children were taught and also by simply watching the children. I was greatly encouraged to do this after seeing Helen O'Donoghue's three videos. I took part in a class of seven to eight year olds, in which they were working with clay for the first time. Here their teacher was present and my aim was to watch how the children worked

in relation to the teacher. To a certain extent I could also see how I myself was taught, as this teacher also taught me, when I was that age.

Each child was given their own piece of clay and instructed to knead their clay into a ball. One boy started to make his into something almost immediately which I thought displayed great confidence and enthusiasm. However, he was quickly and sharply told to keep rolling his clay into a ball until he was allowed to make something out of it. This went on for some time until eventually they were allowed to begin making something with their clay. The teacher suggested such things as a basket, a chair, a bowl, etc.

We must remember that this was the first time these children had used or even felt clay and immediately they were expected to shape it into a representational solid form. They were denied the essential period of playing with the clay and exploring its qualities as a material. All the crucial stages of the art process had been ignored, the time of sensation and exploration, of rhythm and practice, of discovery. All this is vital if the child is to feel able to use the material he is given rather than feel frightened of it and frustrated because he doesn't know what to do with it. The teacher then held up clay pieces that had been made

Fig. 5: A "Snowman"

fig. 5.

in a summer school. As Buber stated in 1925, "approved models are shown which lay down what is unquestionably beautiful and all he has to do afterwards is to decide how nearly his pupils have approximated to these standards". (8)

The teacher asked me if I had any experience with clay and I said that children will often flatten clay and use it to draw images onto rather than build with it. Thus, the teacher simply instructed the children that they were not allowed to flatten their clay rather than encouraging them otherwise. With this further instruction they became almost totally confused which was not surprising. As I began to go around and watch the children individually, I found a general lack of confidence in the children, a confidence that was required to use the material.

The stages of discovery that would have given such confidence were denied. The children simply did not know what to do with the clay. There had been too much strict instruction and a lot of pressure to produce representational forms. One girl was sitting with her lump of clay in front of her and told me "I don't know how to do it, I don't want to do it". With a lot of suggestion and encouragement she became newly interested and when I returned she was busily making a "snowman" and moulding her clay into shapes and forms, as in Fig. 5. Helen O'Donoghue found that "within six days their understanding of the clay

and their enthusiasm to explore it was highly stimulated". (9) I found that within one hour of expecting too much too soon, the children totally misunderstood the clay, were generally unenthusiastic about the activity and seemed totally confused as to what to do or how to approach the clay. Perhaps it is wrong to blame the teacher, for at least the children were being given the chance to use clay at an early age. However, if art education was seen as essential to the child's development, as Read argues, the teacher would have had more understanding of the art process and more experience in encouraging use of a three-dimensional material.

I also took seven children by myself on two separate occasions. This time the age range was between four and six years old. I told the children that I wasn't a teacher, in an effort to break down the pupil-teacher relationship so that the children could work freely, devoid of expectations. However, I was still an adult acting in their school environment. I simply told them to do whatever they wanted to do and to just have fun and enjoy it. In such a small group it was very easy to see the individual personalities emerging. Shane, six years old, seemed to find the whole exercise very expressive and said it was the best art class he had ever had. He seemed to enjoy the freedom he had been given. At the start of the class he had said "you mean we can do anything we want, can we even do the telly? Great".

His first painting he told me was "an aeroplane" surrounded by fog and there's the sky around it". He seemed to have a fascination with "purple snow" which he did with his fingers and which appeared in several of his pictures. He pointed this out quite independently: "that's purple snow because sometimes you get purple snow". Another of his pictures consisted of two houses, one that you couldn't see because as he explained it was "on fire" and he painted yellow and red flames coming out of it, the sun was "falling out of the sky" onto this house and indeed, a yellow line was "falling" from his yellow sun, as in Fig. 6. The second house was drawn with a large grey blob beside it which he stated was a "rock falling off the cliff onto the house but I couldn't fit the cliff in".

Hazel, aged five years, and also Aoibhinn, aged four, were both very quiet and gentle and guided themselves without interruption, quite like Elaine in O'Donoghue's video. However quiet they were they were also very forthcoming and confident about their work. Aoibhinn began to paint her family and did ten circular images with facial features inside, as in Fig. 7. While to me, each circle was indistinguishable as child or adult, she pointed out which was her father, her mother and herself. David, aged six, seemed the opposite to Shane and appeared somewhat daunted by the freedom he had been given. He came up and said "this is meant to be the Thunderbirds but I can't do it properly".

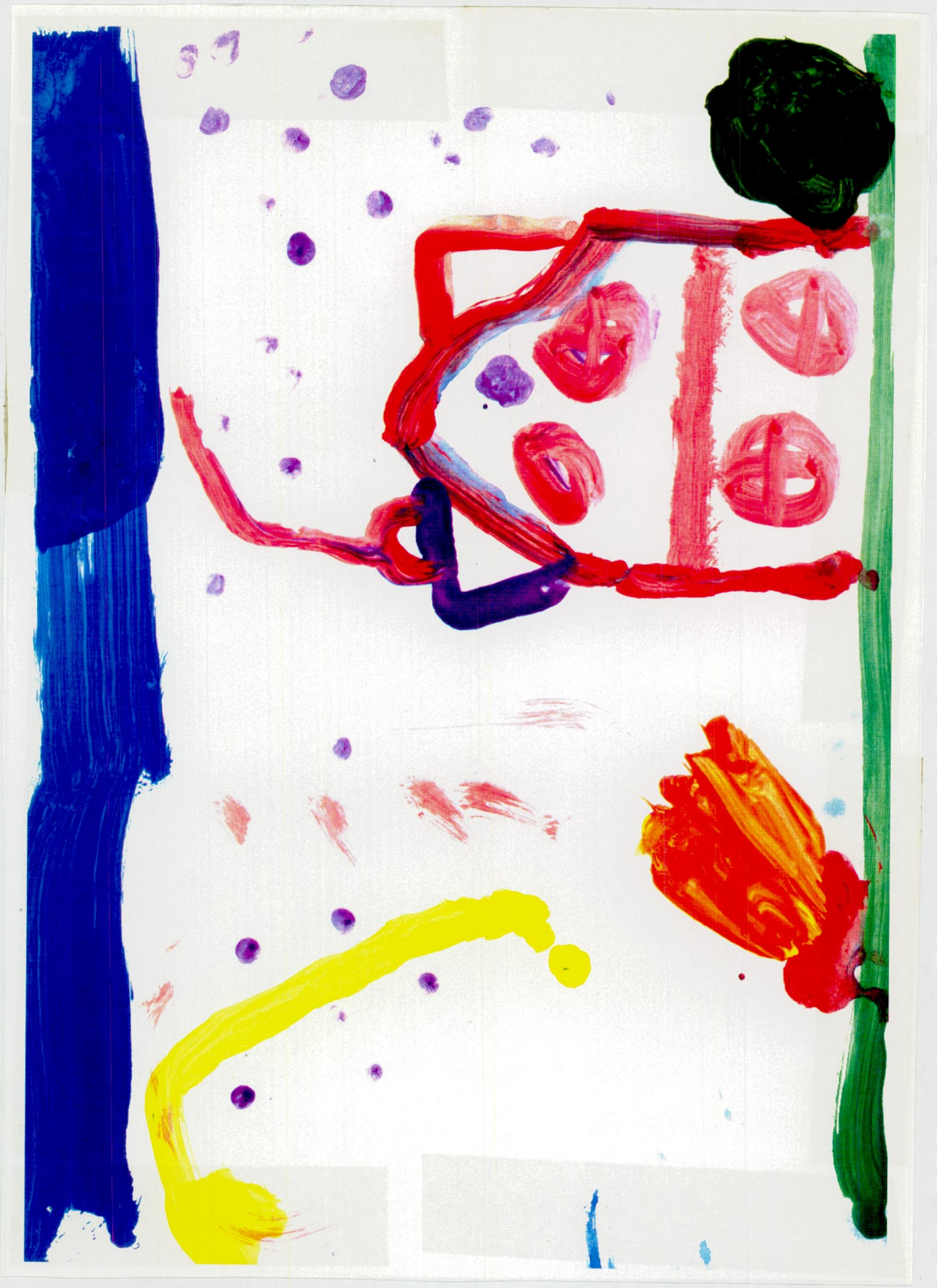

Fig. 6: Shane, age six.

Fig. 7: Aoibhinn, age four.

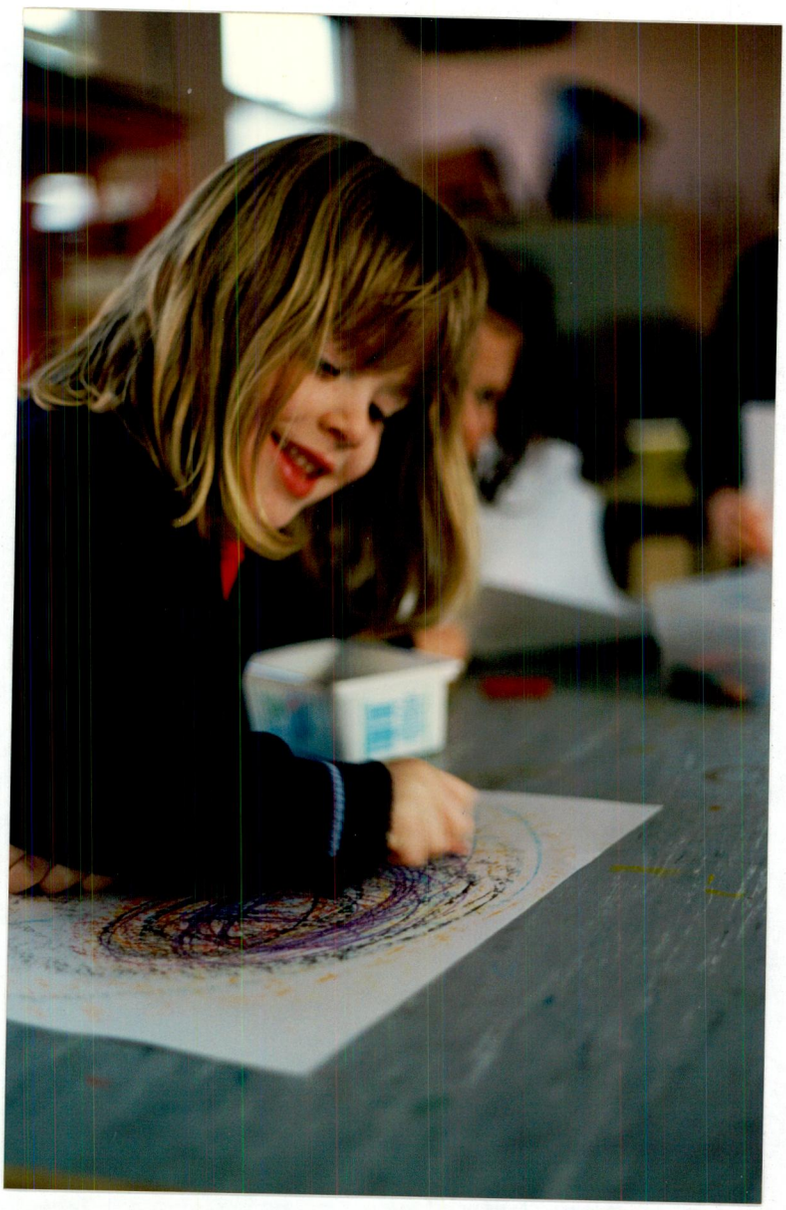

Fig. 8: Hazel, age five.

FIG. 8

Fig. 9: Hazel, age five.

Fig. 10: Eimer, age five, "Hallowe'en Night".

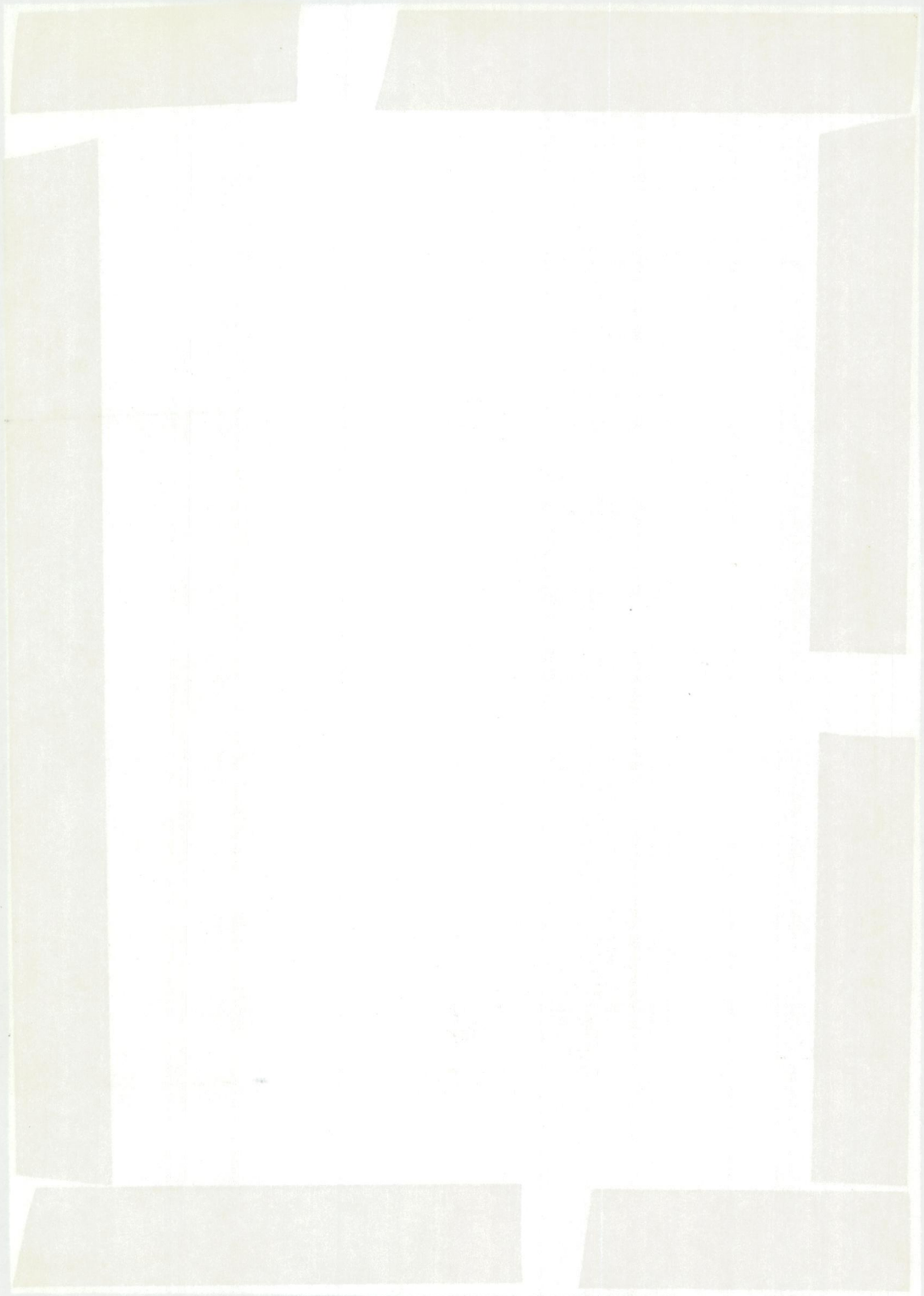

Fig. 11: Eimer, age five.

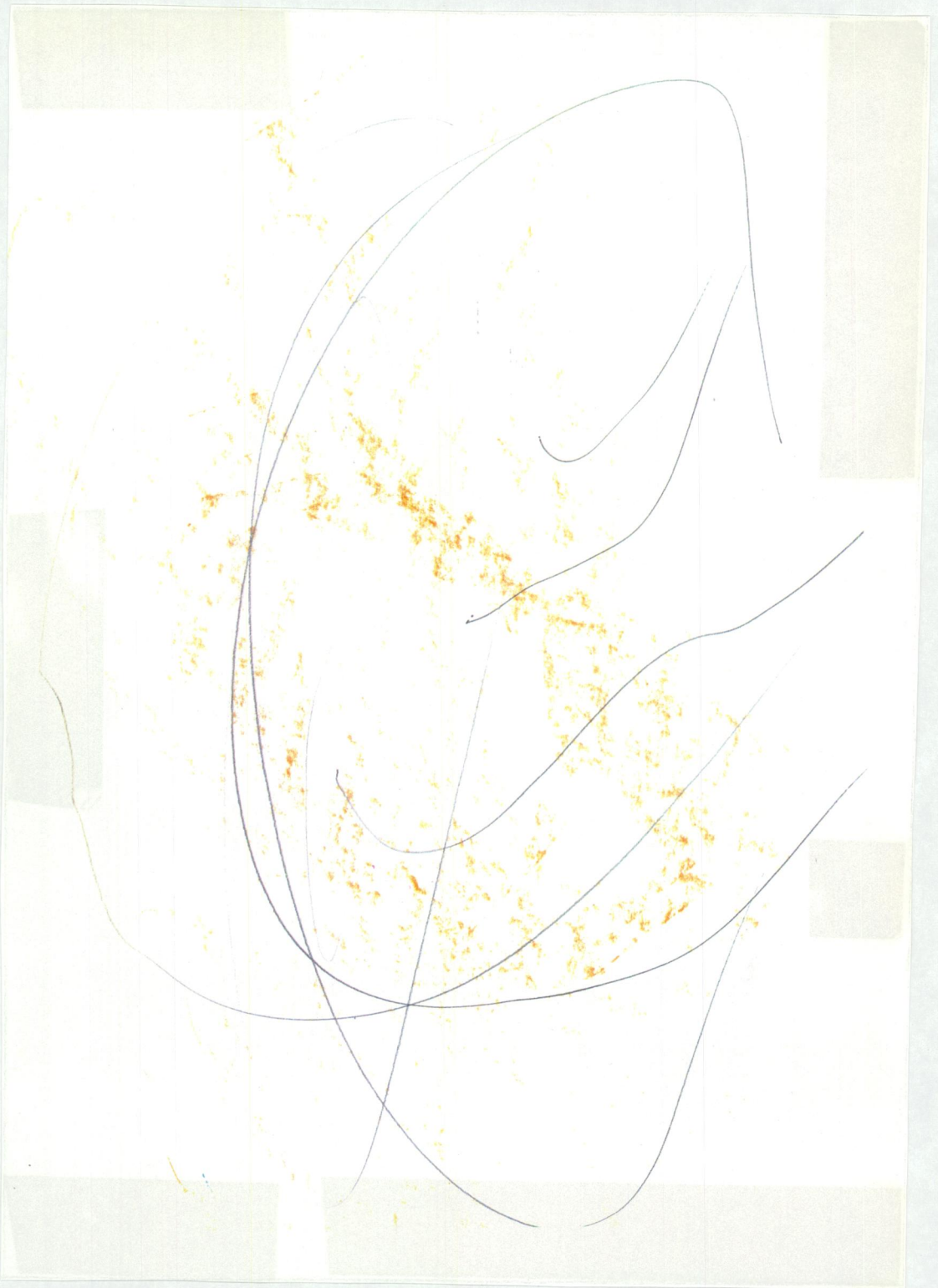

Fig. 12: Shane, age six, "A big orange wind".

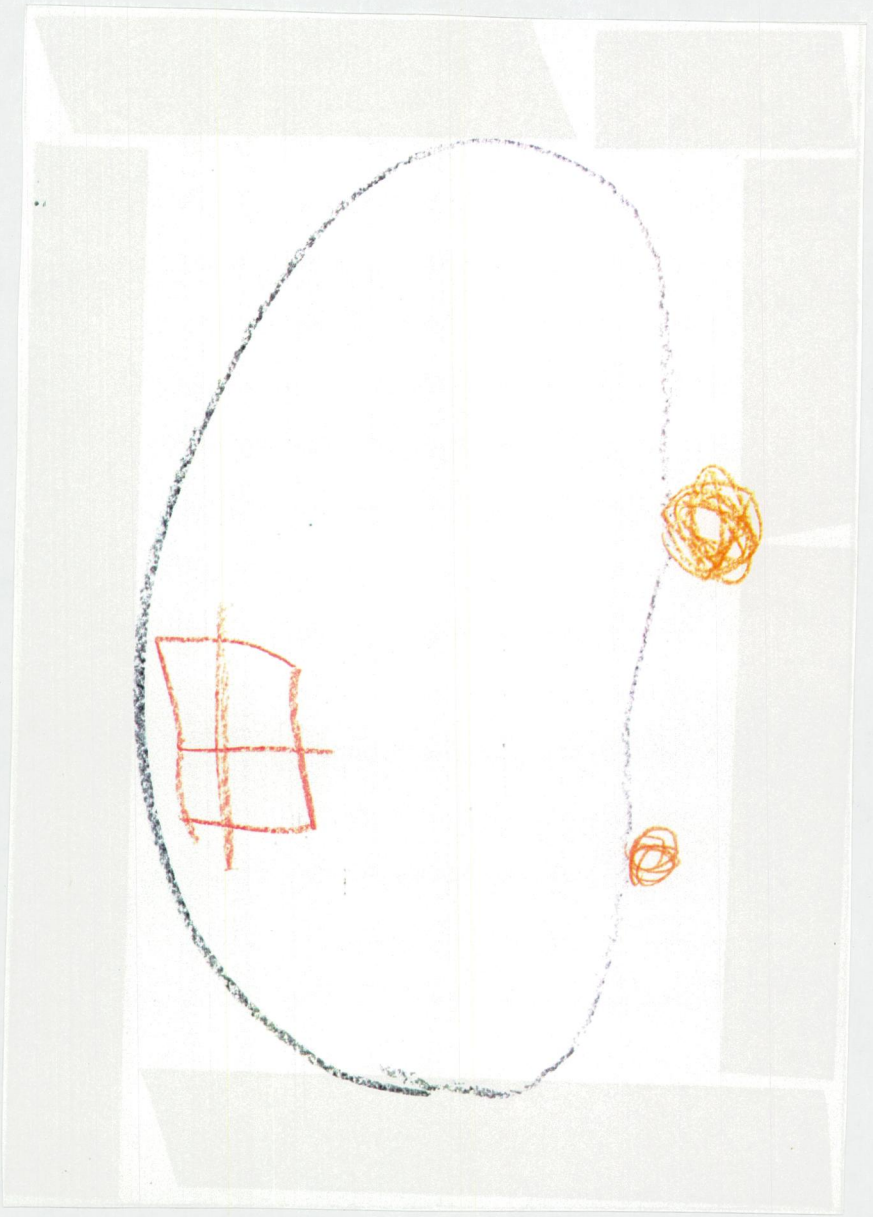

Fig. 13: Stephen, age five, "An egg car".

Fig. 14: Stephen, age five, "A Giant Spider".

However, perhaps it was the medium of paint and brushes that was hindering him, for with the introduction of crayons to draw with, he stated "great, now I can do the Thunderbirds". One of his paintings was of a bank robber with a gun painted as an extension of the arm or hand and several bullets painted in motion. He pointed to a rectangular shape saying "that's his secret way out". He also explored the paint a lot, putting it on his hands and showing everybody. He mixed the paint too: "Hey, look at this colour, I've made brown, Wow! I'm going to mix every colour".

Eimer, aged five, seemed to thoroughly enjoy using paint. She showed me a painting which seemed like a pattern to me and stated "It's Hallowe'en Night", throwing new light on the pattern as that of fireworks, as in Fig. 10. However, she did not apparently like using crayons to draw with at all. She brought me one picture and said "this is all I'm doing". She told me she didn't want to do it because she "couldn't do it". She grew restless and frustrated and produced just one more picture like her "firework painting". I asked "is this fireworks too?" to which she replied rather unenthusiastically "no, it's just stars". Sean, aged five, drew a dog with a football, himself, a house and his uncle. He said this was because his uncle had a dog and he wasn't allowed to have one. Stephen, aged five years old, seemed frustrated by the paint. He started to paint his whole

family with their dog and then painted over all the figures and left just the dog. On the other hand he went about drawing with the crayons quite busily and produced one after another, coming up to me and telling me what they were and rushing back down with another sheet: "That's a shark and that's his eye and he's eating that, you see, it's going into his mouth and that's his eye". Often his comments were short and decisive: "a giant spider" or "an egg car" or "it's a frisbee" or "it's a bulldozer". All his drawings were simple outlines quickly done as in Figs. 13 and 14. He seemed very determined and intentional about the whole activity.

I found the whole experience of working directly with the children extremely fascinating. Marie Foley, an Irish sculptor, wrote this of her experience working with children: "I am relishing my involvement with children from a local school. They are young and as yet have the precious gift of untarnished vision. It is such a blessing to work with students whose vision is unimpeded. Unconsciously they are unlocking the locked doors of the world. In fact they must be more enriching for me than I am for them".

CHAPTER 3 - FOOTNOTES

1. O'Donoghue, Helen. "Look at my Hands", 1988

2. ibid

3. ibid

4. ibid

5. ibid

6. O'Donoghue, Helen. "The Clay Tape", 1990

7. Kellogg, Rhoda. "Analyzing Children's Art", 1970, p.226

8. Read, Herbert. "Education Through Art", 1945, p.280

9. O'Donoghue, Helen. "The Clay Tape", 1990

CONCLUSION

I am in full agreement with Bert Beverly who stated in 1957 that:

> "society from the parents in the home to the broadest social concept is made by and for adults. The child as a child in this scheme of living is entirely disregarded. He is expected to understand, appraise and adjust himself to adult standards as an adult would". (1)

Much of what has been discussed in the previous chapters is captured in Beverly's statement. It leads us to wonder if we have left room in our society for a child to be a child. Children have a strong voice of their own, blatantly obvious in the independence of a child who can say "I don't have to make the nose" and so, he doesn't. The children's strong-minded comments on their works of art speak for themselves.

There is much that we can learn from children, as Picasso stated "when I was sixteen I could paint like Raphael but it has taken me all my life to learn to paint like children". (2) The world through a child's eyes seems spontaneous and imaginative and unburdened with the complexities of life's

imposing realism. Through their art children allow us a window for us to look in on their lives. We must try to forget our adult trappings with reality and attempt to look through this window, through the child's eye.

CONCLUSION - FOOTNOTES

1. Kellogg, Rhoda. "Analyzing Children's Art", 1970, p.210

2. Woods, Gordon. "Circa", No. 57, 1991, p.30

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11. O'DONOGHUE, Helen, LOOK AT MY HANDS, Video tape focussing on art and the pre-school child, Dublin, 1988.

12. O'DONOGHUE, Helen, THE CLAY TAPE, Video tape focussing on children and their experience of using clay, Dublin, 1990.

13. PAINE, Sheila, SIX CHILDREN DRAW, Academic Press, London, 1981.

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