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THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH DESIGN AWARENESS IN THE 1960s

by

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Submitted to the faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies in Candicacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Design



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Paul Caffery

The library staff at N.C.A.D. The library staff at the University of Limerick The library staff at Mary Immaculate Teacher Training College Paul Hogan Professor Iseult Mcarthy

Dr John Turpin



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THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH DESIGN AWARENESS IN THE 1960s

INTRODUCTION

The Confederation of Irish Industry, eighteen months ago, had a seminar on design in Ireland. The guest speaker was Dieter Rams, an important and influential industrial designer who was responsible for developing Braun's design image during the 1950s. The seminar was very poorly attended and a "rent a crowd" had to be employed to fill the seminar location when Brams was speaking,(27). This is an extremely poor reflection on Irish industrialists. The Confederation of Irish Industry may have advertised this seminar among their members but apparently their members did not see the importance of listening to a man who established one of the most successful visual identities ever used by a major international company. This lack of interest shows an ignorance of the role design can play in the success of any product.

If you were to ask the normal Irish person in the street what an industrial designer was, they would not know. If you asked them what Irish design was, they would, if they had an opinion, probably describe bainin jumpers, hand thrown pottery and the <u>Book of Kells</u>. There is little or no knowledge of what modern industrial design is in Ireland or what benefits it can provide to improve the quality of products, the quality of life and a national identity.

The first time a conscious effort was made to overcome the ignorance of industrial design in Ireland was in the 1960s. During this decade Ireland went through great changes both economically and socially. It emerged from the darkness of a protectionist policy that spanned the previous forty years into the light of a modern, and



foreign, consumer society. To function in these conditions the Irish government realised the need for design reform. This thesis will examine exactly what efforts were made to improve the "Irish condition" during the 1960s and if and how this condition was improved.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH DESIGN AWARENESS IN THE 1960s

CHAPTER I

Tradition, Independence and Free Trade.

The 1960s as a decade is remembered as one of those that is curiously individualised, whose essential quality has been captured in a cliche: the swinging sixties. The sixties certainly did swing. It was a time of rude energy, a contempt of tradition in which the material fruits of post war sacrifices and reconstruction could be enjoyed. Like all such times, it threw up a generation that considered itself to have discovered the world anew and to have cracked codes that had eluded its elders.

In Ireland, after the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the new government established the Sinn Féin policy of political and economic independence. As the second world war came and went, the Free State, now named Eire and soon to be additionally designated the Republic of Ireland, asserted its independence from the United Kingdom by remaining neutral. Independence was confirmed but at the expense of removing Ireland one step further from the modern world in its self-imposed isolation from the stream of contemporary developments. Also the Republic did not benefit from the effects of the post-war economic revival. The 1950s saw a dismal combination of economic recession and heavy emigration and any emigrant returning to the Republic after thirty years abroad would have seen little or no change. The country had no television station, although a few homes on the east coast which could afford TV sets picked up programmes from British stations. There were no supermarkets or shopping centres



so shopping was still the local and personalized experience it always had been. If one could afford a car, which most people Ireland could not, the state would not oblige them to take any test of their driving skills. Film and literary censorship was as vigilant as it ever had been. The Irish Catholic Church was very much as it had been in the 1930s, enjoying the last years of peace before Vatican II. Industry was still protected by tariff barriers erected in the 1930s. Agriculture had seen very few changes since the turn of the century. There were hardly any restaurants of quality. Secondary education all the way to leaving-cert was still a minority privilege, based largely on the ability to pay school fees as there was no state aid. The physical appearance of the nation's cities and towns was unchanged - in Dublin only the new bus station, designed by Micheal Scott, opened in 1953, made any concessions to modernity.

In an article published in Spring 1986 Professor John Turpin remarks that

It is sometimes mistakenly believed that contemporary design awareness came to Ireland with the celebrated report, Design in Ireland, prepared by a group of Scandinavian designers in 1962. (45 pp. 4).

He points out that there had been design activities in Ireland ranging from the eighteenth-century School of Ornament of the Dublin Society to the book illustrations and trade designs of Harry Clarke in the 1920s. These activities can not, however, be seen as industrial design. The issue of industrial design was not really addressed until 1937, when on October 22, Sean Lemass, Minister for Industry and Commerce, set up a departmental committee "to advise on the matters affecting the design and decoration of articles" manufactured in the Irish Free State. After meeting 42 times the final recommendation of the committee was for

an exhibition of design in industry, but the planning of this was set aside with the outbreak of war in 1939. During that time, (known as the Emergency), the industrial design that existed in Ireland was more concerned with pure problem solving than with form or aesthetic appeal. Sean Lemass's ministry of supplies was too busy trying to keep a young Free State running with little or no resources.to be concerned with the niceties of styling.

After the war Thomas Bodkin, Director of the Barber Institute, Birmingham, and former director of the National Gallery of Ireland, was commissioned to write a report on the arts in Ireland (the arts were to include industrial design). The report published in 1949 stated that;

There never has been a sustained alliance between the arts and industry in Ireland; and little has been done in the last fifty years to promote such a desirable aim, beyond the efforts made for over thirty years by the Arts and Crafts Society....No civilized nation has neglected art to the extent that we have done during the past fifty years, with consequent injury to our native industries. (45 pp. 45)

The result of Bodkin's report was the Arts Council Act in 1951 and the setting up of the Arts Council, headed by Patrick J. Little, with one of its aims being the promotion of industrial design. The council sought to achieve this aim by holding exhibitions during the 1950s to educate the general public and Irish manufacturers:

The basic problem was that Irish manufacturers tended to view design and packaging as something of an extra, not as an inherent requirement of their products. (29 pp.113)

The second of these exhibitions was the "Irish Design Exhibition 1956" and was produced for the Arts Council by the Design Research Unit of Ireland. It showed Irish furniture, carpets, rugs, ceramics, glass,



domestic equipment, fabrics, wall papers, leather goods, agricultural equipment, packages, containers and goods and three case studies showing how a team of designers could redesign a corporate image. In 1956 the exhibition travelled outside the pale to Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Sligo. For the first time people outside Dublin were exposed to the highest quality contemporary design on offer in Ireland.

P J Little's successor as director of the Arts Council in 1960 was Fr. Donal O Suillivan and he remained a member of the council until 1973, "a Jesuit of great intellect" (27), who was of the opinion that an Arts Council was not the correct body to promote industry linked design in Ireland. He, therefore, lobbied for an independent design body to be set up. Later in 1960 Lemass informed the Dail of his decision to transfer responsibility for industrial design from the Arts Council to the Export Advisory Board, An Coras Trachtala. He declared that

About the worst type of body to employ to interest business men in industrial design is one called the Arts Council...Few business men would accept that in any circumstances an Arts Council could teach them anything useful in relation to their business. (29 pp. 133)

The Arts Council accepted the decision, and Fr O'Sullivan chose to ignore any advice on the fact that the Taoiseach had no power to remove industrial design from the Council's responsibility without amending the Arts Act of 1951. The effect of Lemass's decision was to disregard one of the council's statutory functions. But the Council kept

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quiet and yielded on this point because its budgetary position was eased as a result.¹

Coras Trachtala which was set up in 1952, took over responsibility for design promotion from the Arts Council. A design section was established within CTT in 1961 with new responsibilities which had been outlined in the Export Promotion act of 1959, and confirmed in 1960 by Sean Lemass, Taoiseach, in the Dail. William H. Walsh, manager of CTT, was in a strong position, having the confidence of the Taoiseach to recommend policy changes.

It is true to say that Ireland had a rich resource of design tradition but it is also true to say that the new Irish Rebublic did not. With the advent of the Republic the Irish were at first more concerned with surviving independantly in a modern world and with the development of a modern industrial base than with developing an aesthetic awareness or a visual maturity, and rightly so, for without industry there can be no products to carry design. With this industrial base developed, Ireland then realised that no nation in a modern world can exist in total independance and that there was going to have to be general trade with other nations. Here Lemass knew that if Irish trade was to be successful abroad, Irish design skills and awareness would have to be developed.

¹It may be noted that the Arts Act of 1951 was never amended on this issue and legally the Arts Council is still Responsible for Industry in Ireland.



THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH DESIGN AWARENESS IN THE 1960s

CHAPTER II

Modern Society, the Economy and Changes in Education

In 1959 Eamon de Valera became President of Ireland, having finally retired from active politics. His celebrated radio broadcast on St. Patrick's Day 1943 (appropriately enough, in the middle of the "Emergency") set forth his social vision of Ireland for the middle of the twentieth century:

That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as the basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to things of the spirit a land whose countryside would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths and the laughter of comely maidens, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires that man should live. (44 pp. 4)

This may seem like idealistic fantasy now, but to the Irishmen of 1943, or 1950, or 1955, it was a vision that enshrined a national ideal in which it was possible to believe.

But in the 1950s the old Sinn Féin ideal foundered. Between 1949 and 1956 the Republic's national income rose by one-fifth of the rate for Western Europe overall. Between 1955 and 1957 Ireland was the only country in the western world where the total volume of goods and services actually fell.

What was wrong with Ireland? In the midst of a world-wide boom in capitalist countries, Ireland was near national destruction. According to Fergal Tobin three things characterised the Irish economy at that time:



- 1. A reliance on native capital for the generation of wealth (No foreign investment).
- 2. The employment of that capital behind a protective wall of tariffs and quotas.
- 3. The concentration of social rather than productive objectives in the public investment programme. (44 pp. 189)

It was the challenging and the overturning of these problems that enabled the Irish economy to expand during the 1960s. The legislation which prevented the employment of large amounts of foreign capital was amended in 1957 and abolished altogether five years later. The consequent influx of foreign investment was decisive; over 350 manufacturing enterprises were established between 1960 and 1969 which led to enormous possibilities for the designers in Ireland.

The culmination of this process was the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement in 1965, which finished all barriers and tariffs with Britain. This was testimony to the fact that the old economics, embraced in some form by all Irish governments, had at last been abandoned.

In 1960 a leading Dutch rural sociologist Dr J. H. W. Lijfering came to Ireland to assess the development in Irish rural culture. He detected a greater distance between the ideal and the reality of rural life than would have been desired at the time.

My Irish Experience has taught me that the wish to share in modern development and in urban culture is strong among the rural population. I do not believe it is is a coincidental feature that Ireland has the highest rate per head per population in Europe of cinema going. The rather limited interest of the Irish people in Gaelic culture is a sign in the same direction. Urban influences in daily life, in the recreational pattern for example, like modern dancing and sport-mindedness are not typically rural. I suppose that many of these cultural elements are partly influenced by the urban culture. (44 pp.18)



This is a very interesting judgment on Irish society at the start of the 1960s. It is important to remember that it was made before the advent of television in most rural areas, as television is usually blamed for the breakdown of the rural values in Ireland. It implies that Irish society was receptive to the quickening of change associated with a more restless and fluid urban culture. But it must be said that television was on everyone's mind at the beginning of the 1960s. A small number of houses along the east coast could already pick up BBC and ITV with the help of specially erected aerials. This technological intrusion, if nothing else, obliged the government to address itself to the question of a native television service.

The Broadcasting Act (1960) represented the basis for the development of Irish television. It also brought Irish radio into its modern age, because up until then the radio service had been directly under the control of the Minister for Post and Telegraphs, which meant it was in the province of unambitious and conservative civil servants. The Act established an independent broadcasting authority under which both television and radio would be run, and two years later, on New Year's Eve 1961, a domestic television transmission service began. The service began at 7pm with an address by President de Valera and there was a note of apprehension in his opening remarks:

Never before has there in the hands of man been an instrument so powerful to influence the thoughts and actions of the multitude......It can lead, through demoralisation, to decadence and dissolution. (44 pp.66)

Lemass on the other hand, appeared to have few qualms about the new service. He offered the view that Irish people were citizens of the



world as well as of Ireland, and that their standards, aims and values transcended national frontiers and were universal. He believed that events and developments anywhere in the world would be of direct and immediate interest to Irish people.

The first Television Audience Measurement (TAM) ratings were issued in May 1962. Apart from the main evening news, which was the most popular programme, only one other home produced programme, Paddy Crosbie's "The School Around The Corner", featured in the top ten. The rest, sadly, but not surprisingly, were canned American programmes such as "Dr Christian" and "Dragnet". Nor did the ratio of home to foreign produced programmes change greatly during the decade. Sean O Tuama, a Gaelic revivalist who was concerned with Telefis Eireann's (TE) handling of Irish programmes, was moved to describe the service as:

A smooth strip of cosmopolitan desert where suave gentlemen congregate who know more about what makes the Beatles pop than what makes the pulse of Ireland beat (44 pp.64)

But the brutal fact was that TE was a commercial service; Irish programmes, the Irish language and Irish culture were simply not popular. As ever there was an ocean of goodwill towards the language, exceeded only by the determination not to speak it or listen to anyone else speaking it, if that could at all be avoided.

Television was the most blatant agent of the international culture which threatened the vision of an Irish-Ireland. In the role of a commercial service Teilifis Eireann was forced to give people what they wanted. What people actually wanted demonstrated that Irish society was indifferent to the society characterised by nationalist intellectuals.



At the start of the 1960s Ireland was one of the only western European countries that had a total disregard for equal educational opportunity. In this as much as anything else, the country had ignored external developments. In West Germany, for example, four in five children received some sort of secondary education. In Ireland the figure was barley one in three. Economic expansion and development would put an end to this. An industrial nation aiming at full employment would have few places for the uneducated and would demand higher, broader and more universal standards of education for its youth. Any schemes to develop education in the early 1960s involved an expansion of the inadequate scholarship system.

The principal point of attack was the the revision of existing curricula. As early as March 1960 the dean of the science faculty at UCD, Professor T.S. Wheeler, told an OEEC seminar on chemistry teaching that less than one secondary school in six in the republic taught chemistry to Leaving Certificate level. This problem was heightened by the tendency among university science graduates to avoid a teaching career in favour of industry. The prejudice against the sciences ran deep among Irish educators. For example, Father James Finucane, the President of Rockwell College, told the college's union dinner in 1961 that a liberal education was the best foundation for life that a secondary education could give.

The aim of a secondary school ought to be to train men, not to be doctors or engineers or scientists or accountants, but to be men (44 pp. 168)

This was the endorsement of a system that was based on strong conservatism and anti-intellectual Catholicism. In such a system "intellectual development" was code for "spiritual development". The

first government sponsored report on education in Ireland bore this out. The report which was published in 1962 by the Council of Education, and was a model of complacent conservatism and only two of the Council's thirty-one members had science degrees. One critical observer has summarised the report in these terms:

The principal objective of education was stated to be the religious, moral and cultural development of the child. It is pretty clear that the social and economic aspects of this development were largely ignored. Indeed there was an implicit hostility to such considerations, as in the statement that "in general the aim of science teaching in secondary school is cultural rather than practical". Secondary education for all was seen as utopian on both financial and educational grounds (44 pp.168)

Bareley two months after the Council of Education's report was made public, another , and very different, body was set up to look at education in Ireland. Unlike the Council, it was a small body, comprising of only three people under the Chairmanship of Professor Patrick Lynch. Its report, <u>Investment in Education</u>, is said to be one of the most important documents in the history of modern Ireland. What the report discovered about the state of Irish education was truly shocking. Of national school leavers, only 28 per cent had passed the Primary Certificate; 18 per cent had failed or been absent; and no less than 54 per cent simply could not be traced. Out of a total of 17,459 pupils in the system, about 8,000 had dropped out altogether without even reaching sixth class standard in primary school. Nearly 70 per cent of one and two teacher schools had no supply of drinking water available. In Irish secondary school nearly half the time was spent on languages, but only 5 per cent in the case of boys and 12 per cent in the case of girls went on modern continental languages. Only 10 per cent of boys took sciences; predictably the numbers of girls was even



smaller. About a quarter of all pupils who went to secondary school left without sitting the Intermediate Certificate.

Investment in Education concentrated on the scandalous inequality of educational opportunity that existed in the system and the appalling lack of technical and science subjects in the curriculum. It was directed towards the development of an educational system geared to the needs of an expanding industrial economy.

In July 1966 a new Department of Labour was established and following a cabinet reshuffle, Donogh O'Malley replaced George Colley as Minister for Education. O'Malley was a revolutionary by temperament: he was, at least, in open revolt against the complacency of traditional Ireland. In the Dail in 1960 he said that: "What we need is an industrial, agricultural and intellectual revolution in the next five years."(44 pp.172) On September 10 1966, he announced that he would be introducing a free post-primary education scheme the following year. Significantly, he had not consulted the Church on his proposal and he also neglected to mention it to the Minister for Finance, who was going to have to find the cash to fund the scheme. But O'Malley had Lemass's protection. As Lemass's biographer, Farrell, observes,

There is evidence to indicate that Lemass had seen and even amended the text in advance.

The opening of the free post-primary education to all children of the state was beyond the hopes of the most ardent educational reformers. There was some opposition, in addition to the complaints from the Department of Finance, the religious orders, who owned the majority of the schools affected, were unholy at first, but by the summer of 1967, three months before the scheme began, the hierarchy had signalled its approval.(44 pp.168)

The National College of Art was the principal third level college of education where design was taught. In the early twentieth century, there had been a strong interest in the crafts, such as enameling and metal work, stained glass, lace and embroidery, illustration and illumination at the college. This interest died away and by the 1940s there was very little design activity in the college. During the 1950s there was a strong push to restore interest in design but the college had to function in difficult economic conditions, staff were mostly local, working in the arts and crafts tradition and there was no bridge to industry.

The School of Design at the college had been headed since 1939 by Bernardus Romein, from Rotterdam. He was an artist designer and had a sceptical view of modern design techniques. By temperament Romein was difficult to deal with as one past student recalls "You learnt to do it his way or forget it, you didn't come out with your diploma...then you had to rapidly unlearn it all". He believed in superb hand lettering in the pre-World War II tradition, " I learnt to do the most wonderful hand lettering that is, alas, almost dead now...but in terms of its usefulness it was very limited" (student interview). Romein's students' were not welcomed by the commercial advertising agencies, and in 1953 there was an unfavourable public reaction to students work. Furthermore Romein made no great efforts to link any work in the school with industry or the design profession. A letter taken from a file on the School of Design in the N.C.A.D. in the college library dated 24/11/1965 from a member of staff stated:

The necessity for a reorganization of the school of design in the college is of real importance today......The designer is becoming as integral a part of business and factory organisation as the chemist, technician and salesman as the stimulus of competition and the necessity for external



markets daily grow greater. The demand for designer craftsmen and consultant designers is growingAs the School of Design exists here it cannot adequately meet this demand.....It is most desirable that the School of Design be divided into a School of Design and Crafts and a School of Commercial and Graphic Art. (40).

Romein retired as professor of design in 1959. Dr Patrick Hillery, the Minister of Education, on the advice of his department, put in two temporary stop-gap acting professors, Giles Talbot Kelly and Karl Koehler, both successful graphic designers, but they were never given any clear authority and were unable to initiate change. However a committee was set up to examine the existing syllabus at the N.C.A. its members were Giles Talbot Kelly, Lucy Charles, Prof Maurice MacGonigal and Micheal Burke. They submitted a report to the Director in September 1963, in which they commented on the lack of reforms in design education, stating that

The committee, with reluctance felt it necessary to accept for yet another year the old syllabi etc.For years it [the N.C.A.] has striven, only to be continually dragged down by red tape, inertia, lack of decisions and foresight, and the apathy and indifference of the Department of Education. (40)

The committee went on to question whether the Minister for Education was fully in the picture, that to expect a complete Design School to exist with one full-time teacher was to believe in daily miracles and that some realistic attitude to the payment of new teachers be adopted

> "The College must train people and therefore it must be allowed buy trained people - There's just no more to it". (40)



The committee also demanded that $\pounds 10,000$ be given to the college for special lectures, visits, etc.

This report seems to have gone unheeded because again in November 1964 Lucy Charles, the then assistant Professor of Design, submitted another letter of recommendation from the School of Design. She felt that until a decision could be reached regarding policy development of the School of Design, the curriculum of study should be enlarged and planning should be undertaken for the school's next session (1965-66). She made a number of recommendations that she hoped would have be undertaken as soon as was possible; that the services of teachers for the following aspects of design be obtained - Architecture, Display, Model Making, Typography, Costume and Theatre, Etching and Wood Engraving & Bookbinding.

She looked for grants to cover expenditure for visits to factories, with a view to educating the student towards an understanding of industrial needs. A major problem for anybody involved with the N.C.A. at the time was the difficulty, and red tape involved in requisitioning, where any material wants, even as small as a box of paper clips, had to go before the director for approval. Miss Charles recommended a revision of this method of requisitioning "especially those of small cost and small quantities, in which the delay in obtaining them can hold up the work of classes.". She applied for the increase of grant for purchasing books for the library. "£50," she pointed out, "was totally inadequate for present day costs".

She again asked, as had the committee the year before, for a series of external lectures given by experts and for the establishment of a School of Photography. With relation to industrial design she hoped for lectures in aspects of the subject not covered in the college curriculum, like furniture design, where she suggested that


consultations with industrialists, the head of the Architectural College U.C.D., and Bolton Street College of Technology instructors, be set up regarding special courses for students wishing to make furniture their special study. She also recommended that scholarships should be offered to students wishing to specialise in aspects of industrial design and which there were no facilities for in Ireland at that time. She concluded by emphasising the need for space in the college, and by pointing out that there was space in the college unutilised that could be used to build temporary studios to house the more mobile classes.

Later that year Lucy Charles was promoted to the acting post of Professor of Design and there is some indication that her recommendation was heeded. A letter dated 6 November 1964 from the Director of the N.C.A. to a Mr O'Neill in the Department of Education stated that:

> As Miss Charles' responsibility, has greatly increased....I think it would be unfair to not to recognise her claims for adequate financial compensation.(40)

Later in February 1965 she proposed that grant be give to a first year diploma student, John Henderson, to attend Capellagarden Sommarkurser 1965, Sweden, for a course in furniture design given by Professor Carl Malmsten.

On March 3 1965, Mr E P Danger addressed students of the N.C.A. The lecture was arranged by Mr E.G.O. Ridgewell, General Manger of the Irish Packaging Institute, who said that his organisation would continue to provide specialist lectures on package design and allied subjects so that students could appreciate some of the work being done in the area. On the same day Mr Ridgwell presented two prizes awarded by the Irish Packaging Institute for essays written in



competition organised between the Institute and the School of Design. The recipients were a Rev. Fr O'Connor and a Miss Deborah O'Brien.

But still there was a feeling that the whole structure at the N.C.A. was not geared towards developing design education and therefore design awareness in general. Professor David Sherlock Deputy Director of N.C.A.D. wrote much later that

All courses should have elements of diagnosis of ability, of general educational development through the study of art and design and more traditional academic disciplines, of stimulation of ingenuity and problem - solving capabilities, which would be applied to life in general and to a wide variety of jobs, and guidance for maturation to citizenship.(40)

As a result of <u>Design in Ireland</u>, the report written by a group of Scandinavian designers who came to Ireland to advise on design development, the Council of Design was established, in September 1963. Dr P.J. Hillery, then Minister for Education, commissioned the Council to write a report to survey design activity, especially in relation to industrial design and to the training for designers. The report was to advise on the future of design policy, the establishment of an Industrial Design Degree Course in the School of Design at the National College of Art and to foster links between industry and the School of Design. The Council had a 20 - strong membership, was chaired by Dr Michael ffrench O' Carroll, and included Miss Sybil Connolly and Sir Robin Darwin. The council had nine meetings and 46 subcommittee meetings and visited Irish art schools as well as those at Cologne and Ulm.

The report was submitted in 1965 to Mr. George Colley, Minister for education. The report examined all levels of education. It drew



conclusions which were along similar lines as those the Scandinavian report had produced six years earlier. It argued that good design and its appreciation could not be imposed but might be encouraged by example and also that it was within the State's power to influence for good a child's aesthetic and creative experience in school.

> The Child who is given a good visual environment is helped towards an instinctive aesthetic appreciation. But this must be complemented, from his earlier years in primary school, by his own opportunities for creative expression. As things are most children leaving primary school have been deprived of a whole dimension of creative development. The absence of experiment in artistic expression and appreciation has stunted this aspect of the growth of personality. (4 pp.5)

During this period at secondary level, art was not a subject popularly chosen for examination. It was only taken by 7% of the children who sat the Intermediate Certificate Examination in 1963 and by only 6% of the children who sat the Leaving Certificate Examination of that year. On secondary and vocational level the report states

The Course in Art should be broadly based and should include design and craft work and appreciation both of the fine arts and the design of everyday objects. (4 pp.6-7)

On the issue of third level design education the Council had no reservations in stating that the premises of the National College of Art at Kildare Street, Dublin, were totally inadequate for a national institution; that there was not adequate space even for the facilities essential to the school of design's programme, not to mention developing new courses at the School like photography, lithography, television design and film design.

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The report suggested the establishment of a 'National College of Art, Architecture and Design.'

The designer must use materials with the sensibility of the sculptor, with the engineer's appreciation of their of their physical properties and with the architects's skill in functional design. We consider, therefore, that a faculty of industrial design should be associated with faculties of architecture, technology and the fine arts.....The College should be built in the Bolton Street area of Dublin and be associated with, but not be part of , the College of Technology. The National College should have the maximum of academic independence compatible with integration into a national programme of design education and promotion. (4 pp.21)

The Council of Design's report was one of the most important factors in reforming design education in Ireland during the 1960s. Added to other factors, it led to the National College of Art and Design Act in of 1971 which, in turn, led the way for a new premises for art and design education on Thomas Street in Dublin. In 1976, an Industrial Design Department was set up, led by David Sherlock, an industrial designer from Nottingham Ploytechnic in England. The new industrial design course, formed in response to a decade of agitation, was run in tandem with the newly established National Institute of Higher Education, Limerick, where high technology (but no artistic) facilities were available. This was a move away from the recommendations of the Council of Design's report, but not necessarily a bad one. The type of industrial designer now produced in Ireland is unique to Great Britain and Ireland, where their education has its strength in the technical aspects of the profession. In mainland Europe the emphasis in design education is on the theoretical. In short we produce designer doers, and mainland Europe produces designer thinkers. For example, Italian designers depend a lot on engineers to develop their ideas into

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working products, whereas this is a skill that an Irish designer has been fully trained in. Perhaps neither of the two should be the model for the perfect industrial designer, but a balance between the two should be struck for the modern European designer. This blending of practical and theoretical in design is to day being helped by student exchange programmes like the Erasmus scheme, where students can gain invaluable experience by visiting and studying in a foreign country with a different approach to design education than that of their own.

The industrial base which was developed during the era of Sinn Fein became the backbone of the new Irish economy, but until the end of this era there was very little competition for the Irish manufacturers and they became complacent. For a long time good design was not seen or used as a tool to improve product quality. When the economy began to improve with the end of the Sinn Fein policy and the development of the media, especially television, Ireland strove to be modern. But this was at the expense of Irish culture which people perceived to be old fashioned. Irish people looked at foreign societies to lead the way and rather than build on their own cultural heritage, they adopted many foreign ideas without question. To fuel the economy the government improved the education system which was in great need of reform. But one of the last areas to get any attention was that of design education. This reflected the attitude that Ireland had towards design at the time; an attitude of ignorance and naivety, and although the government saw the importance of using design to improve Ireland's trade abroad (evidence to this is the fact that they used the export board to promote design), they did not see till much later the importance of education in developing a design awareness.



THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH DESIGN AWARENESS IN THE 1960s

CHAPTER III

The Government, The Scandinavians and Killkenny

In 1961 CTT was given the responsibility of promoting good design in Ireland. William H. Walsh, Manager of CTT, became the central catalyst of the design reform movement in the 1960s. Walsh knew the value of design in marketing through his personal experience in private enterprise. He had a particular interest in contemporary design in Denmark, a country parallel in some respects to Ireland as it was small and largely agricultural. Walsh employed Paul Hogan, a package and textile designer and a former student of the Design School at the N.C.A. Hogan was given responsibility for finding and inviting a group of Scandinavian design experts to come to Ireland to advise on design problems and to help develop Irish design to international standards . Hogan was then to write up and publish their findings in report form.

At Easter 1961 a group of Scandinavian designers, Kaj Franck , Eirik Herlow, Gunnar B. Peterson, Eirik Sorenson, and Ake Huldt, visited Ireland for a period of three weeks. The group made a well focused study of textile printing and design, linen, woollen and woven cloths, poplin, Donegal tweeds, hand knitwear, handmade and machine-made carpets, souvenirs, graphics, packaging, and stamps (to which they devoted a special analytical report).

The report <u>Design In Ireland</u> which was published in February 1962, was a manifesto for modernism in design, and was the most controversial on the visual arts ever written in Ireland. It was severe in

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its criticisms. Ireland had to make a substantial improvement in its standards if it proposed to face seriously into the EEC. They reserved their strongest condemnations for the Irish art schools and particularly the National College of Art which

As it is presently constituted cannot be a starting point for the education of young people in the different crafts or indeed for the education of painters, sculptors, or designers.(6 pp. 10)

They felt that the NCA's existing methods were hopelessly outdated. The report judged the first priority to be the provision of industrial designers; it recommended that selected craftsmen and artists be trained as designers, and that the state make funds available for design education. Attention should also be paid to primary and secondary schools:

> To set up a new school of design and at the same time ignore the fact that the Irish school child is visually and artistically among the most under-educated in Europe, would appear to us unwise. (6 pp.12)

The report praised some sections of industry, particularly traditional crafts and glass-making. Their main criticisms were levelled at textiles, machine made carpets, ceramics, metalwork and furniture. Not surprisingly, they hammered the souvenir trade, which consisted chiefly of badly made, shoddy goods.

They made a specific study of postage stamps. From a random selection of forty-one, divided into three groups they made a classification based on the following criteria in descending order of priority; the need for clear indication of value (where twelve out of forty one got a low rating); easy visibility of the name of the country



(where seven failed to reach an acceptable standard); and ease and balance of composition (where ten issues where unsatisfactory).

Many questions have been asked about the validity of this report. One critic of the report put forward the view that although their approach to the stamp designs was thoughtful and conscientious, a discussion of the designs with any Irish artist of the time might have reassured them that principles of space-composition were not quite unknown in Ireland. The question could be asked on what grounds were the industries and handicrafts for visiting selected? On the exportability of their product? Or on basic importance in the traditional economy of the country? Were they briefed on the rich resources in stone-carving and Irish limestones? (Galway limestone was used by the English sculptor Barbara Hepworth). Were the group brought to the National Library which had recently been restored and was a fine example of Irish architectural carving and sculpture, or were the Scandinavians briefed on the Irish brick and terracotta clay industries?

Such questions could indicate the incomplete character of the survey. Despite the brevity and the limitations that this imposed on the visit, the group felt confident enough to prescribe a far reaching solution to Ireland's design problems, which would develop Irish design to international standards. The report glorified the architect and industrial designer and the effect they could have on the acceptability of Irish design abroad. But the question could be asked ; do architecture and design fulfil their highest mission when they merely increase the export trade? The answer is, of course, no, but if there was to be a development in industry's openness to design, this was the aspect of design which had to be emphasised. Industrialists are not interested on the whole in improving the aesthetic awareness or the visual maturity

and and a second sec Manufactures of the second s of the Irish public, but they are interested in improving their profits. Industrial design by definition fufils both these wants.

The late Dr. T. O'Raifeartaigh (Secretary of the Department of Education), criticized the report's findings on the National College of Art as they had only spent two hours there during the holiday period. Paul Hogan accepted this as a half fair criticism but:

> Any one going into Kildare street could read the signs, there was something awfully wrong....The casts white washed time and time again until the detail was all gone. (27)

Hogan went on to point out that although the time that the Scandinavians spent in Ireland was brief, these were men of the highest design credentials and had an insight into how design awareness manifests itself in a society. One only has to travel abroad with a questioning eye to see how design or the lack of it is evident.

Another public reaction articulated by Desmond Fennell to the report was that godless Scandinavia was telling nationalist and Catholic Ireland what to do (a reembodyment of the Celtic Viking conflict).(45 pp.17)

But the fact is that the main value of the report was not in the evidence it collected or its recommendations, but in its exposure of the Irish design to the shock of international comment. The report came like a bombshell into the provincial and complacent atmosphere of Irish art and design education.

On the publication of the Scandinavian report, Lemass as Taoiseach delegated government responsibility for dealing with its design recommendations to CTT. Its design section launched a two pronged attack on Irish industry, the first on industry management and the second by holding exhibitions. Design in Irish industry was seen as

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another part of applied art and not a profession on its own and this was, sadly, reflected in low level of wages that designers received at that time. CTT divided Irish industry into sections: engineering, textiles, fashion and so forth to draw up an annual programme of advice for each section. It began to record a register of designers, and held seminars on design to try and make Irish management aware of how it could improve productivity.

CTT commissioned Gunnar Peterson, Professor of Graphic Design at the Royal Danish Academy, to go to Japan and to assemble an exhibition. He was instructed to select objects that demonstrated how a country could maintain its traditional individualism within a modern industrial society. The exhibition opened in the Municipal Art Gallery (Dublin) in 1963 and it showed traditional lacquerwork and modern plastic versions, tea services from the Japanese National Railways, handtools, textiles, and basketwork. CTT maintained its momentum by sponsoring two exhibitions in the new exhibitions gallery at Trinity College, Dublin; one on chairs and a second on Irish textiles, selected from Irish mills by Jack Lenor Larson, the prominent American textile designer. At the Royal Dublin Society, CTT mounted an exhibition of product design from nine countries in the EEC. In addition the government announced a programme of grants and consultant advice to firms who wanted to improve their design standards. About ninety firms showed some initial interest, but in the first year of the scheme only twenty-five made any real effort to employ consultants or improve their designer's abilities. The main policy initiative was to import foreign design experts and to give grants to manufacturers so that professional designers could be employed. As this policy grew, it was in the short term successful and approximately 200 designers were employed during the 1960s. The presence of these designers

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contributed to the overall design awareness of Irish businessmen and industrialists.

Irish furniture was a good example of an industry that was particularly successful during the 1960s. A leading British furniture designer,Andrew Milne, was brought over by CTT to inject some new thought into the Irish furniture industry (for example at Navan). In the textile industry, CTT brought in designers from France, such as Andre Courreges, and from the United States to work with Irish weavers in promoting lighter weights and more fashionable colours. Irish Ropes employed Margaret Leichner (from Britain) and Louis LeBrocquy, to design carpets in sisal and other materials.

But the field of training in Ireland lacked one solid body for the development or improvement of a designers skills. Walsh in CTT on a visit to Norway had been very impressed by the Plus Craft Workshops at Frederikstad (set up by the Norwegian entrepreneur Per Tannum). He resolved to set up something similar in Ireland. The result was the establishment of the Kilkenny Design Workshops (KDW) in 1963, although the workshops themselves did not start functioning till 1665. The workshops took over the old stables opposite Kilkenny Castle, formerly the seat of the Duke of Ormonde. At first, they were staffed by designers from Britain, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany; the earliest ones were for silversmiths, candlemakers and poplin weavers (all traditional eighteenth-century Dublin crafts). Afterwards came ceramics and textiles (both woven and printed); only much later did KDW become involved in furniture, graphic design, and fashion design. Sadly the first Industrial designer did not work at Kilkenny Design Workshops until 1972. In 1966 W.H. Walsh as executive chairman of KDW was becoming so involved in design reform that he transferred from CTT and made KDW his full time

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concern. The efforts that these workshops made certainly did improve the standard of craft design in Ireland.

> KDW had an enormous effect on the crafts in Ireland, as far as I know there were three design factories in Ireland at the time. One in Donegal, one in Youghal, and one at Shanagary....A lot of stimulus was given KDW...Now you can trip over them. (27)

KDW's approach to introducing design to industry was to develop prototypes for a certain market area and then go around to manufacturers offering them the design on a royalty basis. In September 1967, Heals in London launched the first exhibition of silver, ceramics, linens, woodware and cast-iron prototypes from KDW. The exhibition included ash-trays in unpolished Kilkenny limestone and a more sophisticated version in black marble, both made by James Harding. The other work shops were represented with linens and towels, printed textiles by Rolf Middleboe, jewellery, china and, one of the most popular items, cast iron candlesticks by Oisin Kelly, one male one female, both holding candles. But all of this exhibition consisted of craft based products. A fair criticism of the workshops was that they should have been concentrating on large production number consumer products more commonly associated with design for industry. When this was put to Paul Hogan then design manger in CTT he replied;

> They were easy to make. It would have taken too long to research, design and develop a normal industrial design object...Rather than going to a manufacturer and talking about design you could bring and show a prototype ,thus optimizing Kilkenny's work.But it was always felt that this would develop into industrial design. (27)

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Professor Iseult McCarthy, the head of the Education Department at The National College of Art and Design, when asked to comment on the same point replied that;

Craft is where our strength lies, and always should lie by the virtue of our culture , our population and our personality. (33)

Another criticism of the work carried out at KDW was that it was too similar to the design work of the Scandinavians. A Scando-Irish style developed which was wrong for Ireland at a time when the emphasis should have been placed on developing an inherently Irish design style. Although there are some similarities between Scandinavian countries and Ireland, there is a basic difference between the two.

There was a coolness in Kilkenny's work and this was wrong for Ireland...It should have been warmer. There is a difference in personality between the Scandinavians and the Irish. (33).

When this criticism was put to Bill Walsh (Director of KDW) in an interview in the Irish Times 10 September 1967, He objected vigorously.

To some people anything that doesn't have Chippendale legs is Danish. We can't go on doing decorated snakes from the Book of Kells for ever but we can't self consciously set out to find an Irish style. Eventually it will come. (11)

Bertil Gardberg ,one of Europe's most outstanding designers at the time, was one of the first designers to make Kilkenny Workshops his new cultural home. 'I felt that Ireland was a country that would inspire me.'(11). He believed that the Irish style would come naturally from the countryside, the people and from indigenous materials. He did

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some very interesting work making jewellery from pebbles he had collected polished and then set in silver and gold, he also worked with Irish limestone and inevitably Kilkenny black marble. Gerdberg later left KDW as he was not happy with the direction that Kilkenny was taking (27).

There was the opinion that Ireland was too small an industrial nation with too little home controlled design to develop a peculiarly Irish style, and that Irish design would always be a reflection of foreign design. "We were wrong to think we could have developed a style"(27). Perhaps this was true to a certain extent during the 1960s when Ireland was trying to become modern at all costs even at the expense of its own culture. But in the current climate with Ireland as a member of equal stature in the international community, and with the stability and security that this position brings, the possibility is there to concentrate on developing an Irish style.

Originally KDW was established with the purpose of "advancing good design in industry". They first promoted craft design. The success of their shop opened in Dublin and the quality of their products fully endorses this fact and this success has had many spin offs such as the Craft Trade Fairs in the RDS and in the Mansion House in Dublin. However with this popularity for their craft products, KDW tended to neglect the needs of Irish industry, namely the promotion of industrial design. Also KDW made a commitment to the government to eventually become a profitable company independent of state funding. It is argued that this was very wrong and no state sponsored company promoting design should turn a profit.

In the U.K. the government sponsors the Design Council, whose brief is to promote good design in industry: in that respect it is similar to KDW. However the Design Council does not have a consultancy, it

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is purely concerned with the promotion of design. The Design Council employs staff to go out and promote design nationally and it has five regional offices, all with permanent design exhibitions, explaining to the public and especially to industry, what benefits are to be gained from designers.

Critics of KDW have argued that it was wrong for them to be in the retail trade for designers for whom it received a grant to promote. In fact the Kilkenny Shop was used more for the promotion of the products that were developed in the Workshops than Irish design in general.

From November 12-23 1969, Kilkenny Design Workshops held an exhibition of designs for multiple production at their work shops in Kilkenny . The exhibition presented a cross section of prototypes and production samples developed for industry. Its purpose was to demonstrate the range of the Workshops' activities over the previous four years since they began. The introduction in the catalogue for the exhibition states that

While prototypes and designs are made by hand , the promotion of the handcrafts is not a main function of the workshops.

The requirements of quantity production are at all times a determining factor. (30 pp. 1)

The exhibits were listed under the following headings:

Those already contracted for and in production.

Those already contracted for, but not yet at the production stage.

Uncommitted and free for negotiation.

The exhibition had a total of 114 products or product ranges and included textiles, ceramics, furniture, silver, jewellery and metals, general purpose (toys, light fittings and wooden giftware), graphics, packaging and marble and stone work. Of that total an acceptable 38 were uncommitted designs. But also of that total only 17 products or product ranges can be seen as transcending the boundaries of the handcraft image and be recognised as industrial designed products. Of this 17, 11 were uncommitted. This showed an obvious lack of interest in industrial designed products; either at the Workshops or among Irish manufacturers.

The five "problem, procedure, and result" case studies at the back of the exhibition's catalogue are excellent examples of how KDW approached, analysed and developed solutions to design problems in industry. But they are all in craft based industries: textiles, ceramics and metalwork.

It must be said that Kilkenny Design had done an excellent job in promoting Irish hand made products. However industrial design was not promoted as much as it might have been. One only has to look today to the small number of industrial design consultancies in Ireland to see that Irish industry is still not aware of the advantages to be gained from the services of an industrial designer. Also the first of these consultancies was not set-up until 1972.

The Scandinavian design report pointed out that the craft based industries were Ireland's strength and that the knowledge of these crafts should be used as the basis of a modern Irish design style. Unfortunately we tended to adopt the Scandinavian's design style rather than their suggestions. Instead of artists and craftsmen using their skills to further Irish industrial design, that is design for industry, they developed a Scando-Irish craft style. Therefore not only did we not progress from craft to modern industrial design, most craft produced during the 1960s was foreign-influenced rather than inherently Irish.

Design in Ireland should reflect its surroundings, its history and its culture. Kilkenny should have, and perhaps all of us need to, consider our country's past. For it is only with an educated understanding of Ireland that we can arrive at an inherently Irish design style.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH DESIGN AWARENESS IN THE 1960s

CHAPTER IV

What We Read, What Foreigners Read & What We Should Have Read.

The industrialisation of Ireland and the efforts made by the government to develop good design and improve design education were ultimately reflected through the Irish public. During the 1960s, concepts of art and design became more generally appreciated, particularly through the media.

As the scope of accessing the Irish public's design awareness during the 1960s is so massive a task, it has been chosen to take a core sample of readings from the leading Irish newspaper the <u>Irish Times</u>. Newspapers only contain what sells them, therefore any design content in the paper can be taken as a reflection of public interest. Design awareness in this context means the ability to make an informed choice with some sense of a visual maturity. To question that which is offered to you on more than a basis of convenience or peer acceptance.

Design in the media seems to have been directed towards the Irish housewife as she would have had most of the responsibility for deciding what items and styles should grace the inner sanctums of the Irish home. In the issues of the <u>Irish Times</u> studied from 1960 to 1964 the only mention of design in an industrial design sense was an occasional reference in a once weekly half page column devoted to women's matters. The paper in general during this period seems to have lacked the visuals or photographs now so commonly found in todays newspapers. Any advertisements which appeared were small

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and simple - most were pure text. Advertisements that did include visuals consisted of simple illustrations that in reality gave no visual information on what the product actually looked like. The impression given is that the visual aspects of a product from the point of advertising were secondary to those of price and function. An interesting article that was found concerned one of the many new all electric show houses set up around Ireland by the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) to promote the use of electricity in the home. The article published in September 1962 centred on a show house at Springfield Estate, Templeogue, Dublin. The house boasted a new heating system called Electric Floor Warming which employed electric heating cables embedded in the floor of the kitchen, dining room, and entrance hall. As with most of these houses the advantages of electricity were directed towards the housewife.

This kitchen with its layout and decor is superbly planned, and containing the most modern electrical household aids is surely any housewife's dream.(47) $P_{\text{constrained}}$

The use of colour and furnishings in the bedrooms was noted as defining the occupant of each.

The main bedroom, which is to the front of the house is furnished in mahogany set against a colour scheme of pink and grey. This simple effect makes it definitely the main bedroom.

The No. 2 bedroom has a more effeminate character. It contains a very strong colour in the carpet which is relieved by the light coloured furnishings. This gives a more youthful appeal for the junior misses of the family. The no. 3 bedroom is simply furnished as a boys bedroom in contrast with the girls room. (47) $\rho_{\rm even}$

This revelation of the use of simple colour schemes to define occupants suggests an unrefined and naive view of interior decoration.



Such knowledge of the use of colour would today be taken for granted and definitely not highlighted in a national newspaper. The occurence of articles attempting to improve the awareness of design in the Irish public, continued to be very scarce until the mid 1960s when, with the advent of Kilkenny Design Workshops, design in industry became more prominent in the public eye. In early 1965 Ida Grehan, a journalist with the <u>Irish Times</u>, began a series of articles on the women's page every Thursday, commenting on the quality of products available to the Irish household. In an article dated April 1, 1965, Grehan starts by introducing the Irish public to the notion of using the wall space in their homes'as more than a mere background for pictures, mirrors or wall paper. She notes that all kinds of clever architectural and engineering inventions had been developed to hold shelves of varying dimensions and degrees of flexibility. She proclaims that this "clever furniture " has arrived in Ireland and that one Irish furniture craftsman "has his designer at work on an Irish version."(7) provide the second sec One cannot condemn the Irish industrial design profession during this time with this single statement, but it does indicate a high level of ignorance of what designers are trained to do. Here, more or less, the designer's role is that of a copier, taking a foreign design and reproducing it without breaching any copyright laws. This, as we now know, is not how a professionally trained designer should make his living. Admittedly this is, and has always been, a common occurrence in industry, but not one that should be highlighted in a national newspaper. Again, this highlights an Irish ignorance and naivety to design in industry. Grehan goes on to praise a Danish system made by Cado which provided wall panels which could be used to cover all or part of a wall. These panels were prepared with slots from which you could hang shelves or other panel accessories. She goes on to point out



that this system is designed with "mathematical exactitude"(7). Here again one would have to question the level of surprise that this journalist finds in the fact that any piece of furniture should be designed with such accuracy in mind. But it is not the level of knowledge of the journalist in this case which must be questioned, but that of the public she wishes to educate. Grehan concludes her article by acquainting her readers with the Building Centre on Baggot Street, Dublin. It was a member of a union of sixty such Building Centres in capital cities around the world. In this centre nothing could be bought, but it permanently displayed products of the diverse manufacturers who contributed to the comfort and safety of home and public buildings. The centre was not state funded and relied on subscriptions received from firms who displayed their products there. Any surplus revenue from the centre was used for educational purposes and many exhibitions were held there displaying progress in textiles, ceramics, bookbinding, furniture etc. This article shows a level of innocence and ignorance towards design in industry, but it also shows that a level of public interest existed, in the fact that a Building Centre was running successfully in Dublin and, by the existence of the article itself in a national newspaper.

In another article (November 8 1966) Grehan proclaims that as far as Ireland is concerned we are still in the "gas mantle age" (8) with too ρ^{n} many people using lighting unimaginatively and with "depressing meanness" (8). She gives a rule of thumb of one or two watts per square foot when deciding what wattage bulb to use. It is noted that lighting should be considered an art. Later the reader is informed that the "old fashioned centre light is out"(8) and the latest in lighting is the new and the much more flexible multi-ceiling plate from which pendant fittings



can be looped to be hung conveniently over different areas of the room. I saw some beauties from Scandinavia in jewel colours; green, blue, orange and white. They were moulded from two solid thicknesses of glass one coloured and one opaque white. Neither did the bulb show through nor was the light effected by the coloured glass. In daylight or artificial light they would make the most effective and positive contribution to a strong colour scheme. (8)

Grehan again concludes her article with some informative news that there is actually a variety of tones of flourescent tube lighting to choose from, ranging from harsh to warm. She tells the reader that it is possible to get what are described as "de luxe colours" which give a warm light tone, compared to that used in hospital, factories and other public buildings .

Here again this article gives evidence to the fact that the Irish consumer did not have a great deal of exposure to what was available in the market place, but that there was an interest in new modern designs as new product ranges were being brought in from abroad. Almost a year later, the Irish Times published another article on lighting by Ida Grehan, in which she highlights the gap between, on one hand, the offices, hotels and public buildings where engineers, architects and lighting manufacturers have combined together to design the lighting system, and the average home with its central light and a few sockets here and there for lights and heaters. She declares that there is no contact between the manufacturers and the home. This tells us two things. Firstly, that industry did not seem to be using designers to their full ability, for it is one of the roles of the industrial designer to bridge the gap between the manufacturer and the consumer. Secondly, that there was a need for educating the home owner in how to obtain and use modern consumer products. Later in the article, Grehan interviews Ken White, a lighting designer who felt



that the time was right in Ireland to educate the public, that there was a dawning awareness of the use of light in the home to give it character and to make it more efficiently functional. He felt the time was right for home lighting advisors to talk about their subject in stores and to groups of house owners. Not a great step for the development of design awareness in Ireland put still a step forward.(12)

In Febuary 1967, a Mrs Rosaleen Cahill Fitzgibbon came to Ireland from the United States to conduct a product survey looking for native goods to put on display and sell in a leading New York store. What she had in mind was to remove

the sods of turf, leprechauns and other cliches which our sounvenir exporters have led New York sophisticates to believe is the limit of the rescources of those of us not distilling whiskey, weaving tweed or emulating the stage Irish. (9)

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She visited the then budding Kilkenny Design Workshops, the Shanagarry Pottery and a large range of Irish craft - based concerns. "What is good here is very good"(9) she commented, but her main criticism of Irish products was "If only you could make enough of them." (9). This is a possible indication that there was not enough knowledge of industrial designers.

Two years after Ida Grehan introduced "clever furniture" to the Irish public, she reported on the Irish Furniture Fair held in Dublin's Intercontinental Hotel during October 1967. She was pleasantly surprised at the level of design which had developed in Ireland. Work like that of Andrew Thompson, who won four Merit Awards for exhibiting



two impressive excutive desks in dark rosewood topped with dark hide.and a black hide settee and chairs framed in rosewood with a gleam of polished aluminium, (15)

or the "Master Chair" made at the Gaeltarra Eireann Factory at Annagary, Donegal based on a tough shell of fibre glass upholstered in black hide or Donegal tweed. In the kitchen section, fitted unit kitchens were all the rage with Arco of Waterford displaying a modular kitchen system that allowed you to add on to your kitchen as finances permitted. A Mr Cody, the furniture technologist at the time at the Insitute of Reasearch and Standards, commented " This is only the beginning"(15). Andrew Milne, an industrial designer of Irish origin and, at the time, a leading industrial design consultant in Britian, was engaged to advise the furniture manufacturers under the Coras Trachtala design consultancy scheme, in the period leading up to the fair. According to Ida Grehan, the results of taking the advice of an expert from outside could be plainly seen at the Fair. The quote below is taken from an article in the Irish Times dated March 19 1968 and is a designer's comment on the Irish public's attitude towards choosing products

The general public are very unenquiring about products. They are too inclined to take what they are offered. They don't go to enough trouble to get what really would suit their homes best. They don't take account of atmosphere so important. There are many services available through the manufacturers and they're not nearly enough used by the public. (23).

In Ireland in the 1960s industry was not aware that it was one of the designer's roles to improve the levels of visual awareness of the buying public, who will, in turn, pride themselves on their own buying decisions, their houses and, ultimately, themselves. The idealistic designer's aim was to improve the quality of life of the end



user of his product. The reality was shaped, not by the designer, but by the hardcore marketing man whose final aim was to improve the profit margin.

In evidence throughout this chapter is the underlying fact that the Irish public during the 1960s were not very aware of design and what difference it could make to their homes and lives. They seemed to accept what was offered to them as the best possible choice, and were all too quick to turn to examples of products from other countries and praise them. It is true that these foreign products may have been of a high standard but it was wrong to accept them unquestioningly. Products had to be questioned first as to their suitablity to function in the home. An informed decision had to be made. This required an element of self assurance, a knowledge of some kind of criteria on which to judge design. It was on this point that there was a need for education at all levels. Through surveying the core samples of design related articles in the <u>Irish Times</u> throughout the 1960s, there is evidence which shows that awareness had improved. But could it have further improved ?

Throughout this thesis again and again reference has been made to Scandinavian design and to how Ireland should have followed the example of the development of the Scandinavian way. But the Scandinavians were not born with design, something which became almost a general belief during the 1960s. They were educated. Firstly through formal education at all levels, secondly through government bodies set up to promote design, but thirdly, and most importantly, through the media; through magazines, journals and television. Innumerable articles on interior decorating, colour schemes, furniture and textiles had a tremendous impact.

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In the late 1940s the average Swedish home had three essential articles: a gold imitation baroque wall clock, a painting (a copy or a print) of two elks standing at the edge of a forest. and imitation Chippendale, or some other "rich looking " furniture or fancy free production of what it should look like. Textiles and carpets were all of different patterns preferably with flowers in all shapes, colours and sizes. The sitting room was over crowded with furniture small delicate looking coffee tables here and there... It was a very unhappy room to the eye to many patterns and paraphernalia, all displayed in an uncomfortable light.(37)

Magazines and journals began to educate their readers. A few rules of thumb were set down.such as

Don't put too much furniture into one room, since this make ` the room look smaller than it is and leaves little room for living.

Don't mix different patterns in textiles and curtains, because it creates a cluttered impression.

Avoid wallpaper with a pattern, off white walls or plain coloured walls show furniture etc. off to its best advantage. Hang paintings and pictures so that they can be comfortably studied and looked at.

Instead of a single lamp in the ceiling have three or four spread out in the room.

This educational campaign had such an impact that by the 1950s three out of five Swedish homes looked like copies of each other. and the new Scandinavian modern furniture could be seen almost everywhere. This impersonality changed, however, as home owners were urged to use their imaginations, not to be afraid to do something out of the ordinary, and that there was nothing wrong with mixing old and new within the home. (37)

Whether Scandinavian deisgn was or should have been copied or interpreted for Ireland, whether the above rules should have been

applied in Ireland, is secondary to the fact that this form of education was never implemented on such a scale in this country. Whatever the efforts of the government to improve formal education or to set up semi-state bodies to promote design, the Irish media did not concentrate on or emphasise design in everyday use. One only has to look at journals at the time that would have carried this campaign, magazines such as <u>Model Housekeeping</u> and <u>Womans View</u>, to see that they were mostly concerned with recipes for fruit flans and ways to cure constipation and colic.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH DESIGN AWARENESS IN THE 1960s

CONCLUSION

There is no denying that the 1960s were a time of change in Ireland. With the end of the Sinn Fein policy Ireland's economy began to grow. The industrial base established during the Sinn Fein era was the basis for this growth, but this era also produced a manufacturer who was not used to competing with foreign products. The Irish consumer of this era was used to a limited choice of goods and the Irish manufacturer was assured of a market. The advent of free trade during the 1960s, and therefore, the new element of competition, forced the Irish industrialists to change their attitude and improve productivity on all levels. One way of doing this was with the use of design. The government of the time realised the important role that design could play and made efforts to advertise this fact. By all accounts they were quite successful as seen by the number of designers brought in by Coras Trachtala during the decade.

In the area of education the government was unfortunately not so quick to make reforms in matters that related to design. This may have been due to a short sightedness in the government who failed to see that improving design education would eventually produce design aware Irish industrialists, or it could have been due to a conservative attitude in the Department of Education where design, a newly introduced profession was not considered to be as important as other educational areas that were in need of reform.

Irish society blossomed during the 1960s and became hungry for all that was modern and new. Kilkenny Design Workshops made great efforts to feed this hunger on the recommendations of the



Scandinavian report. But they made the mistake of adopting the Scandinavian style instead of the Scandinavian approach to developing a national design style. The staff of KDW cannot accept the full blame for making this mistake, as it stems from an attidude that existed and still does exist in Irish society - to unquestioningly accept what is offered because it is foreign and therefore good.

Because of Ireland's great history of oppression, the ability of the Irish people to think and make decisions for themselves was seriously undermined. The process of anglicisation was successful in Ireland. It had been slowed by the forty years of the Sinn Fein era but not stopped. During the 1960s Ireland emerged from the secure childhood of Eamon de Valera's Gaelic ideal into the noisy adult reality of cosmopolitan consumer capitalism. It was a country in search of its own soul and in a sense it was afraid of what it might find. Because of the Irish habit of unquestioning acceptance of anything foreign and our ingrained attitudes towards anglicization, we accepted what was offered to us from abroad as being better than that which was Irish. If culture is to be defined by the daily lives of ordinary people, then we are all west Britons of one sort or another...

Scandinavian design has come and gone in Ireland and with it, the Kilkenny Design Workshops. Irish society in the 1960s was not sure of itself and therefore could not have been sure of Irish design, but at least we became aware of modern design in industry for the first time. As yet

the full advantages a designer can bring to industry have not been exploited in this country. What happened during the 1960s made a large inroad into the ignorance of industrialists and the general public regarding design. But we have a long way to go. What lies in store for us now in the 1990s? We are cooperating with foreigners of our own choice for the first time. We now have the security of our position and

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the confidence in our own abilities to take control of our destiny. We can make decisions independently, or relatively so, less influenced by those around us than we ever have been before. We have made a conscious decision to unify with the rest of Europe in one common market. Now our energy can be spent on expressing ourselves as individuals in a community of equals instead of trying to emulate those we used to consider our superiors. Many countries express their

national identity and individuality through their design. If we consider their successes and if we follow their example, not by slavishly copying their style of design as we did in the 1960s, but by applying their

approach, their ideas and their methods to our own design development, perhaps we, also, will reach the stage where we can express our national identity and individuality through our design. It is in this climate that Irish design will prosper.

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