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TRINITY COLLEGE

FINE ART EDUCATION IN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE INFLUENCE OF MODERNISM ON THE CURRICULUM OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN, 1975-1988

BY

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CHAPTER 15

THE INFLUENCE OF DEVELOPMENTS IN BRITISH FINE ART EDUCATION IN THE POST-WAR YEARS ON THE FINE ART CURRICULUM AT THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

15.1 Introduction

In 1943 Herbert Read stated that the aim of education was to train artists. By education Read meant education in general and not just art education. In making this statement in the fearful and anxious context of 1943 - a context that was particularly loaded for an idealist like Read who, as a soldier, had experienced the horrors of the First World War - he was expressing an aspiration to change society by changing the nature of the relationship between art and society.[1] This was a utopian aspiration. It was also the subject of *Education Through Art*. In the changed context of 1944 and the seminal *Education Act* of that year, however, this aspiration ceased to be a utopian aspiration and become a possibility. Given this new possibility, and given Read's powerful influence in post-war Britain in relation to art, new avenues were now open for the development of tertiary level art education. The effect of Read's aspiration coming into contact with the practical necessities of post-war British society, and with

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[1] Herbert Read, *Education Through Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 11.

post-war education policy as manifested in the 1944 *Education Act*, was the development of new curricula in art schools. This was particularly the case in relation to the teaching of fine art. The teaching methodology that grew out of all of these developments was the Basic Design system[2]. The Coldstream and Summerson Reports formed the mechanism that put this new teaching methodology into practice.

15.2 Background

Developments in art education in Great Britain in the post-war epoch took place in the context of the binary controversy. As shown in Chapter 5, this was a debate that animated British Society at this time and that addressed the question of whether the state's role in education should be to raise standards by focusing on the idea of excellence or to broaden access with a concomitant risk of lowering standards.[3] This debate, as shown in Chapter 6, had a direct influence on third level art education. The state's policies on art education at this time, which were necessarily ambivalent, were implemented primarily by the Council for National Academic Awards and by the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design. In the context of the binary controversy T.S. Eliot's book *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* was significant in establishing the hegemony of the idea that tertiary art education must focus on raising standards by developing excellence. This objective tied in with the focus of modernism, as defined in Chapter 10, on formal analysis, refinement, and progress. It also tied in with the objectives that the more avant-garde British artists had been

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[2] The system of art education, developed in the 1950s, that focussed on the study of basic forms that were believed to be common to all art practice.

[3] Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art, and Politics since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1997), 80-87.

pursuing in the inter-war years.[4] According to Campbell Bruce, as already stated, *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* left a significant mark on his thinking and on that of his generation at the Royal College of Art,[5] as, significantly, did developments in American art and culture at the same time. Interestingly, Eliot believed that in the seventeenth century a split had developed in man between his feeling self and his ratiocinative self. He felt that as man became more intellectually refined he lost touch with his inner self.[6] In other words, Eliot believed, like William Morris, that in modern times man had become dissociated from his spiritual side. He also believed that the decline of man in the mid-twentieth century, as he perceived it, was a consequence of this. Eliot felt that the modernist agenda could remedy this situation, and also, like Read, felt that it could help to solve social and political problems.[7] This position is understandable when the negative influence of European politics on art and culture between the wars is considered; hence, for Eliot – as for Read in 1943 – emerged the urgency of the need to raise standards in 1948, when the book was published. The position of education for the arts in this new situation is encapsulated in the following quotation from F.R. Leavis, who was one of the most influential intellectual forces of the post-war epoch: "The real university is a centre of consciousness and human responsibility for the civilised world; it is a creative centre of civilisation – for the living heritage on which meaning and human intelligence depend can't, in our time, be

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[4] T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1948); A.N.Whitehead was, as already mentioned, an inspirational figure in this same context.

[5] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 869.

[6] Donald Cuspit, *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 115.

[7] Eliot, *Definition of Culture*, 110-124.

maintained without a centralised creativity somewhere."[8] It is important to stress that the context of Leavis' comment was the context in which Campbell Bruce developed his thinking - the rise of totalitarianism and the development of the cold war.

For the fine arts, after some jostling for position during the 1950s and 1960s, the centralised creativity that Leavis talked about was to be New York.[9] Another important influence in this context, as already shown, was A.N. Whitehead. Whitehead, interestingly, given the fact that art was seen as a continuing process by the Basic Design system that was to develop during the 1950s, asserted the primacy of process over substance in his writings. Whitehead's influence was widespread in intellectual circles in Great Britain in the post-war years, and this influence was significant in the context of the binary controversy.[10] A significant aspect of Whitehead's thinking, especially in the context of the assertion in the first Coldstream report that art courses should be equivalent to a liberal arts degree and that students should acquire a broad base of skills, was the assertion that education must be liberal and broadly based rather than specialised. It is interesting to note, given the subsequent influence of American culture on the development of British art in the 1950s and 1960s, that both Whitehead and Eliot had strong American connections. Whitehead spent the later years of his life in the United States, where he lectured at Harvard University, and Eliot had been born and raised in America. The influence of thinkers such as Eliot, Leavis and Whitehead, all of whom emphasised the humanities and the need to create cultural excellence in the

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[8] Quoted in Robert Hewison, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945-1960* (London: Methuen, 1988), 54.

[9] See, Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984); John A. Walker, *Cultural Offensive: America's Impact on British Art Since 1945* (London: Pluto Press, 1998)

[10] Roy Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History* (London: Routledge, 1988), 67.

debate that grew out of the binary controversy, led to a situation where the fine arts would be aligned in tertiary level art education in the post-war epoch with the liberal humanities and not with technology. The pursuit of excellence would, in this context, be an important aspect of art education.

15.3 Herbert Read and the Pursuit of Excellence

When Herbert Read talked about the role of art in education in the context of 1943 he had something specific in mind - excellence:

> Education may . . . be defined as the cultivation of modes of expression - it is teaching children and adults how to make sounds, images, movements, tools and utensils. A man who can make such things well is a well-educated man. If he can make good sounds, he is a good speaker, a good musician, a good poet; if he can make good images, he is a good painter or sculptor; if good movements, a good dancer or labourer; if good tools or utensils, a good craftsman. All faculties of thought, logic, memory, sensibility, and intellect, are involved in such processes, and no aspect of education is excluded in such processes. And they are all processes which invoke art, for art is nothing but good making of sounds, images etc.[11]

Thus, according to Read, anyone could be an artist if he did what he did well. The overall aim of education for Read, then, was excellence, and, in line with Read's

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[11] Read, *Education Through Art*, 11. It is worth noting at this point the ideas of Henry Provensal, which had such a huge impact on modernism through their influence on the architect Le Corbusier. Provensal was influenced by the German Romantic tradition and in particular by Schelling and Hegel, influences which he passed on to Le Corbusier. According to Paul Turner, Provensal, in his book *L'art de Demain,* which was published in 1904, affirms his belief in spiritual reality, laments the rise of positivism and materialism in modern times, and calls on man to achieve – primarily through art – a harmonious uniting of the spiritual and material aspects of his nature. Turner goes on to say that Provensal made, "A distinction . . . between a 'talented' person who merely accomplishes traditional activities better than the majority and the 'genius' who imagines totally new activities in a new and original way. Interestingly, Provensal makes a distinction between 'emotion' of which all men are capable, and cognition. Turner continues, "The truly great artist will reveal himself by, first, his capacity for completely original innovation, and second, his intellectual temperament, which will be 'sharp and clear' rather than emotional". Turner goes on to say that, according to Provensal, "[The aspiring artist should] seek out an intellectual minority, a centre of action and combat". He should then reveal himself to this elite group by the 'verke' which expresses his own inner self. Then he must begin to "formulate in every aspect of his work, a new personality to replace his former activities. . . . According to Provensal, the new utopian age of science-art is imminent". (Paul Turner, "The Beginnings of Le Corbusier's Education," 1902-1907, *Arts Bulletin*, LIII [June 1971]: 214-224)

radicalism, education had to be based on a truly democratic pursuit of excellence. Tertiary art education in Britain in the post-war era developed in the context of this demand for excellence. There was a deeply psychological aspect to this process, for Read, which is spelled out in detail in *Education Through Art*. The details of *Education Through Art* are beyond the scope of the present study other than to say that they focus on the development of a balanced and free individual. By stark contrast with the inter-war period, and largely as a consequence of American influence, the development of Read's ideas took place in a different socio-political climate than hitherto, a climate that gave primacy to the individual and to the development of the individual. Significantly, this was also a climate in which, by contrast with the inter-war period, change actually took place in the structures of British society.

An important aspect of the pursuit of excellence, for Read, was the development of skills and disciplines. In this new context, however, skills and disciplines were defined in relation to the development of the individual and not in relation to technical proficiency. The Coldstream report, it will be remembered, stated that skills and disciplines must play an important part in art education. Read was not concerned with the kind of skill or discipline that dominated the neo-classical curriculum and that can be learned until they are instinctive. Rather, the concept of skill and discipline that Read had in mind was intellectual. This intellectual skill was concerned primarily with "the matching of the form to the emotion". This approach to art ties in with the ideas of A.N. Whitehead and with the curriculum at it was developed in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design between 1975 and 1988. Read continues with the following statement: "This was the basis of the free verse movement in poetry. The same discipline is present in a movement so superficially undisciplined as action

painting;[12] one soon learns to distinguish between those action painters who have this inner sense of discipline and those who merely splash about."[13] The notion of Inner sense of discipline is a key notion in relation to the development of tertiary level art education in Britain in the post-war period. It is thus significant that discipline was stressed as a key aspect of the syllabus for 1975 in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. The importance of an inner sense of discipline as an aspect of fine art education will be discussed more fully in Chapter 16.

Having established the nature of skill, Read suggested that the basic course, which he felt that all art students should pursue in their first year at art college, must aim to exploit the student's sense of form through direct contact with a variety of materials. For Read an understanding of form was axiomatic in order to practice art.[14] This was

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[12] Action painting is a style of painting in which paint is dribbled, splashed, and poured over the canvas. It was made famous by the American painter Jackson Pollock (1912-1956).

[13] Victor Willing, "What Kind of Art Education?," *Studio International* 172 (September 1966): 136. The sense of discipline which Read demands of the artist is comparable with the mental and moral qualifications of the artist as demanded by Ruskin. Ruskin states that the certainty and directness of approach by the artist to the means of making art demands a grasp of the whole subject without which there is no good painting. Ruskin says: "This grasp of the whole implies very strange and sublime qualities of the mind. It is not possible, unless the feelings are completely under control; the least excitement or passion will disturb the measured equity of power; a painter needs to be as cool as a general; and as little moved or subdued by his sense of pleasure, as a soldier by the sense of pain. Nothing good can be done without intense feeling; but it must be feeling so crushed, that the work is set about with mechanical steadiness, absolutely untroubled, as a surgeon - not without pity, but conquering it and putting it aside - begins an operation. Until the feelings can give strength enough to the will to enable it to conquer them, they are not strong enough." (John Ruskin, *Selections from the Writings of John Ruskin* [London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1868], 95) This is an approach to art that has found many supporters in the Modern Movement. In a lecture which she gave in 1939, for instance, Mainie Jellett, in quoting George Braque and in advocating a similar approach to creative activity, said that "nobility [in art] comes from controlled emotion" (B. Arnold, *Mainie Jellett and the Modern Movement in Ireland* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991], 212). It is interesting to note that the sense of calm which Ruskin was advocating was a particular trait of Herbert Read's character. It was pointed out by Roland Penrose, in a tribute to Read when he died, that Read was noted for his coolness and calm demeanour as a soldier during the horrors of the First World War. Read saw the war as the purging of the soul through courage and duty properly performed. This was a task he clearly took seriously as he was awarded both the military cross and the Distinguished Service Order. (Hugh Cecil, *The Flower of Battle; British Fiction Writers of the First World War* [London: Secker and Warburg, 1995], 243-266); and (Ben Nicholson, Naum Gabo, and Peter de Sautoy, "Tribute to H Read 1893-1968," *Studio International* 177 [January 1969]: 2-4.)

[14] Willing, "What Kind of Art?," 136; and T. Elder Dickson, "What Kind of Art Education?," *Studio International* (November 1966): 226.

the foundation stone upon which the Basic Design system was built.

> I think form is in some way fundamental. If a student has not got an instinct for form he is not likely to be any good at anything in the arts, because even in what I have been calling free art, or expressive art – that is, painting as ordinarily understood or engraving or sculpture - it is still necessary to have a sense of form.[15]

A sense of form and an understanding of materials having been established as the basic principle underpinning the practice of art, students would then, according to Read, be free to express themselves through interaction with form and materials. Students would thus be enabled to develop emotionally in response to form and materials. This is essentially what developments in tertiary art education in the 1950s and 1960s were about. It also formed the basis of the course in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975. The "free" expression that Read envisaged as the outcome of this process was not, however, chaotic - despite Read's claim to be an anarchist – as there were structures that imposed a restriction on this freedom. These structures were, according to Read, psychological and social. The psychological structure was bound up with form.

> There is such a thing as free expression, which has been talked about a lot, especially in relation to children's art. In modern poetry and painting there is a kind of permissiveness which seems to be undisciplined and might give the illusion that there is no discipline in fine arts. This is wrong. The poet or painter does not have freedom unless it is measured against some standard. This enables the artist to appreciate the force of any diversion from the fundamental discipline. Take dancing as an analogy. Ballet in a way is a free form of dancing, but the positions are very disciplined and have to be learned, otherwise you cannot exploit them. It's the same with poetry and painting, unless the poet or painter has fundamental standards from which he can depart for expressive purposes you get a kind of chaos.[16]

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[15] Willing, "What Kind of Art?," 136.

[16] Ibid., 138.

Read did not define the precise nature of the fundamental standards that underpinned the fine arts, though it is clear that he intended an understanding of formal structures to underpin the production of all artistic practice.

The social structure that Read believed imposed a restriction on artistic freedom was based on the need for individuals to integrate into society.

> Education must be a process, not only of individuation, but also of integration which is the reconciliation of individual uniqueness with social unity. From this point of view, the individual will be 'good' in the degree that his individuality is realised within the organic wholeness of the community. His touch of colour contributes, however imperceptibly, to the beauty of the landscape – his note is a necessary, though unnoticed, element in the universal harmony.[17]

Thus, by the late 1960s a new set of aesthetic values had been established as underpinning tertiary art education in Britain, and these values, though they owe much to them, had displaced both the neo-classical aesthetic and the arts and crafts aesthetic. This new set of aesthetic values was a direct consequence of the changes brought about by the 1944 *Education Act*, by the ideas of Herbert Read, and by various government reports on art education that were published after 1945 and that culminated in the Coldstream and Summerson Reports. These new aesthetic values were based on a number of issues that have their roots in modernism and in the Romantic Movement - the study of materials and the analysis of form, and individual expression. As they developed throughout the post-war period these new aesthetic values, as they were applied to art education, became inextricably bound up with the radical and critical values of the avant-garde and with the less radical values of modernism, and of formalism, as defined in Chapter 10, in particular. They were thus a potent challenge, not alone to the neo-classical and arts and crafts based aesthetic of

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[17] Read, *Education Through Art*, 5.

pre-war art education, but also to the old patrician attitudes and values of the pre-war era. It was in this way that Read's ideas were anarchic. The success or failure of Read's agenda is an open question, and is outside the scope of the present study. It can be said, however, that towards the end of his life Read despaired of ever achieving the radical reorganisation of art education, let alone education in general, that he had dreamed of as a young man.[18]

15.4 The Basic Design System

The Basic Design system of art education can be described as a methodology that encompassed, embodied, and expressed post-war ideas and thinking about art and society in Britain. It therefore challenged orthodoxies and heralded change. An interesting parallel can be drawn between the aesthetic values that underpinned the Basic Design system and the aesthetic values that gave rise to the development of the aesthetic of 'fitness for purpose' and the Aesthetic Movement in the nineteenth century. The aesthetic of 'fitness for purpose' and the Aesthetic Movement also reflected social change, and they led to the development of a new type of fine art curriculum that focussed on form. This new type of curriculum, as shown in Chapter 2, was exemplified by the curriculum at the Slade. In short, the development of an aesthetic based on a search for excellence, formal analysis and individual expression, in third level art education in Britain after 1945, challenged old orthodoxies and heralded new ways of thinking. It also led to the development of a particular type of curriculum in art education. This curriculum was best exemplified in the course that was developed at Goldsmiths' College as it was described in Chapter 8.

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[18] Willing, "What Kind of Art?", 136.

The synthesis of elements that became the Basic Design system, and which embodied this new thinking, can be used as a touchstone to evaluate the influence of British art and culture on the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975. It can also be used to gauge its influence on contemporary Irish art.

Basic Design, it will be recalled, in a broad sense, defined art as a by-product of creative interaction with materials and forms. Creative interaction with materials and forms was seen by those who advocated the Basic Design system as aiding free expression, which in turn was seen as an integral part of personal development. Creative thinking and personal development were thus the foundation stones upon which Basic Design was constructed. The development of the individual, following Read's thinking, was seen by these who developed the Basic Design system as inextricably bound up with, and symbiotically related to, the development of society as a whole, whether in a metaphysical or in a purely materialistic sense. Further, for those who subscribed to the Basic Design system, the making of art, which since the Romantic era had been based on the observation and study of nature in its widest sense, continued to involve the study of nature. The Basic Design system placed particular emphasis on the study of man, and especially man's response to his environment. In Kantian terms this meant that reason had a role to play, but crucially, in line with Herbert Read's thinking, reason tempered with intuition and free play, and stimulated by feeling. This explains the preoccupation of contemporary third level art education with process, thinking, analysis, intuition, experimentation, questioning, ideas, and expression.[19]

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[19] It is interesting to note in this context that John Dewey, who rejected dualism of mind and body, developed a philosophy that was evolutionary in character, biologically based, grounded on Darwinian theory, and committed to scientific experimentalism.

15.5 Basic Design and the Curriculum in Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design

In comparing the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design with the principles of the Basic Design system, the first thing to consider is the scientific aspect of Basic Design, which, as shown in Chapter 6, has its foundation in the thinking of Herbert Read, Victor Pasmore, and Richard Hamilton.

15.5.1 *The Scientific Aspect of Basic Design*

The scientific aspect of British modernist Art was rooted in an approach to the making of art that was based on the analysis of form. In particular it was based on the analysis of the structures of nature. This analysis is a description, in the Kantian sense, rather than an explication. The American art critic Gene Baro, writing on British Romantic art in 1968, suggested that the bias of British Romanticism was scientific and that its emphasis was empirical.[20] Ruskin, as shown in Chapter 2, saw art as a means of approaching the sphere of God by accurately depicting his creation realistically and in detail. And, according to Herbert Read, "Art is the representation, science the explanation - of the same reality."[21] It is clear, then, that the form based methodology of the Basic Design system - analysis, construction, and play - was in line with the scientific aspect of developments in British art and art theory since the Enlightenment. In contemporary art practice the austere and minimalist work of the British artist Alan Green exemplifies the type of work associated with this thinking. It is also exemplified in the more emotional but similarly minimal and rigorous work of Sean Scully, a British

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[20] Gene Baro "Romantic Art in Britain: A New Look," *Studio International* 175 (March 1968): 128.

[21] Read, *Education Through Art*, 11.

artist of Irish extraction. The most obvious example of a contemporary Irish artist who subscribes to this way of thinking is the more playfully analytical work of Felim Egan. Egan is an Irish artist who has studied in Britain. All of these artists take a very scientific approach to their work, which is based exclusively on formal analysis. Egan, who studied at the Slade, lays particular stress, interestingly, on the developments that took place at the Bauhaus in the 1920s. With the exception of Green, all of these artists have taught at the National College of Art and Design and all of them - including Green, controversially[22] - have been external assessors in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design.

The syllabus document of the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design for 1975 makes it clear that the scientific and analytical aspect of British art was to be a vital aspect of the new curriculum. Campbell Bruce, as already mentioned, has stated unequivocally that the Basic Design system underpinned the curriculum that he developed in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975. It will be recalled that the syllabus document for 1975 suggested that students must refer to the world that they see and not to the world that they think they see. In other words they must refer to the phenomenal world. In referring to "what is and not what appears to be", as the syllabus document for 1975 puts it, the curriculum stresses that students must, in continuing the analytical model, think and act out of a logical intelligence. It reiterates this demand later on in the text where it states that the intensive teaching of the first and second terms will aim to inculcate "habits of work calculated to develop . . . [a] capacity for logical and constructive formal thought".[23] This scientific approach to the practice of art, as a model or as a paradigm for future

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[22] See Chapter 16.

[23] Vol. II, appendix 7, 781.

creative activity, is also asserted in the course documents for 1980 and for 1988, where in identical wording the following statement is made:

> Art is a creative, expressive and intellectual discipline which requires the application of informed procedures and lines of enquiry to whatever material or idea is under consideration. These procedures will be referred to as research, analysis, extension and practice. These will, we believe, provide a framework for future action.[24]

This analytical and scientific approach to the creative process derives from Richard Hamilton's preoccupation with science and technology, and with his interest in thinking and the training of the mind, as discussed in Chapter 6. According to Hamilton, "Analysis is the major part of their work. . . . Once they have a subjective notion it is put through an analytic process until they discover what its constituents are and the way in which these can be used to make a work of art. . . . It's really staking out an area of interest and letting the student find his own rules and solutions. . . . it is a training of the mind and not a training in styles."[25] It will be remembered that Hamilton, in line with modernist thinking, was interested in style as an outcome of contemporary technological advance. It will also be remembered that, as a consequence of this, he developed an interest in popular culture. Following on from this, formal analysis and a search for principles common to all visual plastic arts became a shared interest of Hamilton and Victor Pasmore. Popular culture, of which fashions and fads are an essential aspect, was seen, therefore, by many involved in tertiary art education in Britain, as an integral part of contemporary art practice and therefore of contemporary art education. Hamilton's own work exemplifies this

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[24] National College of Art and Design, Fine Art Faculty, "Course Document", 1980, photocopy, Campbell Bruce's files, 5; National College of Art and Design, Fine Art Faculty, Course Document 1988, National College of Art and Design Library, 7.

[25] Willing, "What Kind of Art?", 132-133.

interest, as does the work of the English Pop artist Bridget Riley. Hamilton, it will be recalled, was hugely influenced by the ideas of Joseph Albers. Albers worked at the Bauhaus until 1933 and subsequently in the United States, where, as a teacher at Yale University, as shown in Chapter 7 he influenced the thinking of Michael Craig-Martin, who attended Yale in the 1960s. In an Irish context Nigel Rolfe is a more apt example. Rolfe has stated that he has had an enduring interest in popular culture since he first heard the Rolling Stones play when he was attending Grammar School. Since then, according to Rolfe, he has had an abiding interest in being at the cutting edge of both popular culture and contemporary art; an interest which he put to the fore in his teaching at the National College of Art and Design. Rolfe has continued this interest in popular culture throughout his career, thus fulfilling the aspiration of Read and Coldstream to break down the barriers that fragment creativity and consign its disparate parts to discreet areas of activity. The legitimacy or otherwise of this aspiration is an open question. This aspect of Rolfe's artistic persona, as an exemplar of this strand of thinking in contemporary British art, is recognised by the director of the college, Noel Sheridan, as having been an important aspect of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion. According to Sheridan, the English artist David Godbold fulfils this role in the college at the time of writing.[26]

15.5.2 *The Role of Intuition in the Curriculum*

Intuition[27] was an important aspect of the methodology favoured by the Basic Design system. The importance of intuition to the curriculum at the National College

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[26] Noel Sheridan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 20, 1098.

[27] By intuition is meant an approach that is spontaneous, feeling based, and non-logical.

of Art and Design is stressed in the syllabus document for 1975, where it states that just as logical control of process will play an important part in this course so "an exploration of elements of chance within the creative process also have an important part to play."[28] The use of the elements of chance, accident, and intuition ties in with David Thistlewood's assessment of the Basic Design system. Thistlewood stated that, in defining Basic Design, the phrase 'art education' should be replaced by 'creative education' which, according to Thistlewood, was "a total development of sensibility and intellect . . . where art might accrue incidentally."[29]

15.5.3 *The Curriculum as a Developing Process*

One of the key aspects of the Basic Design system was that the creative process was seen as a developing process. For example, a piece of art might develop through different media, the act of drawing in two dimensions might lead to sculpture in three dimensions, this in turn might lead to performance, which includes a space and time dimension. In other words, the creative process, as all course documents for the fine art curriculum at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion make clear, is not seen as something that adheres to or springs from the development of specific skills, but as something that exists autonomously. It is seen as something that crosses all areas of artistic practice, as the developing and teleological creative act demands. This ties in with Read's assertion that art is about excellence: progress and excellence are implicit in the idea of a developing process. This approach

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[28] Syllabus document 1975, see Vol. II, appendix 7, 781.

[29] David Thistlewood, *A Continuing Process: The New Creativity in British Art Education 1955-1965* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1981), 8. The artwork produced by this marriage of sensibility and intellect, devoid of declamation, can be seen as a further manifestation of Kant's thinking. Kant had stressed that the intelligible world of noumena is known by pure reason and the

to the creative process also ties in with the developing process that is history, which was expounded by A.N. Whitehead in *Adventures of Ideas*.

The developing creative process is seen by the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design as integrated with the needs, emotions, feelings and ideas of the individual student. The work of Kathy Prendergast, who attended the National College of Art and Design between 1976 and 1983, represents a particularly good example of this process at work. It was this process that Campbell Bruce was asserting when he tried to replace the skills based neo-classical curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design with a more organic one in 1975. As stated earlier, Bruce felt that the old curriculum, by its very nature, disrupted the student's ability to develop creatively in an organic fashion. It was the need to assert this approach that prompted Bruce to ask the neo-classically trained Professor Kelly, in the early stages of the course: "John, how can you paint a life model for three hours on one day and then wait until the next week before you paint again? How does the mind work?"[30] This new approach to making art was central to the curriculum that Campbell Bruce instigated. It was asserted in the syllabus for 1975, where it states that "the process of building work from the first idea to a conclusion must, to a large degree, be a logical and sensible progression."[31] It is also asserted in the course documents for 1980 and 1988 where identical texts state the following:

> For the students studying painting, sculpture, or printmaking any rigid time structure after term two would of necessity condition and limit the possible creative development of his or her ideas. This is a continuous, evolving process whose direction or duration cannot be prophesied, particularly in the latter part of the course, when the commitment to one's chosen area is self-

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world of phenomena is known through our senses. (Ted Honderich *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], 658)

[30] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 875.

[31] Syllabus document 1975, see Vol. II, appendix 7, 780.

motivated.[32]

It is appropriate here to restate that Herbert Read demanded a conflation of science and art within education in general in order to re-model education as a single organic activity that focussed on the development of the individual.

15.5.4 *The Dangers of Eclecticism*

Another and most important aspect of the Basic Design system, which was stressed by Maurice de Sausmarez,[33] was the demand that the use of techniques, technology, and materials must remain creative and that they must not slip into slickness, embellishment or the production of fashionable art objects for their own sake. This danger was highlighted in the syllabus for 1975 where it states that the student

> must beware the dangers of the superficial qualities of . . . new materials, which are usually related to their fashionable use. Although the materials themselves constitute an exciting challenge we must always be aware that mechanical shapes have a short fashionable lifetime. [The students can] by all means use these materials but stripped of their fashionable forms.[34]

15.5.5 *The Criteria of Maurice de Sausmarez*

It will be recalled that Maurice de Sausmarez summarised the essential components of Basic Design under five headings.[35] The syllabus document for 1976 and the course documents for 1980 and 1988 will now be examined in the light of these.

The first assertion of de Sausmarez was that the Basic Design system demanded that the production of art must be based on the rejection of conventions. The principal

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[32] Course Document, 1980, 18; Course Document, 1988, 36.

[33] See Chapter 5.

[34] Syllabus Document 1975, see Vol. II, appendix 7, 782.

[35] See Chapter 6

reason for this approach was to enable the student to start with a clear slate and a mind uncluttered by rules, regulations and conventions that were seen as restrictive and detrimental to the creative process. This approach was considered as essential if the student was to see the world afresh. It would also leave the student free to develop his own personal view of the world. As stated already, this approach was part of the tradition of modernism and in particular of avant-gardism, which by definition rejects conventions. Thus modernist and avant-garde values were inextricably interwoven with the creative process as defined by the Basic Design system.

The rejection of conventions is both an inherent and explicit aspect of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975, and it is stressed in all the documents under review. It is closely bound up with that aspect of the curriculum which stresses that students must take a critical approach to the world and to conventions. The syllabus document of 1975 makes this clear. In recommending a particular approach to the creative process, an approach that it felt was essential if students were to develop as artists, it stated that students should focus on the "evolvement of ideas by means of creative thinking and constructive criticism."[36] The rejection of conventions[37] is alluded to a number of times in the same document. It is evident, for instance, where the document states that the efforts of students, and, interestingly, of staff, must be to break down the walls and destroy the division that exists between the world outside college and that within the college. In other words it must challenge the traditional view of art education and of what an art college is. As Ollie Whelan has stated, this was the approach taken by Nigel Rolfe and

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[36] Syllabus Document 1975, see Vol. II, appendix 7, 777.

[37] By conventions is meant traditions or habits of mind and practice such as figure drawing and the use of perspective, any approach to art that is associated with history or traditional aesthetic values.

Rob Smith on the studio floor.[38] There is a further allusion in this document to the rejection of conventions. It occurs where the document requests that the administration of the college show imagination and flexibility in relation to the needs of the Fine Art faculty, and in particular to the needs of students in that faculty. In doing this the document asserts the position of the fine art student as outside of the normal conventions of an educational institution. It stresses that fine art students will need freedom from the earliest possible moment after they enter the college, and that tension which emanates from the demands of the bureaucratic organisation that is the college will only interfere unnecessarily with this. It goes on to state that, as fine art students are being encouraged to think of themselves as artists, it would be better if means of accommodation were found within the college that suited the needs of these students, and if administrative rigidity was minimised on their behalf. Finally, the status of fine art as lying outside of normal conventions is stressed again where the syllabus for 1975 states that neither set classes, rigid timetables, or, alternatively, a university-based structure will suit the situation in the Fine Art faculty.

In the context of the conflict that resulted from the removal of the old regime in the fine art area at the National College of Art and Design, it is possible to speculate that the above rejection of conventions in the syllabus for 1975, as well as stating a curricular imperative, was trying to ensure some isolation from a college bureaucracy that may have supported the old regime. Whatever about this, the rejection of conventions has remained an important part of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty since 1975. For example, both the 1980 and 1988 course documents, under the heading "Course Curriculum Painting", state that "through discussions, critical

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[38] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see appendix 22, 1142.

analysis, and practice, we question the function of art in society."[39] Another example is provided by a first year project that was set by Nigel Rolfe in April 1980. In the brief for this project, under the heading of "principles", it is stated that the project will "question why and what and when art is a useful avenue for expression". It goes on to state that the project will "challenge more conventionally accepted ways of "art making" as an invalid and unnecessary interruption on an already over-complex forum".[40]

The rejection of conventions is an ubiquitous aspect of modern art practice in Britain. The iconoclastic work of the artists Gilbert and George is a perfect example of such work. The rejection of conventions in modern British art can be seen as an echo of Ruskin's rejection, in his search for truth, of the picturesque. It can also be seen as an extension of the concomitant aesthetic of truth to materials that developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, and ultimately of modernism as it developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Clement Greenberg, the leading modernist art critic of the post-war era, had a particular idea of why a critical approach to art was important. According to Greenberg, "The essence of modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticise the discipline itself - not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence."[41] Note the implicit reference to excellence and to a teleological progressiveness.

In the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout the

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[39] Course Document, 1980, 25; Course Document, 1988, 41.

[40] Course Document, 1980, 107.

[41] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" in *The New Art*, ed., G. Battock (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1966), 101-103. Quoted in E. A. Carmean Jr., "Modernist Art 1960 –1970," *Studio International* 188 no 968 (July/August 1974): 9.

period under discussion, and in line with contemporary avant-garde practice and with the thinking of Greenberg, students used criticism and the rejection of conventions as methodological tools. However, in the context of the polarisation of the faculty, criticism and the rejection of conventions as methodological tools were contentious issues and a source of conflict. The sculpture department was a particular source of contention. It was the inspiration, as already shown, for a number of students who took a very critical and confrontational approach to the making of art, and who also took a very aggressive approach to staff and students who did not share their aesthetic values. This approach on the part of these students was not just aimed at traditional art practice, but at contemporary art practice, particularly in the early stages of the course. The writer recalls the seriously disruptive effect of this attitude on the morale of students, on the work of students, and on the running of the faculty throughout his time in the college. As already stated, the dominant influence in the sculpture department was Nigel Rolfe.

As mentioned earlier, the model and idol of Nigel Rolfe, and also of many of the more confrontational sculpture students, was the German performance artist Joseph Beuys, who was one of the most influential leaders of the avant-garde in the 1970s and 1980s. Beuys, who created a personal mythology of dubious veracity,[42] with other performance artists throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties, shifted the emphasis from what the artist makes onto his personality, actions, and opinions. He was made Professor of Sculpture at Dusseldorf Academy in 1961 but was dismissed in 1972. He became a member of the Fluxus group in the 1960s, as did Noel Sheridan, and he was regarded by his admirers as a kind of guru.

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[42] D. B. Kuspit, "Beuys: Fat, Felt, and Alchemy," *Art in America* 68 (May 1980): 78-79.

The second requirement of de Sausmarez, in relation to Basic Design, was that information which we gain from an appreciation of the physical nature of materials, and in particular from their formal and spatial functioning, was as important as information restricted to the visible facts of nature. This requirement ties in with Read's demand that a prerequisite of art education is the cultivation of a sense of form. This aspect of de Sausmarez' program is addressed in the syllabus document for 1975 where it states that the student will be expected to "develop a residue of formal knowledge which will allow him to express his conceptual ideas with clarity and conviction".[43] Following on from this the syllabus goes on to state that an understanding of materials is a key aspect of the course. Continuing the theme of materials as a source of artistic creation the course document for 1988 states that "a number of procedural patterns will be used to explore the use of paint in an exciting and creative way, learning by discovering the diverse and interesting possibilities inherent in the material".[44]

The third requirement of de Sausmarez was that literary and other associations were ancillary to the creative process. This requirement is asserted in the syllabus document of 1975, where it states that one of the chief aims of the new course is to direct the student's mind towards the actual faces of reality, as opposed to the diverse faces of reality, in order to prevent him taking merely eclectic attitudes.[45] It is also asserted in the syllabus document, where it states that students must be sensitive to

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[43] Syllabus Document 1975, see Vol. II, appendix 7, 779.

[44] Course Document, 1988, 43.

[45] Syllabus Document 1975, see Vol. II, appendix 7, 779.

what exists and not to what the student believes to exist.[46] This was a key aspect of the curriculum, and it was reflected in the dismissive attitude taken by many of the new and visiting staff to work that was perceived by them as purely representational or expressionistic. These were styles that these particular members of staff felt were superficial. These same members of staff took the same dismissive attitude to styles of art or artwork whose validity was believed by them to have been accepted too easily and without question by students. This aspect of the course can be linked to A.N. Whitehead's assertion of systematic thought and an analytical and critical methodology as an antidote to the dogmatic finality which he felt was all too common in modern society.[47] In this context it is noteworthy that the new English staff in the Fine Art faculty felt that the staff who were associated with the Royal Hibernian Academy were dogmatic in their beliefs, and that their control over fine art education at the college was tenacious. As already pointed out, Campbell Bruce has stated that one of his chief objectives when he came to the college was "to take the college away from the tyranny of the Royal Hibernian Academy".[48]

Another key characteristic of the Basic Design system, according to de Sausmarez, was that the total personality must be involved in making aesthetic decisions, so that personal preferences therefore were an important aspect of truly individual expression. This feature of de Sausmarez' program is covered in the syllabus for 1975 where it is stated that in studying the world the student must always direct his enquiry through

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[46] The idea behind this approach was that students would take their inspiration from the world of their own experiences and that they would reject conventions and traditional ideas about art.

[47] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 208.

[48] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 873.

himself in order to reveal his particular "vision".[49] The work of Kathy Prendergast is a prime example of the efficacy of this aspect of the course.[50] The work of Gwen O'Dowd and Alanna O'Kelly provide other examples.

The final assertion that de Sausmarez makes in relation to the characteristics of the Basic Design system, which, as shown, echoes the thinking of Whitehead, is that art was not based on static concepts, but that it changed and extended its boundaries in response to the shifts of emphasis in the intellectual and emotional situation of each period of history. All of the course documents under review make it clear that they see art education as a constantly changing process. And, as is the case in the curriculum at Goldsmiths' College, this process is seen as a process that responds to the changing face of contemporary art practice, which is seen as influenced chiefly by the needs and demands of students. A curriculum that fulfils students needs, therefore, meets this aspect of de Saumarez' requirements. This approach to art education is very much part of the thinking of Noel Sheridan, who is Director of the National College of Art and Design at the time of writing and who was Director of the college throughout most of the period under discussion. Sheridan has said that he came to the National College of Art and Design with no particular agenda, "beyond the fact [that] we want to support the talent [of the students] and we want to be open to whatever it is that's on. If kids want to do video let's get video. You cannot go back to hand painting in oil on an

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[49] Syllabus Document 1975, see Vol. II, appendix 7, 779.

[50] One particular piece of work by Prendergast illustrates this approach. This piece is called "The End and The Beginning". It is three-dimensional and it is made up of a wooden spool and human hair. The spool is a typical spool for holding thread, and the hair, which is wound around the spool, is taken from three generations of Prendergast's family, Prendergast herself, Prendergast's child, and Prendargast's mother. This piece thus has a universal aspect – the spool of thread speaks to and for generations of people, and of women in particular - and a highly personal, almost totemic aspect. See Claire Schweider "Kathy Prendergast 'Lost Maps . . . and Other "Limbo" States'," *0044 Irish Artists in Britain* (Cork: Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, 1999), 128-134.

easel and think you have an art school."[51]

The close correlation between developments in British fine art education and developments in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin is illustrated by the striking similarity between the situation at Coventry College of Art, as described in Chapter 7, and the situation in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design between 1975 and 1988.

For example, in line with other British art schools in the post-Coldstream era, Coventry College of Art was free to evolve its own artistic standards. Thus the fine art department at Coventry had complete freedom to design its own course. This was also the case at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975.

The conflict between the avant-garde and formalism had a significant role to play in the curriculum at Coventry College of Art in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as shown in Chapter 7, as it had at the National College of Art and Design after 1975. At Coventry, as at Dublin, students were faced with two dominant styles, both imported from America and both of which saw art as a comment on art - formalism and the avant-garde. The authors of *Art Students Observed* state: "The avant-garde question the nature of art. . . . Their outlook is didactic and equalitarian where the formalists are more self enclosed and elitist."[52] Arising out of this polarisation, one of the principal aspects of the course at Coventry that worried students was that they were expected to question the validity of all art in the modern world. This questioning attitude was one of the principal features of the course at Coventry, and it led to much confusion among students, especially as

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[51] Noel Sheridan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 20, 1092.

[52] Charles Madge and Barbara Weinberger, *Art Students Observed* (London: Faber and Faber: 1973), 18.

no direction was given to students in order that they might cope with this situation. This conflict, between a form-based modernism with a history - formalism - and a radical avant-garde that rejects history, which led to problems for students at Coventry, was echoed in the curriculum at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975. The principal problem that students at Coventry faced was caused by the fact that, as shown in *Art Students Observed,* students were being asked in the fine art course to be hyper-critical of art and its institutions, and yet they were also being asked to produce art. This situation was echoed at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. At the college in Dublin, in the writer's experience, students were not given the tools to be critical; students learned by example and thus were vulnerable to fashions and fads. The difficulties that were created for students by this situation were exacerbated at the National College of Art and Design by the negative and critical approach of the new staff to old staff and to the work of students who did not support the values of the new curriculum.

Another similarity between the course at the National College of Art and Design and that at Coventry, and one that is related to the above problem, was highlighted in the belief of the authors of *Art Students Observed* that students entering art college were entering a maelstrom as a consequence of not being equipped to cope with the variety of styles – and the associated conflicts - available to them in art schools. This was acknowledged as a problem in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in 1984 by the external assessor in sculpture, Patrick Ireland.[53] As the authors of *Art Students Observed*

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[53] Patrick Ireland, "Report of External Assessor for Sculpture, Fine Art Faculty, National College of Art and Design", 1984, Typed Manuscript, File Number AR/ BH/ 1AD (3) February 1980-February 1990, National Council for Education Awards.

put it, art students were being socialised into a role that was extremely fluid and ill defined. The situation at the National College of Art and Design in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as Patrick Ireland recognised, was exactly the same in this respect as the situation at Coventry.

One of the most striking similarities between the fine art course at the National College of Art and Design and the course at Coventry was the contradiction between the two principal values that were held by the fine art faculties at both institutions: 1) individual freedom and autonomy, which gave students the idea that they could do anything they wanted, and 2) the need for rational explanations and a questioning attitude, which demanded explanations and justifications which students were ill equipped to handle.

A major source of complaint at Coventry that was also echoed at the National College of Art and Design was the belief that students could not rely on or expect staff guidance. At Coventry most students complained that staff didn't teach, and also that most staff were indifferent to students and to their work. The same criticism was made by former students of the National College of Art and Design to the present writer, whose own experience confirms this criticism.

Other striking similarities between the two colleges include the following: expressionistic and representational modes were generally discouraged; clear logical thinking was encouraged; art as a process of enquiry was stressed; personal development was stressed; students were confused by doubts about the viability of art in the modern world; students felt pressure to work in a certain way; the approach to drawing was the same at both colleges; an avant-garde faction at both colleges created discord; a number of students at both colleges complained that there was no course; there was a fine art bias in the pre-diploma course at both colleges; fine art students

were socialised into a particular set of values at both colleges; and, finally, fine art students were being socialised towards greater separateness as individuals at both colleges. In short, as shown in Chapter 7, both fine art courses were designed to encourage students to focus on themselves, their ideas, and the expression of these ideas, in a situation that contained within it the contradictory dimensions of rigorous criticism and total freedom.

15.6 The Influence of Developments in Fine Art Education in Britain on Irish Artists

The values of British modernist art, as encapsulated in the teaching methodology of the Basic Design system, influenced contemporary Irish art through the curriculum at the National College of Art and Design after 1975. This influence is amply illustrated by the work of a number of contemporary Irish artists who attended the college throughout the period under discussion. The work of Cecily Brennan is a particularly good example of such work, as is the work of Alanna O'Kelly, Paul O'Keefe, Aileen MacKeogh and Kathy Prendergast. A particularly apt example is the work of Gwen O'Dowd. O'Dowd's work provides a very clear illustration of the influence of the new post-1975 curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design on the mature work of one Irish artist.[54]

15.6.1 *The Work of Gwen O'Dowd*

True to the tradition of the Romantic Movement, and in echoing Rob Smith's principal preoccupation, nature is the primary source of the work of Gwen O'Dowd;

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[54] See Vol. II, appendix 9.

landscape is the inspiration for much of what she has created.

The most salient feature of O'Dowd's paintings is the heavily worked surface in which the materials and graphic marks form an integral whole; O'Dowd's work is noted for its particularly graphic aspect. These surfaces are very much engraved. They almost grow out of the materials. This interest in materials, surfaces and form, out of which O'Dowd develops themes and expresses her ideas, has an obvious link with the principles underpinning the Basic Design system. It is also of interest because of Rob Smith's particular preoccupation, as both an artist and teacher, with drawing, materials and surface. Smith, who was O'Dowd's tutor through most of her time at the National College of Art and Design, regarded drawing as a form of excavation. According to a number of students who attended the Fine Art faculty at this time, "Carve it out" was a common refrain of Rob Smith in exhorting students to greater effort in exploring the formal aspects of their drawings or paintings.

The formal methodology utilised by O'Dowd, in line with the principles that underpinned the course in the Fine Art faculty, is a combination of physical engagement with materials, exertion, and concentration on technique. It derives ultimately from a rigorous and systematic process that involves analysis of materials and forms. The very evidently worked surfaces of Gwen O'Dowd's paintings are very much the result of a prolonged engagement with materials and point to a complete immersion in that aspect of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty that focussed on materials and formal analysis.

In line with the principles that underpin the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty, painting, for O'Dowd, as stated already, is very much about process. According to Rosemarie Mulcahy, "Gwen is not interested in surface for its own sake, but as

evidence of how the image has evolved".[55] O'Dowd herself says that "through the process of destroying and re-making, the painting gradually emerges over time".[56] Destruction as an aspect of the creative process in O'Dowd's work (destruction is an important aspect of the work of Nigel Rolfe) implies that criticism is part of the methodology of the creative process for O'Dowd. In discussing her painting, *Bride's Veil*, for instance, O'Dowd says, "it became one of those obsessive images which one keeps destroying until eventually something resembling that first impression appears".[57] In discussing small works on paper, which sometimes figure in her artistic repertoire, and in invoking the approach to drawing which was favoured by the new English staff in the Fine Art faculty and which the 1975 syllabus described as a "very immediate, nervous, highly personal almost controversial basic language",[58] O'Dowd, says that "they are like a thinking process where one can explore different possibilities." The assiduous aspect of the creative process, as repeatedly stressed by Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith, and the concomitant importance placed on discipline and intensity of work in the curriculum - both of which relate to the inner sense of discipline demanded by Herbert Read - are echoed by O'Dowd where she says: "I always mistrust an image that comes too easily."[59] O'Dowd points out that a number of students who did the fine art course at the National College of Art and Design while she was a student there drifted off or lost interest during the first and second years because they "were not able

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[55] Rosemarie Mulcahy, *Gwen O'Dowd* (Dublin: Gandon Editions Ltd., 1993), 9.

[56] Ibid., 16.

[57] Ibid., 20.

[58] Ibid., 23.

[59] Ibid., 20.

to keep up that sense of self-discipline".[60]

Another important feature of modern British art, and of the Basic Design system in particular, as it manifested itself in the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, is reflected in O'Dowd's interest in working from sources and making preliminary sketches, studies and drawings. O'Dowd's constant reference to sources, and the role of sketches and drawing in her work, indicates close adherence to the methodology of the course in fine art in the late seventies and early eighties. According to Rosemarie Mulcahy, Gwen O'Dowd's "method of working in series involves numerous small sketches, made on the spot".[61] O'Dowd herself says that over time, for her, studies and sketching have become increasingly significant:

> They are essentially exploratory. . . . Every image has the potential of being seen in so many different ways, so that consequently a group of them often relate to one another in a series. Sometimes they can condense the atmosphere of a place or subject to the extent that they have a power out of proportion to their size. I find it [sketching] useful, particularly when I'm away.[62]

Continuing the theme of using sources in the phenomenal world, and in explaining the investigative aspects of her work, O'Dowd says that most art work is grounded in some real experience, as opposed to one that is superficial.[63] What O'Dowd means, presumably, is that she is interested in what lies behind perceived reality, in something that is much deeper and more fundamental than phenomena. This aspect of O'Dowd's work clearly relates to the assertion in the syllabus document for 1975 that the student must "direct his enquiry outside himself and towards the world. . . . This requires a

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[60] Gwen O'Dowd, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 16, 985.

[61] Mulcahy, *O'Dowd*, 9.

[62] Ibid., 20.

[63] Ibid., 13.

condition of sensitivity and receptiveness to what is, and not what he believes to be. . . . This awareness can be cultivated in the student by drawing."[64] O'Dowd goes on to state that her early work, though essentially abstract, reflected her immediate environment.[65] She stresses that for her it is important to work from subject matter, which, she points out, can be the materials that the artist uses. Significantly, according to O'Dowd, the investigation of these materials can be a creative force in itself. It is interesting to note, in this context, that O'Dowd states that she is not interested merely in the appearance or the precise look of a place. "What intrigues me more is the transience inherent in a place and that activity which is not always immediately visible."[66] This could be interpreted as a reference to Plato's ideal world, and the manifestation of its existence in the transient images of this world.[67] It also echoes Kant's idea that aesthetic experience connects the actual world with the metaphysical world.[68]

As well as enabling her to express herself through the development of a personal visual language by working from sources with various materials, art college also exposed O'Dowd to younger, living English artists who came to the college as visiting lecturers. These visitors, according to O'Dowd, made the process of making art immediate and exciting to her and brought her into contact with practising artists who were surviving as artists in the real world. She also points out that the scale of the

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[64] Syllabus Document 1975, see appendix 7, Vol. II, 780.

[65] Mulcahy, *O'Dowd*, 16.

[66] Ibid., 12.

[67] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 215.

[68] Harold Osborne, *Aesthetics and Art Theory* (London: Longmans, 1968), 113-130.

work of these artists opened up new creative possibilities in her own work.[69] Thus, O'Dowd found visiting artists inspirational and influential. O'Dowd stresses that these artists were mostly from England during her time at the college. It can thus be concluded that visiting artists played a particular and significant role in the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, as Campbell Bruce had envisaged.

O'Dowd says that the work that she produced for her first one-person show, which was held in 1984, was a continuation of what she had been doing at college.[70] There was thus for O'Dowd, who graduated in 1980, a seamless connection between art school and the real world of the practising artist. As the syllabus document of 1975 makes clear, this is normally considered a difficult transition to make. This easy transition from art school to the real world was made possible for O'Dowd by a number of factors. Firstly, as she was employed as a visiting lecturer at the National College of Art and Design between 1980 and 1986 she continued to maintain contact with the college. This situation minimised for her the usual difficulties that students faced on leaving college that were caused chiefly by the fact that on leaving college students found themselves isolated from the world of practising artists. It also, to some extent at least, provided O'Dowd with financial security. Secondly, on leaving college O'Dowd became involved with the first of the co-operative studio schemes in Dublin, which was located in Strand Street, and which was known as the Visual Arts Centre. Thus, O'Dowd also had an inexpensive studio space in which to work. The Visual Arts Centre, which is supported by the Arts Council, continues to provide studio space for artists today. As stated in Chapter 13, the Visual Arts Centre was a state sponsored

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[69] Mulcahy, *O'Dowd*, 12.

[70] Ibid., 16.

studio space for artists, which had been set up by Ollie Whelan and Gay Murray, both of whom were recent graduates of the National College of Art and Design at this time. As also mentioned earlier, Rob Smith also had a studio in Strand Street, thus enabling the continuation, for O'Dowd, of that aspect of the student-tutor relationship that saw the student and tutor as equals in the artistic enterprise. O'Dowd's experience illustrates the fact that a seamless connection between art-college and the real world of the professional artist was possible for some fine art students, and that this situation was made possible by the nature of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design.

In the sense that the Visual Arts Centre was a continuation of the art college situation, the success of the aspiration of the syllabus document of 1975 to break down the walls that exist between the real world and the world of the college is thrown into question. It might be suggested that the situation of those students who taught at the college immediately after leaving college, and who shared state-sponsored studio space with other such artists, were continuing the art school ethos, and were thus not breaking down the barriers that exist between the real world and the exclusive world of the art college. O'Dowd's situation was mirrored by that of other graduates of the college at this time, including the aforementioned Alanna O Kelly, Cecily Brennan, Aileen Mckeogh, Ollie Whelan and Kathy Prendergast.

All of the above artists supported the radical aesthetic values of the new regime in the Fine Art faculty, and many of these artists received significant financial support from government sources such as the Arts Council, the National College of Art and Design, and corporate sources such as Guinness Peat Aviation. This situation illustrates the fact that the values implicit in the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design were approved by the Dublin art world and by

state and corporate bodies that gave sanction to artists by supporting their work. Thus, the aesthetic values of modernism that were favoured by the Arts Council throughout the nineteen fifties, sixties and seventies, the aesthetic values of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art since 1943, and the aesthetic values favoured by the corporate buyers of art throughout the same period were now the values of the fine art curriculum at the National College of Art and Design.

In this context it is noteworthy that the rejection of conventions as demanded by de Sausmarez was an important part of the art school experience for Gwen O'Dowd. In the case of O'Dowd the chief convention that was rejected was, significantly, the Irish landscape tradition. In this context it is notable that O'Dowd criticises the tendency, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, to promote Irish landscape artists as a manifestation of the "Celtic Twilight". She also criticises the approach to Irish art that sees Irish landscape as exemplifying the "Irishness" of Irish art.[71] In addressing the theme of rejecting conventions, O'Dowd says that she found the work of the young English artists who were brought to the National College of Art and Design by Campbell Bruce when she was a student there to be more exciting than that of Irish artists. This was "because they were breaking with the safe tradition of landscape painting."[72] In illustrating the point that a complete break with the Irish landscape tradition has been achieved by O'Dowd she states emphatically that her work comes from a tradition that is more English than Irish.[73] Interestingly, in this context, the two contemporary Irish artists whose work, according to O'Dowd, she admires most are both English artists who have lived in Ireland for many years, Barry Cooke and Camille

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[71] Ibid., 13.

[72] Ibid., 12.

[73] Ibid., 12.

Souter.

Thus it can be concluded that the work of Gwen O'Dowd is an outcome of the modernist values that underpinned British art in the post-war period, the Basic Design system, and the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion. This situation, of course, does not preclude O'Dowd expressing Irish issues or themes in her work.

15.6.2 *A New Approach to Drawing: The Response of Irish Artists*

The influence of the Basic Design system and of recent British art are evident in the work of other Irish artists who studied at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion. This is particularly so in relation to the importance that many of these artists place on drawing as it was perceived in the new curriculum. Cecily Brennan, for instance, who studied under Rob Smith and Nigel Rolfe, and who was a contemporary of Ollie Whelan in the Fine Art faculty, states: "Drawing is fundamental to my work. However, the materials used and its application can take many different forms - as preparatory work, for the development and clarification of ideas, or as . . . a finished piece of work in itself".[74] In describing one particular drawing called *Ice Cube,* which was inspired, in the tradition of the Romantic Movement, by nature, and in the tradition of Basic Design by natural processes, she illustrates how the form of the medium is seen as an integral part of the process of expression: "It is one of a series of thirteen made as a result of a trip to Iceland in 1989. It illustrates how the subject matter can suggest specific materials. Charcoal seemed particularly suitable as a medium to explore the qualities of mud filled

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[74] Paul M. O Reilly, *The National Collection of Contemporary Drawing*, Vol. I (Limerick: Limerick City Gallery of Art, 1996), 20.

ice and scoring of the landscape produced by the glaciers."[75]

Kathy Prendergast, who was in the same year as Gwen O'Dowd and who is noted for working in a variety of media, in discussing the role of drawing in her creative development, says: "I would like my work to be seen as some kind of evidence of a private world. It is a separate reality which is inspired by, drawn from, parallel to, and yet very distinct from our world."[76] In illustrating the broad interpretation that the syllabus document of 1975 gives to drawing she goes on to say:

> My work involves many media, and moves between drawing and sculpture - often in the same piece. I mainly deal with the notion of identity in a personal way, and in broader terms, I take up the metaphor of landscape or mapping in conjunction with the image of the human body. The work is not about the 'grand gesture' or the monumental. It is about a more intimate and private relationship with the viewer. Because of this, it is often very detailed.[77]

Drawing is of major importance in the work of Prendergast who in recent years has been working on an ongoing project that involves making painfully detailed and intensely delicate drawings of maps of the major cities of the world. Maps have figured as an important theme in the work of Prendergast since her diploma show in 1980.

The approach to drawing asserted by Prendergast continues today at the National College of Art and Design where Donald Tesky and Joe Wilson both teach drawing. Tesky, who studied at the Limerick School of Art and at the National College of Art and Design, in describing a particular drawing, invokes the Romantic tradition and its preoccupation with nature. In doing this he makes an analogy, which would delight Wordsworth, between the physical process of drawing and the physical process of exploring the landscape.

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[75] Ibid., 20.

[76] Ibid., 116.

[77] Ibid., 116.

> The drawing process . . . seemed to echo the whole sensation of exploring the landscape. Climbing, falling, encountering obstacles and occasionally having to turn back or find alternative routes. Weather conditions and constantly changing light and shadows, sound and smell activating all the senses, the great sense of freedom you feel when hopelessly lost.[78]

By associating the production of art so closely with the act of being in nature and of exploring nature, this quotation illustrates beautifully the aesthetic values of the Romantic Movement, and again bring to mind Kant's ideas.[79] This quotation also represents an illustration of the idea of process as defined by the Basic Design system. Art was, after all, for the artists of the Romantic era, as Harold Osborne points out, "an analogue of the creative power of nature".[80]

Joe Wilson, who studied at Manchester Polytechnic between 1965-1969 - where Rob Smith had done his MA - and who teaches in Core, which is the common year that all students who study at the National College of Art and Design take, describes drawing in the following way: "For my purposes, drawing is an activity which oscillates between description and invention. It is also a record of and a witness to the experience of looking, noticing, remembering and repossessing, demanding a continuous updating and re-defining [of] its parameters."[81]

Finally, Samuel Walsh, who studied at the Limerick School of Art and Design and

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[78] Ibid., 126.

[79] In this context it is interesting to note the importance placed on line, as opposed to colour, by Kant. Kant states the following in the *Critique of Judgement*: "In painting, sculpture and in all the formative arts . . . the *delineation* is the essential thing; and here it is not what gratifies in sensation but what pleases by means of its form that is fundamental for taste. The colours which light up the sketch belong to the charm . . . but they cannot make it worthy of contemplation and beautiful. . . . The *charm* of colours or of the pleasant tones of an instrument may be added; but the *delineation* in the first case and the composition in the second constitute the proper object of pure judgement of taste." (Quoted by Lorenz Eitner, *Neo-Classicism and Romanticism 1750-1850* [London: Prentice-Hall, 1970], 99.)

[80] Harold Osborne, *Aesthetics and Art Theory,* 115.

[81] O'Reilly, *Contemporary Drawing,* 138.

at the National College of Art and Design, summarises the contemporary model of drawing in Irish tertiary fine art education in a particularly revealing way. In doing so he illustrates the influence of the Basic Design system on contemporary Irish art and the influence of that aspect of the Romantic aesthetic that focussed on reason:

> Art without drawing is like a body without a mind and like a life without breadth. Drawing is thinking. If I did not draw I would not think, and as I think, I can only make sense of those thoughts as drawing. Spoken language is unclear, corrupt and unspecific when uttered as an example of thought. Drawing is a more accurate vehicle for saying what you mean.[82]

It is significant, in relation to the correlation between the creative process and the process of drawing discussed above, that Rita Donagh was the external assessor appointed in the painting area for the year in which Gwen O'Dowd and Kathy Prendergast graduated. This is especially so in the context of the importance placed on maps as analogies in the work of Kathy Prendergast. Donagh, though a generation younger than the artists who developed the Basic Design system, shared the aesthetic values of that generation of artists; Donagh has for years been a close associate of Richard Hamilton. The extent to which Donagh's aesthetic values are rooted in the values of the Basic Design system is illustrated in the following description of her work, which might equally apply to the work of Gwen O'Dowd or Kathy Prendergast.

> Rita Donagh works with precision, gradually developing an idea through sketches, drawings and collages until it has been clarified ready for introduction onto the canvas. Each element in a painting is the culmination of a series of graphic investigations, interesting in their own right, but which function primarily as stages in a slow and ruminative process of addition, elimination and perfection.
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> The layers of meaning and association contained in each work are difficult to unravel, especially when they are hinted at only by marks or signs. For the paintings are not figurative illustrations of an idea, but rather closer to maps in which personal experiences and emotions - the topography of the artist's inner feelings - are plotted in a personally developed pictorial language. She invents analogues for states of mind, thoughts and experience in which every mark

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[82] Ibid., 134.

> contains a clue to some deeply felt concern. The coolness and delicacy of handling in the paintings and drawings belies the intensity of feeling that underlies each image. "I am primarily motivated by feeling and the desire to work things through that impinge on me emotionally. I don't paint for pleasure, on the contrary I find it almost too difficult. My interest is located in the idea and my work is an offshoot from the pursuit of that idea".[83]

The work of Rita Donagh, which is known for its socially conscious aspect, encapsulates the two most basic values of the Romantic Movement - that art has enduring social value and that art originates in the artist's own experience. These values, which have many different influences and offshoots, including the ideas of Kant, Ruskin, Morris, Gropius and Read, but above all the avant-garde values of modernism, are shared by many Irish artists today. Many of these artists acquired these values while attending the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design. The connection between the values expressed in the fine art curriculum at the National College of Art and Design between 1975 and 1988 and the avant-garde values that developed in France in the early nineteenth century that grew out of the Romantic Movement and that have influenced the development of British fine art education since the 1860s is encapsulated in the following quotation from the French writer Gustave Flauber. Flaubert was, according to Peter Gay, the founder of the avant-garde tradition, and, according to Pierre Bourdieu, the founder of the modernist conception of the author and the originator of the idea of 'art for arts sake' that led, through the influence of Alphonse Legros and Whistler, to the Aesthetic Movement:

> It is one of my principles that a writer should not be his own theme. An artist must be in his work like God in creation, invisible and all powerful; he should be everywhere felt, but nowhere seen. Furthermore, art must rise above personal emotions and nervous susceptibilities. It is time to endow it with pitiless method, with the exactness of the physical sciences.[84]

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[83] Lucy R. Lippard, ed., *Hayward Annual '78* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 78.

[84] Joyce Piell Wexler, *Who Paid For Modernism: Art, Money, and the Fiction of Conrad, Joyce, and Lawrence* (Fayetteville, The University of Arkansas Press, 1997), xviii.

15.7 Problematic Features of the Curriculum in the Fine Art Faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975

It is clear that there were major similarities between developments in British art in the post Second World War era which influenced the type of fine art education that developed in Britain at the same time and the course that was developed in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975. The similarities between the fine art courses that were run at Coventry College of Art and Goldsmiths' College, which were looked at in Chapter 7, and the course at the college in Dublin are adequate illustration of this point. It is clear also, as shown in this chapter, that the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the college in Dublin was effective in training students as artists along the lines suggested in the course documents that were looked at in Chapter 13. As shown in Chapter 14, it is equally clear, however, that many students found the course in the Fine Art faculty at the college in Dublin unsuitable if not a hindrance to their development as artists. In order to tease out the reasons for the difficulties that these students had with the course the features of the curriculum that brought about this situation in the Fine Art faculty at the college in Dublin will now be examined.

15.7.1 *The Introduction of the New Curriculum in the Fine Art Faculty after 1975*

The primary focus of the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion, according to the documentation, was to train artists to a high degree of specialisation along specific lines. This program, as shown in

the present chapter, precluded drawing in the traditional manner. Until at least 1981, the year in which the panel of assessors for the National Council for Education Awards visited the college in order to assess it for degree accreditation, the difficulties students faced in the pursuit of the objective of becoming artists were exacerbated by a number or issues. These included the absence of a clearly structured course, a lack of direction and clarity on the part of some members of staff, and conflicting ideological differences between staff.

The assessors for the National Council for Educational Awards who visited the college in 1981 found the fine art course unsuited to the awarding of honours degrees and the work of students in fine art derivative and unoriginal.[85] In explaining why the work of students was considered derivative and unoriginal, the panel concluded that, "many of the weaknesses evident in the work of students may be attributed to the lack of structure in the course".[86] The panel also felt that the focus of the course on student needs was restrictive, and that, as a result, "a much more structured learning program needs to be provided, at least until the end of the second year." The panel went on to state that, in its opinion, it was vital that, "at least until this stage, staff should actively direct the program rather than respond passively to students' interests or supposed needs".[87] It is evident that nothing much happened in the faculty to redress these problems as the lack of structure in the course was still evident in 1985 when the

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[85] The panel stated the following: "What the panel finds absent in the aims and objectives as set out in the submission, is an indication of the depth and rigour which would normally be associated with an honours degree course. There is little to suggest that this is a programme which will provide real intellectual challenge for the students or make demands on them." The National Council for Educational Awards, "Report of Panel of Assessors", 1981, Typed manuscript, File number B/AD/A9.4 CR 4, The National Council for Educational Awards archives, 2.

[86] Ibid., 5.

[87] Ibid., 5

Killiney seminar was set up. One of the reasons that the Killiney seminar was organised, according to Bruce Arnold, was to impose order on what was perceived by the Board of the college at that time as a disordered fine art course that had no structure.[88]

The recommendation of the assessors for the National Council for Educational Awards that staff should actively direct the program in the faculty rather ''than respond passively to students' interests or supposed needs" had been elicited as a consequence of the approach by the dominant staff in the Fine Art faculty to students in the period after 1975. This approach was based on the premise that student needs dictated course content - this premise still holds in the Fine Art faculty today where, according to Ollie Whelan, "the master is the slave of the student".[89] Adherence to this premise led to an approach by staff throughout much of the period under discussion which appeared vague and which was prefaced by a desire not to teach. Many fine art educators at this time believed that too much teaching by staff might interfere with the development of students. This approach echoes the thinking of Marion Richardson and other primary and secondary teachers in Britain in the inter-war period. These teachers had been influenced, as shown in Chapter 4, by the ideas of Franz Cizek. These ideas were taken up by Herbert Read and elaborated on in *Education Through Art*, which, as shown in Chapters 4 and 5, had a significant influence on the development of third level art education in Great Britain in the post-war years. Ultimately, of course, this approach has its roots in the demands of the artists of the Romantic Movement, as expressed in Caspar David Friederich's request, which was quoted in the Introduction to the present study, that students be allowed the freedom to develop as they

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[88] Bruce Arnold, interview by author, 27, January, 2000.

[89] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 1167.

themselves wished. These ideas influenced the reformative aspirations underpinning post-war British art education at tertiary level, and led to a situation where staff tried not to interfere with or corrupt the personal development of students. This was an honourable position to take, and it formed a key principle of the course in the Fine Art faculty after 1975. This approach to art education clearly helped students like Kathy Prendergast, who needed time to develop her ideas without the interference caused by a rigid course structure or academic and bureaucratic demands. This approach also helped independent minded students like Ciaran Lennon and Gwen O'Dowd who had clear objectives and clear ideas about what they were doing. However, it hindered students who did not know exactly what they wanted to do, students who wanted to learn specific or traditional art skills, and students who, for whatever reason, did not feel that they could agree with the values expressed in the post-1975 curriculum.

The success of this approach to teaching depends heavily on the successful implementation of the student-tutor relationship. In some cases this relationship worked very well. In other cases, however, as shown in Chapter 14, the success of this relationship has been called into question. The success of the student-tutor relationship depends on an atmosphere of support and encouragement for students, a coherent curriculum with some recognisable and unambiguous structure, and a clear set of aims and objectives. Until 1985, at least, this was clearly not the case in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design.

The principle that student needs dictated course content, which underpinned the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, was not universally accepted by teachers working in the modern mode in art schools at this time. The formalist artist and teacher Roy Johnston, for instance, who worked at the Belfast art school and who was a visiting lecturer at the National College of Art and

Design during the 1970s and 1980s, criticised this approach to art education. Writing in an article on American art schools that was published in the *Irish Times* in 1979, he stated that "the whole notion of student as artist [was to be] treated with some scepticism." In demanding greater commitment to teaching on the part of teachers in art schools, Johnston pointed out that, in his experience, "student enthusiasm and teaching commitment were interactive."[90] The issue of the curriculum addressing the student as an artist was also criticised by the panel of assessors for the National Council for Academic Awards, who visited the faculty in 1981. This panel stated the following:

> While agreeing that the course must be concerned with providing an education appropriate to an artist, the Panel finds this unduly limiting as the sole aim for an honours degree course. Given that the majority of students who complete the course will not become artists, the Panel believes that the course should be concerned primarily to provide for students an education in the visual arts, leading to a comprehensive understanding of these subjects.[91]

This criticism, as shown in Chapter 13, was eventually acted on, and the curriculum was modified to take account of it.

A significant danger that is inherent in the avoidance of a clear stance on the part of staff lies in the fact that students could misinterpret this approach to teaching as vacillation. This may partly explain the loss of confidence by a number of students in certain teachers at the college in Dublin. This situation was exacerbated, as shown in Chapter 14, by an excessively dogmatic and condemnatory stance on the part of the same staff when discussing styles that they felt were unacceptable. As happened in English art schools, this confused many students and it angered others. This situation

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[90] Roy Johnston, "Lessons from American Art Schools," *Irish Times* (Dublin), 21 June 1979, 10.

[91] National Council For Educational Awards, "Report", 1981, 2.

was exacerbated by the complete freedom that students were given by the curriculum. There is another danger inherent in this approach. This danger lies in the fact that students might interpret a desire not to interfere as a lack of interest. In fact, a number of former students who were interviewed by the author, including Simon McLeod, complained that staff did not show any concern for problems in the faculty or commitment to the development of students.[92] Such a situation had also prevailed at Coventry College of Art in the late 1960s.

The successful implementation of such a loosely structured course as that in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975 depends on a high degree of organisation, co-ordination and integrity on the part of staff. In particular, as stated above, it depends on the effectiveness of the student-tutor relationship and the successful implementation of this aspect of the course. The situation in relation to these issues in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design between 1974 and 1988 has been called into question, as shown in Chapter 14. This situation contrasts starkly with the situation at Goldsmiths' College in London, which was in many ways, as already pointed out, the model for the post-1975 curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the college in Dublin. The panel of assessors for the Council for National Academic Awards, who assessed the curriculum at Goldsmiths' in 1975, stated that it was the effectiveness and well organised nature of the student-tutor relationship, in particular, that enabled the successful implementation of such a loosely structured course as that at Goldsmiths'.[93] As shown by the effectiveness of the curriculum at Goldsmiths, a good working relationship between

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[92] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15.

[93] Council for National Academic Awards, "Report", 1975.

staff is vital to the successful implementation of such a course. Gwen O'Dowd, who taught at the Cork School of Art and at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin in the 1980s, found that, by comparison with the National College of Art and Design, where there were barriers between areas, there were no rigid barriers between areas within the fine art area at the Cork School. O'Dowd states that the reason for this difference between the two institutions was that the staff in Cork, by contrast with staff at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, got on well with one and other. Divisiveness between staff, then, was a major problem in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin in the 1970s and 1980s, and this divisiveness hindered the effectiveness of the new curriculum after 1975.[94]

Apart from the need for staff to work well together and to co-ordinate their efforts within some form of properly organised curriculum, or, at the very least, shared value system, the successful implementation of the type of loosely structured course that the new regime instigated in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design depends primarily on the development of a very close and supportive relationship between staff and students. It was for this reason that the student-tutor relationship was considered by the new regime to be the driving force of this course. It is significant to note in this context that, in the writer's experience, the most successful students to come through this course were those who developed close relationships with tutors.

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[94] The chasm separating the factions within the Fine Art faculty is neatly illustrated by the predicament of one particular student, as described by Charlie Brady. This student was given a college scholarship based on merit by the traditional faction, and yet was put on probation pending an improvement in his performance by the modernist faction. See Vol. II, appendix 10, 817.

15.7.2 *The Student-Tutor Relationship*

The syllabus document for 1975 stipulated that both students and tutors were to be involved in the continuing process of learning, and that the core of the pedagogic method was seen as the relationship between the student and the tutor. Tutors in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, according to Campbell Bruce, were seen as developing artists in the same sense that students were seen as developing artists. Tutors were envisioned as having the dual role of co-worker and mentor. This aspect of the course at the National College of Art and Design was similar to that at Goldsmiths', where Michael Craig-Martin stressed this relationship as one of the key aspects of the course. A major problem with this stipulation, and one of the greatest contradictions of tertiary level art education in Great Britain and Ireland since the changes that were brought about in the 1960s, was the demand, which was consequent on this stipulation, that lecturers be practising artists. Many fine art lecturers at this time, and in particular those associated with the avant-garde, were critical of academic structures and traditions. This is an attitude, as already stated, that grew out of the critical approach of modernism, and of avant-gardism in particular, to tradition in the arts. The contradiction lies in the fact that, because of their academic role and of their function in relation to students, lecturers in fine art departments, as Robert Pincus-Witten has said, "could hardly avoid a certain *de facto* academicism".[95] In this context it is interesting to note the irony of the fact that, as pointed out earlier, Nigel Rolfe has recently been appointed as Professor of Sculpture at the Royal College of Art.

The student-tutor relationship took on a special significance in the Fine Art faculty

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[95] Robert Pincus-Witten, *Art Forum*, (October 1971). 85. Quoted in Madge and Weinberger, *Art Students Observed* , 269.

at the National College of Art and Design in relation to the aspect of modernism that focused on criticism, and in particular on criticism of traditional approaches to art. As shown in Chapter 13, this critical approach to tradition had a significant role to play in the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the college. Crucially, however, it was taken out of context and reduced to the level of a fashion. As a result of this situation students were left ignorant of the historical and philosophical origins of this aspect of modernist practice, and as a consequence students produced much work that was mannered in style. The panel of assessors for the National Council for Educational Awards who visited the college in 1981 noted this fact, and recommended that changes be made in the curriculum to remedy this situation:

> It is understandable that students will be attracted to the current attitudes and concerns of the visual arts. However, an understanding of the nature and philosophy of these attitudes and concerns is essential and does not come about from imitation of imagery. It comes rather from an informed academic involvement and understanding of the issues underlying the imagery. In summary, the Panel found that the work of the students reflected a lack of balance in the course. We recommend that this balance be redressed through a reorganisation of the structure and curriculum of the first two years.[96]

The trap that students fell into, as Maurice de Sausmarez warned in *Basic Design: The Dynamics of Visual Form*, was that the critical approach of avant-gardism was in practice treated as a superficial methodological mechanism within the curriculum. As a consequence of this, many students took up an uncompromisingly and dogmatically critical approach with youthful enthusiasm. When this approach was combined with the factional situation that existed in the faculty throughout most of the period under discussion, particularly in the context of the anti-academic, reactionary, and defensive approach of some staff and students within the faculty, it provided much scope for

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[96] National Council For Educational Awards, "Report", 1981, 6.

abuse. This was particularly so when combined with the potentially manipulative aspect of the student-tutor relationship within the course. The student-tutor relationship thus contained within it the potential for abuse, and therefore it needed close monitoring. Such monitoring was lacking in the early years of the course.

The student-tutor relationship is a logical development of the master-apprentice relationship that was demanded by the Nazarenes in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is also a continuation of the system introduced by Orpen at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin between 1906 and 1914, as discussed in Chapter 8. This situation was repeated in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after the introduction of the new curriculum in 1975. The close relationships that formed between some students and staff after 1975 echo the relationship between Orpen and his favoured students, and, subsequent to his rise to power, between Keating and his favoured students.

Campbell Bruce describes the role of teachers in the student-tutor relationship in the following way:

> Through questions, practise and experience the individual should develop his/her own unique potential, language and skill using as a model for reference and as a standard, the major artists and thinkers against which students could assess their own sensitivities and achievements. . . . The function of the teachers in this situation is to encourage, reveal, and help the student to manifest those inherent qualities against agreed academic criteria and also to give the depth of their own experience to that development.[97]

In interview with the present writer Campbell Bruce stated that, in order to ensure that staff had some minimal depth of experience, graduates of the Fine Art faculty were not employed in the faculty until at least two years after graduation.[98] The tutor-

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[97] Aidan Dunne, *National College of Art and Design Decade Show* (Dublin: National College of Art and Design, 1986), 13-14.

[98] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 884.

student relationship, as shown in the last chapter, worked very well for some tutors and a number of students, who developed very close and supportive relationships. These relationships were particularly useful in helping students to bridge the gap between art school and the real, post-art school, world, a gap that is notoriously difficult to bridge. For many students, however, as already stated and as shown in Chapter 14, this system did not work very well, and many of these students, who were not perceived as destined to become professional artists, found themselves marginalised in the faculty. The general success of the student-tutor relationship within the post-1974 curriculum at the National College of Art and Design in the period under discussion is thus thrown into question. There are a number of reasons for this. One reason is that, given the nature of the factionalism in the faculty, there were clearly no agreed academic criteria against which the students could assess their own inherent qualities, despite Campbell Bruce's claim to the contrary in the above quotation. Also, as the panel of assessors for the National Council for Educational Awards pointed out, it is clear that until at least 1981 there was only a superficial understanding of the issues underlying the "academic criteria" that students adhered to. Another reason is factionalism, which led to the "depth of experience" of some teachers being excluded from what was acceptable. This situation is illustrated in the interview with Lorcan Walsh that is reproduced in the appendices to Volume II, and is demonstrated by the case of Domhnall O'Murchadha, as pointed out by Brian Palm, whose interview is also reproduced in Volume II. According to Palm,

> traditional sculptors in stone or wood or clay or whatever, I found, were frowned upon. There was one staff member, Domhnall O'Murchadha, who I hardly knew, but everyone sort of held him up as what by all accounts to avoid: traditional, classical, Celtic style stone carver. I always liked what he was doing. It never bothered me at all. In fact I was fascinated by Irish history, and I used to make regular pilgrimages to monuments: castles, ruins,

monasteries, Ogham stones, high crosses, graveyards, all around Ireland.[99]

Another problem regarding the depth of experience of teachers was that some influential teachers had very little depth of experience as artists working in the real world. Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith, for instance, had come directly from art school to the college, and Kathy Prendergast, Paul O'Keefe, Ollie Whelan and Andrew Folan were all recruited to the faculty immediately on graduation from college. Ciaran Lennon states candidly that he, as a teacher, left the college in 1982 because he felt that many of the students that he was teaching were more mature than he, and that he thus had little to offer them. There is thus a certain amount of hyperbole in the claim that there were agreed academic criteria against which students could measure themselves, and that the depth of experience of staff was an important aspect of the curriculum. Some students understood this, as the comments of Brian Palm and Lorcan Walsh make clear, and this often led to disillusionment for these students, and sometimes it led to confrontation between staff and students.

The stance of some members of staff, as teachers, in telling students what to do - or rather in making it clear to students in a dogmatic way, without telling them directly, that they were not to work in a certain way or that they were expected to work in a certain way - was seen by some students as inappropriate. It was also contradictory in relation to the claims made in the curriculum that staff and students were equal partners in the education process. This situation, as shown in Chapter 7, echoed what had happened at Coventry College of Art in the 1960s. The contradiction in this situation was magnified by the fact that many students had more experience of the real world than had some members of staff. There were students in the Fine Art faculty

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[99] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1008.

throughout the period under discussion who had spent time in the so-called real world in a variety of interesting situations before they entered the faculty. There were students who had lived and worked abroad, students who had travelled widely, students who had run their own businesses, and students who had worked as professional artists. These students consequently had greater depth of experience in the real world than had some of the staff. For instance, as Tom Ryan recounts and as the writer recalls, an ex-Royal Ulster Constabulary policeman who had run his own gallery in Belfast attended the faculty as a student in the late seventies. This student incidentally, and interestingly, had serious difficulties with the staff who represented the new curriculum, but got on very well with staff who represented the old curriculum.[100] The contradiction between what happened on the studio floor and the claim in the curriculum that students and staff were partners in the education process led to a diminution in the status of some staff in the eyes of students, as the comments of Brian Palm make clear. This situation led to conflict that interfered with the student-tutor relationship.

A significant problem with regard to the experience of staff, it must be stressed, was that for a significant number of staff, as already mentioned, their depth of experience was as teachers of art rather than as professional artists. In other words, their status as artists was dependent on the fact that they were teachers. In the case of visiting artists this situation was sometimes different, though not always. The course document for 1980, as shown in Chapter 13, acknowledged the existence of this problem. In stressing that it would introduce students to the attitudes of visiting artists who were surviving by their work this document points out that "this may not always

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[100] Tom Ryan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 19, 1084.

be true, since some visitors will be teachers from other colleges".[101] This is an important issue. It must be made clear to students that most graduates of fine art courses do not become successful artists. Very often this situation is ignored or disguised, with the result that students are in effect misinformed. This situation was exacerbated at the National College of Art by the fact that it was stressed that the curriculum focussed on training artists. As shown in Chapter 7, staff at Coventry College of Art talked about teaching as a career in derogatory terms and told students that they were learning to become professional artists, and that they were being taught by professionals. According to the authors of *Art Students Observed*, students at Coventry felt let down by staff when they realised in their final year that little other than teaching was available to them on graduation. The same situation prevailed at the National College of Art throughout the period under discussion.

Another problem with the student-tutor relationship in the period under discussion lay in the fact that some tutors did not take their role as tutors seriously. One particular former student, who was interviewed by the author but who wishes to remain anonymous, stated that her tutor, who, she claimed, rarely spoke with her, had neglected her and a number of her fellow students. As a consequence of this situation, she claimed, she and her fellow students were allowed to drift aimlessly. Another former student, who was interviewed by the author and who also wishes to remain anonymous, claimed that, because of the factional situation in the faculty and because of the bias in the faculty against figurative work, which was his particular interest, he intentionally avoided staff, his tutors included, by staying away from the college. In this context it is interesting to note that some tutors found the task of tutoring onerous and

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[101] National College of Art and Design, Fine Art Faculty, "Course Document", 1980. Campbell Bruce's files, 21.

others found it easy. Gwen O'Dowd, for instance, as shown in Chapter 13, has said: "You were entirely responsible for [students]. I found the onus far too much. You were working for five hours or six hours a week and you had maybe six to eight students to carry through the whole year".[102] Ciaran Lennon, by contrast, found that there was very little pressure on staff and that students did not need much support.

It can be concluded, therefore, that just as there were positive aspects to the tutor-student relationship throughout the period under discussion that had a beneficial effect on some students, there were also serious problems with the student-tutor relationship that had negative consequences for others. This situation was an echo of what was happening in Britain at the same time. In 1992 an HMI report established that there were problems with this aspect of third level art education in Britain, including a lack of appropriate skills among staff for dealing with the student-tutor relationship. This report suggested that because of difficulties with the student-tutor relationship the role of this relationship in the curriculum of art schools should be modified so that courses could be made more effective.

> Practical teaching . . . still too often comprises an unbroken diet of studio supervision and informal tutorials. The one to one teaching method that results may be likened to the traditional relationship of the artist and apprentice. On some courses one to one teaching is used wastefully for the dissemination of general information and the repeated support for individual students but often lacks clarity of purpose. . . . Individual instruction remains an essential element of successful art and design teaching but staff must develop the skills to deploy it more selectively.[103]

The same criticism could have been be made of the student-tutor relationship at the National College of Art and Design for most of the period under discussion. A lack of

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[102] Gwen O'Dowd, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 16, 994.

[103] Great Britain, Her Majesty's Inspectorate, *Higher Education in the Polytechnics and Colleges: Art and Design*, 1992, 13.

clarity of purpose, for instance, in the tutor-student relationship was certainly a problem in the Fine Art faculty at the college in the early years of the new course, and it led to abuses that fed into the factional situation in the faculty. One such abuse grew out of another aspect of the Basic Design system that needs to be addressed. This was the aspect of the course that focused on questioning, and in particular on the students questioning the role of the artist in society, a role that the student as potential artist was preparing for.

15.7.3 *Questioning the Role of the Artist*

One of the principles underpinning the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design was that students should focus on the "evolvement of ideas by means of creative thinking and constructive criticism." An important aspect of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975 that grew out of this principle was that students were expected to question their role as artists and the role of the artist in society.[104] As shown in Chapter 7, this was an ubiquitous aspect of British fine art education from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, and it led to a critical approach to tradition and established art forms in fine art courses such as those at Coventry School of Art and Goldsmiths College. Nicholas Pearson has the following to say of this aspect of British Tertiary art education:

> Of recent years art colleges have been fond of courses that are 'critical', 'questioning', and 'experimental'. Sadly, however, the 'questioning' has all too often been an unfocused, open-ended, and rootless invitation to half baked philosophising, imitative and shallow visual experimentation, and inflated claims for elementary soul-searching.[105]

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[104] Rob Smith and Nigel Rolfe, National College of Art and Design, Fine Art Faculty, "Syllabus", Photocopy, 1975, Campbell Bruce's files. See appendix 7.

[105] Pearson, "The Un-Publicness of Art", 22.

This approach to art, as already stated, is a legacy of modernism and has its origins in the Enlightenment and in developments that took place in the second half of the nineteenth century when men began to loose faith in progress. In explaining the source of this approach to art Carl Schorske, in *Thinking With History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism,* asserts its uncertain origins:

> No agreement yet exists on the great sea change in our culture ushered in by Baudelaire and the French Impressionists, and given philosophical formulation by Nietzsche. We know only that the pioneers of this change explicitly challenged the validity of traditional morality, social thought and art. The primacy of reason in man, the rational structure of nature, and the meaningfulness of history were brought before the bar of personal psychological experience for judgement.[106]

Apart from the obvious reason of adhering to the dominant aesthetic of the day - Greenbergian formalism - and of adhering to a basic principle of avant-gardism, the specific reason for this approach to artistic practice in fine art curricula was to encourage a genuine inquisitiveness. It would also, it was hoped, help students to avoid the production of fashionable artwork, a danger warned against by Maurice de Sausmarez, as shown in Chapter 5.

A positive aspect of this approach to artistic practice in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design was that it encouraged students to take nothing for granted and to question older art forms, thereby generating debate and discussion. This aspect of the course helped many students like Kathy Prendergast and Gwen O'Dowd, as it stimulated their creative endeavours, especially when combined with the freedom from academic constraints that the course provided.

In the context of the factionalism that prevailed in the faculty, however, this aspect

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[106] Gordon A. Craig, review of *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism*, by Carl E. Schorske, *New York Review of Books* XLV (August 13, 1998): 8.

of the course proved to be problematic, especially when combined with the dogmatic condemnation by some staff members of non-fashionable styles. In the case of some staff members, as already stated, this included all painting, which, regardless of approach, was seen as outmoded. As shown in Chapter 14, the sculpture department took a particularly vigorous approach to this aspect of the curriculum. A particular situation that the writer and others recall involving this department illustrates the danger posed by such an approach.

Under the influence of avant-garde ideas in the sculpture department during the academic year 1977-78 three particular students in the first year class took the idea of questioning their role as artists to extremes. As part of their creative work, and at a very early stage in the course, these students made a small room out of black plastic in the middle of the main studio floor. All students in first year shared this floor. The plastic room that was constructed by these students measured approximately ten feet by ten feet, and the three students concerned spent lengthy periods of time sitting in this room. The principal preoccupation of these students was questioning the role of the artist, and this involved a lot of discussion and writing in notebooks. These were trends, as shown in Chapter 7, which flourished at Coventry College of Art in the late 1960s and early 1970s under the influence of the Art & Language group. The preoccupation of these students with questioning the role of the artist affected other students in a negative way. The reason for this was that the three sculpture students who questioned the role of the artist behaved in an extremely hostile way towards other students who shared the same studio space. This was especially so in the case of those students whose chosen mode of working was painting or drawing. Painting and drawing were considered by avant-garde students to be archaic. There was no evidence of actual artwork being produced by the students in the plastic room, and, given the

absence of a structured programme or of any required project work, this situation continued for a very long time. Many students who shared the same studio area found the behaviour of these students disconcerting, and some had great difficulty working in such a hostile atmosphere. Combined with the very obvious factionalism that separated traditionalists from modernists and modernists from avant-gardists this situation led many students, especially those who were painting in a modernist fashion, to feel unsure and insecure. As a consequence of this situation many students avoided the studios altogether, and, given the absence of a structured course, this was easily done. This situation was, again, an echo of what had happened at Coventry College of Art.

The situation involving the above three students, which some members of staff encouraged, was of no benefit to either the three students involved or to the other students in the same year. The three students who were involved in the above activity of questioning their role as artists did not complete the course. Subsequent to the development of the above situation another body of students from a different year galvanised around the same avant-garde attitude and took a similarly hostile and confrontational approach to students and staff who were not associated with the avant-garde position. The hostile atmosphere generated by this group led to the confrontation between the painting students and the sculpture students, which was discussed in Chapter 14. It also led to a decline in the morale of many students who were affected negatively by this hostility. Quite clearly, then, the aspect of the course that questioned the role of the artist did not work as it should have done, and it led to abuses that impacted negatively on students. The primary reason for this was that it fed into the tension-ridden and factional situation that already existed within the faculty. Factionalism, in fact, was made worse by this questioning attitude on the part of students. In short, this aspect of the course caused confusion. It caused conflict. And,

contrary to its objective, it did not stimulate discussion, dialogue or creative endeavour.

Four years after the development of the above situation involving the three sculpture students the panel of assessors for the National Council for Educational Awards, which visited the college in 1981, noted the continued existence of divisiveness in the Fine Art faculty. This was particularly so in relation to the sculpture department, but also in the painting area. This panel also noted other deficiencies in the sculpture area, where, it felt, the course had not been well thought out.[107] It is particularly noteworthy in relation to that aspect of the course that encouraged students to be critical and to question tradition, the nature of art, and their role as artists, that the same panel of assessors stated the following:

> The panel found in students' work a marked tendency to concentrate on current imagery in an apparently superficial way and *a lack of any vigorous questioning of the nature of the study of fine art itself.* [Italics added]. The suggestion that the course promoted individuality was not demonstrated by the work shown, which in general, fell into certain fashionable categories.[108]

Interestingly, such a development had already been warned against in 1976 when an American academic, who visited Ireland in that year, said of the work of Irish fine art students that he had seen in a show in the Project Gallery:

> I felt much of the work was derivative. It consisted primarily of images and ideas transposed from various modern art movements as experienced by the students through art magazines. The images did not evolve from the integrity of their own personal environments. I felt a lamentable absence of interiority.[109]

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[107] National Council For Educational Awards, "Report", 1981, 2.

[108] Ibid., 6.

[109] Jim Sullivan, "Irish Art Education - A Visitor's Impressions," *Introspect* (December 1976): 10. Campbell Bruce was a member of the advisory board of this magazine.

From the above quotations it can be concluded that the production of original artwork did not necessarily follow from the questioning aspect of the course that was in place at the National College of Art and Design up to 1981 at least. It might be suggested that in many cases this aspect of the curriculum militated against the production of original artwork and against the development of students. Certainly it can be said that six years after the new curriculum was introduced, with the stated objective of encouraging individuality, it was concluded by a panel of assessors for the National Council For Educational Awards - the degree awarding body for the course - that it demonstrably did not encourage individuality. The principal reason given for this situation by the panel of assessors was the absence of a course structure. There were similar problems in fine art education in Britain in the 1970s. Nicholas Pearson had the following to say about this aspect of fine art curricula in British fine art education:

> Art colleges do need to question; but systematically, carefully, and with a sound grasp of their own history, position, and power.
>
> They need, if they are to re-locate themselves on a firmer educational and public foundation, a sure grasp of how they have come to be where and what they are.
>
> One of the things we can expect them to re-examine and re-think, whatever they choose to do in providing a general liberal education in art for those who seek it, is their role first as a support for a community of practising artists, and second as a training ground for many of those who go on to seek to practice as artists. In other words, they need to critically re-examine their responsibilities towards art as a public practice.[110]

15.7.4 *The Question of Skill*

One of the principal and stated objectives of the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design was to introduce students to a "range of tools and visual language", which would open up a number of career possibilities after college, or, as the course document for 1980 put it, "to provide the aesthetic and

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[110] Pearson, "The Un-Publicness of Art," 23.

technical information that will help the students to organise his or her work through a range of tools and language that will encourage optimal use of inherent abilities and motivation."[111] Although skill wasn't clearly defined either in the documentation or on the studio floor, except in the sense that it was not skill in the traditional sense, the development of skill was seen as an important part of the curriculum. The reason for this was the belief that had developed in the reformative context of post-war Britain that art had a practical role to play in changing society. This was a belief that was strongly held by Rob Smith.[112] Skill would be of use in this context because it would enable fine art graduates to play an effective, positive, and beneficial role in society. This aspect of the curriculum, which aspired to teach "the aesthetic and technical information . . . that will encourage optimal use of inherent abilities and motivation",[113] which was central to Campbell Bruce's philosophy, had the stated aim of creating employment. It had the broader aim, according to Bruce, of developing aspects of the student's creative self that would be of use in all walks of life, especially in relation to the ever-changing role of art, design, and media in the modern world. Though the curriculum was not precise in its definition of skill, what Bruce had in mind can be gleaned from the following statement: "We were not training painters or sculptors we were training people to be visually literate".[114] The implication that students were being trained in new skills; that is, in new ways of seeing and thinking, was rooted in

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[111] National College of Art and Design, Fine Art Faculty, "Course Document", 1980, Typed manuscript, File number AD 450/80 NCAD, The National Council for Educational Awards archives, 6-7.

[112] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1152-1153.

[113] National College of Art and Design, Fine Art Faculty, "Course Document", 1980, Typed manuscript, File number AD 450/80 NCAD, The National Council for Educational Awards archives, 6-7.

[114] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 887.

Herbert Read's ideas and in nineteenth century liberalism, and it was directly inspired by Gropius' vision of a new type of society. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the wording of the various course documents that assert the aims and objectives of this course reflect very accurately the stated aims and objectives of Walter Gropius' curriculum at the Bauhaus.[115] The assertion in the various course documents that students will acquire new skills reflects Herbert Read's idea that art develops aspects of the person that have relevance beyond the narrow confines of the art world. It also reflects William Coldstream's demand for a broad base of skills, as envisioned in his first report. In short, the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975 rejected traditional skills and set out to teach new skills. These new skills were seen as allied to perception, and included "aesthetic and technical information" that would have a role to play in transforming the relationship between the artist and society, and thus in transforming society. These new skills were not defined very precisely, either in the documentation or in the minds of staff. Despite this fact, it was stated in the documentation, and it was believed by staff, that the skills that students acquired would be of use in the development of students as artists, and that the same skills would open up a number of career possibilities.

The success of the aspiration to teach new types of skill in tertiary art education in Britain, where there was a similar approach to skill in fine art courses as at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, has been brought into question. Hazel Kirkham, for example, an officer of the Welsh Arts Council, writing in 1981, noted that "over a period of years, Welsh Arts Council officers have been conscious of a general lack of professional skills and awareness in many of the artists with whom they

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[115] Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996).

deal".[116] The success of this aspect of tertiary art education in Great Britain was also questioned by the report of the Society for Research into Higher Education of 1982, which was examined in Chapter 6. This report pointed out that the narrow focus of the curricula in various English art schools on the training of artists had led to premature specialisation by students, and that this in turn had led to many students failing to acquire the broad range of skills that had been envisioned by Coldstream. Given the statistical fact that, of all graduates of British art colleges, fine art graduates had the greatest difficulty finding work, the success of this aspect of tertiary level art education in Britain since the publication of the Coldstream Report of 1960 is thrown into serious doubt.[117]

The effectiveness of this aspect of tertiary level art education in Ireland is also thrown into serious doubt when the financial situation of Irish artists is examined. A report produced by the Artists Association of Ireland in 1999, for example, established that while 86% of Irish artists had received third level education, sixty seven percent of Irish artists had an annual net income below £5000 in 1997. It further stated that fifty two per cent of Irish artists earned less than £2500 annually, and only five per cent earned more than £20,000 – this, it must be stressed, was in the middle of an economic boom. The same report showed that sixty percent of artists earned their income in areas that are not art-related.[118] The clear implication here is that useful and saleable skills are in short supply among artists educated at tertiary level in Ireland. It is

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[116] Pearson, "The Un-Publicness of Art," 23.

[117] John Brennan and Philip McGeevor, *Graduates at Work: Degree Courses and the Labour Market* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1988), 147-149.

[118] Stella Coffey, *Visible Invisible: A Strategic Review of the Visual Art Market in Ireland: Recommendations for a Developmental Approach* (Dublin: Artists Association of Ireland, 1999), 102-105.

interesting to note in this context that in Britain it has been suggested that the Basic Design system of art education had a negative effect on secondary level education precisely because fine art students, many of whom become teachers at second level because of the difficulties of surviving as artists – unlike design graduates who found employment more easily, graduated without having learned any transferable skills.[119] In conversation with the present writer a number of graduates of the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, who attended the college in the period under discussion, complained that they had learned no useful skills while studying fine art, and that they would have been better off today had they done so. Apart from the above report by the Artists Association of Ireland there is no further or more detailed information available on the career destinations of fine arts graduates in Ireland, especially in relation to the National College of Art and Design. There is a need for such information.

A recent anonymous article in the *Arts Bulletin*, the journal of the Artists Association of Ireland, showed that there was general agreement among eleven graduates of fine art courses in Ireland who finished college in 1998 that the training in professional skills that they needed to survive as artists was lacking in the fine art courses that they had pursued in different but unnamed colleges throughout Ireland. The particular problem that the eleven students who were interviewed had was in making the transfer from the closed, secure, and supportive situation of the art school to the real world of the artist. The author of this article states that "some [students] recalled leaving college without knowing practical basics such as how best to follow

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[119] Robert Clement, "Art and Design Education: Theory into Practice," Journal of Art and Design Education 7 (1988): 261-273; Leslie Cunliffe, "Tradition, Mediation and Growth in Art Education." *Journal of Art and Design Education* 9 (1990): 277-288; Idem, "Basic Design Teaching into Secondary Art Education: James Bradley at Sidcot School" *Journal of Art and Design Education* 12 (1993): 201.

application procedures, the regulations applying to CE schemes, or the nuts and bolts involved in the business side of working as an artist".[120] While this article does not address itself specifically to the National College of Art and Design, it makes a general criticism of the situation in Irish art schools.

This article raises the issue of the training of students in a broad range of skills, from the specific skill of drawing to the more general skills that will help them to survive as artists, and it points to the fact that difficulties associated with the acquisition of skill is an ubiquitous problem in fine art education.

The course documents for the Fine Art faculty that cover the period 1975 to 1988 are informative in relation to the question of skill and the career destinations of graduates, because they reveal the misleading attitude taken by the curriculum to this issue. For example, the syllabus document of 1975 and the course documents of 1980 and 1988 give the impression, correctly, that the course in the Fine Art faculty between 1975 and 1988 produced successful artists. However, they also gives the impression that the course prepared students fully for the role of the artist by implying that it gives students the skills that are needed to carry out this role. The course documents for 1980, 1983 and 1988 that the present writer has seen, for instance, list the names of students who have graduated and their occupation at the time that the course documents were written. In doing this, in the writer's opinion, the course documents put a positive spin on the situation of graduates. The information in these documents is, thus, at worst biased in order to give the impression that many students become successful artists; at best it is misleading. A number of former students who were known to the writer and who are listed as artists in these documents were not making a

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[120] "The Big Chill", *Art Bulletin* 18, no. 98 (Apr/May 2001): 3.

living as artists at the time that they were written or, indeed, today. At best the information contained in these documents is a rough description of what former students were doing at the time that they were written. The documents do not contain any statistical information about graduates that might impact negatively on the perception of the curriculum: how many students failed the course for instance, how many students abandoned the course, or how many graduates have left the area of art for other careers. The course document for 1983, for example, listed thirty-one graduates as making a living as teachers, and thirty-nine as "occupation not known". This was out of a total of one hundred and eleven students. The rest were either listed as artists or as being engaged in further study. This information is vague and gives the impression that a significant number of graduates become successful artists and that most graduates gain employment.

A calculation made by the present writer based on a group of eighteen students who are listed in the course document for 1980 as having graduated with a National Council for Educational Awards Diploma in fine art in 1980 gives the following breakdown. Seven work today in areas that are not related to art. Three are today successful artists; two of these earn their living as artists - both of these students started teaching at the National College of Art and Design immediately after they graduated. Two students became teachers at second level and one at third level. One student works in an area related to art. The writer does not know the occupation of four of these students. A further ten students whose names are not listed in the course document and who began the course in 1977 are not listed as having completed the course. Two of these students are today successful practising artists who work at the National College of Art as lecturers. Given that the eighteen students who graduated with a diploma in 1980 had the option of spending an extra year in the faculty in order

to qualify for a degree in 1981, it is significant that only seven of the eighteen students chose to do so. Some of those students have said to the author that the only reason they stayed on was because there was nothing else for them to do, the extra year staved off the real world. In short, out of a total of twenty-eight students who enrolled on the fine art course in 1977, only seven, when given a choice, after they had acquired a diploma, pursued the course in order to obtain a B.A. degree; only five of the twenty eight students, four of whom either teach or have taught at the National College of Art and Design, are successful artists.

It is quite clear, then, that in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout most of the period under discussion there was a dearth of skill training. This was partly a consequence of a deliberate effort to play down the teaching of traditional skills. It was also a consequence of the vagueness of the aims and objectives of the new curriculum after 1974. The lack of structure in the course that was caused by the fact that the curriculum was defined by the "needs" of students and staff as developing artists contributed to this situation. Another problem in relation to the teaching of skill was caused by the fact that in the early years of the course, as Professor McCarthy's interviews show, the interests of many students were confined to the purely formal aspect of art in the specialised area of the student. Thus, students did not learn or demand skills that would be of use beyond their immediate requirements within the closed art school situation. This situation was made worse for many students by a shortage of materials.

Ollie Whelan states that the interests and ideas of the people who actually taught the course defined the course in the Fine Art faculty throughout the period under discussion. Given that the interests of staff define the course, and given that the staff represent a diversity of interests that sometimes conflict, there is an inherent danger in

this situation. This danger lies in the fact that such diversity of interests and styles creates a situation where there is in effect no course to guide students, just a diversity of people to influence students. This situation was exacerbated by the lack of structure in the course and by the fact that the staff were seen as individual artists who were not tied by bureaucratic demands, especially in the first year of the course. Another danger lies in the fact that the interests and biases of staff, given that individual staff members chose what and how they taught, might lead to a very closed and hermetic, even solipsistic, situation. This was especially so given the ghettoization that was caused by the factionalism in the faculty. This danger was exacerbated by the fact, as Ollie Whelan points out and as stated earlier, that students could have the same tutor for two years in succession.

Given the absence of a structured course for much of the period under discussion and given the lack of training that was caused by a lack of structure in the course, this situation was not conducive to the effective education of students or to their acquisition of skill. This situation was exacerbated by an anti-academic attitude that was taken by many in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in the 1970s and 1980s. This was a common attitude in fine art faculties throughout Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, as shown in *Art Students Observed*. Michael Craig-Martin noted this aspect of fine art education in Britain when he first arrived there in 1966. He has stated that the lack of academic training that he found to be common in British tertiary art education, by contrast with what he had experienced in America, surprised him. Criticism of the academic aspect of fine art education was not just confined to some students and to avant-garde members of staff. Patrick Ireland, who was an external assessor in the Fine Art faculty from 1983-1988, while praising the course, suggested that the emphasis on art history within the course might limit the

freedom of students to express themselves.[121] It is not surprising then that the panel of assessors for the National Council For Educational Awards, which assessed the fine art course in November 1981, suggested that students be given an understanding of the nature and philosophy of the underlying attitudes and cannons of contemporary art. This understanding, they hoped, would in turn give students an informed understanding of the issues underlying the images with which they worked. In doing this the assessors for the National Council for Educational Awards hoped to enable the students to produce work that was less fashionable and superficial and more considered than was the case when they assessed the course.

In summary, after 1975 traditional skills of the type associated with the neo-classical tradition were considered obsolete by those who supported the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design. These skills were replaced in the new curriculum by an emphasis on a different and more general type of skill, which, as shown above, was not defined in a precise way either in the documentation or in the minds of staff. It was believed by Campbell Bruce that these new skills would not only equip the student to perform the role of the artist in society, but also to cope with a variety of situations and careers in the real world after college. Drawing was considered to have a vital role to play in this context.

15.7.5 *Drawing: A Key Aspect of the Curriculum*

The development of each individual student's ideas by enquiry into the world of phenomena was the particular focus of the course in the Fine Art faculty between 1974 and 1988. Having established this objective as the principal focus of the course, the

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[121] Patrick Ireland, "Report of External Assessor for Sculpture, Fine Art faculty, National College of Art and Design", 1984, Typed manuscript, File number AR/BH 1AD (3) February 1980-February 1990, National Council for Educational Awards archives.

syllabus for 1975 states that the student must direct his enquiry "through himself and towards the world."[122] This statement is illuminating in relation to the role that drawing was to play in the curriculum, but also because it illustrates a particular focus within the curriculum which is important in art historical terms. This was the focus of the curriculum on the individual and on subjectivity.

In art historical terms there were two important, related and sometimes conflicting influences on the curriculum throughout the period under discussion. Both of these influences are evident in the documentation, in the comments of students that are quoted in Chapter 14, and in the comments of staff that are recorded in the appendices to Volume II. These influences are pivotal on a key change in the development of abstract painting in the twentieth century, which reflected a change from the hegemony of European ideas to the hegemony of American ideas in modern art. The quotation from the syllabus document of 1975, which was quoted above, states that the student must direct his enquiry "through himself and towards the world", and locates the thinking behind the curriculum in the context of this change. Thus was established the influence of American thinking on the post-1975 curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. The same quotation also echoes the thinking behind the curriculum at Goldsmiths' - it is significant in this context that Michael Craig-Martin is American. This change in the development of abstract painting in the twentieth century is a change from one approach to abstraction to another. The first approach to abstraction is illustrated by the work of the great European painters, Wassily Kandinsky, Kasimir Malevich, Piet Mondrain, and the English painters who were associated with Constructivism in the 1930s. These English artists included Clive

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[122] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 779.

Bell and Rodrigo Moynihan, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4 - Moynihan, it will be recalled, was Professor of Painting at the Royal College of Art when Campbell Bruce was a student there. This approach to abstraction sought inspiration in science, and it aspired to connect with what was considered by these artists to be a deeper sense of reality than the reality of everyday life. This deeper sense of reality was to be approached, according to these artists, by challenging the primacy of the material world and by emphasising forces and processes over things. The second approach to abstraction is illustrated by the work of the American Abstract Expressionist painters, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Clifford Still. The approach of these American artists, by contrast with that of the European artists, was purely subjective. Ciaran Lennon, who worked in the faculty in the late 1970s and early 1980s, very consciously took the American approach to art:

> This thing about painting about things collapsed with American Art. The [American] artists embodied what they did. So Pollock was not about Greek mythology any more. Pollock was mythology. It was as if Cezanne hadn't any mountain to look at, that he was just Cezanne without the mountain. . . . It meant that you would never be stuck for a subject because what was going on in your life would always be what your work was about.[123]

Lennon considered this new American approach to abstraction to be fundamentally different to English modernist art, which, he states, was closer to the European model. These two different approaches to abstraction are summarised in the following quotation, which is taken from a review of *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still*, by John Golding:

> While the European abstractionists were concerned with articulating a universal understanding of objective reality, the American abstractionists wanted to achieve universal meaning through deep subjectivity. The Europeans, as Golding notes, "had achieved their absolutes, had purified and purged art, by in a sense painting themselves out of their pictures, whereas the

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[123] Ciaran Lennon, interview by author, See Vol. II, appendix 13, 933.

> Americans were trying to achieve some of the same ends by painting themselves totally into their canvases, by stepping up and into them, even in an odd way by becoming art." For the Americans, painting abstractly was synonymous with self-knowledge. "I paint only myself, not nature," Clyfford Still asserted. And Pollock, when asked why he did not paint from nature, famously responded, "I am nature." "Painting," he flatly stated, "is self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is."[124]

The method of studying and practising art that was expressed in the syllabus document for 1975 and that developed throughout the period under discussion encompassed both of the above approaches to abstraction, but focussed more on the American approach. In doing this it echoed the approach to teaching that Johannes Itten introduced at the Bauhaus, which focused on an intuitive and personal response to materials, to art, and to the world. It also encompassed the approach of the Basic Design system.

Fundamental to this approach to the making of art was the act of drawing; drawing, as shown in Chapter 13, was seen as a reflexive and critical activity, which was defined in syllabus document of 1975 as a "very immediate, nervous, highly personal, almost conversational basic language". Drawing was considered important because of its formal aspect and its abstract possibilities. It was particularly important, however, because of its personal and subjective aspect. The stated purpose of drawing, as the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion saw it, and as shown above, was "to increase the student's vision, but also to increase his freedom."[125] Drawing in this context was no longer seen as skill based and pedagogic but as personal and expressive. It was also seen as explorative and analytical, as established in the precedent for the post-war

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[124] Jack Flam, review of *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still*, by John Golding, *New York Review of Books* XLVIII (April 26, 2001): 12

[125] See Vol. II appendix. 7. 780.

generation of artists and students of Giacometti's work, as shown in Chapter 12.

The syllabus document for 1975 states that the students' awareness of the world will be cultivated by their seeing drawing "as a . . . basic language."[126] Drawing, as the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty after 1975 defines it, thus fulfils the criterion of Basic Design that the focus of art education is personal development through creative thinking and interaction with materials. This aspect of the course, which dominated the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion, has been one of the most enduring, and, as shown above, it is manifested in much artwork produced by graduates of the college today.[127] This approach to drawing has effectively replaced the neo-classical and the realist approach in most modern Irish art educational institutions. With the advent of post-modernism this approach to drawing has been challenged and consequently there has been a broadening in the approach taken to drawing by contemporary Irish artists. This change has implications for the current curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design but is outside of the scope of the present study.

While there was a specific idea of what constituted drawing in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design between 1975 and 1988, there was no specific or precise definition of drawing to guide students. It is clear from the 1981 report of the panel of assessors for the National Council for Educational Awards and from the Killiney seminar of 1985 that throughout most of the period under discussion the issue of drawing as it was defined in the Fine Art faculty was problematic.

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[126] Ibid., 780.

[127] See illustrations in the catalogue to the exhibition that was held in the Royal Hibernian Academy on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the National College of Art and Design. National College of Art and Design. *NCAD 250: Drawings 1746-1996.* (Dublin: National College of Art and Design, 1996)

According to Professor McCarthy, the approach to drawing that was adopted in the Fine Art faculty after 1975 has caused a dearth of traditional drawing skills in art education today at all levels. These skills, according to Professor McCarthy, once lost are permanently lost, because once these skills are gone there is no way to recover them. Thus, she points out, there is now a situation in teaching at second level in Ireland where many Irish art teachers do not have drawing or traditional art skills. As already stated, Professor McCarthy points out that, as Professor of Education, she had to introduce a drawing examination for students from the National College of Art and Design itself who had applied to do the teacher training course at the college. She did this, she claims, in order to ensure some minimum standard of drawing among Irish art teachers. Professor McCarthy has stated that, with exceptions, she found that students who came to the Education faculty from the Fine Art faculty, by contrast with those from the Design faculty and from other colleges, generally lacked drawing skills. Brian King has stated in response to this criticism that the approach to drawing taken by the Fine Art faculty was completely different from that of the Education faculty.[128] The type of drawing favoured by the Education faculty was, he states, a requirement of the Department of Education and was defined by the needs of students as potential teachers. This response reveals an inadequacy in the fine art curriculum, given, as already stated, that many, if not most, fine art graduates in the period under discussion took up teaching at second level as a career.

When asked to define drawing as it was perceived in the faculty in the 1970s and 1980s Brian King stated that it was not possible to say exactly how drawing was defined in the faculty at this time, other than to state that it was not the skill of drawing

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[128] Brian King, interview by author, 12 March 2001.

in the neo-classical sense. There were thus two conflicting approaches to drawing at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion, the traditional approach that was favoured by the Education faculty, and the new approach favoured by the Fine Art faculty. It is clear from this situation that there was a specific and exclusive view of drawing, as opposed to a pluralist view, in the Fine Art faculty throughout the period under discussion. According to the documentation, and as shown in Chapter 13, there was an effort to redress this imbalance between 1983 and 1988. According to some staff in the Fine Art faculty at this time, and also according to Professor McCarthy and Tom Ryan, this was not the case.

In summary, throughout the period under discussion drawing was defined by the new regime in the Fine Art faculty in a specific way that was clearly related to developments in contemporary art. Drawing as it was thus defined was not seen as media specific but was seen as encompassing a variety of materials dictated by the needs of the student. Its function was to free the student's imagination and to provide an avenue to the exploration of the student's ideas. This approach to drawing is evident in the work of many contemporary Irish artists. However, there were other approaches to drawing in the faculty that reflected different traditions and that are equally evident in the work of contemporary Irish artists. The work of Carey Clarke, Charlie Cullen, and James Hanley are some examples of this type of work. Throughout most of the period under discussion these styles did not receive the support that they might have in the Fine Art faculty. Towards the end of the 1980s this situation changed and, in the writer's opinion, while there does not appear to have been much support for traditional drawing skills and for the neo-classical or New English Arts Club approach to drawing, officially there was a more pluralistic approach to drawing, which continues today. This change was clearly a response to the report of the panel of

assessors from the National Council for Educational Awards who visited the college in 1981 and to the Killiney Seminar of 1985. It was also a response to changing fashions in the art world and in particular the fashion of New Expressionism that was popular in the 1980s.

15.7.6 *The Problem of Eclecticism*

In echoing the fears of Maurice de Sausmarez about the production of merely fashionable work by students, the syllabus document for 1975 pointed out that the most difficult task of tutors would be to "prescribe the limits of beneficial eclecticism, to the extent that it is understood as such and may improve technical skills, or to recognise elements of original organisation as they become manifest in each work."[129] It is inevitable in an art school that students will produce work that is derivative, because the process of making art is in many ways about building on the work of others. Tinteretto's achievements were built on the achievements of Titian, which were built on the achievements of Giorgione, which in turn were built on the achievements of Giovanni Bellini, which were built on the achievements of his father Jacopo Bellini, and so on. In a modern context, as shown in Chapter 7, the curriculum at Goldsmiths', as envisioned by Michael Craig-Martin, was a logical outcome of the progressive development of modernism, where the current focus on ideas is seen as a continuation of the formal evolution of art in the twentieth century. Given the preoccupation of the post-1975 curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design with individuality, originality, and personal development, in the context of developing the ideas of students, the issue of influence was particularly important. The above

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[129] See Vol. II appendix. 7, 782.

quotation from the syllabus document of 1975, which addresses the role of staff in relation to eclecticism, thus illustrates a key concern of the curriculum.

At Goldsmiths' College there was a similar awareness of the dangers of eclecticism. According to the panel of assessors for the Council for National Academic Awards who visited Goldsmiths' in 1975, the staff "were well aware of the possible dangers, as well as the virtues, of the kind of course they [were] offering."[130] The panel went on to point out that the very tight and efficiently run tutorial system at Goldsmiths' minimised the dangers of such a course by ensuring that students were carefully monitored at all stages of development. The panel noted that at Goldsmiths' students were working seriously and with great commitment, and that there was clear progression in the students' programme of work. This problem of eclecticism was thus not a serious problem at Goldsmiths', because different departments and areas within the Fine Art faculty worked well together

By contrast, and despite the concern over the issue that was shown in the syllabus document for 1975, eclecticism was a problem in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, as the National Council For Educational Awards report of 1981 makes clear, and much derivative work was produced as a consequence of this problem. One particular problem in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design was that students, because of factionalism, were overly influenced by individual members of staff, as the case of Nigel Rolfe and the influence of the avant-garde within the faculty illustrates. The failure in this case was clearly on the part of the staff, and, in the context of the quotation from the syllabus document of 1975 that was cited above, this situation raises questions about the effectiveness of the student-

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[130] Council for National Academic Awards, "Report", 1975, 3.

tutor relationship. A key problem for young students in the context of the factionalism in the faculty was that unnecessary pressure was put on them by the perceived need, as expressed in the written documents and as made clear to students on the studio floor, to take on the role of the radical artist. The role and status of artist was best achieved by the student acquiring a style and an artistic persona as quickly as possible after he or she entered the faculty. This situation was encouraged by the absence of a structured course and by the underlying assumption of the curriculum that the primary aim of students was to become artists in a particular sense. This development was exacerbated by the absence of guidance by staff, by the factionalism mentioned above, and by the preoccupation with originality in the course and in contemporary culture.

This problem was not unique to the National College of Art and Design. It was also a problem in Great Britain. The report of the Society for Research into Higher Education of 1982, which was looked at in Chapter 6, found that it was in the very nature of fine art courses in British art schools to encourage premature specialisation, and that this led to the production of much derivative work by students. By contrast with what was happening in the US, where he had trained, this situation struck Michael Craig-Martin as an unusual aspect of British tertiary art education when he arrived in Britain in the 1960s. In this respect, then, the situation that prevailed at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion echoed what was happening in Great Britain. The tightening up of the course in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in the late 1980s helped to diminish this problem. As the structure of the course in the faculty has remained essentially the same since 1974, however, the changes that took place in the 1980s did not eliminate this problem, which remains to this day a characteristic of fine art education in both Ireland and Great Britain.

Throughout most of the period under discussion Eclecticism and fashionableness were salient features of the course in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design. There were three chief causes of this situation: 1) the excessive focus of the course on the training of fine artists, which led to premature specialisation; 2) the neglect of students that was caused by lack of structure in the course, which allowed many students to drift into confusion and aimlessness, thus making them vulnerable to eclecticism; and 3) the tendency of some staff to attract students as followers. The feeling of some students that they could never hope to become successful artists brought about a particular problem that was associated with the excessive focus of the course on the training of fine artists. The reason for this was that it caused many students to lose motivation because it created a context of failure in their minds. Another problem with the course throughout the period under discussion, which was also associated with the excessive focus on the training of fine artists, was the excessive focus on the final show of work at the end of the final year. This show was in effect the students' first major exhibition. The fact that the focus of students tended to be on the show and not on the coursework led to a situation where, as already stated, some students did all of their work in the last few months, if not weeks, of their final year in college. The present writer recalls one student producing all his work in the final three weeks of the final year with the help of his friends. This situation negated the need for a course, echoing the situation of fine art education in Britain in the inter-war years when the focus was on the examination and not on the course, and it encouraged the production of superficial work by students.

The issue of eclecticism is a complex one. In fine art education it needs to be handled with care, sensitivity, and understanding, especially where the focus of the curriculum is on the development of the inner voice of the student. It is an aspect of art

education that can lead to complete failure for some students just as it can lead to success for others. This was especially so in the situation that prevailed in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout at least some of the period under discussion. Certainly it can be said that during this time students in the Fine Art faculty produced work that was similar to that of their tutors or which followed fashionable trends. It can also be said that some of these students became successful in the sense that they went on to become lecturers in art schools or practising artists or both. It must be pointed out, however, that as many students who worked in the denigrated realist tradition were condemned for eclectic patterns in their work by staff who subscribed to the modernist aesthetic, there was inconsistency in the behaviour of staff in relation to this issue.

The inconsistency of staff in relation to the issue of eclecticism points to an underlying agenda in the faculty. This agenda, which was created by the factional situation in the faculty throughout much of the period under discussion, was about power. Essentially it had to do with a struggle for hegemony between those who supported the old neo-classical curriculum and those who supported the new modernist-inspired curriculum. This problem was not confined to the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. A recent American publication summarises the position of modernism in tertiary art education in general in the late twentieth century in the following way:

> The modernist rejection of classical norms. . . was not a repudiation of the cultural apparatus in which these norms were embedded but rather an attempt to gain control of this apparatus in order to assume the authority hitherto reserved for the tradition alone, an authority that, once usurped, it exercised with no fewer prohibitions.[131]

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[131] Carl Goldstein, *Teaching Art: Academies and Schools from Vasari to Albers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 296.

According to this reading, the conflict within the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design was less an attempt to change society radically by creating a new fine art curriculum than an attempt to usurp the position of the previous ideology.

The problems that developed in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art between 1975 and 1988, especially as they impacted on students, can thus be seen as the collateral damage in a war between two different ways of thinking. Both of these ways of thinking, ironically, grew out of the Enlightenment, and they formed a continuum. On one side was the neo-classical system. This system went back to Winkelmann in the mid-eighteenth century who, in the early stages of the Enlightenment, looked to ancient Greece as a model for the relationship between art and society and as a model for the new rational type of society that he hoped would develop at that time - Winckelmann's exhortation to artists to dip their brushes in intellect will be recalled. Winckelmann's approach to art brought radical change to aesthetics during the Enlightenment and it fed into the development of the academies. It also established the hegemony of the new-classical system of art education. On the other side was the Modernist Movement, which had its origins in the scientific and analytical worldview that also grew out of the Enlightenment, and which dominated thinking in nineteenth century Britain. In the early twentieth century this approach to art developed into formalist preoccupations and ultimately led to pure abstraction. The American influence added another dimension and brought a subjective aspect to abstraction in the post World War II era. All of these developments were manifested in art education. The influence of nineteenth century liberal thinking was manifested in the curriculum that was developed at the Slade in the 1890s. The influence of the Modernist Movement reached its apotheosis in British third level art education in the ideas of Herbert Read, and in the Basic Design system. A combination of the American

influence and earlier developments in modernism in Britain led to the development of the curriculum at Goldsmiths' College in the 1970s.

In short, the situation in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design between 1975 and 1988 reflected a power struggle between two systems of thought that were interconnected in an evolutionary way rather than opposed in a radical way. Both systems were rooted in the Enlightenment. One was neo-classicism, and the other was modernism. It is interesting to note that the period in which modernism finally established its hegemony within the art educational establishments of Great Britain and Ireland coincided precisely with the advent of post-modernism, a system which, by definition, threatens the tenets of modernism.[132]

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[132] Post-Modernism, by contrast with modernism which is, however complex, a unifying aesthetic, refuses to accept the integrity of unifying or all embracing systems of thought. In the fine arts post-modernism manifests itself in a pluralism of styles where everything has significance and meaning but where there are no underlying values.

CHAPTER 16

CONCLUSION

16.1 Preface

The forces that influenced the development of British society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are echoed in developments that took place in tertiary level fine art education at the same time. The overpowering influences on developments in the early nineteenth century were the Enlightenment, the Romantic Movement and the French Revolution. The latter two gave to the early nineteenth century an epochal aspect, and also social and political instability. This instability was reflected in developments in fine art education, as shown in Chapter 1. By contrast, the overpowering influence on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the confident affluence of imperialism, as manifested in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. These eras included the decline of imperialism; this, like the French Revolution and the Romantic Movement in the late eighteenth century, also brought significant social and political change to British society in the early twentieth century, including independence for Ireland. These changes, which were examined in Chapters 2 and 3, were also reflected in fine art education in both Britain and Ireland.

Developments in fine art education in Britain throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were reflected in developments at the school of art in Dublin at the

same time. After Ireland achieved independence the nature of the relationship between third level fine art education in Britain and Ireland changed. As Ireland became isolationist and inward looking, so did the approach to fine art education at the school of art in Dublin, which, after 1932, adopted a nationalist outlook. In formal terms the curriculum continued to be influenced by developments that took place in British fine art education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In relation to subject matter and in relation to the influence of the formal innovations of modernism, however, as shown in Chapter 9, the National College of Art took a different direction. This was particularly so in the post-Second World War era. This situation changed radically in 1975.

The *Great Reform Act* of 1832 was in many ways the pivotal point of the changeover from the more insecure Britain of the early nineteenth century to the confident Britain of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prior to the *Great Reform Act* Britain was somewhat unstable. After the passing of this Act, and as the new burgeoning middle classes gained in power and influence, British society became more secure and confident. This change, as shown in Chapter 2, was manifested in British art. Utilitarianism, which was a concomitant of this development, dominated progressive thinking and underpinned social developments in the early Victorian era. As shown in Chapter 1, it also underpinned developments in art education, as the case of Henry Cole demonstrates. This situation changed as the century advanced. The historians Tony Kusher and Kenneth Lunn summarise this change in the following way:

> The major social movement of the first half of the nineteenth century, utilitarianism, was overtaken by the rise of Whig liberalism, which placed its main faith in the evolutionary expansion of parliamentary government. In the latter half of the century, a stimulus was given to this liberalism by the injection of a Hegelian idealism from the Oxford School of T.H. Green and Bernard Bosanquet, who contributed to an intellectual accommodation within governing circles to the idea of an organic and collectivist state. The "new liberalism" built on the earlier growth of Government in the state and was not

seen as a revolutionary phenomenon.[1]

This "new liberalism" formed the background to the development of British society in the first half of the twentieth century, and it provided the philosophy that underpinned developments in British art in the same period.[2] The key point about this "new liberalism", as Kusher and Lunn point out, was that it was not seen as a revolutionary phenomenon. As shown in the above quotation, its worldview was Hegelian in origin, and it saw the state in an organic way as a collectivist undertaking. This view did not preclude social stratification. "New liberalism" lay behind new and innovative developments in art education in Britain before and after the First World War. These developments, as shown in Chapter 5, did not have any significant effect on third level fine art education in Britain until after the Second World War. It was this view that Campbell Bruce and Jonah Jones brought to the National College of Art and Design in 1974. "New liberalism" thus underpinned the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after the introduction of the new faculty system in 1975. It is illuminating to note here a letter that was sent to *Studio International* by the protesting students at Hornsey School of Art at the height of the student rebellion there. In this letter the students used the canteen as a metaphor for both the type of society that they were rejecting and the type of society that they proposed as its replacement. In doing this the students noted the continued existence of the old Victorian value system at the college, and, in their view, the 'radical' alternative: "The old canteen [at the college] was a cog in a Victorian Machine; the

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[1] Tony Kusher, Kenneth Lunn, ed. *Traditions of Intolerance: Historical Perspectives on Fascism and Race Discourse in Britain* (Manchester University Press, 1989).

[2] Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988), 95-123.

new one [run by students] an organic part of a living organism."[3]

16.2 Introduction

During the Renaissance man and his place in the world became a legitimate subject of study; hence humanism. As a concomitant of this change the Renaissance was also an age of artists and an age of great cultural development. During this period the quality of the work produced by artists became a major preoccupation of Humanist thinkers. At the same time the location of man in history became an issue. Thus, man and his place in the world became an open debate, and art had a role to play in this debate. The Reformation of the sixteenth century caused a major crisis in this context, and it caused much intellectual insecurity. A nadir was reached in 1527 with the sack of Rome. The sack of Rome produced a crisis in Renaissance Italy that found artistic expression in *The Last Judgement* by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, which was painted between 1536 and 1541. This painting, which was a key painting in the history of the Renaissance in that it reflected the death of a confident humanism and the rise of the new militant spirit of the Counter Reformation, was formally inventive and emotive. Formal innovation and emotional engagement were two key themes in the subsequent development of art. The crisis of the sixteenth century was just one of many crises that had hounded man and dampened his spirit since ancient times. The Enlightenment, according to Peter Gay, as mentioned in Chapter 14, represents man's recovery of nerve. This recovery of nerve was the context for the development of

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[3] D. J. Warren Piper et al., "Hornsey's Dissenting Voice – The 'Revolution' at Hornsey College of Art." Studio *International*, 176 (July/August 1968), 6-8; See also Students and Staff at Hornsey College of Art, *The Hornsey Affair* Penguin Education Special (Harmonsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 40-46.

Kant's aesthetic ideas. These ideas, as stated in Chapter 1, which successfully reconciled the potential conflict between the earlier metaphysical worldview and the new philosophy of rationalism, have had a major influence on art right up to the present day. The Enlightenment informed the development of Romanticism, which, following on from Kant, asserted the freedom of man to express his inner thoughts or ideas, and, crucially, to do so in relation to nature or the world of phenomena. Formal innovation was a key aspect of this process. Self-expression and the exploration of form, the principal themes of modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, subsequently became the focus of progressive artists and thinkers. The modernist aesthetic, which owed much to the philosophy developed by Kant during the Romantic era, underpinned the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975. This aesthetic was not a literal translation of the philosophy of Kant or of the Romantic Movement or of modernism. Rather, it was a complex mixture of these influences. Other influences on the curriculum include various aspects of British cultural and intellectual development throughout the twentieth century that have been discussed in earlier chapters. These include developments in politics, aesthetics, and philosophy.

One of the principal factors that informed the development of British third level art education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the stratified nature of British society and the consequent distinction between the high arts and the useful arts. This was despite the fact that in the nineteenth century, as shown in Chapters 2 and 3, the respective development of each of these areas shared the same aesthetic concerns. The issue of social stratification, as shown in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, was a key issue in the development of British art education throughout the nineteenth century, and it has

been an important force in the development of British education since then.[4] It has informed the debate that surrounded the passing of *The Education Act* of 1870, *The Education Act* of 1902, *The Education Act* of 1918, and *The Education Act* of 1944.[5] As Paul Sproll put it, "limiting access to the fine arts [in the nineteenth century] was an act of social control."[6] The issue of social stratification was a key issue in the development of third level art education in Britain in the innovative post-Second World War era. Developments in third level art education in Britain at this time were, in turn, the primary influence on the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975.

There were two major and interrelated forces, then, informing the development of the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975. The first of these forces was modernism, and in particular modern British art and its formal preoccupations. The second of these forces was a concomitant of modernism. This was the complex of conflicts and issues that informed the development of British third level art education since the Second World War and that grew out of the desire of reformers like Herbert Read to create a new type of society, a society that was less stratified, less divisive, and more integrated than that of the inter-war period. These issues, when transposed to the National College of Art and Design in Dublin in 1975, were transposed into a context and a culture that in many ways were

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[4] Paul A.C. Sproll, "Matters of Taste and Matters of Commerce: British Government Intervention in Art Education in 1835," *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research*, 35, no. 2: 109.

[5] Francis R. Phillips, *Creating an Education System for England and Wales*, Welsh Studies, Vol. 8 (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1992); Gary McCulloch, *Educational Reconstruction: The 1944 Education Act and the Twenty First Century* (Ilford: The Woburn Press, 1994); Roy Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History* (London: Routledge, 1988).

[6] Sproll, "Matters of Taste", 109.

informed by forces and issues which were different from those that animated British art education, but which in some ways were similar. In the wider Dublin art world, for instance, outside of the National College of Art and Design, and as shown in Chapter 10, there was a common interest between the socially reformative and modernist inspired group associated with the reformed Irish Exhibition of Living Art and the new regime in the Fine Art faculty. Given the very different value system and the entrenched position of those associated with the old regime at the National College of Art in relation to the changes taking place in Irish society, this situation inevitably led to conflict.

A key theme in the development of third level art education in Great Britain in the post-war years was the question of whether design and fine art were separate disciplines. Campbell Bruce, in line with the organicist ideas that underpinned the new liberalism of the nineteenth century, believed that they were interrelated. He believed that they shared a common and radical approach to thinking, based on observation and visual literacy, hence his interest in Basic Design. Since 1835, as Paul Sproll shows, there has been a strand of thinking in British society, often radical and sometimes utopian, that saw design and fine art as interconnected but interdependent. This strand of thinking, which influenced Campbell Bruce's ideas, was manifested in the thinking of William Morris in the nineteenth century and in the thinking of Robin Darwin at the Royal College of Art in the 1950s. This way of thinking had its apotheosis at the Bauhaus in Weimar Germany in the 1920s. It had its chief spokesman in Britain in Herbert Read.[7] The idealistic and radical dimension of Read's thinking, as shown in Chapter 4, had a huge influence on fine art education after the Second World War in

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[7] Herbert Read, *The Education of Free Men* (London: Freedom Press, 1944)

British art schools. According to David Thistlewood, Read's thinking, though radical, was not egalitarian. Read, according to Thistlewood, "foresaw a vanguard of exceptionally talented individuals, in effect enlarging the corporate consciousness of the world".[8] Read's thinking thus fitted in with the thinking of F.R Leavis and those who supported the idea of the supremacy of high cultural values in the debate that surrounded the issues of high culture and popular culture in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, and which still continues today. Campbell Bruce supported this position. As a consequence of this situation, and despite some difficulties in maintaining its independence, fine art as a subject area within tertiary art education in Great Britain after 1950 developed as a repository of high cultural values independently of other areas within art education, as shown in Chapter 6. According to Nicholas Pearson, among others, as a consequence of the esoteric nature of much modern art, and of the influence of the avant-garde in particular, this development has been to the detriment of art education in general, of design education in particular, and of students.[9] In this sense, and despite its radical stance, fine art education since the Second World War has fitted into, and thus reinforced, the paradigm of education that was in the minds of the mandarins of the Ministry of Education in the post-war epoch. This paradigm, according to the historian Corelli Barnett, was the elitist Victorian model. This model had not been replaced in the post-war epoch, as was commonly believed by many, according to Barnett, but had been reinforced by the Norwood Report of 1943 on the curriculum and examinations in secondary schools, which underpinned the 1944

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[8] David Thistlewood, "Disciplined Irrationality: A Process Dominant Art Education," in *The Teaching of Art: The Roots of Self Deception? A Symposium Held in Aberystwyth September 1981*, ed. Walford Davis (Aberystwyth: The Department of Extra Mural Studies, The University College of Wales, in conjunction with The Welsh Arts Council, 1981): 9.

[9] Nicholas Pearson, "Art Schools and the Un-Publicness of Art", in Davis, *The Teaching of Art*; Dave Rushton and Paul Wood, *Politics of Art Education*, (London: The Studio Trust, 1979)

Education Act.[10]

The debate that took place in British society in the post-war era that focussed on the distinction between high art and popular art, and the concomitant question of raising standards of public taste, became particularly important after 1950 in the context of post-war development. This debate, as Paul Sproll points out, goes back to 1835 and the preoccupation of the nineteenth century with commercialism and industrial competitiveness in the age of imperialism. As shown in Chapter 5, this debate became particularly heated during the 1950s and 1960s – also a period of intense commercial competition, and, significantly, social, cultural, and political insecurity - and it had a huge impact on art theory and practice in both Britain and Ireland throughout this period.[11] This debate was manifested in tertiary level fine art education in the 1960s and 1970s in the conflict between the supporters of formalism and the supporters of the avant-garde. It influenced, for instance, what happened on the fine art course at Coventry School of Art, as discussed in Chapter 7. Not surprisingly, this debate reappeared during the Thatcher years in Britain where it informed government education policy in relation to the arts; this led to the development of a design bias in schools curricula as a way of art education avoiding marginalisation at this time.[12] This debate also influenced what happened in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975, where it was most evident in the conflict within the sculpture area between those who supported avant-garde values, those who supported

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[10] McCulloch, *Educational Reconstruction*, 57; see also Lowe, *Education in The Post-War years*.

[11] See Robert Hewison, *Under Siege: Literary life in London 1939-1945*, (London: Methuen, 1988); idem, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War, 1945-1960* (London: Methuen, 1988); idem, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1995)

[12] Steers J. "Current issues in Art and Design Education: Resistance and the Freedom to Fly," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 6, no.1 (1987): 13-16; and Sproll, "Matters of Taste," 106.

formalist values, and those who supported traditional values. It was particularly evident in the conflict that grew out of the stance taken by the students who were influenced by Nigel Rolfe. Rolfe, it will be recalled, identified with the avant-garde and popular culture, and he opposed academic art, tradition, and high cultural values. It is ironic, as pointed out in *Art Students Observed*, that the acute conceptualism of much British performance art of the type performed by Rolfe possesses the characteristic features of the academic art that it opposes; it is wordy, literal, and rhetorical.[13] It is interesting to note in this context, as pointed out in the last chapter, that Rolfe has recently been appointed Professor of Sculpture at the Royal College of Art.

The situation in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975, as shown in Chapters 12, 13 and 14, was closely associated with developments in British fine art education in the post-war era, even though, of course, the situation in Dublin had its own particular problems. Thus, forces within the wider art world, and particularly the British and American art worlds, which informed the development of fine art education in Britain throughout the post-war years, also informed developments in fine art education at the National College of Art and Design between 1975 and 1988. Chief among these was the conflict between modernism, avant-gardism, and traditionalism.

16.3 The Effectiveness of the Curriculum in the Fine Art Faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975

The forces that informed the development of fine art education in Britain in the

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[13] Charles Madge and Barbara Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 208 and 269.

1960s and 1970s informed the structure and content of the new curriculum that evolved in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975. For example, in line with other British art schools in the post-Coldstream era, Coventry College of Art and Goldsmiths' College were free to evolve their own artistic standards. Thus the fine art departments at Coventry and Goldsmiths' had complete freedom to design their own courses. This was also the case at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975. Also, as Goldsmiths' and Coventry trained artists and focussed on the training of artists, so did the course at the National College of Art and Design. As shown in Chapter 15, for some students the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the college in Dublin throughout the period under discussion worked well as a means of training artists, and a significant number of the students developed very close, supportive and helpful relationships with staff from early on in the course. These students had no problems at all with staff, and found that from beginning to end the course had been supportive and without conflict or difficulty. For other students, however, as shown in Chapter 14, the curriculum failed in this respect and did not give them the support that they needed. In asking the question of why some students at the college in Dublin had difficulty in dealing with the new situation after 1975 it is useful to compare the situation at the college in Dublin with that at Goldsmiths'.

In 1975, as stated in Chapter 7, a panel of assessors for the Council for National Academic Awards visited Goldsmiths'. This panel was very impressed by what they found at Goldsmiths', and particularly by the effectiveness of the student-tutor relationship. The panel also found that at Goldsmiths', despite the fact that there were no distinctions or barriers between groups within the Fine Art faculty, each group – painting and sculpture, for instance - had a clear sense of identity. They also found that

this sense of identity was conveyed to students and that this created a good working atmosphere.[14] This situation contrasts starkly with that in the Fine Art faculty at the college in Dublin. At the college in Dublin, as shown in Chapters 14 and 15, there were major differences between different groups within the faculty. Sculpture and painting, for instance, were hostile to each other: there was factionalism between those representing the old curriculum and those representing the new curriculum, between those representing formalism and avant-gardism, and between the different departments within the faculty. There was also a very high level of tension on the studio floor, as shown in Chapter 14. The distinctions that existed between groups, areas, and factions in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, as Chapter 14 makes clear, were a key source of confusion and insecurity among students. It is significant in this respect that Professor McCarthy's research found, as shown also in Chapter 14, that, compared with other similar groups in Britain and America, there was a very high level of psychological tension among students working in the fine art area at the college in Dublin. Factionalism also led to a narrow and aggressively defensive approach by some students and staff to artwork. This situation led to many students feeling restricted, and it led to a complete lack of communication between groups, which in turn led some students to shy away from contact with staff and other students. In this environment, by contrast with Goldsmiths', seminars and discussions were rare, and when they occurred, as shown in Chapter 14, there was a hostile and defensive atmosphere.

In summary, by contrast with the course at Goldsmiths', the course in the Fine Art

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[14] Council for National Academic Awards, Fashion and Textile Design Board, Fine Art Board, History of Art and Complementary Studies Board, "Report of a visit made to University of London Goldsmiths' College on 6 November 1975 in connection with the renewal of approval of the B.A (Hons) courses in Fine Art and in Textiles/Fashion (embroidery)", 1975, Campbell Bruce's Files.

faculty at the National College of Art and Design in the late 1970s and early 1980s did not work very well. There was very little, if any structure in the curriculum, and there was much divisiveness between different departments within the faculty and between different traditions within the faculty. It can be concluded therefore that, while there were major similarities between the curriculum at Goldsmiths' and the curriculum at the National College of Art and Design, there were also major differences between them. It can also be concluded that the difficulties that students faced at the college in Dublin were very similar to those faced by students at Coventry College of Art in the late 1960s. Apart from the lack of structure and disorganised nature of the course in Dublin, these difficulties had their roots in a number of issues that the authors of *Art Students Observed* identified, and in other matters that had to do with the changing situation of art and artists in contemporary society. These will now be summarised.

16.4 Summary

The problems that developed as a consequence of the introduction of the new curriculum that was brought to the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design by the new regime which was introduced in 1974 echoed the problems that affected tertiary art education in Britain subsequent to the publication of the First Coldstream Report. The principal problem that students faced was the same as that which the authors of *Art Students Observed* found at Coventry College of Art in the late 1960s. This problem lay in the fact that "[fine] art students were being socialised into a role which was extremely fluid and ill defined".[15] This problem had two principal

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[15] Madge and Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, 20.

causes: the exclusive focus of the curriculum on the training of artists, and the contradictory beliefs, not just at the National College of Art and Design but in the wider art world at that time, about what constituted art. The authors of *Art Students Observed* pointed out a particular and significant contradiction in third level art education in Britain in the late sixties, which also applied to the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975. This contradiction lay in the belief that an organised three-year course with a diploma at the end could give the student the freedom to unfold in a way that was irregular, unexpected, and revolutionary. The same authors summarised the situation of art students as they found them in England in the late 1960s in the following way:

> The problem of the art student is threefold: he has opted out of the dominant occupational system; he is driven to behave as though he had access to a charisma which may not be his to command; and he has to justify this, to himself, and to his peers and teachers, in intellectual terms and under conditions of almost unbearable ambiguity.[16]

As this quotation summarises the situation of fine art students in Britain in the late 1960s so it summarises the situation of fine art students in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design following the changes to the curriculum that were brought about in 1975.

Throughout the period between 1975 and 1988 the nature of the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design changed in response to developments within the faculty and the faculty developed in response to outside forces. This change can be summarised as follows. Initially, in the years immediately following the introduction of the new curriculum, there was conflict. This conflict was rooted in factionalism, which had two different aspects. The first aspect of this

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[16] Ibid., 21.

factionalism was the struggle for power between those who supported the old curriculum and those who supported the new curriculum. Those who supported the old curriculum adhered to a neo classical and New English Arts Club aesthetic and a nationalistic worldview. Those who supported the new curriculum adhered to a modernist aesthetic and a neo-liberal worldview. The second aspect of this factionalism was the conflict within modernism between the radical avant-garde and classic modernism or what Nigel Rolfe has called academic formalism. By the late-1980s, when the factionalism that had riven the course in its early years had abated, the classic modernist model had prevailed. As the classic modernist aesthetic prevailed, so both the neo-classical aesthetic and the radical avant-garde aesthetic were marginalised. This was despite the fact that the director of the college, Noel Sheridan, was an avant-garde artist.

The particular aspect of the factionalism that split the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design exacerbated the difficulties that fine art students found at the college and that grew out of the ambiguities of the curriculum. This factionalism was more complex than a simple bipolar conflict between traditionalists and modernists. It included an explicit political aspect that related to the development of Ireland as a modern western economy. This situation was informed, to a significant extent, by the relationship between Britain and Ireland at this time. Factionalism within the faculty exaggerated and brought to the surface perceived cultural differences between the two countries. Students noted these differences. Some former students like Lorcan Walsh believe that the English members of staff at the college in the 1970s and 1980s favoured analytical and formalist styles, and a general approach to art that stressed accountability, explanations, and justifications. Some English members of staff, as the syllabus document of 1975 shows, and as the confrontation between

sculpture and painting students that was discussed in Chapter 14 makes clear, felt that Ireland was provincial, and that no art of any significance had been produced in Ireland.[17] It is interesting to note that the conflict in the north of Ireland coincided exactly with the changeover from the old neo-classically inspired and politically nationalist curriculum at the National College of Art and Design to the new modernist inspired curriculum. In this context it is also noteworthy that there was a radical political aspect to the student rebellion between 1968 and 1972 that opposed what was perceived by many students as the influence of British imperialism in Irish art and Irish art education. It is revealing and highly symbolic in this context, as already mentioned, that Domhnall O'Murchadha, one of the more nationalistic of the traditional members of staff, according to Lorcan Walsh, spoke only in Irish when addressing Nigel Rolfe, who was the most confrontational of the new English staff.

The curriculum that was introduced in the Fine Art faculty in 1975 was similar to, if not modelled on, the curriculum at Goldsmiths' College in London. This curriculum was certainly, as befitting a challenging course, confrontational. The challenging aspect of the curriculum, however, led to difficulties. As shown in Chapter 13, the fudging of the new curriculum in the 1980s in response to demands that these difficulties be resolved diluted the truly radical nature of the new curriculum that was introduced in 1975 and had two causes. The first of these causes was the need for accreditation. The National Council for Educational Awards, which was the accrediting body for the course in the Fine Art faculty, demanded that the course have a clear and effective structure and that there should be academic accountability. The second cause was the Killiney seminar of 1985, which, as shown in Chapter 13, was an attempt by the Board

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[17] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 973.

of the college to bring some structure and sense of direction into the course which, they felt, had declined since the changeover to the new curriculum in 1975. According to Noel Sheridan who was the Director of the college at that time, the Board that had set up the Killiney seminar identified with the values of the pre-1971 National College of Art, and the Killiney seminar was a reactionary attempt to "get at" the curriculum that Campbell Bruce introduced, which, according to Sheridan, was embodied in himself - the radical avant-garde artist - in the eyes of the board.[18]

This change in the curriculum, which diluted its radical aspect and which was brought about in the mid-1980s, is evident in the documentation. The course document for 1988, for example, as shown in Chapter 13, illustrates a slight but significant change in the curriculum when it is compared with the syllabus document of 1975 and the course document of 1980. The 1988 course document gives the impression of a more pluralist and less narrow approach to the teaching and practice of fine art than was the case in the late seventies and early eighties. Thus, there is no house style in the Fine Art faculty today, which, according to most of the staff in the faculty at the college at the time of writing, is emphatically pluralist in outlook and both tutor- and student-led.[19]

The absence of a house style at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin is at least partly the outcome of the above change in the curriculum, and contrasts with the situation in England, where many art colleges have developed house styles. This development in British fine art education was an outcome of the resolution of problems that were associated with the introduction of the post-Coldstream system of fine art

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[18] Noel Sheridan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 20, 1109.

[19] Ibid., 1097; Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1156; and Theo McNab, interview by author, 12 June 1998.

education. In particular it was the outcome of problems that were caused by the influence of fashions and fads on fine art education in the 1960s and 1970s. In effect it was the institutionalisation of fashions and fads. The absence of a house style at the National College of Art and Design is essentially a consequence of the demands of the National Council for Educational Awards and of the Board of the college to create a structured, open, and pluralist curriculum. According to Tom Ryan, Professor McCarthy, and others who support a more traditional approach to fine art teaching, however, no accommodation was or is given to traditional values in the faculty, despite the apparent openness of the curriculum since 1985. According to Nigel Rolfe, whose aesthetic position is the polar opposite of that of Professor McCarthy and Tom Ryan, neither is accommodation given to any radical alternative to the dominant classic formalist approach to art since the mid 1980s. Rolfe, as a radical artist, believes that the curriculum that was introduced in 1975 has been fatally compromised by the changes that took place in the 1980s, and that the freedom of students in the faculty today is curtailed by the politics and bureaucratic demands of the college. He believes that after he left the college in the mid-1980s the course become restrictively academic in a modernist idiom, was as stifling as the pre-1975 curriculum, and was no longer student led.[20]

Whatever about these differing opinions, it is clear that a fudge was made in the 1980s that compromised the truly radical nature of the curriculum that was introduced in 1975, and that as a result of this change the course by 1988 had become more structured and organised than was envisaged in the mid-1970s. Despite this change, however, there was no fundamental change in the aims and objectives of the

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[20] Nigel Rolfe, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 18.

curriculum. Thus, in 1988, when the present course document was written, the basic principles of the new curriculum that was introduced in the Fine Art faculty in 1975 remained in place, although it had evolved into a more organised course than that of the first half of the period under discussion. According to Ollie Whelan, who has been in the faculty continuously since 1975 and who has been teaching in the faculty since 1979, the curriculum had the same set of aims and objectives in 1988 as it had in 1975, and, indeed, as it has today. Broadly speaking, then, although it had a much tighter and much more controlled methodology than the course in 1975, the course in 1988 was still defined by the interests of individual staff members and visiting lecturers and by the needs, ideas, interests, and aspirations of students. In this last sense - its emphasis on the needs of students – throughout the period under discussion the course in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design echoed the curriculum at Goldsmiths' College very accurately. The College in Dublin shared with Goldsmiths' the same philosophical and historical origins. These included the reformative Bauhaus aesthetic of the 1920s and the reformative aspirations and ideas of the post-war generation of liberal British and American artists and intellectuals.

In terms of effectiveness, many students were helped in their objective of becoming fine artists while attending the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion. The student-tutor relationship played a key role in this sense and worked well for many students. Some of these students, like Paul O'Keefe, were helped by the fact that the style of work that they produced was fashionable, and some students, like Kathy Prendergast, were helped because their natural talent was allowed to develop at its own pace without interference within the loose structure of the curriculum. Just as this happened, however, other students, like Lorcan Walsh, felt that their natural talent had been restricted by their experiences at

the college, and particularly by the fact that there was no structured course for a significant part of the period under discussion. There were a number of important issues that had a bearing on this situation. These will now be looked at.

16.5 Salient Issues Affecting Fine Art Education at the National College of Art and Design after 1975

16.5.1 *The Question of Talent*

An ubiquitous aspect of art education that informed the teaching of fine art at the National College of Art and Design between 1975 and 1988, is the belief that artists are born and that art education thus has little significance other than to facilitate talent. This is a widely held belief among artists and fine art educators and often leads to the fallacious argument that the students who prevail and who go on to be successful artists were destined to do so, regardless of the influence of art education. Noel Sheridan makes this argument: "Highflying people like Kathy Prendergast graduated from here when it was virtually a building site. Of course she got a First, because she was good when she came in."[21] This is a specious argument. It is also a self-fulfilling justification. Many students who get First Class Honours degrees fail to become successful artists and many successful artists fail to get First Class Honours degrees as students. The question arises here of how talent was defined in the Fine Art faculty throughout the period under discussion, by whom, and on what grounds - especially given the open-ended nature of the curriculum, the *laissez-faire* approach to teaching in the faculty, and the contradictory approach to what constituted art in the different factions in the faculty. This question brings us to one of the anomalies of the post-1975

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[21] Noel Sheridan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 20, 1093.

curriculum, which raises an interesting aspect of fine art education as it developed in Britain under the influence of Herbert Read in the post-war years. This aspect of fine art education focuses on the artist's "inner sense of discipline".

16.5.2 *The Inner Sense of Discipline*

The "inner sense of discipline", as discussed in Chapter 15, is a key phrase in relation to the demise of traditional skills in the development of tertiary level art education in Britain in the post-war period. It is of no little significance that discipline was stressed as a key aspect of the course in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design by the syllabus document of 1975. Because of the unclear and sometimes confused nature of curricula in the transitional post-Coldstream era in Britain, the "inner sense of discipline" became one of the key criteria that tutors used in judging the work of students. This development is not surprising, given that Herbert Read believed "that is was impossible to examine art on any academic basis".[22] This is a most important aspect of third level fine art education in the post-Coldstream period and it must inevitably, because of its uncertain nature, be problematic. The reason it is problematic is because of the difficulty for tutors in sensing its presence in the work of students. A particular danger lies in the fact that defining this inner sense of discipline gives to judgement and to assessment a particularly subjective aspect. This subjective aspect of assessment is especially problematic when the conflicts, polarised positions, and fashions and fads of the art world during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s are taken into account. An example of the potential absurdity that such a subjective approach to assessment could lead to is given in *Art Students Observed* where it is pointed out that

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[22] Willing, "What Kind of Art?", 136.

some tutors at Coventry College of Art took lack of work as evidence that the student had the requisite inner sense of discipline and was thus thinking very seriously and critically about the nature of art. These students were thus given high marks in their assessments. This was especially so if students could give convincing explanations or assurances of commitment.[23] One significant danger inherent in this approach lies in the fact that clever students could exploit this situation and fake commitment, as happened in the case of at least one student at Coventry College of Art, who admitted doing so.

16.5.3 *The Artist as a Professional*

Given the absence of an agreed definition of talent in fine art education throughout the period under discussion in Both Britain and Ireland, and given the predilection for such vague terms as the "inner sense of discipline", it is fallacious to assume that there prevailed in fine art education at this time a clear, precise or agreed definition of talent, or that this definition had any bearing on success for students either within the art school environment or in the art world outside of the schools of art. For art students, the development of a successful career depended quite clearly on more than talent.

Throughout the period under discussion success in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design was vital to the aspirant artist for a number of reasons. Chief among these was the fact that success enabled the student to secure post-graduate study. Most importantly, it helped the student to acquire financial support for such study. Success in the Fine Art faculty was thus an important step on the road to becoming a professional artist. Success in the Fine Art faculty was also important because the college was closely aligned with the Dublin art world, and

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[23] Madge and Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, 74.

success at the college was a door into this world. Students who did not get the full support of the most powerful faction in the faculty were thus at a disadvantage when it came to post-graduate opportunities, employment prospects, and success as an artist. It is interesting to note – and, given the stated anti-bureaucratic aspect of the course in the Fine Art faculty throughout the period under discussion, it is deeply ironic - that successful Irish artists who came through the National College of Art and Design in the period under discussion owe much of their success to skill in navigating the heavily bureaucratic structure that is the contemporary Irish art world. Success in this world involved securing postgraduate study opportunities, part-time and full-time work in art schools, Arts Council grants and other such financial support. It might be suggested, then, that success as an artist depended, throughout the period under discussion, as it does today, to a great degree on the development of the specific and specialised skills of working within these complex bureaucratic structures and of using them successfully. Certainly financial success depends upon it. In the author's experience, the most successful contemporary Irish artists are those who are most efficient and organised in bureaucratic terms and not necessarily those who are most bohemian or radical or critical or talented, however talent is defined. A glance at any current artist's curriculum vitae, which are ubiquitous in exhibition catalogues today, will amply demonstrate this point. This situation illustrates the decline of the dilettante and the ascent of the professional businessman-artist in the late twentieth century. The artist and writer Stephen Farthing has the following to say about this situation:

> Most artists of today's middle generation were encouraged during the course of their education to see ideas as coming out of practice, so most find it odd to see how young artists import ideas into the art school then simply seek out the technical support they need to realise them. Like visualisers in the advertising world and impresarios in the film world, art students and the new generation of artists have become ideas people. They have more or less detached themselves from crafts and getting their hands dirty and have placed

themselves in an executive, white-collar class.[24]

16.5.4 *Life After College*

In relation to the question of whether the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design prepared students for the real world or life after college, as it claimed, it is difficult to come to clear conclusions in the absence of proper statistical information. It can be said with certainty that there is an inverse correlation between financial security and the choice of fine art as a career. This situation, despite a new professional approach to art in the art world and in fine art education, and despite the need for professional artists to develop professional skills, clearly, and ironically, favours dilettantism, and brings us back to the pre-war situation in both British and Irish fine art education. Apart from the few students who will become successful professional artists, the only realistic career options available to students who studied fine art during the period under discussion was teaching at secondary and tertiary levels. As shown in Chapter 6, research in Britain has shown that fine art education, though it formed the background of many art teachers at second level, was inadequate as a means of training art teachers, because it didn't teach transferable skills. The situation of fine art students who graduated from the National College of Art and Design in Dublin throughout the period under discussion was the same in this sense as that of fine art graduates from British art schools. It can thus be concluded that the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty was inadequate as a means of training students for the typical career destination of the fine art graduate.

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[24] Stephen Farthing, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Art*, (London: Duckworth, 2000), 92

16.5.5 *Maintaining the Status Quo*

Quite a few people interviewed by the present writer felt that the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design did not prepare them adequately for life after college. This was especially so in relation to the acquisition of skill, whether intellectual or practical, which would allow them to earn a living. The present writer suggests that, in line with what happened in Britain, and as the authors of *Art Students Observed* show, the principal function of the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion was to socialise students into a particular way of thinking. This way of thinking was liberal, even radical. It was open and critical, but it did not teach usable skills - and this is revealing in that it shows the origins of this course in the dilettantism that developed in the mid-nineteenth century and which Gropius tried to eliminate in the curriculum that he instigated at the Bauhaus. It might be suggested, then, that this course, contrary to its overall aspirations and to the aspirations of the utopian ideology underpinning it, actually hindered social mobility by encouraging dilettantism and by discouraging the acquisition of the very technical skills that would enable students to earn a living. Fine art education at the National College of Art and Design since 1975, in this sense, has been aligned with the liberal agenda of tertiary level art education in Britain in the late nineteenth century, but more particularly in the post-Second World War years.

Developments in British Education in the post-war years, according to the historian Roy Lowe, did not substantially alter the social stratification of British society – popularly believed to be one of the achievements of the 1944 *Education Act* - or increase to any significant extent social mobility. In fact, Lowe suggests, the changes which occurred in education after the war were an integral part of a process which "imposed tighter definitions of social class on its recipients, . . . and which [were] in

many ways a catalyst of social distinctions". Lowe goes on to say that between 1945 and 1964 the English educational system developed in ways that were to confirm the deep social cleavages that only became fully apparent during the 1980s.[25]

In this context it is interesting to note that, according to Brian King, who is the head of sculpture at the National College of Art and Design at the time of writing, sculpture students in the Fine Art faculty today who come from affluent backgrounds produce better quality work than students who do not come from affluent backgrounds. The reason for this situation, according to King, is that the more affluent students can easily afford expensive art materials whereas students from less affluent backgrounds cannot. King also points out that students from more affluent backgrounds tend to do the joint Honours Course in Fine Art and History of Art, which was mentioned in Chapter 13. This course, because it is academically more rigorous that the BA in Fine Art course, tends to attract students who have acquired the requisite academic skills to do such a course, and these students, according to King, tend to be from more privileged backgrounds than the students who do not do the Joint Honours Course. These students have a higher chance of gaining employment than those who do not possess such skills. There is therefore a two tiered system of fine art education at the National College of Art and Design today.

It might thus be concluded that changes in British art education, and changes in fine art education in particular, which were an integral part of changes in British education policy following the publication of the 1944 *Education Act*, have failed in their aspiration to create a new egalitarian society in which art would have an integral role to play. This is especially so in the sense of creating equality in a meritocratic sense,

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[25] Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years*, 202.

and consequently of creating social and psychological harmony, as Herbert Read had hoped. At worst, developments in fine art education in Britain since the Second World War have contributed to the creation of social distinction, and to the more rigidly polarised society of the twenty-first century than existed in the 1950s and 1960s when the new radical curricula that were discussed in the present study were being developed.[26] The same situation, it might be suggested, has prevailed in Ireland since the changes brought about in fine art education at the National College of Art and Design after 1975.

Given that 15 out of 21 students in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design refused their diplomas in 1979 in protest at the detrimental influence of the curriculum on their work, and given that many of those interviewed by the present writer felt, at best, that the curriculum was irrelevant and, at worst, that it was actually a hindrance to their development, it can be said with certainty that the curriculum that was in place in the Fine Art faculty between 1975 and 1988 had serious flaws. It can also be said that while this curriculum was successful in helping a small number of talented individuals to become successful artists professionally, it was also, broadly speaking, inadequate as a means of helping many artistically talented students to develop. In summary, it might be suggested that the principal reason for this was the

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[26] It is interesting to note that in Britain, at the time of writing, that aspect of art education which aspires to social change is being eroded by a situation which is similar to that of the Schools of Design in the nineteenth century, where wealthy middle-class students predominated to the detriment of artisans and others who hoped to use education as a means of social advancement. Today, as British art schools are driven by a need to make money, they recruit wealthy students from outside Britain because they pay higher fees than British students do. One English college, in fact, employs an agency in Japan specifically to recruit wealthy Japanese Students. According to Nigel Rolfe, who has worked in a number of English and American art schools, including the Royal College of Art and Goldsmiths', these students represent a significant proportion of the student population in the better British art schools. A glance at the catalogue for the graduation show of students work at Goldsmiths' College in 1988 reveals that out of forty-nine graduates in fine art twelve had addresses outside Britain. (Goldsmiths' College, *Goldsmiths' Fine Art 1998* [Bromley, The Christmas Daisy, 1998])

narrow focus of the curriculum on the training of artists, and the fact that the needs of the students were allowed to become secondary to the primary objective of the new regime, which was to take power from the old regime. It might be suggested that the members of the new regime were blinded to the overall needs of students by their role - to paraphrase Professor Turpin when commenting on the hegemony of the South Kensington System and its influence on the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art in the nineteenth century - as missionaries of the 'modernist' system.

16.6 Recommendations

For much of the twentieth century, and in particular in the period following the Second World War, success as an artist depended on more than the acquisition of specific manual or artistic skills. It depended also on a number of interrelated and complex issues that included skills of varying kinds but also such matters as talent – however it is defined - drive, luck, fashion, and, not least, economic security. This situation has become more complex with the major technological advances and cultural changes of the twenty-first century. In the context of the decline of traditional skills in modern art since the Second World War the role of art education as a means of imparting specific information and skills has diminished, and this type of art education, as a means of training artists, is seen by many involved in contemporary fine art education as redundant. It is noteworthy in this context that many of the most successful modern Irish artists on the period after World War II era did not attend art school, as the examples of Louis Le Brocquy, Robert Ballagh, Cecil King, Patrick Scott, and Brian O'Doherty illustrate. Thus, with the demise of traditional skill the focus of fine art education has changed. According to Stephen Farthing, art schools

must respond to this change.

> They can no longer be all things to all people and hope to give their young artists the depth of engagement they need. The change that faces art schools today is more fundamental than ever before and more than adapting to the change in the range of the tools of the trade of the artist. Art, as always, has to straddle the past and the future by working in the present. But it has become physically impossible to encompass all new developments in one curriculum. One school cannot hope to offer both a thorough grounding in the art and methods produced by artists in the past and hope to cover cutting edge technological instruction – which may have to dig deep into the hardware of the technology.
>
> Some art schools would thrive as nurturing environments for the creative imagination of young artists through the acquisition of craft skills, play and focus on the production of hand built objects and images. Such a studio course would continue what is taught in most art schools today. Other art schools would thrive as advanced schools of art. Young artists would focus in these schools on a study of a visual culture that is truly international and cross-disciplinary. They will need the access to the most modern tools available, and get access to the latest engineering, electronics and web communication and imaging. Of greater importance than the history of art will be the history of ideas through science, mathematics and behavioural psychology. Instead of exams, they will work to make creative use of the ideas and possibilities they are handling. Most importantly, leading artists – who seem to give art schools and the next generation of artists a wide berth once they are famous – should be attracted to give students contact with the most prestigious members of the art world.[27]

The values of the curriculum that developed in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design between 1975 and 1988 are the values of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the college today. Recent years have seen major changes in how art is perceived including the advent of Information Technology and the changes that were brought about by the decline of modernism and the ascent of post-modernism. These changes have fundamentally altered the relationship between art and society. In the light of these developments it is important that the current curriculum in the Fine Art faculty be looked at in order that it might respond to these changes. This would ensure a central role for fine art education in the future development of Irish culture.

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[27] Farthing, *Modern Art*, 92-93.

As shown by the authors of *Art Students Observed*, in the post-Coldstream era fine art education in Britain was no longer about the acquisition of skill. It was, instead, about socialisation into complex social structures and ways of thinking. In short, fine art education was a system of induction. The situation in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975 was a system of induction in the same sense as fine art education in Britain. The social structures and ways of thinking that students were being inducted into at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion essentially meant the changing Irish and international art worlds. These worlds, in turn, were intricately bound up with developments in the wider world. For students at the National College of Art and Design success as an artist meant, by definition, success in the art world, both Irish and international. Success in the art world, in turn, meant using the structures of the art world effectively. Success at the National College of Art and Design, as one of these structures, as opposed to a place for learning skill, was therefore an important early step on the ladder to success for young Irish artists. Throughout most of the period under discussion, because of conflicting alliances, there was ambiguity in relation to the way in which the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design related to the wider art world in Ireland and thus to the general situation of Irish culture at this time. The principal reason for this was the epochal and multifaceted aspect, not just of developments in the Irish and international art worlds, but of the social and political changes taking place in Ireland and the wider western world at this time. This situation created much confusion and many difficulties for both staff and students at the National College of Art and Design between 1975 and 1988.

The school of art in Dublin, as Professor Turpin shows, has played a central role in the development of Irish culture throughout its history. As shown in Chapter 11,

throughout the major social changes of the 1960s the college was seen by those in power as having an important role to play in the development of Ireland as a modern western economy. The 1970s and 1980s were a difficult period in this development, in an economic sense, but in a political sense also. The situation of conflict that existed in the North of Ireland and the difficult relationship between Britain and Ireland that grew out of this situation were particularly salient features of this period. Given the polarised, factional, and difficult situation that developed in the Fine Art faculty in the National College of Art and Design throughout most of the period under discussion, which clearly had a political aspect, the following question arises: Why was a decision made, in the heated political context of the day, to bring into this situation, a system of fine art education that was based exclusively on the English system? Following on from this question, the following question also arises: Could the factional and divisive situation that developed in the Fine Art faculty, subsequent to the introduction of the new curriculum in 1975, not have been foreseen? Foresight on this issue would have saved students and staff in fine art much difficulty and the college many problems. Other questions that might be asked include the following. Why was Europe not considered as an option? Were the United States or Australia, countries with strong Irish connections, considered as options? Reasons have been put forward as to why the English system was used, including the following: Ireland was an English speaking country; England was near Ireland geographically; James Warwick, who advised the Board of the college in the mid-1970s, and who was responsible for the introduction of the faculty system, had experience of the English system, and therefore it was logical that that system would be adopted. At the time of writing these questions have not been examined. To get to the root of these questions involves going to where those decisions were made at government level. To answer these questions therefore it is

necessary to examine the National Archives for the period 1971 to 1975. As the state papers that cover this period have not yet been released to the public, the answer to these questions must await future examination.

APPENDIX 1

The National Course of Instruction 1851-1913

Stage 1 - Linear drawing by aid of instruments

a. Linear geometry
b. Mechanical and machine drawing and details of architecture from copies
c. Linear perspective

Stage 2 - Free hand drawing of rigid forms from examples or copies

a. Objects
b. Ornament

Stage 3 - Free hand outline drawing from 'the round' or solid forms

a. Models and objects
b. Ornament

Stage 4 - Shading from flat examples, or from copies

a. Models and objects
b. Ornament

Stage 5 - Shading from the round or solid forms

a. Models and objects
b. Ornament
c. Time sketching and sketching from memory

Stage 6 - Drawing the human figure and animal forms from copies

a. In outline
b. Shaded

Stage 7 - Drawing flowers, foliage, and objects of natural history from flat example or copies

a. In outline
b. Shaded

Stage 8 - Drawing the human figure or animal forms from the round or from nature

a. In outline from casts
b. Shaded from casts
c. Studies of the human figure from the nude model
d. Studies of the human figure from the draped model
f. Time sketching and sketching from memory

Stage 9 - Anatomical studies

a. Of the human figure
b. Of animals
c. Of either, modelled

Stage 10 - Drawing flowers, foliage, landscape details, and objects of natural history from nature

a. In outline
b. Shaded

Stage 11 - Painting ornament from the flat or copies

a. In monochrome, either in water-colour, tempera, or in oil
b. In colours

Stage 12 - Painting ornament from the cast, etc.

a. In monochrome, either in water colours, in oil or in tempera
b. In colours

Stage 13 - Painting (general) from flat examples or copies, flowers, still life etc.

a. Flowers or natural objects, in water colours, in oil or in tempera
b. Landscapes or natural objects, in water colours, in oil or in tempera

Stage 14 - Painting (general) direct from nature

a. Flowers or still life, in water colours, in oil or in tempera
b. Landscapes

Stage 15 - Painting time sketches of single objects or groups as compositions of colour

a. In water colours, in oil, or in tempera

Stage 16 - Painting the human figure or animals in monochrome from casts

a. In oil or in tempera

Stage 17 - Painting the human figure and animals, in colour

a. From the flat or copies
b. From nature, nude or draped
c. Time sketches and compositions

Stage 18 - Modelling ornament

a. From casts
b. From drawings
c. Time sketches from examples and from memory

Stage 19 - Modelling the human figure, or animals

a. From casts or solid examples
b. From drawings
c. From nature, nude or draped

Stage 20 - Modelling flowers, fruits, foliage and objects of natural history from nature

Stage 21 - Time sketches in clay of the human figure or animals from nature

Stage 22 - Elementary design

a. Studies treating natural objects ornamentally
b. & c. Ornamental arrangements to fill given spaces, in colour etc.
d. Studies of historic styles or ornament, drawn, painted or modelled

Stage 23 - Technical Studies

a. Machine and mechanical drawing, plan drawing, mapping and surveys
b. Architectural design
c. Ornamental surface design
d. Ornamental relief design
e. Moulding, casting, chasing
f. Lithography
g. Wood engraving
h. Porcelain painting

APPENDIX 2

Subjects listed for the Technical School Examinations in Art 1915

Technical School Examinations 1915

Art

First Year:
- Object and Memory Drawing
- Mechanical Drawing and Design

Second Year:
- Object and Memory Drawing
- Design
- Drawing from Casts
- Drawing from Natural Forms

Third Year:
- Object and Memory Drawing
- Industrial Design
- Drawing from Casts
- Modelled Industrial Design
- Modelling from Casts
- Pictorial Design
- Drawing from Natural Forms

Fourth Year:
- Object and Memory Drawing
- Industrial Design
- Drawing from Natural Forms
- Modelled Industrial Design
- Modelling from Natural Forms
- Pictorial Design
- Painting from Natural Forms

Special subjects for candidates for Teachers Certificates:-

- Geometric Drawing
- Methods of Teaching Drawing
  - Stage 1
  - Stage 2
  - Stage 3
- Perspective

APPENDIX 3

Subjects listed for the Technical School Examinations in Art 1941

Technical School Examinations 1941

Elementary Stage

Imaginative Drawing

Illustrations of any incident or scene, derived from imagination or experience, or from literature.

Object and Memory Drawing

Drawing of objects involving knowledge of the principles of foreshortening displayed in the representation of cylindrical, conical, and rectilinear forms, singly or in combination.

Drawing from Natural Forms

Drawing from natural forms, such as plants, fruit, shells, or insects.

Mechanical Drawing and Design

Design and pattern drawing on a geometrical basis, with simple arrangements of geometric or free-drawn ornament. Drawing to scale, and simple constructions on plane geometry.

Intermediate Stage

Imaginative Drawing

Illustrations similar to those of the Elementary Stage but of a more advanced standard.

Object and Memory Drawing

Drawings of ordinarily available objects, including surroundings, involving a wide variety of constructional factors, and fashioned of various materials, giving scope for surface and texture treatment, as wood, metal, wicker, cloth, leather, fur, etc.

Drawing from Natural Forms

Drawing from natural forms similar to those of the Elementary Stage, but involving more important studies, including animal forms.

Drawing from the Antique

Drawing from casts of ornament or casts of the human figure and details of the human figure.

Design-Pictorial, Industrial, Modelled

Design for any hand or machine process or for a product of such process. Designs may be drawn, painted or modelled.

History of Art

A broad survey of art from the Pre-Pharonic Egypt to the end of the Pre-Christian Era, with particular attention to Classical Art in Greece and Rome. The subject should be approached from the viewpoint of growth and development with some analysis of the characteristics imposed by social and economic conditions and materials on the art of each country.

Advanced Stage

Drawing from Life.

Drawing the figure, figure in costume or details, i.e., head, hands or feet.

Painting from Life.

Painting the figure, etc., as above.

Modelling from Life.

Modelling the figure, drapery or details, i.e., head, hands or feet.

Design-Pictorial, Industrial, Modelled.

Design for any hand or machine process or for a product of such process. Designs may be drawn, painted, or modelled.

History of Art

APPENDIX 4

The Curriculum in the School of Painting at the National College of Art

1962-1963

Curriculum

School of Painting

Entrance Tests

The provisions for admission to the School of Painting embody the submission of testimonies of study executed by the applicant during the preceding two years, and an entrance examination to be held in the College in the month of September 1962.

The prescribed testimonies of study are:

Six studies of importance in drawings from actual observation.
Six studies of importance in colour, either from nature of copied from reputable examples.
Two original compositions in colour.
An original example of a craftwork.

The examination will consist of tests in:

Drawing from observation.
Drawing from memory.
Design for a composition for a prescribed subject.

The School of Painting provides facilities of a comprehensive character for the study of painting in its various forms, and chiefly in respect of decoration and portraiture.

The work of the School embraces the study of the methods of preparation of painting surfaces, the use of various mediums for painting, the study of precedents and individual expression in original composition.

The conditions of study of the more advanced exercises will conform as far as possible with practical studio work.

All students will be required to follow the prescribed course, unless permission for modification, or more rapid advancement, be obtained on account of exceptional ability.

Lower Division

First Term

Drawings from the antique:- Studies in line and in tone of head, hands and feet, and other details of the figure. Practice in drawing from the antique is treated as a preliminary to drawing from life, and will be directed to proportion, construction and action, and to method and procedure in the rudiments of figure draughtsmanship. Since the antique represents an idealisation through skilful observation of the living form, highly finished studies, as the outcome of a full appreciation of the antique, will not be expected at this stage.

Drawing the antique from memory:- The studies will be directed to verify the realisation of proportion and structure, and to cultivate freedom of rendering.

Drawing from life:- The studies will include the full length figure but will consist mainly of details to be drawn full size in line or in tone.

Anatomy:- An analysis of the anatomical structures in relation to drawing the figure, and consisting chiefly of separate, related drawings on transparent paper, of the skeleton framework, and of the muscles, within outline drawings from the antique or from life.

Still life: - Tone studies in monochrome and colour of arrangements of objects and drapery.

Craftwork: - The practice of an appropriate craft in relation to the course of study.

Second Term

Drawing from the antique: - Studies of the full-length figure.

Drawing the antique from memory: - Studies of details and of the full-length figure.

Drawing from life: - Studies of details, full size and studies of the full length figure.

Drawing the living figure from memory: - Studies of the figure from memory following observation, and in prescribed action.

Anatomy: - More detailed studies of the anatomical structure, within drawings from life, and with particular attention to the influence of action.

Painting in oil, watercolour or tempera: - Studies of details and of figures from the antique; studies of natural forms and objects; studies of simple interiors.
Composition: - Instruction in the arrangement of the various elements of line, mass and colour will be afforded throughout the various sections of the School, and

particular attention will be given to this important aspect of artistic practice. In addition, a subject for composition is set each month, for which students of the School will be required to submit studies.

Upper Division

First Term

Drawing from the antique: - Occasional complete studies of the figure.

Drawing from life: - Studies of the head, studies of the figure in repose and action, drawing the figure from memory.

Drapery: - A series of analytical studies of drapery, arranged on antique figures and otherwise, to show its essential characteristics and treatment.

Painting in oil, watercolour, or tempera:- Studies of a more important type from the antique, and of still life and interiors.

Painting from life: - Studies of the head and details, in oil, watercolour, or tempera.

Composition: - Compositions of a simple type will be prepared in addition to the monthly exercise. The compositions will be primarily figure subjects, and may be for mural decoration, tapestry, posters, or other forms of decorative work. Facilities for making studies from life, and of draperies and accessories for these compositions will be provided.

Craftwork: - A continuation or variation of the work of the preceding two terms.

Second Term

Drawing from life: - Studies of the head, studies of the figure in repose and in action, drawing the figure from memory.

Drapery: - Studies of drapery and of costume arranged on the living model, to be drawn or painted.

Painting in oil, watercolour, or tempera:- Studies of still life, and studies in the open air, with and without the figure. Copying paintings or portions of paintings in the National Gallery.

Composition:- The work of the preceding term will be continued on a more important scale, and involving the production of one composition only. The subjects will be announced some time before the first sketches are made, but if desired, any suitable subject may be selected by an individual student. The work will include the preparation of the colour sketch, setting out the full size cartoon, the preparation of studies from life, and the execution of the whole, or portion of the composition to full size.

Upper division

Third and Fourth Terms

Drawing from life: - Studies of the head; studies of the figure in repose and action, drawing the figure from memory.

Drapery: - Studies of drapery and of costume arranged on the living model.

Painting in oil, watercolour, or tempera: - Portraiture; painting the figure from life; copying paintings or portions of paintings in the National Gallery.

Composition: - One subject for composition, as in the preceding term, with the addition of perspective drawings to show the architectural setting, of the general colour scheme of the surroundings in which the composition would be placed. All necessary studies to be prepared, and the entire composition to be executed in accordance with the requirements of practical work.

APPENDIX 5

The Curriculum in the School of Painting at the National College of Art for 1969-1970

School of Painting Course 1969-1970

The entire course over three Academic years of eight months each.

The main course confined to the morning sessions.

The system I intend to adopt in an introductory talk on elucidation of a particular subject on the presentation of a problem or demonstration when necessary and then to give the student an assignment which he will carry out on his own. This encourages self-development and gives him confidence. Only when he has carried the work as far as he can and needs advice or help should the teacher interfere. The teacher will go around to discuss the work individually. Group discussion on results.

Years 1 & 2

As a transition under the present circumstances I propose to re-iterate the elements and objective principles of design in the first weeks of the course. From then on the course should be an organic growth in order that all knowledge and experience be co-ordinated. Some space and 3D study by constructions. The nature of colour will next be explored beginning with a demonstration of the spectrum and its effects on light. The physiological and psychological effects of light etc.

We pass on to pigment colour and the principle of harmony and contrast.

An assignment will be given on each type of colour contrast in order that the student will have a clear grasp of this principle in practice as well as theory. The nature of materials will be explored - their possibilities and limitations in relation to self expression. A considerable amount of practical work will be carried out during this period. Drawing from natural forms with regard to rhythmic structure, texture, tonal composition, abstract and natural. All possible contrast will be explored in practice through assignments. Those studies will include drawing from life. Antique should not be used (at least not in the first year). Painting from nature. The setting up of objects of everyday life and their interpretation in various ways. All these assignments will begin with drawing to search out the structure of the objects and the possibilities of novel arrangements and interpretation of the subject in various ways from the naturalistic on to abstraction. The teacher must be alert in order to keep up enthusiasm in such studies. Composition comes in here in a very natural and practical way.

The principle of composition. The approach here will be from "abstract composition". Figure composition at this stage would be impractical. Starting here with the basic forms assignments will be given bringing form and colour principles already studied into play.

Further three-dimensional studies. The constructing of forms of a more complicated nature and their interpretation on the flat two-dimensional plane in various media.

The problem of pictorial space - what is it?

The study of space composition.

Analysis of the work of Cezanne in this field. Static and dynamic plane structure. The old masters of certain periods analysed in relation to these problems. Assignments on analysis from reproduction. Method of analysis demonstrated.

Drawing in relation to pictorial space. The transposition of the natural object overloaded with detail to the plastic equivalent for space composition.

Assignments in this form of composition.

I might insert here a very important study - that of modulation as opposed to modelling.

In these studies life painting will come in as well as considerable research drawing.

Drawing becomes a more cerebral activity although still based on feeling.

Mural painting: The nature of the modern as compared to past ages. The demands of modern architecture. The type of forms available for mural painting.

The element of scale.

The element of distortion in colour and form because of distance from and height above spectator. Many other aspects. The cartoon, the layout etc.

Assignments for murals.

This is a rough draught of the course and many other details could be added, but a strict phasing out of work is almost impossible if the course is to grow and expand in a natural way. The student will have the maximum amount of freedom within the context of the course.

I suggest that during each term visiting artists be commissioned to give demonstrations to the students in their particular methods in order to open up the college to outside influence.

3rd Year

This should be comparatively free.

I would suggest that all three schools should work on a project for a building given by the teacher of Architecture for the entire term. This would to some extent give real experience in co-operation and simulate a real commission.

An exhibition of this project should be mounted at the end of the year.

The first and second years should be included in this exhibition.

Aim

The aim of the course is to liberate the creative faculty of the student by giving him the objective principles of art and helping him to develop a personal visual language through experiment in all possible aspects of drawing and painting/experience in various techniques, methods and materials. To advance his independence of judgement and capacities for self-guidance and discipline necessary to continued creative effort. To this end there is a thorough consideration of the intellectual aspect of the visual arts and the development of the ability to use language accurately and with integrity as a tool of analytical thought.

John Kelly

Prof. of Painting.

APPENDIX 6

The Curriculum in the School of Painting at the National College of Art

1972-1973

School of Painting

Diploma Course 1972-1973

1st Year Programme

Tonal Painting: Life and Still Life projects. Painting with pure colour. Life and Still Life projects. (in oils, acrylics, watercolour, gouache, collage.)

Pictorial Structure

The Format
The Picture Field
The Movement Path.

The plane - its relation to the picture plane - types of plane
Opening the picture: Volume - Space — Tension
Balance of volume and negative space, axes and tensions
Division of picture plane
Chiaroscuro
Colour and Form
Theory of plastic colour
Texture and plastic weight
Plastic depth and focal plane
Analysis of the works of Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, etc.
Materials and Techniques
Projects composition stressing the above points
Drawing

Line as gesture
Line as symbol by analogy
Line as logical symbol: contour
Modelling and the tradition of Objective Drawing.
Modelling in relation to pictorial space.
Planes in Drawing
Distortion
Scale
Analytical Drawing
Projects in Life and Object Drawing stressing the above principles.

Related Subjects

History of Art	(essential)
Wood Cut	
Lithography	
Etching	
Silk Screen	
Stained Glass	Two of these subjects must be taken.

Second Year Programme 1972-73

Pictorial Structure
Further work in this area with projects based on the examination of the following:-
The visual field - The retinal field - The picture field.
Dynamic equilibrium of figure and ground.
Colour balance
Continuance
Closure
Spatial sequence: rhythm, repetition, equivocal space.
Depth relationships by vertical location, transparency and interpretation
Perspective: multiple simultaneous viewpoints
Amplified perspective, Integration of equivocal lines, compression.
The cubist experiment.

Life Painting

Projects in objective painting from life.
Projects based on studies from the living model relative to the pictorial structure. Composition.

Projects in still life - Life Painting

Drawing

Life Drawing
Analytical Drawing
Drawing from natural forms and manmade objects.

Other Essential Studies

History of Art	Must be taken
Lithography	
Etching	
Silk-screen	
Woodcut	At least two of these subjects must be taken
Stained Glass	
Metalwork	
Photography	
Ceramics	

The student should be motivated to express a feeling through whatever problem he is given so that he is involved in self-expression from the start.

A problem (and not an exercise) is set on an art principle or group of art principles so that the student is intellectually involved.

The student should be encouraged to collect found objects or objects which appeal to him and use them as material for study.

The student is required to use sketchbooks outside to collect data and enrich his imagination etc.

A logbook in which he can write about his work and progress is also essential.

APPENDIX 7

The Syllabus in the Fine Art Faculty at the National College of Art and Design for 1975-76

National College of Art and Design Faculty of Fine Art

Aims of the Faculty

To provide, within the three years available, a basis for future development as an artist, and the introduction of professional attitudes. This ranges from the evolvement of ideas by means of creative thinking and constructive criticism to the acceptance of such responsibility and self-discipline as is necessary for their fulfilment.

We believe that a student's aspirations as to his post-college career should be taken into account as soon as they begin to show themselves, and while such issues should not be forced, the students should be encouraged to declare such intents rather than forming habits of unfocused thinking and vague intentions. Such ambitions will naturally shift in both direction and depth as the students' own evaluation of experience grows and this is regarded as essential in establishing a mature attitude to their particular art activity. Students should be asked to question their role as artists and to lift their horizons beyond those of the College situation. We believe this is necessary if the student is to assess his position in relation to society and take the first steps in achieving his aims. There are few traditionally organised outlets other than

further training or entry into teaching and this situation requires that the student begins to organise his future while he can expect the support of the College. But it is also to be hoped that the range of tools and visual language that the student will be introduced to will present many additional vocational possibilities. We feel that this consideration of the future should grow out of the working environment within the College, rather than faced as a problem at the end of the third year.

In general, the course is seen as a balance between activities sponsored by tutors and those generated by students individually; progressively there is a change in the onus of initiative from the tutor to the student. During the earlier part of the course, students are introduced to activities which have a bearing on some aspect of the overall aim and much is achieved by the real participation of both full and part-time staff in creating an atmosphere of mutual trust and concern.

Basically, the three Diploma years are visualised as an organic situation which undergoes constant change according to the needs of the individuals who form it, both staff and students, so it is not possible to give a timetable or rigid scheme that must be adhered to, but the following broad outlines indicate our aims:-

Namely that the first year is heavily directed and aimed, not at craft disciplines but through projects to extend their abilities and to establish a personal identity; the second year is seen as a continuously developing process where they begin to evolve their own language and chosen means of communication. The third is an opportunity to develop these means and abilities to the highest level.

The Particular Situation of the College

The College situated as it is in the centre of Dublin within five minutes walk of the National Museum and the National Gallery, within twenty minutes of the mountains or sea, within a city which is in places visually claustrophobic and in others spacious, the architectural layers of the past three centuries against the obscenity of the past ten years. Within a political climate which is devious and innocent, labyrinthine in its complexities. Provides as rich a mixture for an artist to develop in as could be imagined.

Comments on the Aims

The theme at the base of this teaching should be the study of life in its various and endless permutations of reality. By this we mean that the student must be guided to realise that his own invention needs constant feeding, and that out of the accumulation of experience he must find the means that he will come to use to express himself. By doing this he will find a source of nourishment to his imagination which will help develop a residue of formal knowledge which will allow him to express his conceptual ideas with clarity and conviction. The faces of reality are diverse and constantly becoming more so, but we believe that to direct the student's mind towards the world of the actual is to give his talent a tap root in what will be a constant sustenance to him, and help to prevent him taking merely eclectic attitudes.

To direct his enquiry outside himself and towards the world, but really we mean through himself and towards the world, is our intention. Any vision or any conception that he may have, will depend upon how well he can make it evident. This requires a

condition of sensitivity and receptiveness to what is, and not what he believes to be. We believe that some of this awareness can be cultivated in the student by drawing, drawing as a very immediate, nervous, highly personal, almost conversational basic language. Drawing from the figure and drawing from phenomena of all kinds must be constantly encouraged so as to make it a matter of almost automatic reaction for him to take visual notes. The teaching of this must be imaginative; it does not mean setting up a model and copying it with a kind of south west rain of shading, and think that is drawing. The effort to see things freshly, and in as far as possible their way, must be encouraged. A great part of this study will always be hard work, as its purpose is not only to increase the student's vision, but also to increase his freedom. Many examples of drawings done in the past, from the caveman to the drawings of the present day, should be shown, to give the student a sense of this subject as a continuous human activity, and not a subject for testing academic skill by examining boards.

In our experience, the natural tendency of students is to act in an haphazard hit or miss fashion. This must be discouraged and a professional attitude must be taught and insisted upon in specific studio work.

The process of building work from the first idea to a conclusion must, to a large degree, be a logical and sensible progression. Of course, some people will be lazy and brilliant work can follow, but generally we believe that the student must think and act out of a logical intelligence to be able to develop and achieve his maximum expression of ideas.

The world outside the Art College walls is more vivid, hard and exciting, than that within. All our efforts must be to break down these walls and destroy the division between these two worlds.

Perhaps the most crucial time will be the first two of these terms when the students' particular artistic abilities are as yet unknown both to himself and to the staff. Until the nature of his particular abilities are more evident we feel he must be confronted with a specific and intensive teaching programme of definitive set studio activities carefully calculated to lead his enquiry towards a positive understanding of visual phenomena and himself. Habits of work calculated to develop this capacity for logical and constructive formal thought should be taught. Just as such a logical control of any process will play an essential part in the development of an understanding of materials, so will an exploration of elements of chance within the creative process also have an important part to play. First for its own sake, out of curiosity, and secondly, for the specific use of selected chance elements as indications of the students' particular personality.

We must emphasise that to find the nature of the student's particular artistic personality is our principle and major concern. On the evidence of this hard teaching first year we should hope to be able to form some assessment of that achievement and future direction. Just as the particular personalities of students will be a primal factor to the development of any programme, so also will the particular specialities of each individual member of staff.

For more individual work as a student matures there must first be a statement of intent by the student, followed by a choice of process for a specific need. The validity

of this choice must be carefully assessed by the tutor, and more particularly for Sculpture, a careful environmental consideration must be made. Later, the assessment of technical ability will be made in terms of efficient execution.

There is a warning to be considered about the use of many of the new materials and processes that technology has made available to the artists. We must beware the dangers of the superficial qualities of these new materials which are usually related to their fashionable use. Although the materials themselves constitute an exciting challenge, we must always be aware that mechanical shapes have a short fashionable lifetime. By all means use these materials but stripped of their fashionable forms.

A student will inevitably borrow styles in the search for his own organisation. It is perhaps the tutors most difficult task to prescribe the limits of beneficial eclecticism, to the extent that it is understood as such and may improve technical skills or to recognise elements of original organisation as they become manifest in each work.

The injection of value concepts within a course will depend upon two main influences; those initially agreed upon by the staff out of common sympathy which they feel can have relevance within the necessary limitations of a course; those independent of the course which arise as an inevitable result of new movements and discoveries outside and independent of any establishment. Obviously the ideal situation is that each should feed the other, but the most applicable will be that over which the staff have direct control and where the part-time staff can make the greatest contribution.

The sense of achievement is a basic motivating factor to further achievement and it is by pinpointing this achievement that direction can emerge.

In an effort to create the right kind of environment for the young artist in a Faculty of Fine Art, administration is going to have to show the same kind of imagination and fluidity as the actual work of the Faculty. The whole idea of the ordinary school with its routine of set classes and definite timetables will certainly prove to be of no use at all or alternatively a university based structure. The students must be encouraged at all times to feel themselves artists with an artist's very strong feeling of responsibility to his own work, this kind of atmosphere will not be helped by two hours of this and two hours of that, or administrative rigidity, but as far as is possible the needs of the student about the work he is involved with at the same moment must always be considered and some means of accommodating this must be found. The students from the earliest possible moment should with tutorial guidance, be allowed great freedom to choose whatever work they wish to do. We realise that in an institution of any kind administration is a very necessary factor, but the continuous tension between the demands of the organisation and the needs of the individual must, in an art institution, try to resolve themselves to give more freedom to the artists rather than less.

Course Structure

Tutorials.

Tutorials will be continuous throughout the three years; they are a corner stone of the whole structure and without its proper functioning, the personal responsibility required cannot be achieved. Tutors will be directly responsible to the year tutors.

Year Tutors.

Will have an equally heavy responsibility and will constantly see that part-time staff are being properly used, that attendance is maintained, that there are seminars, slide lecturers, etc., that assessments are correctly carried out, that barriers that tend to build up are reduced to a minimum.

Assessments

Although assessments will be continuous through tutorial reports throughout the term, from visiting lecturers on completion of day or block visit and termly by personal tutors. There will, at the end of each term be an assessment by the year tutors, personal tutors, or other staff by mutual consent if either year or personal tutor believes there is reason for doubt about a student continuing the Head of Faculty must be present at that assessment. Students may be put on probation if the assessment panel believes it is necessary, but again the Head of Faculty must be present. The student will be informed at the time, the reasons for it, and a mutually agreed programme through his or her personal tutor will be undertaken. He or she will also be informed in writing that they are on a probationary period.

The report at the end of each assessment must be agreed by the panel. Anyone dissenting should write a separate report; both should be kept together.

Assessment procedure for the final year will be as laid down by the Academic Council.

Tutorials - Structure

(a) All staff shall be available as tutors.

(b) No member of staff shall have more than eight tutee's.

(c) Students shall select the member/s they would like to have as tutor/s. Staff may agree to accept them as tutee's or not, in which case the head of department should, through discussion, arrive at a decision.

(d) Staff and students may request who they wish to attend tutorials.

(e) Tutorial groups should consist of students from all years.

(f) Students in the first term will be allocated tutors by the Head of Department.

(g) Students and staff may through discussion, agree to a change of tutor as, or if, their developing needs require it.

Tutorials - Function

(h) To establish that contact where problems can be discussed.

(i) To put into relationship all aspects of a student's course.

(j) To attempt to work out a programme in keeping with the students needs and course requirements.

(k) To be mutually responsible to see that tutorials take place when required but certainly not less than once a month.

Year Tutors - Structure

(a) Shall be responsible for one year of the course.

(b) Shall be responsible for implementing Faculty Board policy when and where necessary.

(c) Shall be appointed by the Head of Department.

(d) To ensure with the tutors that movement through the facilities does not lead to disruption.

Function

(e) To discuss with and, where possible, implement the educational requirements of that year.

(f) To ensure that educational standards are maintained.

(g) That the Head of Faculty is kept informed of all developments.

(h) To call group tutorials or discussions when necessary, or when requested by either staff or students.

(i) To advise the Head of Faculty on part-time staff requirements for that year.

Term 1

By making responses to both individual and group demands during the 1st year stimulating self-motivation and development, to new possibilities. Depending upon the nature of the people in the first year fine art, a programme of projects is planned for the first term. Condensed areas of activity demanding both hard work and enthusiasm is envisaged to introduce the student (and staff) to a wide visual spectrum. A visual language.

The students will alternate between Painting and Sculpture projects with the year tutors.

Individual tutorials will take place throughout the term as part of continual assessment.

A programme of Slide/lecture will take place on a weekly basis as will regular workshop/studio seminars with all students/staff involved.

Term 2

Projects are expected to continue but with emphasis on a more individual basis. The use of other areas in the college is hoped for as individual needs demand. Suggestions and ideas in writing to the year tutors please. Possible areas where group projects can be arranged . . . . . Printmaking, - Litho, Silk-screen, Etching . . Photography - Film - Video.

The use of craft based areas could also be involved at this time . . . . . .

Stone - Pottery - Weaving - Stained Glass.

A short technical introduction (3 condensed days) is also hoped for at this time. Written information and plans in each facility . . . . . .

Casting - Fibreglass - Woodwork - Metal (welding.) All aspects of technical information made available to students.

With the continuation of projects, students are expected towards the end of term to prepare their own programme.

Individual tutorials will continue.

Term 3

A time directed mainly to individual programmes, interspersed with one day group projects and seminars. Tutorials etc.

Assessments/Exhibition to occur towards the end of term.

A group period outside the college is hoped for at this time.

Nigel Rolfe.

Rob Smith.

First Year Tutors. Fine Art.

APPENDIX 8

Curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design 1982-83

Aims and Objectives of the Course

Educational Philosophy

The practice of Art today ranges through a wide spectrum of ideas, concepts, techniques and skills that offer a choice of expression previously inconceivable. Within the College the boundaries have then to be set by the available accommodation, knowledge and finance.

The following are the proposed subject and media areas:-

Painting	(Oil, Acrylic, Water, Collage etc.)
Sculpture	(Metal, Plastics, Wood etc.)
Printmaking	(Etching, Lithography, Silk-screen etc.)
Media Studies	(Photography, Video, Performance etc.)
Art History	

Art is a creative, expressive and intellectual discipline which requires the application of informed procedures and lines of enquiry to whatever material or idea is under consideration. These procedures will be referred to as Research, Analysis, Extension and Practice. These will, we believe, provide a framework for future action.

Students may opt for the area or areas where their ideas and abilities dictate on the basis of tutorial counselling.

Finally, it has to be said that no system can cater for every art possibility, but it is to be hoped that through individual sensitivity and intelligence most aspects can be catered for.

Aims

The aim of the course is to provide a comprehensive basis of knowledge and practice of the visual arts for the continuing development of the individual.

That, through the knowledge and expertise gained, the student will be capable of making a contribution to the society in which they live.

Objectives

(a) To provide, through a range of tools and language, the aesthetic and technical information that is basic to further developments.

(b) To encourage optimal use of inherent abilities and motivation through exposure to a wide range of ideas and techniques.

(c) Through the use of tutorials, discussions and studio practice, develop the student's own evaluation of experience which is regarded as essential to the mature and disciplined practice of their particular activity.

(d) To take into consideration the individual's aspirations about his/her future, as soon as they become apparent, and provide programmes of study which will form the foundations on which disciplined activity can be built.

General Synopsis of Course

First Year - Common Course.

In the first phase of six weeks aims are to introduce the students visually and intellectually to a wide knowledge of drawing concepts, together with their historical development. This period is devoted entirely to drawing, with positive emphasis on creativity.

In the 2nd phase students spend two weeks in each of the areas of painting, printmaking, sculpture and video/photography, as an introduction to studio and workshop practice.

The 3rd phase consists of two three weekly projects which will give students the opportunity of working on a more individual level and become acquainted with a wider range of staff. The briefs for this phase are aimed at extending the students skill, knowledge and ability to follow through to a conclusion the original idea.

The final six weeks of the year is devoted to a personal project done in conjunction with a tutor. The last week is set aside for the preparation of work, etc. for the end of year assessment.

Programmes of slides and lectures will take place throughout the year, as will workshop and studio seminars with all staff and students concerned.

Individual reviews of work will be carried out throughout the period as part of

"continuous assessment".

Second Year

By the end of the first year, directions will be emerging and attitudes developing. The second year sees the continuation of this process, and in the fourth term, students will be exposed to external influences in the form of visiting professional artists who will carry out block projects of two or three weeks' duration.

The nature of this activity is carefully considered. Firstly, to extend the depth of understanding within a specific brief by using artists who specialise in this field. Secondly, to raise the levels of activity by stimulating ideas and discussion with these visiting artists. It also introduces the students to attitudes of people who are surviving by their work - though this may not always be true, since some visitors will be teachers from other colleges, but even here, there is cross-fertilisation of ideas.

Two projects of this nature are planned per term - they will be optional, but tutors may recommend that certain projects would be advantageous for certain students to attend and while these project groups would usually consist of not more than eight people, it is expected that all second year students would be involved in at least three over the year. Attendance at one is compulsory.

Projects in most cases have their roots in the disciplines of painting, printmaking, or sculpture. This does not exclude other areas of interest which may emerge over the year. Inevitably, students will find themselves orientating to specific areas as they develop. This specialisation should be encouraged as early as possible, so that time

required to gain the necessary skills, depth of understanding and personal involvement, and academic excellence can be achieved.

Seminars are arranged as required.

Third Year

We believe this year is, of all the years, the most complex. Personal tutors are of vital importance as decision-making processes are leading to conclusions about future plans. What is best? To Teach? To work for post graduate places? To work on one's own regardless of difficulties? To be free of the educational system for at least one year? To take any job and continue on one's own or to become involved in some sort of service to the community? To return to one's roots? To sit for the College Diploma (pass degree equivalent) before continuing for the Degree etc.?

The answers to such questions will determine the nature of the individual programme. It is a prime concern to give the individual the opportunity of extending his or her potential in breadth and depth.

Fourth Year

In addition to working within the college, students will be involved in working for bodies outside the college, e.g. last year two students carried out murals for public offices. Another was engaged in engraving a relief on a wall project. They will be encouraged to exhibit in public and private exhibitions and compete for prizes and scholarships.

These involvements are considered to be a preparatory step towards working outside the protected and confined perimeter of a college of art, and of directing their concern towards using that accumulated knowledge in a professional context.

All students are required to submit their work - be it installation, film, exhibitions, etc. for assessment by internal and external assessors before a Degree award can be made.

For the final assessment, students must have available a folder and any other back-up material that will show their evolvement over the four years. Students will be available for interview if examiners require.

Syllabus

Common First Year

The year is in five phases.

(i) Six weeks Drawing.

(ii) Eight weeks workshop and studio practice.

(iii) Nine weeks of projects in Painting, Printmaking, Sculpture and Photo/Video.

(iv) Six weeks individual programming.

(v) One week review of work.

Phase (i) (Introduction)

In the morning an introduction to the year programme and the aims and objectives of the course are gone into and followed by a question and answer session. In the afternoon the students are given a tour of the studio facilities and workshops with brief introduction to aspects of safety etc. by various technical assistants.

Phase (i) consists of six weeks divided into:

(a) Introduction to the mechanics of vision and how we 'see'. Physical relationship of the observer to the observed. Accuracy in drawing: at least six hours spent on a purely tonal drawing; (Duration 7 days)

(b) Language through marks, structures, process of drawing . The various methods by which very precise information can be conveyed by drawing systems. (Duration 4 days)

(c) Narrative in drawing. Introduction to some of the many ways drawing has been used to convey literal information, sequence, layering, etc. (Duration 8 days)

(d) Objective drawing: Drawing from observation using time, tone texture, and notions of weight, balance, rhythm and structure, and 12 hours using only line to define structure, the aim is to produce an accurate drawing. (Duration 3 days)

(e) Social and political content in drawing. The use of drawing as a means of objection, of propagation and as a means of potential change. (Duration 4 days)

Slide lectures and seminar criticism will take place as required. Each section is followed by critical assessment of what was set, what was achieved, and how it related to the next section. The art history programme is directly related into this.

Phase (ii)

The year of students will be divided into four groups of eight. Each group will spend two weeks in each of the main study areas:

(a) In the painting studio they will be required to prepare and carry out a painting in either oil or acrylic.

(b) Printmaking workshops - there will be an introduction to general workshop practice and they will be instructed in one of either, etching, silk-screen or lithography, and they will be required to carry out a print.

(c) Sculpture workshops will again introduce general workshop practice with particular emphasis on safety, followed by practical experience in at least two of the following; wood, metal, clay, plastics or stone.

(d) The photography block will instruct and carry out the process from taking a picture to its completion in a print. Technical information will be given at each stage.

Phase (iii)

Six projects will be given in each of two, three week 'blocks' under the four headings of Painting (2), Printmaking (1), Sculpture (2), Photography of Video (1) One project must be selected from each group. All members of staff are required to submit a 'project'.

These projects have a number of functions; they enable staff to develop themes of their own at a relatively fundamental level over 12 teaching days; it enables students to select on either a thematic or subject basis while still showing the areas of specialisation of individual staff. These briefs are demanding and require both analysis and research.

Phase (iv)

After discussion students will be given tutors with whom they will be required to work out a programme for the next six weeks which if the objectives of the previous phase have succeeded should allow for work already begun to be further developed. Continuous monitoring and teaching maintains a high level of commitment.

The session ends with a review of that work together with discussions about space and areas on specialisation in the second year, together with an agreed program of summer work.

Course Curriculum

Painting

A. Honours Degree Course in Painting

In accordance with the Aims and Objectives as agreed by the Faculty, the Department of Painting would implement them through the following procedures.

The Course aims to introduce students to concepts which have traditionally been the painter's language and how they have evolved into the multiplicity of processes available to the professional painter now.

Through discussions, critical analysis, and practice we question the function of art in society.

It will motivate and crystallise ideas through demanding and precise programming up to the end of second year and thereafter as the need arises. It will instil thinking attitudes and concentrated work habits that will give the individuals confidence in themselves through achievement and skill.

The course will cover, through recommended reading lists, lectures and demonstrations, the methods and materials used historically and today. Students will be required to demonstrate their understanding through practical exercises.

The Department will ensure contact with professional opinion and expertise through lectures, tutorials, seminars, and contemporary ideas and methods by practising artists.

Greater value is placed on intellectual curiosity and quality than the acquisition of technical skills.

The Department aims by careful timetabling to progressively increase through the practice of painting formal and expressive clarity required for continuous development.

APPENDIX 9

Interview with Gwen O'Dowd[1]

Rosmarie Mulcahy - Gwen, you have an established reputation as a landscape painter though your work transcends the traditional boundaries that the term 'landscape' implies. Is landscape your main concern as a painter?

Gwen O'Dowd - The term 'landscape painting' has so many cliched connotations that I find myself deliberately reacting against it. It's a static term and that in itself is the total antithesis of what my concerns are. I prefer to be considered a painter rather than a particular kind of painter - these categorisations are limiting and only really required by the critics. I am not interested in particularly describing the precise look of a place; what intrigues me more is the transience inherent in a place and that activity which is not always immediately visible.

Irish landscape painting extends from the classical topographical painters of the 18th century to the expressive, romantic work of George Barret and James Arthur O Connor in the nineteenth. In the early 20th century, Paul Henry and Maurice MacGonigal represented a rural Ireland, while a more adventurous strand featured

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[1]Rosemarie Mulcahy, *Gwen O' Dowd* (Dublin: Gandon Editions, 1994), 12-25

Roderic O Conor, Jack B Yeats, Nano Read, and more recently, Camille Souter and Barrie Cook. How do you see yourself in relation to this tradition?

Naturally I identify with the latter two. I'm coming from a tradition that is more English than Irish. As a student, I was introduced to the work of the younger English artists who were using landscape as their primary source, people such as John Hoyland, John Walker, Ian McKeever and Christopher le Brun. These were all living artists and this made the whole process more immediate and exciting. These were real people and the ambitious scale of their work opened up possibilities for us. There was no real equivalent here at that time.

These artists were more significant for you than any Irish tradition?

Yes, they were potentially more exciting because they were breaking with the safe tradition of landscape painting.

I would like to dwell a little on the question of Irish landscape. It seems to me that there have been attempts to present a particularly Irish sensibility, which is synonymous with mist, water, poetry.

I think a disservice was done to some fine painters by promoting them as a manifestation of the 'Celtic Twilight'. Irish landscape painting was seen as exemplifying the 'Irishness' of Irish Art. Perhaps this was coming from an outsiders point of view - that is what they expected Irish art to be about. There is less emphasis on this now. The work of Tony O' Malley is of equal standing to any of that on the international scene, as is that of Camille Souter and Barrie Cooke. The Irish

landscape still acts as subject matter for many artists of different disciplines, but little of this past Romanticism is apparent.

Although on initial viewing your paintings may appear to be abstract, they have a firm basis in the observation of reality. Was this always so, even in your student days?

Well, most work, whether figurative or non-figurative, is grounded in some real experience. When you go to an art college you are constantly exploring possibilities in an effort to develop one's own personal visual language. At the time I attended, it was very much project-based, usually quite open ended, and that really acted as an aid or starting point for researching a subject.

Did you find it a stimulating time in the National College of Art and Design?

Yes, I think the college was going through a particularly healthy phase at the time; the new system was beginning to assert itself and there was tremendous energy around. The most memorable element for me was the seemingly whole-hearted commitment by both staff and students, and this led to a constructive rapport being established on the studio floor. There also seemed to be an endless series of visiting lecturers who were a great introduction into the real world of making art.

Did you have a strong vocational impulse to be an artist. Can you recall any specific influence that caused you to choose this career?

From an early age I was encouraged to draw by my father who had a wide range of interests. A box of pastels that belonged to him sparked of a first series of drawings - these drawings formed my portfolio for admission to National College of Art. Other than that, I knew very little about it as a working career.

After graduation, in 1980, you moved into the Visual Arts Centre. How significant was this period for your development as an artist?

The Visual Arts Centre was established with the aim of providing group facilities for artists at an affordable rate. It was the first of its kind in Ireland. The founding group, of which I was a member, put proposals to the arts council who responded in an entirely supportive way. We became involved in the practicalities of looking for a building, dealing with estate agents, applying for grants, learning a whole strategy for survival. Eventually we found a warehouse in Great Strand Street, off the north quays in Dublin, which was easily adapted to our needs. The centre is still in operation today.

Your first one-person show in 1984 in the project art centre was favourably reviewed by the critics. Tell me about that work.

The work that I began then was really a continuation of what I had been doing at college. They were very large works on paper using all sorts of materials, exploring different gesso grounds and different ways of building up surfaces, collages, etc. The early work was essentially abstract but at the same time reflected my immediate environment, which was urban. It had a tough, weathered feel. Subconsciously I was absorbing the images of urban decay in my surroundings.

I was eventually working off the influences of the Abstract Expressionists, Tapies and other artists at that time. I was getting more adventurous with the use of materials and gaining more confidence in what I could do with them. That period really represented three years of letting this body of work mature, and by the time I had the exhibition, I was ready for a public reaction.

The surfaces of your paintings are full of incident, and you seem to take great pleasure in the materials you use.

My work has always tended to be tactile and this is a quality I make use of as part of the visual language. It is not surface for its own sake, but rather evidence of how an image comes about. Through the process of destroying and re-making, the painting gradually emerges over time. The materials have always played a major part. They are a source of intrigue and their investigation can be a creative force in itself. They also tend to be quite seductive - their colour and smell provide a sensual pleasure; indeed, the whole physical activity of mixing colour can be a welcome diversion when one is struggling with a painting.

Would it be true to say you have a strong need to travel?

Well, living on a small island, I think one has to travel no matter what one's career. In the context of making art, it is essential to expose oneself to other work - to see it in the flesh rather than reproduced. For my particular work, I have found travelling to different places such as Spain, Wales and Canada challenging, as each place presents possible subject-matter to work from.

Your visit to Snowdonia in 1986 resulted in a large series of work on paper. How did this come about?

I was in Wales on an Irish - Welsh exchange. It was a three-month residency where I was given a studio. This series came about as a result of a walk up Snowdonia - there was a path. As a walk shouldn't have caused any problems apart from the fact that it became obliterated by a blanket of mist. Luckily, it lifted after a while but the imagery remained with me and developed into a series of transient images that interconnected. Witnessing change like this at first hand made the series format seem appropriate for this purpose.

For me, Underneath the Waves *is one of your most impressive works. Could you talk about the circumstances of its creation*?

That was done for a Greenpeace project to highlight the problems of Sellafield and the pollution of the Irish Sea. A number of artists living around the Irish Sea - in Wales, France and Scotland, as well as Ireland - were asked to participate. For me it presented itself as opportune subject matter, continuing the constant theme of transience. This painting attempted to encapsulate not only the ceaseless motion of the sea, but also the force and brutality. It was several months, and, unusually enough, it was only after completion that I began really to do back up work for it. Also, the potential to take an image further is always there. The sea, fluid, without any solidity, was very sympathetic to the paint itself, where the build up of layers of paint in depth became the foundation and structure of the painting. It consequently led to the whole series of Irish Sea paintings.

I'm fascinated by the working of the creative process. Could you take us through one of your projects from the original concept, through the exploratory stages to its completion?

Each painting has its own particular history. Take for example one of the Canadian paintings - *Bride's Veil*. It came about quite accidentally. It is the name of a glacier which I caught a brief glimpse of on a journey through the Canadian Rockies. It did, however, remain a potent image in my head. Named by the Indians - the title existing long before the painting - it became one of those obsessive images which one keeps destroying until eventually something resembling that firstly impression appears. In this case, I began formulating a mental image and there were certain definite criteria involved. I knew, for instance, that I wanted a solid physical presence; I perhaps knew the shape and size. I had a bare pencil sketch to help jog my memory; in other situations one might have a variety of back-up material - it differs each time. The strong colour that you find in the glaciers of that particular area had to be an integral part - a magnificent blue-green turquoise against white, the result of deposits built up over centuries. That's it, theoretically anyway, I can't really say much else, but I know I always mistrust an image that comes too easily.

I'd like to look at the question of studies, small works on paper, their significance, their power.

I think they've become more significant over time. They are essentially exploratory, they are like a thinking process where one can explore different possibilities. Every image has the potential of being seen in so many different ways, so that consequently a group of them often relate to one another in a series.

Sometimes they can condense the atmosphere of a place or subject to the extent that they have a power out of proportion to their size. I fine them useful particularly when I'm away. They are both transportable and disposable without too much cost involved.

In the paintings that resulted from your visit to the Columbia Ice Fields, there is a romantic sense of awe in the presence of nature. What emotions do you experience through landscape?

That part of Canada is certainly awe-inspiring, I would imagine, for anyone who experiences it. But I think as time goes on, one is excited not only by witnessing a new type of landscape, but equally one is excited at the prospect of it being 'paintable'. I think both experiences merge. The Canadian imagery was particularly significant in this respect as it seemed to relate immediately to the activity in the studio. It was graphic imagery and, therefore, was sympathetic to drawing - marks, lines, colour surrounded by white.

So it is mood rather than topography that interests you?

I think I use the landscape really as an excuse to paint. It becomes a vehicle to portray emotions, so that both mood and topographic elements are necessary and, perhaps, inseparable. However, one does have the licence to be selective.

Being in the landscape, experiencing the solitude of being alone - does that sometimes provoke a sense of unease?

Yes, as it equally does walking in the city at night, but perhaps I'm more familiar with that territory. We've just been talking about emotions experienced through landscape, where a lot of my work originates from. The vulnerability one feels confronting nature makes one aware of one's own mortality, and the residue of that experience remains.

Have contemporary events ever provoked a response on your work?

One would hope that they do all the time, but it is true to say that some issues become more obviously evident than others in my work, for example Greenpeace, Crann (the tree protection organisation), *Fools Gold,* (against mining in the West of Ireland). Another series called Fisk's Fires was, interestingly enough, initiated by listening to Robert Fisk reporting from Kuwait. His descriptions were extraordinarily vivid.

More recently, here in Ireland, the political environment of early 1992 spurred on a new series. It was a particularly depressing climate dominated by the Maastricht Treaty and the abortion debate, and this work in some ways reflects my anger at the time. Using the land and sea as starting points, I wanted to acknowledge the fact that we are here on the edge, a small island, isolated, with rain and clouds overbearing, creating a certain insularity and inaccessibility. It developed in its own way, but contemporary events definitely influenced the mood of the work.

I have been struck by the professionalism and determination with which you have pursued your career. How do you see the present environment for artists in Ireland?

I have always found the situation here very supportive and gradually more so as the network of studios, arts centres and galleries increases across the country. I think the only problem now is that Ireland is becoming too small for the amount of artists it is producing - we need a wider audience. Again the difficulty of living on an island and the problems involved in transporting one's work can be financially prohibitive. However, I would see it as a priority to gain access to a wider international art scene.

In 1987, the exhibition Irish Women Artists *was a striking demonstration of the contribution of women to art in Ireland. What is your assessment of the career possibilities of women artists today?*

In my view, conditions for artists both male and female are similar here. Personally, I have never experienced difficulties because of my gender. Perhaps because we have been anxious to promote our visual artists, regardless of their gender, as our visual tradition is still relatively new, while our literary tradition is well established and very distinguished. I may even have benefited when it came to teaching in art schools, where there was a demand for practising women artists because of the predominantly female student population.

However I do recognise that women have been at a disadvantage in the wider, international art scene. This is obvious when one looks back at the names of the modern masters. The women who emerge are few - Frida Kahlo, Eva Hesse, Georgia O' Keefe, Louise Nevelson etc. Theirs was a tremendous struggle in a male world. Eva Hesse is now recognised as one of the most significant and revolutionary artists of the Abstract Expressionist period. The struggle is still there for women who want to gain respect in that hierarchy. Even today you still fine comparatively few women being promoted by the international market.

Now let us consider the content of art made by women. What are your views on feminist art?

Perhaps I can identify more with the work of some women artists because it reflects the female experience. In my view, there are very few successful exponents of feminist art. Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeoise both dealt with feminist issues at various times during their careers. However it did not dominate their work. I admire their work generally because of their integrity. Others like Judy Chicago, Cindy Sherman and Nancy Spero are important figures because they have taken on feminism and the question of identity and gender as their main working concerns.

What expectations do you have of the viewers of your paintings?

I can never predict peoples reactions. I'm always surprised and, of course, encouraged when work is purchased. That is something one cannot be casual about, or rely on for that matter. I think there is always an anxious time when one feels vulnerably exposed to criticisms of one's audience and, in some ways, they can play too large a part. At the same time, the nature of the product demands an audience and one really has to accept their involvement. I think one essentially needs a public response in order to progress, by sifting through reactions, both positive and negative.

APPENDIX 10

Charles Brady 1926 - 1997: Artist. Studied at the Art Students League, New York City, 1948 - 1951. Lecturer at the National College of Art and Design 1976 - 1984.

Peter O'Neill - Tell me about the college of art when you taught there?

Charles Brady - The students were serious. They didn't have a very good grasp on the future though. There has always been this thing in art schools in these islands, in Ireland certainly, about not wanting to go into teaching. It is a no no area. Your are a considered a failure if you teach. But the reality is that in the two or three years that lie ahead of them - by the time they get to that age - some of them want to get married, then they want children, they want a house, they want European holidays, and the only thing that is going to pay for this is teaching. Washing windows ain't go do it, you know. It's that kind of reality. So you just had to tell them how difficult it was. If you were serious you could do them both; you can do everything. It takes a strong character to do everything. I mean, unfortunately, so many people, students not the least, think of the artist as some guy who's hanging around the pub all day, which is nonsense. I mean that is a phase people go through. Well, here they tended to, in my generation, or ones just older than me. I know a very good painter here, I won't

mention his name, who modelled himself on Sean O'Sullivan, and you couldn't do that. Because, I mean, God love him, he was Sean O'Sullivan; it was bad enough for him.

There was a kind of romanticism about the end of the 1960's, and early 1970's, and there was an aspiration for freedom and political equality. Did you experience any of that in your teaching?

There were things like teach-ins and work-ins. But the thing is, largely it did not translate into Ireland the way it would have in other countries. I was at that time teaching in Bolton Street, conducting is more the word. I had a drawing class at night for architectural students, which was extramural. That is, they did not have to take it. It was not a compulsory course. These were the sons and daughters of architects. There were kids from all over Ireland and they were marvellous. I mean they were really studious. They weren't wasting time, my time or anybody's time. And they decided to have one of these teach-ins. They got Brian Burke and they got Michael Farrell. They threw the net out as wide as they could and brought in a number of people. I went to a few preliminary meetings that were on. I was not due to go up to Bolton Street until one afternoon, other people were going to be there in the morning. The students decided to get some girl who was modelling and bring her in, a nude model. I think she was modelling in the Dun Laoghaire School of Art. And I said they won't wear that in Bolton Street, they just won't accept it. So they tried Burke and Farrell, and they said, "Ah come on, Ireland has changed", you know; it was all these kind of things. I said, "Not to that extent, they've got a Chaplain up there, and he walks through the halls. You don't know, I've been there, I know." They just said, "What do you know Brady". So when I went up around 1 o'clock, when I was due to start, maybe half past one, you

could feel the tension in the room. I knew something was going on. I said to one of the kids, "What's happening?" And he said, "Oh Mr. Brady you have no idea. The model was here and they would not allow it. There is a meeting going on between the heads and the teachers. The poor girl gave up her day to come in and she should be paid. And they took up a collection in the class to pay her". So things had not really changed. I mean it had changed in Time magazine, but that was some place else. Here they had rules that weren't rules. They were not written down. This is the way things were, even in the college. There were things to do and not to do. It was just accepted. So what did it matter? It did not matter all that much, just that they had to accept defeat, not the school but the students.

So we will go now to the National College of Art and Design. Campbell brought me in here. There was an add in the paper in 1973 or so, around that time anyway, 1974 I guess. I had applied, and at the same time I had work in an exhibition called The Figurative Image. It was the first one down in Wexford, and my wife came down with Gerard McKinstry and Robert McKinstry because she had some paintings in this exhibition too. We had a large group of people. I came down to be with her. Some of the group suggested that we go to the bar and have a drink. And this was very rare because my wife would try to get me out of a bar instead of putting me into one. So I thought maybe the dog died or the cat died. I did not know what the problem was. So when we got seated and we had the drinks in front of us they produced this letter thanking me for my enquiry but saying that I didn't get the job. I didn't bat an eye. And they said, "Aren't you upset". I said, "No, why would I be upset?" "But you didn't get the job." "Oh well I didn't expect the job" I said. "I am certain the job was probably already given out before they put the add in the paper". I said, "I think that's the way things are done". I said, "At least now I've let them know I am available. So next time

when the add goes in I'll have the job." So they laughed, and my wife said, "We don't have to spend much time here drinking then".

In the end it didn't happen like that though. I had an exhibition in the Tom Cauldwell Gallery, and at that time I didn't know Campbell and Jackie.

Campbell had only come over in 1974?

This was about that time. Anyway, I had this exhibition in the Cauldwell Gallery, and Campbell and Jackie were at it. I was introduced to them and we made an arrangement to meet the next day in a pub. I think it was Larry Murphy's. We met anyway, and he said to me would I come to work for him. I said, "Where are you from?" And he said, "Inverness". And I said, "I would love to go to Inverness, but really, you know". Campbell said, "I am from Inverness but the job is here in Dublin". So it was a part time job in the college and it was one day a week. I said that I would rather split that one day up into two half days. That would give me two cracks of the whip instead of going all day. So that's the way the system worked. I was brought in on that basis. And I think you will have to look at your records, but I think all the time that I spent with Campbell fine art was in Clarendon Street.

There were a lot of problems in Clarendon Street, largely to do with the heating. The heating system broke down in the wintertime and the students were beginning to become very independent, you know, not really pulling their weight. The ones who did their work did their work. There were three or four that would have been there no matter what was going on. The building could have been on fire and they would not have left their easels. But there were others who said that they were working at home, the usual story. Campbell was very good to work for. I found at one point in time that

one of the other people teaching there with me was sitting one day reading the paper, because the students weren't there.

That's right. A lot of people didn't come in till very late, if at all. There were some who were always there working away, people like Eamon Connors, Joe O'Connor, Pat Harris and Pat Palmer for instance. Do you remember Pat Palmer? He's in California now.

I do. He was the good-looking guy. I remember he went off to Crete on holidays. He was very serious, but you could not get to him in a sense, he had his own ideas. I was not his tutor. I think Rob Smith was his tutor and they did not get on at all. There was great friction there because this fellow you are talking about was very much his own man.

He was also probably the very same age as Rob, if not older.

He was nice. I can't fault him. I was intrigued by him. I didn't know what was going on with him, because he seemed to be in control, he was not a messer. There was another student there called Declan Murphy, who had great charm. It was rather funny. Campbell had him on suspension, a threat of being expelled. At the same time Big John Kelly had him on an RHA scholarship. So he was on suspension on one sheet of paper and a scholarship on the other sheet of paper. The scholarship was something in the neighbourhood of fourteen pounds a month. I was with him one day when he got the fourteen pounds, and I said, "What's this"? And he told me. I said, "Gee, Campbell has got you on suspension".

Murphy went to Germany eventually. Campbell was trying to get him away from the rigid figurative painting he was doing into something abstract. Kelly was trying to keep him on the figurative work, and he was caught between these two guys. It was very funny, in a simple way.

It is a perfect reflection of the situation in the college at the time.

That was an obvious example of it on a very low-key level. I think, looking back - Campbell still can talk to anybody and get along, he can make his way - not every one of these instructors, who certainly came from England, were able to talk to Irish boys and girls. I mean aside from the boys who came from Dublin, the young people came from small country areas, they could not communicate at their ease with these blown-ins.

Especially if they seem a little bit over the top like some of the staff.

Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith, these kids could not relate to these people, they could have come from the moon. And maybe to a certain extent, I mean it's just the way I perceive it, it was an unavoidable arrogance from the Brits to these kids. Whether it was there or not the kids felt this. I did not have to experience it as a student. It's a simple matter to teach or to lecture people when you see something in their work that encourages you to speak to them. But when you are looking at something and it is not there, then, what do you do? There comes a day when you've got to say something. I would go to Campbell as my escape hatch and say, "Look, somebody's got to tell this

kid. He should be doing something else. And it is a big school. There are other places he can go."

There was one particular student, I don't want to mention names, but anyway, I went to him one day and I said to him, "You have ability and your intelligent, your well educated, you can draw, but painting for some reason is not for you. I said, "Obviously I am not God, I can be wrong, but it has taken me a lot of courage to say this to you, because I would not want someone to say it to me. And I have a certain amount of experience." I said, "You should go and talk to somebody in graphics". So I had the same situation with a very beautiful girl in the class, and that was even harder, you know. In both cases it worked. They not only went into another area, but these areas were where they should have been in the first place. I don't know of any other cases, I mean, I may have sent people to some place that did not work. I only know in the two cases where it did work, and they more or less, over the years, have thanked me or mentioned it in my company. So this was one of the other difficulties you had.

There was a big problem one time in the college. I have always felt, and still feel, that one of the great advantages in going to an art school was that the instructors or the people lecturing can only be there so often. So the people come in, and say you have Jim O'Connor working away, you would have Pat Harris working away, and Eamon Connors working away, that's what you see. But a lot of people in an Art school are sensitive and shy. They are not all gregarious or out talking all the time. They're frightened. They come out of homes where maybe their talents were not encouraged. Its hard for them. They come out of families where they want them to be architects or maybe come back to the farm or work in the family business. And so these kids are worried how their families are going to take to all of this. They are very shy in school and they don't know which brush to pick up or how to fill out their pallet. They don't

realise that nobody else knows either. But looking around you see these other fellows, and you just go over and talk to them and see how relaxed they are with what they are doing. You learn from them without anybody lecturing you, without telling you what to do. You watch what other people do and how they adapt.

But to go back to this problem in the college, all of a sudden the students in Clarendon Street began to build these cubicles for themselves. They built walls, and they isolated themselves, everybody, into these structures. So they could not see what the people were doing at the next easel. And I said to Campbell, "This is diametrically opposed to anything I believe in. This is ridiculous. This is putting themselves in the position they are going to be in when they leave here. They are going to be at home where they are going to rent a room some place. They are going to freeze their asses off. They are not going to have correct heating of any kind. They are going to have some little room with a little electric light, and they are going to be all on their own only hoping that somebody will come and knock on the door. And this is the problem they are going to have. Why rush this problem? They should take advantage of the situation." So I said to Campbell, "Let me go up to Belfast and see if the same problem has gone over the boarder, and if they have this problem with their school". So he did. And I went up to the College in York Street, and I went to see the people in the painting department. And of course they did not have this problem. And when I mentioned the problem they said, "Oh we've had that. That's all gone, that's over". So I thought in time somebody here would get the message, because this is one of the difficulties of the college at that time. As you say, the college had freed itself in a sense from this very tight structure, it had been "do this and don't do that". So maybe it was difficult for the powers that be, the people who were heads of these departments, to give orders to the students. So how do you cajole? How do you negotiate? How do

you point out to them that this is wrong. It was up to people like myself to try and change things. It was up to the individual tutors, you know. It didn't last. The barriers came tumbling down.

How did you approach that problem?

Well you did the best you could, and one by one they got out of it. What they seemed to like most was not so much painting in this small area but the fact that they could put their work up on the three sides of these walls they had. So you had to take it down bit by bit, in order that they could still have space to put their work up. This was what they seemed to be interested in, which is no harm, because at least that work was out there for other people to see.

I remember that very well. Mark Reilly for instance was very shy and he was really boxed in. Gulf Gaffney on the other hand was the opposite and his work was all over the place. It varied I think.

The students had to go through the process of learning themselves. I was a tutor. I think I had a couple of students, James O'Connor and Ciaran Lennon. Ciaran Lennon never came in because he had gone to the college earlier. They were both mature students in a sense, and Ciaran had been working in RTE and painting in a studio in Blackrock, or around that area. William Scott was the external assessor that year. He was a well-known painter. He had exhibited in New York. He's got a room I think for himself in the Tate gallery. He was very approachable. You could always talk to him. He was a sensible man, and he was through this thing many times. The idea of having

external assessors was an excellent idea. It was marvellous to bring these people - experienced men and women - to the college, because within the college itself there is going to be this natural friction, anyway. I mean the staff could be all Irish and there would still be friction. Its because people see too much of one another, and this is not just the college, this is any large institution. Institutions tend to get run after a while for themselves and not for the students.

You mean the structure takes on a life of its own.

So bringing in these people on a temporary basis from another area, from across the boarder or whatever, it was a good thing. It opened things up a bit.

That's true. I remember talking to Sean Scully at length, for instance, which I found very refreshing. I remember on another occasion spending a lot of time with an exchange teacher form America. It was a great help to me as a student.

That was a refreshing thing, to open the course up like that. What has happened of course since is that the young people in the college travel much more. They go to India, they go to God knows where. They all go to California, they go to Paris, they go to Berlin, but that was the beginning of it at that time. So the thing has really opened up. These kids would grab a piece of hand luggage and go around the world.

Do you remember an incident, I think in 1979, when some students refused their diplomas because of problems in the faculty?

I had these two particular students; I was tutor to both of them. One was Jane Carr and the other was Declan Dunphy.[1] Now they had both known each other, or they both had been products of UCD before coming to the college. Jane had her degree from UCD. I don't think Declan did, I think he left a year prior to getting his degree. But they were very close. They had a very close relationship. And because of that close relationship Dermot's work improved. I mean he used Jane, to my understanding, as a role model as far as the work was concerned. I knew both of them, and I was friendly with both of them. I mean we would come in here and they would have a coffee and I would have a drink. And she was very intelligent. She was really beautifully educated. She was very determined. She came from one of these families, you know. There were other young people in the college like that; people whose families said you have to go to UCD before you go to College of Art. James O'Connor had to get some kind of Certificate in Bolton Street before his family would really open the door to the college.

They wanted them to get some security.

Exactly, but in the assessments in the College - I can't remember exactly - there's an A and then there are levels of A. Well they both got, lets say, a B. But one got an upper B and one got a lower B. Well he got the upper B and she got the lower B. Now they were not too disturbed because they were friends, but I was embarrassed because I know the reality. The worst that I could accept for them was being on the same level. If I was really going to put my foot down she would have had to have a grade higher, but we will forget about that if I can get them on the same level. So Scott was there, and to

[1] These are fictitious names.

a certain extent these external assessors had so much to look at that they would take the lead they were given by the people there.

They were coming cold to the situation.

Yes. So I was really very upset, far more upset than I should have been. It could have been the day of the week or something, I don't know. So I mean Campbell and these people like Scott came out of the same educational system, and they could talk in a relaxed manner, to a certain extent. Its fair enough, we can understand that. But it wasn't quite the same for me.

Well, after the marks for the final assessment were in I walked over to Campbell's office, and they were all there. I just walked right in. There was a bottle of whiskey on the table, and I just walked over to the bottle of whiskey and grabbed a glass. I poured a drink, threw it back, and poured another one. And I said, "I won't accept this and blah blah blah blah blah blah". I explained the situation. I was visibly shaking. I said she's got a painting up there and I said it is as good as Nathaniel Hone ever painted. And he said to Campbell, Nathaniel who?" I said, "Hone, Nathaniel Hone, Jesus Christ". And I had another drink. I heard somebody say, "Is he always like this?" Because nobody ever did that before, nobody ever came in and questioned anything after the final results were in. I did not know what they were going to do. I had no idea. I just put down my whiskey and I walked out. I left them standing. They did not know what was going on. Mrs Gallagher was there, the secretary, and she told me after. I mean I broke up their little party there. Now this is my memory of it. There may be people who say it did not happen like that at all. You know; this is how Brady won the battle of Waterloo, and they will tell you that Brady lost the battle of Waterloo. I don't know.

But anyway, I walked out. I came out of the College and I called the kids. They were waiting outside for me. I was shaking. They brought me in here to Buswell's and they bought me a couple of drinks. Then we just sat back and laughed because they were mature people. They were more mature than some of the other, younger people. And maybe it did not mean that much to them. What meant something to them was that I went to bat for something that I believed in.

So the next day I came in here at lunchtime, and Scott was sitting by himself and he called me over. I went over rather sheepishly because I felt that I had overstated things. So he called me over and he said, "Look I want to apologise Charlie. You were right. I went to have a look at her painting and I have squared things up." And he said, "You were right to call my attention to it. These things get beyond you, there is so much to look at and there is so much work going on." I said, "I'm sorry, I went over the top. It just hit me. I reacted." And he said, "I am glad you did." He then started to talk to me about something I was doing. He started to tell me I should show in Japan and that the Japs would like what I do. And then everything was normal between us, you know, relaxed.

I got on very well with a man who was brought over here from Portsmouth. I can't remember his name. Campbell would know. He was in charge of art history. He came over to do the assessments a couple of years in a row in art history. He came to me about Jane Carr because I was her tutor. And he said to me, "I read her thesis, it is unbelievable, and I see them at university. I have never seen anything like this. So I interviewed her." "She's a nun," he said. "She's not a nun," I said. "Oh" he said, "She may not be a nun really but she is like a nun." I said, "Yes, well that's the way she is. That's her personality. That's her character." "But," I said, "She is obviously very

intelligent". "Oh she's got it all" he said, "Actually I have recommended her for Cambridge." That was a real accolade.

Now unfortunately she came from a family - her father was a retired Irish army officer - now I am not saying republican, but certainly nationalist. So she told me she went over to Cambridge for the interview, but she was not hyped up for it. And she said the difficulty was that the English kids who were at the interview were all hyped up, and they were all on top of it. They had all the right tuition. They were prepared for the interview. Where she felt - I mean to give her due she really felt, God love her, she felt she had let Ireland down. She felt that she was not at her best when she should have been. The whole experience was too much for her.

When she came back she went to see Miss Cruickshank in Trinity. She read the paper and she was very impressed with it. And she said to Jane not to bother with the masters but to go right to the doctorate, which Jane eventually got. Jane was much better off in Trinity. She was delighted with Miss Cruickshank and Miss Cruickshank with her. And Jane Carr is a totally modest person, as many people of certain ability are. There is no reason for them to blow their horn. Somebody else will pick it up for them. As far as I know she and Dermot are still friends. They still going skiing in Austria. But I don't know what their relationship is. I have not seen either one of them now in a long time. But his personality would be so different to hers. He was involved in the selling of antique paintings. I mean that's a world unto itself. And he seemed to work with some man who really had an understanding of Dutch masters. It is a real specialised area. To someone outside of it, it seems very shaky. It may not be, it's just the way we perceive these things. And yet he got commissions himself. I have not seen him in a long long time. He was sharing a house with two or three other fellows. I am sorry. It's just the way life is, you get separated.

Given that it is very difficult to make a living after art college and that most fine art graduates don't become artists, do you see the teaching of fine art as problematic in that respect?

Well obviously it would be almost impossible in fine art, but it would be less impossible in graphics. I mean there are fellows - names don't come to me that quickly - but I know one or two cases of fellows who have made a fist of it doing poster work and silk screen work. I know fellows who set up their own little workshops around Dublin, but they are so busy. They are all married now with five kids, and I don't know where they are and what they have done. But I knew one boy because his father was a bartender in the Bailey. He spoke to me about his son, and of course he was over the moon about his son at the college, and the boy had really got on, you know, it was nice. It kind of happened in graphics that people got on well. It did happen with this student of mine, Ken Matthews; he does cartooning.

Tom Matthews?

Yes, Tom Matthews. He has been able to make a living, very much so. And there may be others that I am not aware of. Then there are things that happen in Industrial Design, and then of course there are people in fashion. So it's just most difficult, obviously, in fine art. And then when you say it is hard for painters, imagine how difficult it is for sculptors. And also you are involved in a discipline where your genius for the most part is not going to show itself when you are twenty two, you are going to

be fifty two, and who is going to put up with you. You've got to get some crazy woman.

Yes, rich and crazy.

Rich women are no answer because rich women are very demanding. No, seriously, I know from experience. Its drop tools, because they want to go out for coffee or whatever. I mean they have their own agenda. You're the artist, they want to take you around and parade you, and there are all kinds of complications. You know, and then you marry Mary. And Mary's got the money. And daddy says goodbye Mary, and he disinherits her, right. And all she's got left in her dowry is forty pairs of shoes or something. That's not the answer, but these things happen.

But in these other areas now there are openings, aren't there, and more and more as time goes by. Well I seem to notice Peter; I have spoken about this to a few people, but very cautiously. When you consider the number of art colleges that there have been in the last twenty-five years, like Galway, Limerick, Waterford, Sligo, Cork, Dublin, all over the place, there does not appear to be that number of good painters around. That is the amazing thing, where do they all go? I assume an awful lot of them went into teaching in some way or other and then stopped painting. I've known kids that I thought really had ability, that I was literally proud to be seen with, and all of a sudden they don't seem to walk the same streets any more.

It takes tremendous dedication.

I went to a school that was a great school. It was not a state school, but the American Government paid for my education; I was in the War. And then I had scholarships and fellowships. I worked in the day and went to school at night. I did whatever I had to do. But you have to get a job then like anybody else, but you can't tell them you have been to art school or you don't get the job. So you tell them you worked for your father and the business went bust, you've got to invent a background. I saw a fellow one-day in New York whom I went to art school with driving a cab, I yelled at him. I said, "Gee Harry where did you steal the cab?" He said, "I did not steal it Brady, it's a job. Come on I'll take you for a ride."

How did you find the transition from art school to the real world?

In my first job I worked as a guard in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I was not mature enough to realise how lucky I was to be there. Had I been a few years older I would have grabbed it and held it.

That was another regime that ran itself. It was mostly made up, to a large extent, of Irish. I don't mean Irish Americans. I mean Irish that came to New York, and one of their cousins in politics got him a job as a guard in the museum. The museums were administered by the city of New York, and therefore by political parties. The actual proper administration of the museum was conducted by the very rich: the Melons, the Rockefellers, the Fords, and their big foundations, but the building was actually maintained by the city of New York.

It probably had a tax free association with the Government because it was treated as an educational institution. They'd have a children's museum and they would bring school children to it every day on lectures. And there would be marvellous young ladies who were waiting for gentlemen who were at law school in Yale. It is a marvellous museum and it was a marvellous experience.

If you want to give a Goya to the Metropolitan Museum they might actually say to you that they have enough Goyas but that they would love your Fragonard. Now maybe the Fragonard would be less expensive in your mind than the Goya. They got all the Goyas they want but they are short on Fragonards. But then if you give them the Fragonards you have to give them another fifty or one hundred thousand dollars to maintain the quality of that painting. It needs to be cleaned and to be re-framed, and it may need to be repaired. Do you understand? You can't just give them the painting, you need to give them the backup fund. It's very complicated. It becomes a business. The whole thing becomes a business.

When I worked in the Metropolitan of course it was free. Now if you go to the Metropolitan - I don't think you have to pay - they ask you to pay, and if you pay you pay two dollars and fifty cents, and you wear a little button in your lapel. But you don't have to pay; most people would of course. New York is a violent city, and the museum is like a church, I mean it's a safe area. No place is completely safe, but it is safer than a subway platform, or it is safer than being on the street.

You came to Ireland from New York after the war. Coming from that background how did you find Ireland and the Irish art world?

When I first came I lived down in west Waterford, so I was not in contact with many painters, only when I came to Dublin to buy materials.

How did you find life in West Waterford after New York?

It was a farming community and I had people who were very kind to me. And I was very fortunate after a certain length of time to hook up with a man by the name of Brian Pearce, who was a brother of the potter Philip Pearce in Cork. So they were aware of painting. Philip Pearce had a collection himself of Jack Yeats paintings. He was very friendly with Pat Scott. Philip's sons were craftsmen. Simon went into glass and Stephen went into pottery. They were two young boys when I knew their parents. I did not see that much of them, I only saw them five or six times in all the time I was down there. But I had that connection. When I came to Dublin to visit I was very lucky to meet Frank Morris, who eventually married Camille Souter. I used to stay with them when I came up, so I was in the Dublin art world at that time.

But not the more traditional RHA world.

No. But I got to meet the various people who were around town. Whatever about the talent of the abstract expressionists, these men were not, and women of course, they were not New Yorkers. They came from all over the world; they were born in Russia, they were born in Canada, they came from California, they came eventually to New York because of its centrality. It was like the world capital. It was a melting pot. But they were not New Yorkers. I am a New Yorker, and there is no one more provincial that a New Yorker, because New Yorkers are like Dubliners who live in

Rathgar and never get out of it. They were people whose circumstances in their lives forced them to move from one area to another area.

Are you familiar with the famous Steinberg cartoon of New York with a huge Fifth Avenue at the very front and streets getting smaller as they recede and become unimportant, and eventually the Mid-West and the Rocky Mountains are just thin lines and squiggles?

I was leaving the Museum of Modern Art one evening around half past five - they had a marvellous cinema there - and I walked out of the museum and I met this painter that I had regard for who was always complaining about everything. His work was too similar to De Kooning, and he was always one step behind him. And that was very unfortunate. If De Kooning took a week off this guy might have caught up with him. It was too bad because the work had quality. Anyway, I ran into him coming out of the Museum of Modern Art, and he said, "Are you going down the village Brady?" I said, "Yes". And he said, "How are you going down?" And I said, "I am going to get a Fifth Avenue bus". He said, "Come with me over to Second Avenue". And I said, "I don't feel like walking that far, why do you want to go down Second Avenue". He said, "I can't relate on Fifth Avenue". And I said, "Well I can. I like the flags and the people. I like walking in the sunshine." I said, "Second Avenue is pretty dreary".

Obviously the New York art world was blossoming at that stage and you were one of the younger generation. How did you relate to the New York art world?

I could have been what you might call second generation, but I never latched on. Because these men that I knew so well and saw three or four times a week, not only was their work imposing, but also their personalities were imposing. So what you needed to do with them was distance yourself. I mean you needed to establish, as best you could, your own personality, in a painting sense and in a meaningful sense, for yourself. In that circle you had to be in it and yet out of it. You had to know yourself that you were not really one of them. They had come a long road, and you had only been on the last horse from boot hill.

They had all been working through the 1930's.

When I was thirty they were fifty, they were another generation. They were working right after the Second World War; the war ended in 1945, so that was 1947-1948. The first big show, the first marvellous show of the abstract expressionists was the Ninth Street show. Not all of them, but seventeen or eighteen of them rented a storefront on the street, on east Ninth Street, and it was just an amazing experience. I mean it was the first time they had all put - Kline, De Kooning - all these guys put their work up together.

Had you seen the work before that show?

Individually, individual works but not a collection like this. I was standing there with another younger painter, our feet did not touch the ground, I mean it was so exciting.

Most of the scene in New York of course was made up of commercial galleries that showed middle-class paintings that were imitating the French.

Do you mean work that was a legacy of the Armoury show?

No not even that, much more low grade. I mean paintings that would not embarrass the neighbours, a nice landscape.

Like Corot?

Yes, but not that good of course. Fourth rate Corots, or paintings of clouds, nuns on bicycles, not things that would be too serious.

I knew a man who owned a Cezanne, a very rich collector, and he finally loaned it to one of the big museums. He told me he did that because after working all day, after making all this money, he would come home at night and he would be exhausted, and the Cezanne painting would look at him and tell him he was a nobody. He couldn't take it any more, so he loaned it to the Met or the Modern or something.

How did the students that you were working with as a student yourself relate to all of this? What were they like?

They were more mature. These were all very serious and dedicated guys. We were all equal. The only people that weren't equal were the girls. The girls came from wealthier families. They were waiting for Johnny to finish law school at Yale.

I studied initially with an illustrator who was a great friend of Hemingway, and he lived in that kind of world. And most of the men in my class were fellows who were two or three years older than I was, and they were all lucky not to have been killed in

the war. They had all been in ferocious fighting, and some had been wounded. They found life very difficult. You see the abstract expressionist thing was not in the school I went to. This is the amazing thing.

Wasn't that the Art Students League?

Yes. Abstract expressionism wasn't in the place.

Did Rothko teach there?

No.

Maybe he went to school there.

Most people did. Pollock did. He studied with a fellow called Thomas Hart Benton. I did not discover the abstract expressionists - I mean I had seen a few of their paintings - but I did not get to meet them until 1951. I was just about leaving the Art Students League at the time. I'd had a scholarship, and I worked as a guard in the Metropolitan in the daytime, and I went to a print workshop at night. But I was pretty tired and had bad legs, and then to go into this print shop in the league at night was pretty exhausting. I would not get out of there until half past nine, and I had to get up at six or seven in the morning to get to the museum. But a man came to me in the museum and said I should meet some of these painters. He took me and introduced me to Kline and De Kooning and these people. Since I had his introduction they took me under their wing. I can't say they treated me as an equal, but they accepted me as long as I did

not mess my own copybook. You learn quickly where your place is. And I was a New Yorker so I had that advantage. I was not afraid to talk to people. I knew the language. I was batting my own call.

What was the uptown/downtown distinction in New York?

Well uptown would be Fifty Seventh Street and downtown would be Eight Street: the east village, the west village. That is where the studios are for most people.

Now Mark Rothko would not come downtown. It wasn't because he was posh, he was a private person, he liked what we have now, he liked a one to one. Until shortly before he died he was not a drinker. Most Jewish people are not drinkers. If they start drinking its because they are very unhappy. His social life was not in pubs. His social life would be maybe going to the Museum of Modern Art and sitting in the garden over a pot of tea. It was a different world.

With the more American painters, like De Kooning - he was Dutch of course so not him - but Kline and these guys, they would all talk about American baseball or movie stars and that kind of stuff. But Rothko was more philosophical. He had a Jewish, a Hebrew outlook on life

One thing that was marvellous to see and was wonderful for me was to see how these people worked. You realise very quickly they are not gods, they wanted changes, they had mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, just like everybody else.

How did you find the art world in Ireland compared with New York, in the sense of mixing and so on?

Here everybody seemed to have their own clichés. Le Brocquy was way up on cloud nine, and maybe even Paddy Collins was beyond some people. The younger painters put up barriers themselves too.

Was there a scene based around Michael Scott the architect and his company Scott, Tallon, and Walker?

Well Pat Scott worked there you see. He was in the Dawson Gallery. And a lot of painters worked in Scott's.

You were involved in the Independent Artists group?

The man who started that was Owen Walsh, who unfortunately never got enough publicity. It was his idea initially. Some of us were having a chat down in the Eblana coffee shop, I think Sheridan and Patrick Pye came along and they formed a committee. The idea was basically, like a lot of things I suppose, against - well we weren't against anything - it was just the idea that those involved in the Living Art Group and the RHA, at that time, were allowed to put four pictures on the wall. We thought, wouldn't it be great if we could put four pictures on a wall. So that's what we did. We had this committee, and I said we've got to get some older person here to keep us apart so there are no egos running wild. So I got a friend of mine called Elizabeth, a graphic artist and painter, who was a marvellous person. She was an English lady who had been living here for years. She had lived on the Aran Islands, but now she lived in Dublin. She was a lovely person, a real lady. She liked us all. She had sympathy.

So how did the Independent Artists group relate to the other groups and artists of the sixties, to rising stars like Michael Farrell for instance?

Well you see he was part of another scene. He had been sent to an English public school. His father played rugby for Ireland. He went to Stonyhurst or Downside, and he was trained in an art school in London. After that he went on to Paris, so that was another ball game. Michael was always interested in becoming international in inverted commas. He also went to New York and taught at Pratt Institute. Michael had gigantic ambitions, which seemed, at that time, more possible than maybe even now. Sean Scully is a marvellous example of one of the few people who have actually cracked it in that large commercial sense. But that's almost impossible.

Don't you think it's sad that this commercial aspect must be such a part of making art? Surely what matters is the artwork?

This is all a very personal thing. You have to decide what you want. You cannot allow yourself to be taken over and be put into some situation that is not you.

Speaking of someone who has experience of New York when it was the centre of the world as far as art was concerned, do you think it is necessary for students, in terms of the quality of their work, to be closer to where everything is happening, to have access to museums an so on?

You can obviously do it, but one has certain needs aside from the work itself. You have the need to talk with other people for instance, other painters. In New York these painters all tended to meet in the Cedar Bar. It's like here, very little talk is about painting. They talk about almost anything else, but you have the feeling that if you wanted to talk about painting you could. So you feel that you are more relaxed in the company of these people, you know where they are coming from. You have a certain relationship underneath you all the time, and at certain times in your conversation you could refer to certain aspects of that, so that gives it a certain ease, you know.

When I was in the college I think that was most useful thing to me. There were half a dozen of us, who used to hang out together, and often we would go back to Brain Palm's flat over in Percy Place and we would be up all night talking and arguing. It was a central part of my education while at the National College of Art.

You were very fortunate and that's a fortunate experience. In New York not everybody could take the Cedar Bar. I might take someone like you there, or say Mark Reilly, and I wanted people to like him, and they would like him because he is likeable. He might in his ownself be too shy for this, and I would see him a week later and say why don't you drop in, but he never would come back on his own, he would be of that temperament. So you can't force people into situations if they have to feel free and easy about it.

Presumably to succeed in the art world you need to be a little more aggressive, especially now?

It's the way you perceive things. I have always felt that one has to be discovered. That it's like you have to be discovered again and again and again. I mean if you are discovered by five people that's no good, you've got to be discovered at least by fifty people, and then maybe you've got some kind of a hope. I know very talented painters in Ireland, men who have international reputations, who tell me that they only sell to nine people, and if one of those guys dies that's eight people.

Times seem to have changed, even from when I was in college, never mind from when you were in college, being an artist now does seem to be much more about being a professional than about expressing yourself. What do you think?

Because of my last exhibition in July I have quite a success, so people are coming out of the woodwork now. You see, I mean this is Ireland again, this is the way I see it. People are quite shy, people are not really that sure of their own opinions, people need to be told, not by the painter or the sculptor, but by other people. Or they see your paintings in the home of somebody else and then they can really feel relaxed in their appreciation. They can then trust their own judgement because by that time it is the judgement of four or five other people. Do you understand? So I have people calling me up, people I talk to in bars. In New York it all hangs out, that's exciting. In New York if someone did not like you he'd tell you. In Ireland he may not talk to you but he would not say anything.

Or he might hang around with you for six years and still not like you.

He doesn't really say it. He wouldn't probably even say if he did like you for fear that you would take him wrongly, you know what I mean? I find in my case people stop me in the streets or in a pub and they say, "Do you have a neighbour by the name of Mrs Reilly?" And I say, "Well I don't know". Well she has got a few of your paintings and she is very shy about talking to you but she really loves your painting. And I say, "You are Mrs. Reilly". Some lady stops me - they tell my wife mostly that they like my painting, and then my wife tells me. You tell somebody else and they tell somebody else. Where in New York it is direct, you know, bang.

I found talking to people like Kline, because we talked a lot, was great. I would see something by him that really interested me, and I would get up the nerve to say it to him, that I really like No. 6 in the show, and he'd smile and say, "Did you?" And I'd say, "Yes". And he'd say, "I'm glad because I like it". Because you never really know what they like and maybe they are not that happy with it.

Landseer, the great Victorian figurative painter of the *Stag at Bay*, had a great popularity one time, and he said people may like a painting of his, but he is the only one who knows what it might have been, what he might have been able to do with it. That's the thing we all know, what might have happened.

Does that infuriate you, that people won't say what they think?

Well you find this in reviews, you don't so much care that they like it, you want them to understand it, you don't want a critic to say I like No. 4. Talk about it! Say something!

I remember when I was working in Clarendon Street I took my work very seriously, and I remember being terribly disappointed when people would not engage me in conversation. They were afraid to talk.

Do you have paintings on the wall in your house where you live?

Yes.

Do you have other people in? Do they ever look at the pictures you have on the wall? Because I have tradesmen come in, or people come in and they never look. They have their heads down and they are afraid to look up

People don't comment.

Its all there and they don't see it, and they don't say anything, this is very Irish you see. I sold a painting once to an Irish woman, she is the widow of an actor I knew. She bought the painting, and about six weeks later I met her in the street. The painting was forty pounds. It was a bog landscape. I'd exhibited it in the Arts Club. Anyway, I met the lady on the street, and she said would I buy the painting back. She was quite disappointed, and I said I would of course, but why? And she said she had some neighbours in for tea and they did not quite understand it, they did not like it. I laughed and said, "Well actually I did not paint it for the neighbours, but if that's your problem I would be delighted", because I liked the painting myself. It didn't mean anything that she wanted to sell it back because I had a job teaching at the college.

I didn't see her for a month and the next time we met I said what about that painting. "Oh look", she said, "Pat Scott saw it and he said I was very lucky to have a Charlie Brady", and I said, "Look I did not paint it for Pat Scott. You own it. Do you want to keep it". She said, "I'll keep it". "And what are you going to do with the neighbours?" "I won't have them over so often." So I got the Good Housekeeping sign of approval.

In relation to this issue of people understanding what you are at, at what point did you find people did actually understand what you were doing?

Oh very quickly. I mean very very quickly. When I first painted in Ireland my paintings were much more expressionistic than they are now, because I had come out of that New York scene. I was trying to get that out of my system. I related to the Irish landscape that was all around me because I was living right in the middle of it, you know, all that green paint. It's one of the reasons I came to Ireland.

I wanted to go to Vermont, which is green, but I could not go to Vermont because I had relatives living quite near there, and my lifestyle would have been an embarrassment to them. And maybe their lifestyle would have been an embarrassment to me. Anyway they had the money and I was going to be a no no.

So I was painting away quite happily down the country, and, as I said, I had these Pearce people to show things to. And one day Philip came up from Cork, he was living in Shanagarry, and he came over to see me. I had been painting away, and I had a certain style at that moment in time that was rather arbitrary. It was a carry over from New York. I had a canvass that was tinted and the landscape was vignetted; it did not go the four sides. It was an affectation of a kind. I eventually cut them down to make

them square. But he could see something in the painting, and I could tell he - well he did not dismiss it out of hand anyway. And I went to the Pearce's farmhouse that evening for supper; he was to be there with the family. I went into the kitchen, and Peggy Morrisey, who worked for the Pearces, in the kitchen, said to me, "Charlie, who's Jack Yeats", I said, "He was a great Irish painter, why?" "Well Mr. Philip" - they called him Mr. Philip - "said you were another Jack Yeats". So I knew I was all right. He would not say that to me, but I could tell from his body language that he accepted me and he was pleased.

Philip Pearce, to describe him to someone who never met him, he was like a very intelligent Quaker, he was a man of few words but the words were important. Quite concise, very sophisticated in his own way. A wonderful understanding of classical music, and foreign films, and that kind of stuff. And he had this house down in Cork that he bought that had been a glebe house; that would be an old rectory. And he had Pat Scott redesign it. He left the outside as it was and he redesigned the inside. It was rather embarrassing, the staircase had no handrail. I found that very difficult to negotiate, and I stayed up one night with him and his wife drinking mulberry wine. And trying to get up the stairs - I thought I would have to sleep on the ground. I have a short stairs like that at home with no railing on it, and I find it very intimating, I always stick close to the wall.

Let me tell you how one changes ones ideas. When I left Campbell at the end of that third year in the painting department, I just felt I was not able to give enough because new students were coming in and there were various problems. When it was all over I said to Campbell, "Look Campbell lets think of some other way next year, I would like to do something else". Campbell was very understanding about it. He said, "Maybe I could bring you in on a block basis, for four days at a time for instance". I said, "Lets

consider it", but I said, "At the same time look around for somebody else". But there was no hassle, Campbell you can talk to, and if you changed your mind you could call him up again.

So I came over here to Buswell's, the bar at that time was over the other side of the room. I was standing there and Ken Dolan came over to me. I was not even sure who he was, and he said, "Are you Charlie Brady? Is it true you just left Fine Art?" And I said, "Well I talked to Campbell about it, it is up in the air". He said, "Would you like to work in pre-diploma?" "Well" I said, "I would like to talk to somebody anyway". He said that they were having a meeting at that moment and would I come over and meet Myra Maguire. So I went over to the college and Myra was there with a few other people. They asked me would I consider working for them. I can't remember what basis it was, two or three days a week I think. It might have been two days a week, I can't be certain. I told them I would consider it, and they were very pleased with this. Somebody stood up and said, "Charlie we want you to be completely free. There won't be any rules. There will be no restrictions. You'll just do your own thing." I said, "No, wait, wait. How do you run this department? You have teams don't you?" And they said, "Yes". And I said, "Put me on a team and let me work with that team, and let me carry my weight in that area", I said to give me *carte blanche* would screw everything up. That makes me special and I would rather fit in. And someone said, "I told you he would say that". That was great because I wanted to be part of the system, I did not want special duties or anything, but I did to a certain extent. I mean I was allowed a certain freedom.

I had always been rather suspicious of people whom I considered to be art teachers, and that's what basically they were. They took people right out of secondary school into the first year where they did various disciplines to determine which one they were

best at, so they would apply their first year in the discipline of the college, which was great. There were a great variety of subjects. And I felt that these people would give out a problem to their students, drawing or whatever, and then they would seem to be hovering over them all the time while the young people were doing these things. I felt that this impeded the young people. But they felt that unless they were doing something they were not earning their salaries. When I would give out the problem to the group I had I would let them get on with it. I would take a walk. I would come over here or go some place else.

Apparently William Orpen, when he was teaching in the college, used to set the figure up and have a few words and after ten minutes he would be gone. Four hours later he would come back and check out the work.

So I would come back then maybe ten or fifteen minutes before that session was over. I would look at the drawings and I'd get them to put them up on the walls, and then we would discuss them, so the whole class had to discuss. I would give a lecture once in a while about my experiences and things like that. And then I started giving the night classes, which I really did not want. They were doing it out of kindness to give me some more money because I was only working part-time. The classes got so crowded I could not get in myself. I mean they did not need me there, all they needed was the model and themselves. They were serious people. I was only taking up space in some ways.

I was with Campbell for three years, and I worked in pre-diploma for five years. We were all over Dublin during this time, we were over here in Kildare St, and then we

moved down to City Quay, and then from City Quay we moved up to the main building in Thomas Street.

Did Pre-Diploma change in any way while you were teaching there?

No. I think going back to the original talk about the change over from the old to the new, I think the change was a good thing. The college could not have gone on as it was. It could not have lasted very long under the old regime. Something had to change. Now a change is difficult. Maybe it was not the right change, but that had to sort itself out in time.

Do you remember Domhnall O'Murchadha?

I do, very well, yes. I enjoyed him as a man. I enjoyed talking to him on a one to one. Before I knew him I was rather suspicious of him. When I came to know him I was embarrassed for my own ignorance of the man. For myself I was embarrassed. I had never seen much sculpture by him but I have seen small paintings by him that were just beautiful. And I would say, in my own head, who am I to put this guy down.

I always found him to be very easy to talk to but it has been said that he was quite dogmatic on an administrative level and that he was very set in his own ways.

He was very into an Irish Irish thing: Celtic mythology, speaking Irish, and so on. I spent some time with him in a graveyard down in Wicklow, and that was great because he tore these new monuments to pieces, those black things with the gold letters.

He really knew his stuff. He was a mine of information. In a sense he was wasted by the college.

That was the wonderful thing, if you got him on a one to one. He had a problem because he was really the old guard, and he was not only the old guard, he was the old Gaelic guard. They had a problem here in the college with the some of these English assessors, and they really came to loggerheads. I mean they really had a head on. These were Brits. Had they been from Italy there would have been no problem. There would always be the feeling among the Irish that the Brits were looking down, even if they were not looking down.

And if there was any hint of superiority, that was the end of that.

And we all know how difficult it is to communicate one with the other. I mean what does the young girl think when you tell her you love her? Does she think your Robert Taylor? What's going on in her head, and what's going on in your head when you tell her, nobody knows. You don't know and she does not know. Do you know what I mean? It's very difficult, I mean the fact that you say it, she has to realise 20 years later that you really meant it. It's so complicated.

Communication is difficult. Look at the north of Ireland.

I found in Ireland at various times, not so much now because I have been here a long time, because of the way I speak people might see me as being somebody that I really am not, that I was harder or tougher than I really am.

Because you were direct?

Yes, and because of my accent. I might appear to be more dismissive than I mean to be when it wasn't my intention, but as they got to know me a bit they knew - they could see where I was coming from.

Mick O'Dea was telling me the other day that the first time he met you you looked at what he was doing - this was in pre-diploma - and you asked if he was from the country. He said he was. You said, "Are your people farmers?" And he said, "Yes". And then you said, "Did you ever think of taking up farming?" Mick told me he never heard anything so funny in his life, so sharp, but with that kind of directness that we are not used to as Irish people.

I wasn't opposed to his painting, you could farm and paint. I did not know for a few years that his family had a pub in Ennis. I told him this story recently. I was in the hospital and there was a lady there my generation, a bit older maybe, she might have been visiting somebody. She was from Ennis. I said that I knew a young man from Ennis called Michael O'Dea. "O" she said "the artist", and I said "yes, right". I thought that was great. I mean, right away she said "the artist". She did not say the painter. He was thrilled. I did not know the lady's name, but she might have been a customer of his

parents or something. It was so nice I was able to tell him that. It was the way she said it.

I remember some years ago meeting Valerie Hannon's mother in Dun Laoghaire, and she had sprained an ankle or something. She was walking with a lady who was helping her. It might have been a maid or some family friend. Mrs Hannon is a gracious lady and she introduced me to this woman as an artist and the woman said "Oh". Had she said I was a doctor or a lawyer or an architect the answer would have been, "Oh really", but this was, "Oh". It all depends who you meet with. Well this lady from Ennis was very impressed with Mick, which I thought was great.

I think, speaking from my own experience, that for people who never got an education to get to second level education, never mind third, was a major achievement. As far as these people are concerned to be an artist is great. I think the rejection of the artist is more of a middle class thing, to some extent anyway.

I had a very difficult time before I came to Ireland, before I went to art school, before the war. I was born in 1926 and my father had a large industrial hardware business that he had built up after the First World War. He employed about a hundred people. He had a partner, and he was well entrenched. After the Wall Street Crash the business went on the slide, and by 1932 it had really hit him. He went bankrupt. I was only six, but we had to move from where we were living, the maid went, the cars went.

I had been attending a catholic school, not the parish school but a private convent school. My father went to the reverend mother and wanted to know if they would reduce the fees so that I could continue to go there. She refused, so I had to go to the local state school, the public school, which was one of the most wonderful experiences

of my whole life. It was absolutely marvellous. I was with Jews. I was with blacks. I was with Greeks. I was with Germans. I was with refugees. I was with doctor's daughters, architect's daughters, and workers daughters. Nobody cared who you were, we were just kids and we all lived in the same neighbourhood. We all got on great together. It was such a breath of freedom. And we did not have to wear school uniforms like the other place. There was no pretence; what did your daddy do and all that. The schools were almost on the same street. It was a wonderful freedom to get away from all that other stuff.

When the time came for me to go to what we call high school and you call secondary school my mother's family, who had the money, insisted that my brother and I go back to a catholic high school. I wanted to go to a school that taught music and art. There was a school for especially talented children. It was just as well I did not go because maybe I would have taken the wrong turning. Anyway, I was not old enough to get into it. I was sent to special classes on a Thursday or Friday afternoon for drawing and painting, but the problem was that I was sent to this Catholic school. The first year was all right. The school was located in a slum near the docks, but it was a great school and there was a great feeling there.

In my second year I went up to the main building which was a Diocesan School - it was Cardinal Hays High School - and it was brand new. The odour was new and there was no feeling in the building. No one had ever lived in it. No one had ever cried in it or laughed in it, and there was all this pretence about how wonderful it was and new. I did not get on well there at all, so in my third year my family sent to me LaSalle Academy, which was the French Christian brothers. That was way down town on Second Street and Second Avenue, in the heart of a Jewish ghetto. I was very unhappy there. And most of the boys I went to school with were sons of first generation immigrants. Their

parents were either born in Ireland or Italy or Germany. So maybe they were the first members of their families to go to high school or secondary school, and their whole ambition was to get on. I had no ambition of getting on because we had gotten on and the whole thing went anyway. So getting on did not seem that important. I mean obviously I had to do something, eventually, but I did not have that same drive that they had because I thought that this was a waste of time. You are OK on Tuesday and on Wednesday they come along and take it all away anyway, so why knock yourself out. And my father said more or less said the same thing to me. He said forget about the money and try and find something in this life that you enjoy because it is not worth it if you are going sit behind a desk for forty years and regret it.

That was very liberal of him.

Well he had been though the mill.

How did he get on after the crash?

He had to survive, and my mother was very good. People were very proud of her. We had neighbours who jumped off the roof and off the bridges. A lot of people killed themselves, and it was very hard on a lot of people. There really were very poor people. I did see bread lines, and I did see guys selling apples. You did see real poverty, and you'd see kids your age without shoes in the middle of winter, you cried. It was really horrible, and we were just lucky to keep the show on the road. There were times when my mother could not pay the rent for the apartment and the electric light bill. If the two bills came at the one time we had to do some ducking and diving.

My mother was a high flown secretary before she married my father, and she went back to typing school so she would be able to get a job. She hired a maid to look after the house, but that could not go on very long because she had to pay for the school and the maid. It was impossible for her to get a job as she was over the age limit, so times were hard. My mother's family helped out, they were teachers and were not married; they had private money.

APPENDIX 11

Campbell Bruce (1927 -) Artist, Studied at the Royal College of Art 1950 - 1953. Professor of Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design 1975 - 1987.

Peter O'Neill - Could you tell me about your art education in England?

Campbell Bruce - I went to Saturday morning art classes at fourteen. We were initially given things like a trowel or a flowerpot and told to draw them naturally. When the guy got to know us a bit he let us bring in our model aeroplanes, Messerschmitts and so on, and we could draw those. We could draw aeroplanes better than anybody else, and battleships, and all that sort of stuff. Gradually he involved us into other things like what good drawing was about.

And was this an official class with a program and so on, or was it just a casual thing?

These classes were for kids who could come from anywhere within that area to attend on Saturday mornings. As far as I can remember there were about six or eight classes, some were in things like fashion, other were in things like lettering.

And were they designed to get people into art school, or were they just for people who had an interest in art?

I don't know really, I think it was the London County Council which organised them, and it was to encourage anybody really.

From what I've read it seems that the LCC at that time had a very liberal, almost socialist, approach to art education.

Well it was socialist, totally socialist. Because this was what Herbert Morrison had brought in 1937 and 1938 with the complete reorganisation of the LCC. The classes I attended were all free; you just had to get there. We all had bikes.

In 1936 the Government tried to bring together the disparate parts of the tertiary level art education system in London by trying to develop a structure that would correlate the work being done by the different art education institutions. The colleges involved were the Royal College of Art, the Central School of Art, the Slade School of Art, and the Courtauld Institute. In the end the plan came to nothing. In the context of the above socialism it seems to me that the system did not want to change.

These institutions had their separate trustees and governors, and so on. But there was actually a philosophy behind that; that if you have a number of different centres of excellence you brought out different qualities. It was a bit like Oxford and Cambridge. These institutions became centres of excellence largely because of the people who

worked there. So for example the Central could develop a strong crafts bias, if you wanted to be a printer you could go there.

And what was the standing of the Royal College of Art at that stage?

Well the Royal of College Art had become dead on its feet. I can't remember the date now, but when he came out of the army Robin Darwin was appointed director of the Royal College of Art. And he completely revised everything about it. Part of his program was to bring it back to 1851, to its original position. He wanted to create a balance between design and fine art. But it was not just that, I mean things like industrial design were brought in. So there was painting, graphic design, illustration, sculpture, and so on, but they were all separate you see. There wasn't such a thing as fine art as such; they were all by subject.

So each subject was separate?

It was all by subject, so painting was a thing of itself, sculpture was a thing in its self, printmaking was a thing in itself, and stained glass was a thing in itself. Not all of them had professors, only the main groups like design. There was a professor of sculpture, a professor of painting, but there wasn't a professor of printmaking, he was just head of printmaking.

One article that I read criticised the Royal College of Art in the 1930s for having a structure that included design, and stained glass, and crafts, and so on, but where the ethos remained fine art based.

The Royal College of Art became almost entirely fine art based in the thirties. I can't remember the facts off the top of my head. The saddest thing that happened was in 1937 or 1938, after Rothenstein resigned, when they appointed Percy Jowett as Principal. They had a chance at that time to bring in one of the Bauhaus men. It was Gabo I think.

He was in England at that time, as were Moholy-Nagy and Gropius.

It was one of these guys. Gabo was interested in the job but they wouldn't let him take it.

There was a big influx of people into England from Nazi Germany in the 1930s, many from the Bauhaus, and presumably that did have an effect and an influence on English art and ultimately on art education.

It did. I don't think it had any effect on art education until the 1950s though.

That's actually one of the interesting things. Although there was an influence on British art in the 1930s, there was no clear effect on art education, which to me seemed to imply, as I have already said, that the structure of art education was very conservative and against change.

Absolutely, when I went to art school full time there was no choice, you had to do the drawing examination.

Which art school did you attend?

I attended Croydon School of Art. You had to do the drawing examination. The drawing examination was basically like core studies is today. Everybody did the drawing examination. And the drawing examination consisted of perspective and mechanical perspective, which means you had three hours to do an examination paper, which obviously you hadn't seen until the commencement of the examination. You also had to do a three-hour paper on mechanical perspective, and another paper, which was three hours of memory perspective. You also had composition. Composition was again four hours; they would set the subject. There was an anatomy paper in which you had three hours to do a nine-inch figure. You did the outline of the action they gave you, a man chopping up a log or carrying two buckets of water up a stairs, for instance. And you did the first one in outline with a skeleton inside it, then you traced off the outline and with the other one you did the muscles. If you got the skeleton wrong of course you couldn't do the muscles. And then you had one hour to answer three questions about muscles, their origins, their insertions, and their function.

You started at nine in the morning and most of us did a voluntary two-hour evening class. You could do the examination in two years, but most of us thought two years was purgatory. This is where the Saturday morning classes had been an advantage. I had done nearly two years of Saturday morning classes, 18 months maybe, so I had got to know the system. In the end you were beginning to know the older students, because, if you had done a year, instead of having the master there they would let you work with a senior student. Someone who was doing industrial examinations could earn some money by teaching you on a Saturday morning, so you could find from them how the whole thing worked. We did not know it at the time but it all worked as a

system. And these guys would take us around and show us what people were doing, so we could see what was happening.

So you knew what you were letting yourself in for. It was a sort of an elongated pre-diploma course - the Saturday morning classes. And who examined you before you were allowed to enter art school, the teachers from the art school itself?

Yes.

And when you were in art school studying did the school itself examine you or was it Department of Education inspectors?

The Department of Education, all your papers were sent away, all of them.

And did the school mark them as well?

The school of art had nothing to do with it at all. They were sent away.

So it was a completely centralised system.

Yes.

Was it the same if you were in Manchester, Birmingham, or Leeds?

Yes.

I read that the system was decentralised in 1911 and that as a consequence more autonomy was given to schools.

All the work was sent away. Now I would not know whether they were sent to regions or not. There may have been regional inspectors, but as far as I know - no there couldn't have been, because even when they got to the industrial examinations people who got the top marks were notified, so if your school could get somebody up to the top marks bracket they were in the annual exhibition which was held every year of the best works.

Held centrally somewhere?

In Westminster I think it was held.

Originally the Royal College was the main school of the National System and the whole system was driven from the Royal College of Art. It was a very centralised system and they had the same curriculum throughout the whole country.

When I was studying art the Royal College the Slade and the Royal Academy schools were independent bodies. The ministry of education was responsible for Art School Examinations. You could not get into to the Royal College or the Slade unless you got your NDD or whatever, although there were exceptions made.

Was the Royal College a post-graduate school only?

Yes.

So there were no people doing basic degrees there?

Absolutely none at all, no.

Only post graduate, so you did your degree somewhere else, or you did your NDD somewhere else. Did you do the NDD?

I did yes, because when I came out of the Medical Corps the new system was in. As far as I know there were no degrees in art though the NDD would have been considered equal to a pass degree.

And what was the original one called?

The Industrial Examination, the Board of Education Industrial Examination, and around Industrial Examination were subject brackets. I did lithography.

So art education was seen in terms of design by the system, what you did were industrial exams, not fine art exams.

You were really back to 1851.

And it was only after the war that system changed?

Yes.

Was Robin Darwin a design person?

No he was a painter.

So did he bring a painting bias to the Royal College of Art?

No. He got rid of the snobbery that was attached to painting - he didn't get rid of the painting bias, but he re-established all the design faculties. He brought in a man called Richard Guyatt to run graphic design. He brought in Moynihan to run painting. A whole new team of staff were employed.

Moynihan, as in the Euston Road Group?

Yes. Though Moynihan had been one of the first abstract English artists during the thirties.

And completely abstract, but didn't he become disillusioned with abstraction?

I don't know. During the war he went back to figuration when he did all his wartime portraits.

Did he ever go back to abstraction?

He went back to abstraction, but much later. Well that's not strictly true. His figuration was still lives and that sort of thing, but very much to do with abstraction in the way they were worked.

So he kind of married the two?

Yes.

And he was part of the Euston Road school. Didn't they have a very strong socialistic/communistic streak in them?

Virtually everybody at that time was a socialist - we had just come out of a war against fascists.

Except Hepworth, Nicholson, Moore, and Pasmore. Didn't they tend to be outside the rest of the system?

Hepworth and Nicholson yes, but not Moore and Pasmore. They weren't conservative in the sense that they were Tories, and, I mean, certainly Moore would have considered himself totally radical.

Being a working man from Yorkshire, like Read.

The whole thing was Herbert Read. It was all based on that.

And Read was a socialist.

But it was all a reaction. You have got to remember that whole Bloomsbury group was very powerful with almost a stranglehold on British art at that time. I believe Gaudier-Brzeska particularly suffered at their hands. Later Wyndham Lewis, Bomberg, there were all sorts of people.

Didn't the Bloomsbury group feed into the Euston Road Group?

Yes essentially through the influence of Sickert. There are always these reactions.

Weren't the Bloomsbury group elitist and aestheticist?

Bloomsbury? Oh absolutely.

Whereas the Euston Road painters were much more socialistic?

Euston Road would appear to have been totally the reverse of Bloomsbury, almost the working man's art. Sickert was the big voice then. Sickert was the sort of God, because he'd painted theatre and domestic scenes which he had got directly from Degas.

And he was very modern of course. He rejected the Victorian aesthetic and Ruskin and so on. It's hard to find a thread, but one thing that I find interesting which runs

through the whole thing from the early twentieth century is this thing of socialism/communism within the art world, and how that ultimately influenced Coldstream himself, who in turn influenced art education through his reports. But the other thing, which ties in with that, again to get back to design, is this design thing. As far as I can see they are key issues in relation to how art education developed after the war. CEMA, which became the Arts Council of Great Britain, was a reflection of this new ethos of socialism, equality, and egalitarianism that came out of the war. I can see how that fitted in with the design approach to art, the idea that art has to be functional, has to have a public role, and has to serve the people in a sense. But at the same time you have developments from modernism feeding in, with the Bauhaus and so on.

I am going to jump the gun a bit here. You have almost to go back to the 1890s when, in the north of England, miners set up art groups amongst themselves, and it was considered a means of cutting across everything - you would really need to read about it yourself. But yes it was radical, the whole notion of what Morris was doing with the crafts for instance. Jumping the gun again to after the war, a great many painting students were influenced by the French, and Sartre, and existentialism, and what Giacometti had been doing. The exhibition of Picasso and Matisse in the Victoria and Albert Museum just after the war was also very influential.

But you have got to remember - you see again I can't separate it from history - towards 1942-43, I think, Churchill could have been described as one of the most disliked men in England. So that when the war was over he didn't lose an election, he was slung out. Just look at the figures. He couldn't understand it. The wartime leader,

who led the people to victory, towards the end he was looked on as just a bloody warmonger.

So were people just fed up with the war or with a combination of the war and the social and political system of the thirties and twenties?

I don't know, again I am not really in a position to say. There has always been the working class backlash to elitism, to the English public schools and so on.

The first Labour Government in England was after the First World War, immediately after the first war. In 1919 Ireland got its independence, again immediately after the first war, another consequence of the war.

And then those in power gradually re-established themselves. It has got to be remembered that the Mitfords and many upper class English didn't want to make war. They wanted Hitler to be in power in Europe. The strange thing that cuts against all of this is that, despite all the socialist aspirations, the man they appointed was Darwin. Darwin may have been a socialist, I simply don't know, he did many socialist things. Yet he was an old Etonian and he eventually became Sir Robin Darwin. Most of his staff at one stage were old Etonians. This was something that at the time we didn't know. It was only when we read obituaries and that sort of thing that we realised. It's then that you suddenly see all the tentacles.

And he was in charge of the RCA, throughout the 1950s, after the war?

Yes, he was appointed in, I think, 1948. I am not sure.

He had some involvement here with the College of Art, as had Misha Black.

Yes he visited Dublin and encouraged the students to throw out all the old ideas. There was this group of people called the Hampstead socialists, which were the people who had been to Oxford and Cambridge, who had been to Eton, who became socialists, people like Benn.

Tony Benn you mean?

Yes.

Weren't Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth in Hampstead as well? And some of the Bauhaus people lived there for a while too. So it was an intellectual circle of socialists who arguably didn't have much effect on the ground. You're familiar with Herbert Read's attitudes I'm sure. As you know he was a socialist. But he thought the role or function of art was to be non-confrontational, to be radical but dormant as it were. He believed that within the forms of art and through a radical approach to the structures of art that art was preparing itself for the day when revolution came and that it would then come out of the woodwork.

It was very English. I wonder what Marcuse would have made of it.

It was very safe. I found that very interesting.

One has to remember that Darwin was related to the original Darwin, and that when you go back through all these things you see the connections. People were related to Huxley, people were always related to someone else. You are really talking about families.

To what extend were you or your peers aware of that when you were a student?

We weren't.

At what stage did you become aware of these things?

When I became aware of it I was no longer a student. I became acutely aware of it when I started teaching. But I think very few people were as naive as I was at that time.

And when was that?

Say middle fifties. I had done bits and pieces of teaching, but I really started part time teaching, I think, in 1959.

And when you became aware of that did it influence your approach to teaching or your approach to what you were doing?

I don't know. When people came out of the services there was such a desire to change the world, to make it different, and there was enormous frustration built up

because financially there was no way one could change anything. The money was not even in the country. It was in the States. There was an enormous frustration. You'd got marvellous people like Bevin and Atlee - bloody good brains - being frustrated constantly by the system. It's easy to see now, but even the way they got rid of Wilson in the 1960's. The people who really hold the power are always able to assert themselves.

If I could side-track just for a moment and put it very personally. When I was in the Royal College of Art we used to put our names on easels on a Friday evening so that we would have a place for Monday morning. You would come in on Monday morning and if a place wasn't taken by a quarter to ten someone else would take it. I can remember a particular incident in the life room. This man came in and took a label off someone's easel and started working there. When the other guy came in all hell was let loose. These were ex-service men. A life class could have thirty or thirty-five people. It was packed. There were five years of backlog to get through the system. I can't remember exactly the figures now, but I seem to remember the year that I went there were two hundred and ninety six applicants. To get into the Royal College then you had to go and do an examination in the college, you had to draw a model, you had to write a paper - it might be based on a quote from Cezanne, and you had an interview. You took up your folder of work two weeks before hand. It was specified that certain things had to be in the folder. The number that was accepted was usually between twenty-eight and thirty-five.

And had you finished your journey through the old system before that or had you had to disrupt your studies because of the war?

I had actually got into the Royal College in graphic design before I was called up.

Having finished your Industrial Examination?

I had got into graphic design, but I didn't want to do it, and when I came out I asked if I could transfer, and they said "no you can't". None of this would have been possible if I had not been called up, because we would not have got the ex-service grants. I had a grant paid from the army.

Does that mean there was greater democracy in art education after the war, in other words that more people with talent could get in and not just those with money?

Absolutely, Yes.

And did that have an effect on your education in the sense that the people you were mixing with had war experience and consequently were much more demanding of what society was going to give them and where it was going and so on?

Oh yes, compared with my previous education where I did what I was told. There were ex-officers, there were men who had been in prison of war camp for four years, you couldn't turn around to them and say, "Hey you can't do this".

It must have been very heady, a really exciting and stimulating time.

It was very heady indeed. But when you are going through it you don't know that, because you have got no comparison. There was a great deal of optimism even though none of us had any jobs. We believed that if you started making a success as an artist at forty that was what it was about. We knew we would have to work. There was not an expectation that anybody owes you a living. It was a practical attitude. Even men in their thirties and considered to be very successful artists were surviving by teaching.

How many years did you spend in the Royal College?

Three years in the Royal College, I finished in 1953. I came out of the army in 1948, I took the NDD in painting and I left the Royal College in 1953.

And where did you go from there? Did you go out of the system? Were you involved in teaching?

No. Oh God no. I swore I would never teach. None of us wanted to have anything to do with teaching "those who couldn't, taught". We all believed that.

Did you all aspire to making a living eventually, as artists?

Yes. But then we didn't think. There was a much more open attitude. Being ex-service and this sort of thing you thought you could do anything providing you kept the work going, so what was essential was to be working. If you had to get another job during the day - we had read about the French artists and all these other artists who worked in china factories and so on.

When you were in the Royal College to what extend were you aware of people like the artists of the Euston Road School and their ideas. For instance the way Coldstream worked with the Post Office film unit during the thirties, and I think maybe during the war, for socialistic reasons. Was the idea that art had a social function an issue with you while you were at the Royal College? And after you left the college did these things matter?

I said to you earlier we were very much into existentialism and all that sort of philosophy. One of the books that really left a mark was T.S. Eliot's, *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture,* another was Alfred North Whithead's *Adventures of Ideas.* So everybody was very much coming out of a very doctrinaire, ordered world. I mean we had had enough of rules. Everybody wanted to be responsible for themselves. We believed, in other words, that the system existed around you to answer our needs. The Royal College, at one stage, looked ridiculous. It looked like everybody was in mourning. We all wore black. It was all that sort of thing. At the end of the day for me that book by Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas,* was quite critical.

So that informed your thinking then?

That informed my thinking. I also have to say when we were at Art College it was insisted upon that we read and did things outside. One of the masters used to send us sketching at weekends in the country. And I used to go, between five o'clock and seven o'clock, to the reference library. But it was insisted that we read. I read War and

Peace over a period of about fifteen months in the reference library. While we were in the army we were in to things like Proust, Huxley, and Russell.

Lets now turn our attention to the National College of Art and Design. My objective in looking at the National College of Art and Design is to focus very closely on fine art education, to look at the curriculum, to see how it has developed since 1960, and to see how that curriculum relates to what was happening in England.

So in relation to this objective the first question is this. Could you describe the fine art curriculum that you found at the NCAD when you arrived there?

The situation was that people did subject classes of three hours duration, set classes. I can't remember exactly, I think there was something like twenty-eight students in total, and there were quite strict rules before you could enter a class, and each class was small in numbers.

At that time the curriculum - I mean the individuals concerned, John Kelly for instance, were very well informed. He had been to the States. He was very good, but he found himself in a structure which was in my terms archaic, and he could not find a way of changing.

In Britain, after the war, the problems of drawing and the problems of color had become vital. We had very little history or tradition to go on, so when the critic David Sylvester came back from France - Sylvester had been the first English critic to go to France after the war - he said, "Look, I've got photographs of Giacometti's drawings here", and he showed them to us. We saw that Giacometti had gone into the business of focus, which went right back to Durer and so on. This raised questions like, What do you focus on when you draw? Giacometti might focus on the nose or a particular

part of the head, and then everything else was peripheral vision. It was almost an expressionist way of looking. And if you were focusing on the nose you felt where that was and - you know exactly what I'm saying. It was fifteen years later that Chuck Close did those huge portraits. It was precisely the same thing, but different in scale. To us this was absolutely riveting because what we had been told about drawing was strictly based on the tensions which had to do with structure and the relationship of the marks to achieve it, weights, and all the rest of it. This old system was ridiculous. So this notion that we fixed focus was like some kind of revelation. Consequently all the teaching that came out of the Bauhaus suddenly made a lot more sense, like taking the negative shape of something. Then the Duchamp thing suddenly became, instead of theory and laughable, practiced reality. It was tremendously exciting, and all the knowledge that exploded later, all those other ideas, we wanted to encompass all that, so we thought teaching was disastrous. Remember teaching was, for us, architecture, drawing, perspective, anatomy, illustration.

That was where we came from. Then to come over here in the 1970's and to find that whatever knowledge had been taken up in the States [by John Kelly] it was to a further period back, it had not absorbed post-war French or American findings, they hadn't come through. So the College here was still linked with Orpen, and there was nothing wrong with that, nothing wrong at all. It was valid for those who saw it that way. I mean no one is going to say Keating or MacGonigal were fools, but what one could say was that they were out of their time.

The great irony of that was of course that the tradition they subscribed to was that of the Slade, Orpen and Lavery. It was not Nationalist Irish.

Its strange isn't it that Coldstream as the embodiment of the Slade tradition was responsible for the liberal Coldstream Report.

And it ignored all the things that people like Norah McGuinness were working on, all the ladies in fact who had been to France, and remember it was 1942-43 when the Living Art started. Well, you have only got to hear Keating going around the 1971 ROSC to understand. You can't fault the man for his own beliefs, but it is the huge gaps in between, and his method of drawing is surely as Slade based as Orpen and Coldstream.

When you went to the NCAD first, to what extent were the staff in the college pursuing a curriculum? Did they really have concrete ideas? What was happening on the Ground?

I think there were concrete ideas. I suppose the person who in many ways, however much I may have disagreed with him, who was most coherent, who had worked out a philosophy, was Domhnall O'Murchadha. Sculpture and the Renaissance had carried him into mathematics, so he knew all about the mathematical formula of things. Therefore abstraction as a notion was not something strange for him, not something emotional or something lacking in skills. In fact it was very skillful. So he was very much isolated, but he was isolated also because of his Catholicism. I mean the same man had wanted to bring in the angelus at twelve o'clock.

The acting Director Jonah Jones got an agreement with the unions and the staff that no decisions would be taken by the new professors of design or fine art or education without the knowledge and, where necessary, the agreement of the existing professors. Lucy Charles, John Kelly, and Domhnall O'Murchadha were the three professors. It

was a sort of unsaid thing that the head of the RHA would automatically be professor of painting or sculpture, and clearly that was something else that had to be broken. This was what the Government did when it brought in the new act. To take the college away from the tyranny of the RHA and remove the power of the Department of Education were the two things that had been achieved.

The Department and the RHA?

Yes. Because what O'Nuallain wanted was to update the college, but he didn't have the power to do it. He had strong ideas on how to do it. And Diarmuid Larkin, also an inspector in the Department of Education, wrote in fact quite a good little booklet on art training and how it should be done. But that was at loggerheads with what O'Nuallain saw, and with what the Professors saw, and of course the newly set up NCEA.

When I went into the college - I would not have passed a picket, I had been involved with unions and I knew how important the unions were. One of my biggest surprises in coming to Ireland, to a Republic, was finding how much the Civil Service structure was virtually identical to the one I had left. I was horrified. That to me, in hindsight, was a great advantage because I knew that system, and I knew that civil servants are usually pretty good providing you give them what they are looking for. You give them the facts in other words. So we went very carefully into looking at all the facts and so forth.

But going back to the business of the sacked staff who had been excluded by the Department of Education from teaching because they objected to the methods used. I went out at nine o'clock and I explained to those picketing that I had already been in

the college and would not have passed the picket without finding out what they were about.

So they said, "Will we go back to Buswell's?". I said, "No I have to go in and make myself known, I'll meet you at lunchtime and we will talk then". So I met them at lunchtime. It was Peter Mew, he was a philosopher, Charlie Cullen, and Charlie Harper. There was another person, he wrote something about the history of all the troubles, but he had not been employed in the college so I could not talk to him. I talked to the sacked staff and their ideas seemed to me far closer to what education was about than the people that I had already been talking with on the permanent staff. So I went to Jonah Jones and I said the full time staff seem to me to be totally out of sync with what I think contemporary art education is about, and the part time sacked staff seem to have a far clearer idea. So he said, "As you are employed to do the job you had better go and do it and I will back you". So I interviewed each member of the internal staff and I interviewed the sacked staff. Carey Clarke was the union representative at this time.

I recommended to the director that all the sacked staff should be brought in. When I went to see the full time staff I said what my recommendations were. They were not happy.

At the same time that I was appointed I was shown the short list of certain candidates who were applying for other jobs in fine art. The plan was to bring in new, very young, highly qualified people. One of the people who came in at that time was Jeoff Styner Scott, who was a silk screen printer, also Rob Smith and Nigel Rolfe. Rob I got on extremely well with, as well as you can get on with anybody, I mean Rob always kept his own distance from everybody, you could get very close on certain levels but he was a very private man. Nigel was extremely well informed. He had

studied in Bath. Rob was from Manchester. He had come from Wolverhampton. He did his MA in Manchester. He had had a show. Both were extremely sincere, very honest. We couldn't have wished for better. Both were first rate technicians.

Within, I think, about one month of starting we decided that the curriculum didn't allow people to develop, and that we would put people in, in blocks.

You were looking at the old curriculum.

The old curriculum is what we were looking at. I said to John Kelly, "John, how can you paint a life model for three hours or one day and then wait until the next week before you paint again. How does the mind work?" There was absolute uproar.

There was a hidden agenda in this. I wanted to break the tyranny of the individual insisting that students do things their way. One way to do that was if the students could stay working for one week. They could then develop their own ideas as a continuum, which I insisted that everybody should attempt to do. The response I got was "they don't know [anything]. How can they know what they want?" My response was to say that you are dealing with people who could be conscripted and go out and kill for you, and you said they don't know what they - "that's different". The meetings - there was one particular meeting that was really heavy but more was probably resolved at that four hour meeting than any subsequent one.

Was this the attitude of the heads of the different areas?

It was some of the staff as well, some of the staff were worse than the heads actually.

In relation to you achieving things as head of fine art, did you have precedence over the previous professor?

Effectively yes.

So you had the final say.

I didn't want to be a dictator in any shape or form. I wanted to do everything by consensus because that's the way I work. If I employ staff I employ them to do the job. I'm not going to tell them how to do it. They are the experts.

Did the situation then just drift into two camps?

No, because a lot of people saw the sense of it. Domhnall O'Murchadha and Nuala Creagh were much more sympathetic because they could see the point: how long you had to spend on a piece of sculpture [for example]. It does make sense if you chip away for a week rather than every so often. I am not saying that I made schisms, but there were divisions that were already there. You see there was also the difficulty, apart from three individuals, that a lot of them actually did want change. They did know that there needed to be movement. They had had four, nearly six, years of staff and students conflicting - sacked staff, students outside. I mean they had had their walls sprayed. Quite appalling things had gone on, like having fascist sprayed across the front of their houses. So they'd had a lot of time to think.

Anyway, that's some of the background. We tried to use the basic English system, which included a one-year foundation course. That had been agreed right across the academic counsel. At that stage there was a three-year degree, so it was a four-year course. This was fought every inch of the way by the Department. They said "Trinity has three year degrees, UCD has three year degrees, why is it different here?" Quite simply because for the last however many years no art has been taught in schools. So they come to us like kids go to primary school, without even the basic language. So after lots of humming and hawing this was agreed.

The particular man we were dealing with in the HEA was called Jim Dukes. He got the college to call us down to his office in Merrion Square. He got the heads of faculties, the head of the college, and David Sherlock, and he talked to us like a Dutch uncle, he was so clear. I have tremendous respect for these men. People like Tom Gunn's father, like Jim Dukes, they had been through it, these were men in their late fifties and early sixties. They were so clear cut and bright about what their intentions were. They thought all this stuff that was going on was absolutely against everything they stood for and had fought for.

Jim Dukes was tremendously supportive. We had so much going on at this stage. We looked for three major buildings. We could make nothing while we were in Kildare Street. It was riddled with tradition, people thought it was their property. We had to change that. I mean you are an employee, nothing is yours. The only thing that's yours is the salary that you earn. You don't own the furniture. There was all this sort of thing. Each professor had a studio, we thought everybody should have a space. And I was the first one who actually went out and got alternative premises. We got it from a Mr. Allen. That was Clarendon Street.

So we got Clarendon Street for three years, and that was an endless hassle. Again that was where deals had been done, we had looked around, all of us had looked around. I cannot even remember who found Clarendon Street. I think it was Rob. I'm not sure. So all the contracts were made, no checking about the central heating, no checking if the wiring was OK. Then we got this horrendous bill to put things right. James Allen had got out because the place was unsafe; the lesson was learnt. After that we went to Moss Street.

Eventually we had to get out of Kildare Street because the Dail wanted that part of the college that was in Kildare Street. The architects who were dealing with the college, Burke Kennedy Doyle, were a very good team of young architects. Ruari Quinn worked with them. We had long talks with them and eventually they came up with this whole notion of building a College of Art. The first rounds were about whether it should have been in Earlsfort Terrace, where they wanted us to go. There were other suggestions. Then there was Powers old distillery in Thomas Street. Most of the older staff objected strongly to Thomas Street. "Its full of robbers." "It's a low class area." "That's not the place for a college." "The college should be out in the country, in a park, with landscape around it." Absolutely not, an art college should be right in the heart of where everything is happening.

Anyway, that eventually came to a feasibility study for Thomas Street and the site was bought. Then for years there was no movement on it. David Sherlock and Mike Ozmin had found that the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham and various other places had masses of absolutely marvellous industrial machinery that was going to wrack and ruin. There was no industrial museum, and so much stuff in Ireland had been made by craftsmen, by ironworkers, to suit specific purposes. So there was machinery that was actually unique, even the stills and that sort of thing in Thomas Street were incredible

devices, absolutely marvellous. So the idea was to set up an industrial museum and make the college an industrial archive. I suppose an archive like the books in Trinity. There would be a centre for slides, books, and so on.

So these were all good ideas in the middle 1970's which met with great support and great help from people like Jim Dukes. The Department architect suddenly started being very excited, "this is a great idea, you should really try to do it". Thomas Street was actually fantastic because so much of the stuff was actually there, which we did actually preserve. I'd hate to see it now. So all of those ideas of preservation had currency: proud of our past, this is our heritage, let's go from here. The last thing we wanted was an elitist situation.

The whole notion of the RHA was much the same as it was in England. It was an elite group of people who had all these satellites around them. It was exactly the same as in England in those days. Academicians would take private tuition of old ladies, and anybody else who paid money, to survive. The same thing happened here. And every year of course these academicians would go around after the selection was made and pick out the rejections - "oh no, I can't, she'd leave my class, it has to go in". So all this stuff is picked out as having to go in because this is their livelihood. So the academies were full of amateurs because they were students of academicians. If they wanted to do that that was their business, but that was something else.

So all the time it was not a question of destroying something but of replacing it or putting alternatives in. And this was something we could not get into because they actually did see it as destruction. The perception was, as you know, lets try and break this down. It had the effect, of course, of putting everybody on their toes. And at the same time that this was going UCD were having enormous problems with their architecture department, and Fitzgerald was sidetracked. Many of our architects came

out of that turmoil and were aware of the problem, they were very well informed about education in general, about what was needed, how to fight for space and so on.

Unfortunately, bit by bit those plans were whittled away. Most destruction was done in 1979 by Domhnall O'Murchadha, after Jonah Jones had left with some ignominy.

Domhnall O'Murchadha was made acting director when Jones resigned. Then everything started going against us. In 1978, for instance, we appointed a head of media studies. The man we appointed went for a holiday to the States but was killed. When we tried to refill the post Domhnall O'Murchadha said, "No, that's it". "This should be done by Rathmines." At this time we had Cathal Black, Joe Commerford, Thadeous O'Sullivan, and Luke Gibbons on the part time staff. We tried to set this thing up, and Domhnall rejected it: "This is a college of art, we are not having film and television in here." And he persuaded the Government not to refill the post. So it all slipped away from us. Dun Laoghaire subsequently developed it. So that was a tremendous loss. When that started to happen all doors closed. We had hoped that David Sherlock, knowing all the ins and outs of what was going on, would deal with the civil servants. He had all sorts of contacts with TDs. etc. He was a brilliant organiser and he was a really superb illustrator and assistant director. But he went. After Domhnall O'Murchadha took over he blocked everything as chairman of the academic council, and all these staff who had been against the new system suddenly found their feet again.

Did his directorship have an effect on the curriculum in fine art?

No. It was too late because the documents had actually been approved by the NCEA. The documents had all been done. They had been seen and approved by the student body, they had been seen by the academic council, they had been seen by the faculty boards and the Governing body. The NCEA had approved them. That was the course document, the course submission. We made three submissions to meet the requirements of the NCEA.

The other big thing that changed the college was when Noel Sheridan was appointed. The whole of the, let's say, the O'Murchadha/Gunn axis wanted a particular English teacher who was a graphic designer. We were interested in Patrick Ireland; the man who had changed his name and who worked in New York. And someone said, "What about Noel Sheridan, he is a recognised painter". I had herd about Noel from all sorts of people. I had heard about what he had done in New York. And then I heard from friends of mine about what he had done in Australia. Because one of the staff I knew at Stoke had gone out there, and he said there was a marvellous man out there called Sheridan, who was an Irish American. So I checked around with a lot of people, people in the business like David Hendrix, and they said he was a marvellous man. He was the son of Sheridan the actor and all the rest of it, and he had just done this five year study of Australian art education. So I felt this is the man for us. I talked to Brian King about him and contacted him through Brian and asked if he would be prepared to apply? And he said "yes". So he applied and got the job.

I felt it was necessary for staff to broaden their experience, so I insisted that all staff should have at least a term out. I suggested that all staff should go and have time out either in the States, in the UK or wherever they wanted, with the idea of learning what's happening in the world today. And I thought people would actually go to the States or to Germany or to Holland or to the UK.

Charley Cullen did his study in the States. In fact everybody took time out. I thought it was absolutely essential. The knocking business had to stop. This was achieved by going to see how other places worked, how bad they were, how good they were, what our strengths or our weaknesses were, so it was essential that staff got out. The second thing was that it was essential that I got students out. So we set up the first Erasmus scheme in Ireland with Limerick, and before that I had got exchange systems working with I think it was...

Minnesota?

Minnesota.

I remember the half American-Indian teacher who came as part of that exchange, he was a very interesting character, and I remember spending a lot of time talking with him.

It was essential that we got this thing going - you know, you were part of it for Christ's sake. By doing that sort of thing we also got known for what we could do. We tended to send good students and they sent poor students, so it was quite interesting. They saw our best and thought they were getting what we were trying to get rid of, we got the worst of their students. So our students thought, "Jesus Christ, we could match those buggers anytime", which was the attitude, and then other things opened up. The whole thing from Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, all those opened up. Bernadette Cotter went to San Francisco. The book has it all.

The catalogue of the ten-year show in the Hop Store?

That has a lot of the information. It has the visitors thing. It has where we went, what we did. I didn't make any bones about it. Noel was totally against me putting it in the book, all about that animosity at the beginning and the sort of battles that went on. I'm still quite convinced that created tremendous energy in the place. I think for some of the students it must have been very worrying because it meant there was so many ideas going around. If you took sides you were in trouble so you had to sort of plough your own furrow. And actually with hindsight it was a bonus, which neither the students or the staff fully understood.

The mere fact of conflict forces you to address problems that you would never have addressed if there were peace and calm, so in that sense it was probably a good thing. The Chinese curse about living in interesting times comes to mind.

Could you say something briefly about how the new curriculum was instigated?

Very briefly, I felt that every member of staff had something to offer, if they did not they should not have been there. I knew that there had to be a small nucleus of full time staff, and I wanted a quite large nucleus of part-time staff, and a considerable number of visiting staff. The visiting staff would come in as the needs of students emerged, there was no good having visiting staff that had nothing to do with the students. You needed the maturity of the full timers at the very top, not because they were the best teachers, but to create continuity. I wanted to give an age span, I did not want everybody over fifty, I also wanted people who had just left college. People who

could tell you, "Look I just left college two years ago and I can tell you that's a load of crap". It was all that double take. We had tried to bring back students. Students were not employed for at least two years after they had left, even if they were very good, because that was too incestuous. I tried to bring staff from everywhere, and again if you look at the back of the book you will see. Staff came from Germany, from the States, etc.

One of the crucial points was the assessment procedure. We had to get away from the notion of corruption, not intentional corruption but corruption simply by power. And to break that down we arrived at a system that people thought was cumbersome. OK, if it was cumbersome for the first three, four, five, or six years then we will drop it and reduce the number. But initially it must have the student's tutor as an assessor. It must have the departmental head as an assessor. It must have one person from another department to show parity of mark, and it must have one person of the student's own choice. When the student saw the list of assessors they could say, "I'd like that person in". That way there was no argument about who you had. The difficulties were purely numbers, how do you fit in this person or that. By doing that we felt we could break the old system. The other thing, in terms of assessment, was that each member of staff should have a separate sheet of paper, which they marked. That mark was entirely confidential. That was the other thing we brought in, that every student was entitled to see their own records and their own reports.

Having established the confidence of the students in the system we went to the next stage. When the marks came in they were all taken by the secretary and myself, and they were just added together, and the average was made up. We then called all the staff together. Obviously when you have this system you have got to take all the

backbites, and you do know that tutors were very close to their students. Bit by bit despite all the acrimony, you begin to get levels, you begin to get cycles.

So marking was in a sense a democratic thing. It was not a really logical or precise measurement of anything. It was different opinions pooled, discussed and so on.

You could not get away from the subjective side of judging. All the staff got together, every point of view, so that if a student was well up and all the references were to the Irish thing, Domhnall and Michael might find themselves saying, "Yea, that's absolutely right, that's true". And suddenly a lot of the things - well not suddenly, over a period - began to settle down, and people were very much more careful in their judgements, and we did not get great discrepancies in the marks. The initial marking in the first three years was unbelievable, and a lot of it was based on personality. A lot of it at the time was acrimonious, it was vicious, but then it had to be done. It was the only way to do it that I knew. Because having been through the Hornsey affair you had to give, whether you disagreed with it or not, you had to tolerate different opinions, you had to go along with it and hope that time or whatever would end it. But it was difficult.

It was happening at all sorts of levels, you had to get back to the fact essentially that it was individuals that you had to believe in.

Were you focusing on the individual student? Were staff there to support students in their personal development?

No not really. I thought they were all actually evolving artists, a staff member of twenty eight is just as much an evolving artist as a student of twenty two.

So it was not really a student/staff thing at all.

That's why I wanted the staff going from young to old, so that there would be a continuum of experience that we could build up, and use, and work from. In other words a twenty year old would get on better with a twenty six year old, and a twenty six year old will get on better with a thirty five year old, its a sort of oscillating thing.

So it was moving away from the idea of a school where you have teachers and students and it was getting closer, in a vague sense, to a community of people who work together, sharing things.

The idea of tutorial groups was to break away from the idea of teacher and the student. The tutorial group was an exchange of ideas between people of different years. You remember the tutorial groups.

Did you or the course document specify any particular way of teaching on the ground or did you leave it completely up to the each individual teacher, for instance in relation to projects to be done or particular things to be achieved?

No. This sort of thing emerged over a period of time, it was quite clear that the students coming into first year, to foundation, hadn't a bloody clue. So it started off really with basics. For instance, what's a mark? We weren't actually teaching drawing,

we were teaching observation. We weren't teaching colour theory. We were teaching what happened at a physical level.

It has been said that in the seventies there was a bias within art education at tertiary level in Britain in favour of fine art and to the detriment of design. Could you comment on that?

The reason for that was the breadth of the fine art courses. You've got to remember that some of the greatest fashion designers, not only fashion designers but also theatre designers came out of the RCA in the early 1950s. The RCA had a theatre group. They had a small place that they could use to do their theatre practice, so to do it to the scale they wanted they used perspective to solve problems. They did a whole series of perspective sets to make the space look huge. In fact the space was only about twelve feet deep. And then you had the business of how to make people look smaller. You make things bigger at the back so that they look smaller. So all sorts of optical things were used which subsequently became used on the stage when English theatre design really took off. Hokney is an opera fan. So all those things grew out of this. This is why when we did the course we said we are not training painters or sculptors we are training people to be visually literate, in four years you can't train a painter. If that's where they want to go that's where they go.

So your objective was not necessarily to produce painters or sculptors.

No. That's why fine art took such an expansive approach. Design got smaller and smaller, whereas the fine arts went into design. Some of the top designers by the early

1970s were fine art trained people. Perhaps we were arrogant but we really believed we were giving people a visual language which they could develop to meet their own needs.

So it was a kind of a liberal, general, art education. It prepared people for almost any area in the arts whether it was film or whatever.

Yes. The idea was that if you found out in second year that you could write very well, why shouldn't you do the joint course for instance. This course was hijacked by art history. It never achieved what we set out to achieve.

So art history hijacked it?

Fine art is fine art and art history is art history. They couldn't abide this business of joint staffing. You must remember all those arguments about bringing in art history staff and bringing in craft staff. You could always stop things. We were determined to open things. That's why we had people like Joseph Beuys. That's why we had people like Christo. It was a question of what is art. Look at your own history. At the time that you were there performance was probably as strong in Ireland as anywhere in the world. And we could send students from here to Holland or to Britain to perform. There is no way people like Margaret Magee could have gotten to Chicago and finished up running her own television station. She had that sort of background, performance. But having someone like John David Moody come over from Chicago as a sculptor assessor helped. And I had to do that against Domhnall O'Murchadha, just as I had to bring over Patrick Ireland. And again we insisted on bringing over people

with Irish backgrounds or Irish connections. I did not want Germans. I did not want English. Look at all our external examiners at that time, Sean Scully, Rita Donagh, William Scott, and Patrick Ireland who said he wouldn't change his name back to Brian O'Doherty till British troops were out of the north. I got abuse from Tom Ryan for bringing this man who used string in his art. But he was Irish. They were all Irish, so was Noel Sheridan. I found as soon as you got an Irish person they immediately had this conversation, they had a rapport. We had all this great stuff that was going on by Irish people outside the country, it was frowned upon from the inside, so bring them in. Its repercussions for students were immeasurable.

Just one last thing, very quickly, from what you know of it, where do you see the college now? What way do you see things have gone in general, in relation to fine art?

You have asked me an almost impossible question. When I left I stayed away. I absolutely refused to make any comments on what was happening, on what was changing. In a general sense what I do know now is that it doesn't have any way near the reputation that we had fifteen years ago, because of the staff we had, because of the external examiners, because the knowledge was being spread out. I would suggest it was at a peak about 1984-1985. People had to know what we were doing. We had to be able to stand confidently.

APPENDIX 12

Mick Cullen (1946 -) Artist. Studied at the National College of Art 1970 - 1973.

Peter O'Neill - When did you go to the College of Art?

Mick Cullen - I started as a full time student in 1970.

What was the college like then, the general situation of the college?

The year I went was the second year of the new one-year foundation course. At that time it was probably the most interesting, most comprehensive Bauhaus education in a sense. It involved people like Alice Hanratty and Paul Funge.

This was a pre-diploma course that they had brought in themselves?

At that time it was called the foundation course.

And this was in the middle of all the trouble?

The trouble had not started yet. It had been kind of simmering I suppose. 1969 was the beginning of the trouble, that was when it exploded. That was when it became a major issue. MacGonigal resigned in that year as well.

Did Funge and Hanratty set up the foundation course by themselves?

I am not too sure about this, about how it actually came into being.

Did you enjoy the course?

Yes I did. I had been involved as a night student in the college since 1962.

So you were well grounded in what the old system was?

I went through all the different bits and pieces that were relevant to education I suppose.

Were the night classes very academic and neo-classical?

It was very nineteenth century.

Who were the teachers?

A lot of people from the college like Peter Grant and Terry Gayer.

Do you find speaking as an artist now that it was useful to have done that, to have confronted the academic thing?

It was useful to me. It was useful in that aspect of grist to the mill.

What form did the course take in the foundation year?

It did a lot of the fundamental groundwork. I was interested in the two-dimensional aspect, I still tend to retain a memory of that aspect. I worked in the three dimensional area as well but it didn't have the same residue, only those elements that are the cornerstone of the development of painting.

The fundamentals if you like, the things that were behind art rather than the superficial aspects?

Yes.

I did a course with Funge in Waterford, he ran a foundation course there in the mid-seventies, and everything was project based. Issues like tone would be confronted or line, and there was a lot of sculpture, all the basic elements. That was the angle he used on it, and the whole essence to me seemed to be to encourage expression rather than to teach technical or specific issues. I presume it was more or less the same in Dublin.

I think these ideas were in the air, a kind of shibboleth, in words, in ideas.

When the foundation course was finished then, what was the structure that you were given?

Are you aware of the structures before that?

The old academic system?

Yes.

It was more or less like the atelier system. The teachers would set up a model for periods of varying length and students would work on the model, and the teachers would come in and talk to the students about what they were doing. They basically ran a system along the neo-classical lines of the nineteenth century, where essentially they gave their advice as professors.

They did more than give their advice. They painted the thing.

So they kind of got in the way in that sense.

I was lucky I never had to deal with that.

Did you know Keating?

I did yes. I had Keating and MacGonigal.

Keating was supposed to be a raspy personality.

Irascible I suppose.

Was he an endearing character?

Well he was all right, a nice man. I only had him for anatomy. He had retired at that time and he was just coming in to do anatomy. I did not have him as a professor.

Were John Kelly and Domhnall O'Murchadha there then?

When MacGonigal left, that was the last of the old. I think he left in protest. He just bailed out as soon as the problems started and Kelly took the post.

Did John Kelly then bring in a similar system?

He had a kind of interest in a lot of things. He probably would have instigated a more lax or liberal sort of course if he had a chance. I think he eventually just became caught between the Department of Education and the student body. The students were becoming radical. That kind of radical element went on for just about 4 years, so he could not actually instigate anything really, he was just held down trying to catch balls, that sort of thing.

How did that effect your studies, did it get in the way?

There was absolutely no course. You could go down and follow the remnants of the old course. Some people did that, they would go down and paint from the model, and do still lives, compositional studies, and tonal studies. I think a lot of people suffered because of what you say. It was very unorganised because the system was falling down, because of the dichotomy as well. You could go down stairs and follow the old program, but all the energy and everything was upstairs in the "free area" where people followed their own program.

So you were free in a sense and the system was looking after itself, sorting itself out.

The thing is, there were rooms and there were materials, people did work.

So work got done. If people wanted to work they could work, no problem?

No problem whatsoever.

And if you wanted to get involved you could get involved, on either side?

You could, on either side. The attraction was towards where the most energy was.

Did the majority of students go where the energy was or did significant numbers stick with the older system?

The majority of students went to the free area, and other students, for their own personal reasons, opted out of that.

And what was the faculty structure then?

Design remained more or less intact. It never actually disintegrated. The people in design had sympathies towards the rebellion, but I think they tended to follow the line. They just wanted to get through. They attended meetings, stuff like that.

Were you concerned in any way with the changes that were taking place, and were you aware of them or were you just not concerned about them?

I mean the whole thing was change throughout this whole period. It was just shortly after the student rebellion in Paris in 1968. There were also a lot of things happening on American campuses.

It must have been a very heady time, really energetic.

The economic thing was better than it had been, that sort of thing. It was towards the end of 1960's, and that 1960's myth was still around. I thought there was a lot of optimism, I think that was engendered even in the college. I mean it was not like a headless sort of thing, there was a head there as well. There were people capable of working out things, capable of coping with things.

People who knew what they wanted and knew where they wanted to go, even if it was like Paul Funge, all over the place, it was a direct powerful energy.

He was kind of on the side in one sense. He had left the college about 1966 or something like that. He was the previous generation. He was very professional in the way that he related to things. He was a teacher and he behaved himself in that way, but at the same time he had a lot to give.

And who were the other people then that the energy centred around, were there particular names?

Paddy Gillan and Dympna Mullen.

Alice Hanratty?

Well again she was a teacher. There was a divide between students and teachers. She behaved in a professional way. They were able to guide people in a professional way as teachers and as working artists.

I got the impression from reading about the student rebellion that on one side you had the older system trying to make sense of this situation and on the other side teachers and students trying to upset the apple-cart. What you say makes it very clear that there was actually some sense and order there, and an idea of what should be done, that it wasn't just chaos.

That thing lasted for four years. I think it influenced a lot of changes. I think it influenced a lot of the changes that came after.

It sounds like the student rebellion was a very positive thing, a very good thing.

I always thought it was. A lot of people who went through it, and maybe suffered in some way, they felt they lost out in a way, they tend to see it in a more negative way. I suppose it is understandable because they were looking for something else.

Was the student body split?

No. It was usually bought together by the events, there was always discussion, and through the process of discussion people could make up their own minds. There were some things in a situation like that that were bound to happen as a result of people doing it off their own bat. Statues I think did get damaged.

Apparently a lot of stuff was damaged at that time.

But that was a symbol of the old, a symbol of oppression. A lot of that stuff was dispersed. No one knows where they are now. There were two enormous rooms full of them, three of them in fact. What used to be rooms one, two and three, upstairs in Kildare Street. Do you know those rooms?

There was a great big room at the top of the stairs and then behind that there was another room.

Yes right down at the end. It used to be a life room. It was chock a block with the Elgin marbles and stuff like that. And then 2 or 3 had busts and so on. The corridors were lined, at least down around the sculpture area, with friezes.

A few of those are still there in Kildare Street.

There used to be an abundance of them, all kinds of casts really.

Obviously they were part of the curriculum in the last century.

Yes, you drew those and then you went to work on the models. I think that probably grew out of the Renaissance or something like that.

Another thing, I don't know if you came across it, at that time the Department of Education gave grants for people. Subsidies for students created a whole new thing. It made it easier for working class people to get in, up to that it hadn't been that easy.

How did that manifest itself when you were in the college?

Somewhere around 1963 or 1964 those grants came into existence, so it was already in effect by the end of 1960s. This brought a different type of student who was looking for an education as opposed to a finishing school.

It is interesting that this was the case given that people like Sean Keating did not come from a wealthy background.

Keating went to college somewhere back in the last century. It might have been the turn of the century. Anyway, he went through, and he just wanted to follow the course - this was his own story - as much as possible, and to be very diligent about it. Orpen took him aside one day and said, "You know John, I think you should spend your time in the life room". He said, "But Mr. Orpen I have to do my exams", Orpen said, "Don't worry about that you just go down to the life drawing room and I'll fix it up".

Orpen was obviously a God then.

He was a God. Keating thought he was a God right up until the time he died.

So Keating obviously took his tradition to heart and continued it on.

He would have been the top student at one stage and was singled out for his drawing abilities. I don't think he could paint very well.

You can see his drawing is very strong.

That's it. It was based entirely on his ability to draw.

That is interesting given that Orpen's tradition was drawing based rather than painting based. And that continued right up until you were there?

Yes, it still had a certain virulence.

Were people of your generation conscious of that drawing thing and were you trying to break it, or did you just have your own ideas and not necessarily see it like that.

I was interested in drawing anyway. I did not like certain elements. I was biased against them at that stage, they did not ring through for me I liked the more lively energetic elements.

Where did you find inspiration? Where did you find support? Where did you get ideas? There were very few books in the library at that time.

The director had a say on who got their hands on books. You did not even get your hands on books, they were locked away. They were locked away in the director's office, in a room at the back of his office. You had to go out and buy your own books.

So you got ideas from meeting people, from talking to people who had travelled, from going to exhibitions and so on?

A time like the 1960's was just a decade after the American Abstract Expressionists. So abstract art became the thing. People would say 'do you do abstract art?' You know, that kind of thing. For years the word abstract just meant for me abstract painting. Again you have to think of it in terms of the 1960s. That was just twenty

years after the war. I have an idea the students of the 1960s were the first generation after the war. There was a kind of feeling that this would never happen again. There was optimism, something that equated to a feeling of deliverance of the spirit.

The old system predated the war so perhaps that was part of the reason for its rejection.

There were a lot of changes, television and all of that. It was as if people wanted to distance themselves from what went before. It seemed old fashioned. The media was beginning to make itself felt. Then there was the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 thing. It was the end of the Free State in a way. The Free State vanished in 1949.

Of course the problem in the North of Ireland was another thing that was there in the college at that time. That was the psyche that was behind it. It was very theatrical and stuff. That was the big background, 1969 and the beginning of the troubles.

When did the new system that Campbell Bruce brought in start manifesting itself in college?

The new Board came in at the beginning of the new semester around October or November 1974. Warwick from Belfast was the new director, I think he was an interim director. Within a matter of months Jones made his appearance, just at the end of 1974. Then Campbell Bruce and Nigel Rolfe arrived. That was the point at which changes happened. They listened and talked to people, and there was a fair awareness of what problems there were in the college and how they should be dealt with. We have always followed the English system, what they were doing was an implantation of

the English system that was current them. They were trying to make that fit in, or at least offer it as a solution, and I suppose it did have a lot of things going for it. I thought there was an opportunity at that time, instead of going to England as they always have done, of going further afield, to Germany for instance, to get an amalgam of influences. Maybe that was too unwieldy to try out.

I don't think the French system was any great solution. The German thing had evolved, they had dismantled the old machinery. The evolutionary process was much more dynamic there.

That is very interested actually. Campbell Bruce mentioned that when he was a young teacher in the 1950's he was very influenced by Giacometti and French art. It is interesting that you mentioned Germany. Because in France the same situation just continued after the war as had existed before the war, whereas in Germany everything was different.

German painting came back after the war, I suppose there were always transitions going on, but other elements came in. As German art had lost its identity anyway after the war they went to America for tutors. Instead of generating help for themselves they began to take in American hegemony. The figurative thing in German painting became suspect as having some sort of fascist or Nazi sort of thing about it. So they cut it out. Except for some individuals you would have had people like Baselitz. He would have been maturing roughly in the early 1960s, he was a student in the 1950s. But he obviously was picking up something because he was painting very much against the official sort of thing of the 1950s and 1960s. So obviously there were individuals

following something else. But it was the showcase of the world. It was super cool when it got back into its stride.

Did you think that formalism then became a bit too much of a trend, fad or fashion?

It was like everything else, anything has to run out of energy, has to exhaust itself.

Can't that be encouraged? What I am trying to say is that the influence on the college was particular, after Campbell arrived, it was predominantly abstract. A particular type of art was supported. I'm suggesting that by not presenting all the alternatives some styles were actively being excluded.

They were quite forceful about it at times, weren't they.

Since then it seems to me that the situation here has opened up much more. Through people like yourself, for instance, who in a sense were working outside of that system. When the Living Art was dominant there were people like yourself and others who were outside of that system who have since come back in. I did not notice at the time, I was a student and was working to the agenda that was set in the college, without understanding the context. But I can see in retrospect how the thing developed. In the end this was good because it led to diversity.

I have also liked diversity myself. It would be a boring old world if everything was the same.

Do you ever teach in the College of Art?

Just as a visiting lecturer.

What are your ideas about the teaching of art?

I don't think it can be taught. A student just needs access to information and communications or whatever. You have two elements. You have an element where someone goes in and follows a curriculum, and they follow it to the end, and they get their degree and they are invariably qualified to do whatever. The other one is where a person knows where he is going and has already acquired a lot of the information anyway. These people are just interested in developing their ideas or whatever, they just want the time and space to do it, to pursue their main thrust of interest. They needn't get any piece of paper at the end, they qualify just by doing what they do.

Do you think there should be two strands within an art school to cater for that? A strand for the ones who want to learn something specific and one to allow people freedom to develop?

Well, isn't the college a bit like that at the moment? I wonder if it would be necessary to have two strands if the system is flexible enough to contain both. In the school of art in Berlin you can follow your own thing. The professor of sculpture might send you off to do a few armatures or something. They just give technical advice. What you do is up to yourself. Most people seem to follow that. You are

mostly left alone. Most people seem to work away from the college. There was no space. There were just a certain number of studios available and if you did not get one you just had to go and get your own. People would paint in their flat or whatever.

Did that system work?

It seemed to work. The chances of seeing your professor were low. Some people might see their professor once every three months, that sort of thing. At your assessment, that's when the truth comes out.

Do you think there should be some kind of liaison between an art school and the world of practising artists, in terms of galleries, studios, and visiting artists?

That's where the painter usually gets his or her information from in a sense, meeting other artists, through looking at paintings.

How did you find it after leaving the college of art? I presume it was as difficult for you as for anyone else?

I think I was preoccupied with the problems of my life at that time. But I think I found painting more attractive than getting a job somewhere. I didn't study art to become a teacher. I mean teaching it demands a certain aptitude. It's a whole thing in itself. At the time I did not think about it. That was another track somewhere else.

Do you think there was a difference of approach between students of the 1960s and the present generation, in terms of the way they approach art?

I remember feeling that the students of the generation after me were just in it for their own sake, they just wanted to get qualifications in order to get jobs. The eighties was yuppidom. I don't know now. It would be interesting to see what the story is now.

APPENDIX 13

Ciaran Lennon (1947 -) Artist. Studied at the National College of Art and Design 1964 - 1967 and 1974 - 76. Lecturer at the National College of Art 1978 - 1982.

Peter O'Neill - Tell me about your experiences as a student at the National College of Art.

Ciaran Lennon - Secondary school and university, that was the program that was laid down for me. But because of the kind of intelligence I had, which is another way of saying because of the kind of stupidity I had, I went to the technical school. I had been to the Christian Brothers, but I just did not like being thought with a stick and leather, so I worked my way out of the Christian brothers. Sometimes in life you are just lucky, or maybe there are certain kinds of luck around for you. The Vocational Education system, the Swedish system, had just came in a few years before I started school in 1950. It was a great success, and it was based on the notion that an education could actually succeed. With secondary school you would not really know, you learned by rote, your Latin verbs and so on, but it didn't prove anything. Whereas if you could solder and weld, and temper steel, and make a dovetail joint to a degree of accuracy, that could be proven. This was a wonderful system. Later on they amalgamated the Leaving Certificate and the vocational system. In those days it was one or the other. So I worked my way into the vocational system.

I was also a very keen boxer. I was Dublin champion at seven stone seven. See this plaque, I won this in London. I boxed in Shoreditch Town Hall. I beat the kid in one round, and it was an important fight because we were behind four to two, and I brought it back to four to three, and we eventually won seven to four. The fight was on TV. So coming from that all my talents went into being a really good boxer, the training and so on. I did really well in Vocational School. I thrived on it. Vocational school was not just crafts, you had Irish, you had mechanical drawing, and you had draughtsmanship and art, so there were three different drawing subjects, I was in heaven. You know I can still do an exploded view of anything. I can draw it up and make an oblique view of it. I can make a plan, elevation, and side view. It's basic stuff. And also I could make dovetail joints, and mortise and tenon joints. So I went to art school with these gifts, these talents. There were kids going around there who knew their Latin verbs but they did not know that painting was on canvas. I remember Paul Funge always worked on canvasses, proper canvases, and he would be lashing out the Paul Funges. Paul painted then much as he does now.

What, explosively?

Well, at the time I thought himself, and Grainne Dowling, and Paddy Graham - they were all ahead of me - I thought they were very good artists. They managed somehow to get the gist of what they were learning about, like the value of colour tones, the grey value and the light value for example. Paul would get all of that just right, and he would slap it down in a very flat way. He would also get a likeness, and somehow it looked really fresh and I think that was his best work, especially his portraits. Then the political side of him took over. But I could see all this going on, and what I could do

was to make a very good portrait within two hours, painted, painted and done within two to three hours. There was a kind of panic about the way I worked.

Was MacGonigal teaching at that time?

MacGonigal was my teacher. The other students always knew when I was in because, as I had a broken nose at the time, they could hear me sniffling. That also came from boxing. When you are boxing, as you threw a punch you breathed out. You could hear a boxer anywhere. That was the sound when I was painting.

Did you do a preliminary course at the College of Art?

I did, yes. You had to do at least three years of drawing from the antique before you went to the life class. I was younger than the others too, because I went to the college at fifteen or sixteen. You had to be seventeen to enrol fully. I went at night with Terry Gayer. And we used to pride ourselves on being ahead of the day students. And we were. I went to night classes for a year before I became a day student. The day students were amazed with our work. They had all day, of course, to work. We just had four hours a night or less, from 7 to 10.30. We really worked, and the teachers were on top of you all the time. They were really watching you there. I still work at night. The work was incredibly rigorous. Night school had people who really prized what they'd got. We had some mothers with children, men who had jobs, and I made some good friends there. So when I went at daytime I brought that kind of discipline that I had from boxing and from vocational school, and I could apply that. I found the day students, the day classes, very disappointing. I thought there was no discipline.

There was by comparison with today. You had to be in on time, and the teachers started lectures on time.

What was the structure in the day classes?

You had life drawing in the morning from 9.30 to 12.30. Some days that would be broken up into history of art from say 11.30 to 12.30 with Mrs. O'Murchadha. And then you could have an hour a week or less bookbinding. I didn't take that class. And I found the history of art very dull. History of art, which was academic, secondary school type of stuff, slides of the Parthenon and so on. I could not grasp that at all. I was also reading the reviews in the Sunday papers at this time. Russell was writing in the Sunday papers. I was learning new art words. I used to pick up on that stuff. So I worked up what I thought was a sly trick, a survival trick. When I would find an artist like Mark Rothko or Robert Smithson, they would lead me to other artists. Smithson mentioned Thomas Pynchon for instance, and Pynchon mentioned others, and so on. You could find your way back into history this way. It was much more practical. I discovered De Kooning in these paintings that I saw at the *Art: USA: Now* Show, the *Johnson Wax Show*, in 1963, I think. That was two years after I won the boxing competition. I found that they used big brushes, and that there was a relationship between the painting and the wall that I liked. Just by using the same brush you had this relationship. What painted the wall painted the picture. This brought it much closer to reality. A lot of things went my way. So a certain kind of painting was falling out of fashion and there was a space for me who was coming into being.

How did you find MacGonigal responded to that in the College? And how did you find you could develop those ideas in the college?

I got married when I was nineteen, and I had a young child by the time I was 20. MacGonigal could see that I had financial problems. I used to paint landscapes on cups and sell them on Saturday. I used to paint those during the week at some stage. I used to get good money for it too.

Was there a rigid program in the Art school?

There was. We had Lucy Charles, Miss McCarthy and Ruth Brandt. They were the basic teachers for design. They were wonderful people. From them we learned about half drops, and patterns, and overlays. Or maybe we would do a really intense study of a rose or a cabbage, something like that. I loved it. I was very good at it you see. I really was good at life drawing and portrait painting, not landscape.

Were you free to do any of your own work in the college?

No, absolutely not. Charley Harper started showing around that time in the Molesworth Gallery, and he was the first student to have an exhibition while he was a student, himself and Tony O'Carroll. They were selling work at this time, and they would go to the arts club at night and sell more. Charley and Tony were really smart, you would come out of a pub with Charley and you would be broke because you had spent your money, and Charlie would say I just made 20 pounds. The teachers did not like it, and I still don't like it. When I was teaching in Dun Laoghaire recently I had a

student, a very good friend of mine, Ken Harding, and he wanted a year off to go and work with Sol Lewitt. I said, "No, I don't want you to go, you are never going to have a year like this where you can take your time and develop your ideas and do your thesis, you will never get this year back again". And this thing of going off to New York with Pat Steer - it was Pat Steer he worked for, Sol Lewitt's wife - it was all very trendy and there was good money for it. I learned that from my own teachers at Art school, you do your own expression in your own time. When you are here you do what we tell you. It makes perfect sense to me.

Who were the teachers there apart from MacGonigal?

Cary Clarke and James Nolan, they were the ones who really were closer to me. They watched my drawing all the time, especially Cary Clarke. My work got confident very quickly. While another student might be struggling with reflected shadows. I hadn't a problem with that. I got it very quickly. Others were slower.

And was most of this based on the figure?

It was all based on the figure. Because I was good at it I suppose I was pushing them. So they might say, "Maybe you should look at Rembrandt". So I discovered Rembrandt could get a bleeding light right through a whole picture, a sense of wholeness and light, and I discovered the colour range of Blacks at this time. I still think of Rembradt's black and white drawings as colours. And that came from that period. I would draw Donatello's David, for insistence, over and over and over again, or the Dying Warrior. The Dying Warrior suited a light pencil. Donatello's statue really

suited charcoal and conte crayon. I loved it. And the Laocoon, I eventually got around to drawing the Laocoon because it's so complex. What they did not teach us was to put the two together, the History of Art and what we were looking at. For instance, I knew the David and Goliath legend. I didn't know the Laocoon and what it represented. I didn't know what the Venus de Milo represented. What was the idea behind it? So there was a big perceptual lack in the course.

So there was a complete separation between the History of art aspect of the course and the drawing aspect of the course?

Its sociological aspect, its meaning was neglected. I could draw the Venus de Milo for you now. I could draw from memory, because we did memory drawing as well. You would look at the figure for an hour, and then you would go into another room and draw it from memory, that was a traffic exercise. Your body would learn something and your mind could copy it later on. If you only learned the ideas it would not have real meaning for you. When writers come into the studio they don't look. The young painters who are hungry to learn, to make their own art, they look, and then they find the work's reverberations in the mind and what its meaning can be; how to make a metaphor, how to paint it for yourself. It had a scope for me of development, it just did, and it didn't for a lot of people.

What was the story with the Art Teachers Certificate? Did every one have to do that?

No they didn't. You could get your painting certificate and do your diploma in painting and sculpture without doing the teacher's certificate, but you could not teach without it. The ironic thing was that you could not teach second level without a teacher's certificate but you could teach third level, which was more money, and that was the strange thing. So MacGonigal suggested to me that I do the art teacher's Certificate.

Parallel to the diploma?

He said forget about the painting, you are not going to learn any more. You're absolutely fine. You're grade A. He did this because I was a star. Like Paddy Graham was the star before I was. And literally you were a star, people looked up to you, and kids came over to you and would stand around watching you draw. I would have four or five behind me watching me draw. The girls all wanted to be with me and follow me around.

So the ATC wasn't compulsory for those doing the diploma? It was a separate class?

No, it wasn't compulsory.

So you went through the ATC system and did the various exams.

The ATC was very rigorous. There were a lot of subjects including oral Irish. Our teacher, Terry Gayer, had been teaching at that stage for fourteen years. He was by far

the best teacher we ever had. All students would agree, because he really knew how to learn. Everything in the book with Terry was learn. He said there is no such thing as teaching. Sometimes learning happens and you have to find out how. We all loved him. He was teaching 14 years and he was still temporary, because he had no Irish and he had no gift for it. He was English and a Zen Buddhist. He was hands down the best.

Did Sean Keating teach in the sixties?

Yes, he taught till he was a very old man. I would go to Sean Keating's life classes - I loved his classes - where he would tell you the origin of the zygomatic bone for instance, its Greek origin, because it was the shape of an eagle's eye or something. He was wonderful. He was really steeped in that. And he was a clown. He was a showman. He had a skeleton that had all kinds of elastic bands holding the bones together, and he would get great fun out of it. He got great crack of ignoring the girls. He would say, "I won't teach you because you'll be off with a boy. I bet you have a boyfriend waiting in Sligo." He was very misogynistic. Really, incredibly so. He would give me and Paddy Graham and people like us a lot of attention, and models loved working for him. He had one model standing on a radiator, on one foot, holding a rope. He would do these amazing conte drawings using stumps, paper stumps for smudging. He did excellent drawings.

Keating's classes were all terribly macho. The girls did not have a look in, and so the tough guys would be with Keating doing drawing. He'd draw too. You would feel you were a part of a real elite, like being champion boxers training, the very same feeling. And damn all to do with art. For me this was too easy. To me it was just like boxing. When I was boxing, jockeys used to come in and train with us. They would be

covered up with clothes. They needed to sweat a lot to keep their weight down. This was much the same thing to me, exactly the same thing. I brought all that to my work in the college.

Terry Gayer, unlike Keating, would explain anatomy as physics, the push and pull. You extend one muscle, you contract another, and the weights are thrown up in balance, you are constantly balancing a figure. So he brought a logic of physics to it. Keating drew in a way that I could understand, around the form like a sculptor. MacGonigal was a smudger. He was a planar painter. He drew as a painter, always smudging, across the plain. This was magic, but it was not the way I drew. Just a few smudges and the eye would appear, a nostril, all across the plain. I couldn't reconcile that with the way I drew. Terry Gayer would literally draw stripes around the shoulder, so your eye would go around the contour. It was from Rembrandt that I saw how you could make the contour, this three-dimensional sense of objectiveness about what you were drawing. Whereas MacGonigal was atmospheric, and I could not get those two things together.

It's been my life's work really; trying to make a figure based on that. Its what I am still doing, its where I am now. That is what I am up to at the moment. I am separating the plane from the mark. I bring these two realities together so I have a figural dimension in the calligraphy, a full-bodied calligraphy, and also I keep the plane there. I get a kind of lightness happening between the two. That's what I'm doing now. I'm keeping those things together.

I suppose the worse teacher in my mind was Tom Ryan. He had a class where we would sit down and draw. He was a lazy teacher, probably not interested in teaching. Like most members of the RHA he was a great survivor. What he would do was his

own work. He did an Easter Rising painting, most of the students in my class are in it. I'm in it.

I've seen it recently. Which figure are you?

I don't remember. In his classes you modelled for him. He did these drawings which were dead. No one had any respect for him. He represented the academy, which was unfortunate. He was not a friendly man. It turns out he is a great collector of, among other things, buttons.

Did the RHA not have status?

Keating did because of his ability.

Did the students have any interest in exhibiting at the academy or were they hostile to it?

As far as I can remember we were hostile to it because we had to be modern. Big John Kelly, who has since died, was a lovely man. He was very aloof and he drew beautifully. They were all doing their own work there. Fergus Kelly, who was doing silk screen, had a studio there. Then there was Mr. Herkner. He was a Nazi.

That's right. Little John Kelly was telling me about a guy who went back to Germany during the war, I presume that was him, and another guy, who was Dutch, who went back to Holland to fight against Germany in the Dutch resistance. When

they came back to the College of Art after the war, understandably they couldn't stand the sight of each other.

That's right. Herkner was the German. He taught sculpture, social realist sculpture. The other guy taught design. And then there was a lovely man called Murphy who taught stained glass. He was a jolly fellow. He had a sharp wit. I was a little bit wary of him, afraid of him; other students loved him.

What year was that?

I don't remember. It was probably during the troubles.

Were you in the college when the troubles started?

I was just leaving. I had just done the Teachers Certificate and I was teaching. At nineteen I was teaching people of eighteen out in Dun Laoghaire.

Did you have any contact with the college or with the people in the college at the time of the trouble?

No, I was married with a child, and I was teaching and doing my own work. In a way I was glad at the time. I had mixed feelings about the troubles. I was anti-authority naturally. It was in my nature to be anti-authority. I was individualistic. And I found the teachers in the college generally aloof. Also I was very poor, I was struggling. There were a lot of things happening. I had my own work, I had to find

money, I was painting landscapes on cups, and I had a new family. I got out of being involved in the troubles that way. I just was not there.

When did you come back to the College of Art?

I ended up working for RTE for about seven or eight years, and I wanted some way of getting to do my own work, but not just by working at night or something like that. I felt schizophrenic. I was doing illustrations in RTE as a graphic designer, and then in the evening I was doing my own work. So I went back to art school just to paint.

You went back to study in art school.

Yes, to do my painting degree.

When was that?

Not that long ago, in the 1970s.

When I knew you in the College of Art you were teaching. That was in 1978.

I was teaching after that.

When you went back to the college, as a student was Campbell Bruce in charge?

Yes he was. I was teaching under Campbell Bruce.

Were you studying under Campbell at any stage?

I beg your pardon, yes, I was. He did not understand why in the hell I wanted to go to Art school. I just wanted to return.

How did you find it when you went as a student then?

I was working at home, so I went in to about one class a week, that's all. I went in to Peter Mew's class. He was teaching Complementary Studies. He was dreadful. Basically he would take the class off to the pub as soon as we could. His idea was that the semantics of the class would be democratic. We would all sit around and nobody would be in charge. So as a result he did not teach very basic things like how to make an argument, how to give examples and points, or how to have a counter-argument. He taught you nothing. I like him though.

I had my own program anyway. I was making black hole paintings. I had an idea. I had something to do, so I just went in and I used the facilities of the college.

And did you have a tutor?

I did yes, Campbell Bruce and Charley Brady. And William Scott was my outside assessor.

This was for one year?

For two years, and William Scott used to look forward to the visits.

And you worked mostly outside the college?

I did yes.

And when it came to teaching in the college what program was in train? Were there projects? Was the course very structured?

The extra mural was for me where the real action was. There was only so much you could do in the studios. To me it seemed, later on, while I was teaching, that for some students one hour a week was too much, a half an hour would be quite enough, after that I felt that I was in the way. Another student might need two hours a week. So I came up with a course called historical precedence, and Gerry Walker, who was Head of Complementary Studies, liked this idea. So I got a class called historical precedents.

Were you teaching in fine art?

I was teaching fine art. I was supposed to be in a studio, but I thought I was much better off if I could get the students together with this idea, which I was teaching anyway. From this theory you could learn backwards from your techniques and what you were actually making. By questioning the meaning of what you were making more and more deeply you could pick history as you needed it. I don't know how good an idea that is but it seemed a good idea at the time.

So I had people like Brian Palm and Joe Lee. Joe came in on one occasion and I said, "Joe how long have you spent on this etching?" Show it. Bring it into the class. And he would say, in talking about his work, "I don't like to see the destruction of Dublin and social history destroyed". It was happening a lot in those days. And I said, "What exactly are you doing". And he said, "Well I am making these etchings of these shops and buildings that are being destroyed". So we discussed it and I said, "Do you think etching is the right medium?" He went away and thought about it, and the next week we talked about it and he decided that film was the best way to do this. So Joe set up a film company and he gave up etching. Brian Palm too. He was going on marches to save buildings and through this class he learned to give himself permission to do his banners and make that his art. In some ways it helped people to bring out their real passion. I was not allowed to do that at Art school, but they could work on the things that they were really interested in.

Were you their tutor?

Not all of them, I don't think I was Brian Palm's tutor. I don't know what happened to that class after I left.

How did you find the general structure within the Fine Art faculty in relation to the other staff?

There was a division. There was terrible animosity between, on one side, the visiting lecturers, Campbell Bruce, and Nigel Rolfe, and, on the other side, the old teachers. Like those who taught stone carving for instance. A sculpture student could

ignore carving, and casting, and modelling, and go straight into Nigel Rolfe. I don't want to talk for Nigel, but I think that the idea was that your art came from yourself rather than from adjusting to any tradition or finding yourself within a tradition or having to reform a tradition. So it was very easy, you did not have the challenge of a 600-year-old tradition. You didn't have the humility and all the wonderful things you learn about that. So it was very difficult when asking a student to do anything tough or rigorous, like learning the meaning of why they were using cotton duck. A student might say, "What do you mean?" And I would say, "Why is that, what you are doing, your idea of a painting?" The next week I would say the same thing, and I would ask a student, "Why have you not learned?" They might say, "Oh I don't know, Rob Smith said I didn't have to". Or maybe they would say, "I write my dreams down" or "I stand in a bucket of water" or "I am doing a performance" or maybe "I am dying my hair this week". It was very annoying.

The animosity Peter, the resentment from the older teachers was really palpable. There was a cold-war that you could cut with a knife. I left and went back to RTE because I could not stand it. Also my own private life was coming to an upheaval, a big change, and I felt a lot of the students were more mature than I was. There were students who had spent a year or two alone in Paris. I had never done anything like that. I had just lived with the same girlfriend, got married and so on. So personally I had a reason for leaving too. The students were of a generation that seemed much more confident. For instance Anna O'Sullivan could makes works about being fat. She was a wonderful student, she was really confronting herself and her own image, really challenging.

How did you find the whole issue of visiting artists and external assessments?

Absolutely brilliant, but it only again fuelled this cold war. The other side was getting all the goodies, you know. Stuart Brisley came in, and Nigel organised this wonderful thing called 'Dark Space'. It was fantastic. And Stuart Brisley did a marvellous performance over at the project. And Patrick Ireland did a terrific thing on Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, a wonderful rope piece. It was brilliant stuff. Charles Simmonds was another artist who came over. He was from America.

For all of that, and Campbell was the easiest man to work with, all the responsibility was on myself. I could teach what way I wanted, but what was going on all the time was this terrible feeling that the traditional art forms were really being frozen out, there were no two ways about it, and that was not a nice thing. And these people who were being frozen out had permanent jobs, so they were working their way towards retirement. I felt very sad for someone like big John Kelly, because later on I got to know a little about him. He had tried being a cubist and he had gone to Spain. And yet he was the most academic painter I had ever met. He knew a lot about Greek art and he had a great respect for Picasso. I had a long chat with him one day. I felt it was a terrible shame that these lovely humanist people with this deep tradition of feeling that I absolutely loved and which gave me a whole lease of life at a crucial time of my life were ignored. These people whom I adored were being frozen out and hurt.

Imagine moving the art school to a place like city quay. This big old gentlemen would come in, in his suit, and very respectfully teach values that I just loved. I felt very sorry for them teaching in those terrible offices with these awful brick walls. I felt really sorry for them. They were wonderful stoical people to endure all that. I felt like a pup in the same company as them. And I often had more power than they had. The Living Art group sometimes held meetings in the art school because a lot of us

involved in the Living Art were in the art school, and they wouldn't be allowed at a meeting. I threw him out once.

You threw Big John Kelly out?

He came to a meeting. And I said, "Are you a member of the Living Art group? This is a meeting of the Living Art group". He said, "No I'm just interested". I said "I'm sorry, you can't".

That wasn't very nice.

Somebody had to do it. He wouldn't let me in on an RHA meeting, would he?

I hadn't realised that the Living Art was so closely allied with the College of art at that time.

I suppose the Living Art was our equivalent of the academy. I was offered membership of the RHA. I just didn't want it at all. But that was the way it went. And if you were a member of the RHA you could get a teaching post. That's how it worked. So our academy was the Living Art.

It was almost an alternative RHA.

Brian King was the youngest member of the Living Art. And he told the old members that they were out of date, that they were not showing contemporary art. They were all modernists and they said "you should know Brian, we are all in our fifties, sixties, and seventies", you know, Louis le Brocquy and Pat Scott and so on. So they said, "Ok Brian, we will make you president". So Brian went out looking for this art he was talking about and it wasn't there. He was shocked to find that there was so little. And they said Brian where are all these great artists you said were out there.

Wasn't the first exhibition of that group in 1971 or 1972 at the Project Art Centre?

That's right.

Were you in that?

Yes I was, I had a canvas piece, a corner piece.

Were you involved in assessments at the college?

Yes. Assessments were very interesting because of the outside assessors. I remember James Coleman for instance. He was ahead of me when I was a student. He worked in Milan for a while on an Italian scholarship. When James was outside assessor I remember there was a student called David Clifford who as part of his final show was killing fish.

There was another interesting student called Martin Folan. Martin had made a whole room out of chicken wire and clay. His work was wonderfully tense. You were afraid to breathe in case it would fall apart. About two days before the assessment the pressure got to Martin and he smashed everything into a pile. It was an incredible sculpture. If you had been looking at it develop it made absolute sense. So an artist like James Coleman would perfectly understand this. He would understand why someone might have to do that. As artists we are all about trying to include a wider range of potential meaning and potential freedom. That's the way we saw it, I mean real freedom, with responsibility, which was a different kind of thing from what was being taught. It was a traumatic time, everything was traumatic, and everybody had very deep feelings and love for what they were doing. We were passionate about what we did, but my feeling now is that the old school was being very roughly treated.

Were you there the year Rita Donagh came as a visiting lecturer?

I was yes. I liked her. She was very nice person, very very sweet. She worked at the Slade School of Art with Stuart Brisley. There was someone else who taught at the Slade that I knew, a very good printer, David Leverett. He went to art school with a pal of mine, All O'Donnell, who was a folk singer. They went to Nottingham Art School. Al was a great folk singer. He was on top of the bill when Paul Simon was trooping around England. He was second on the bill to Paul Simon.

How many years were you teaching at the NCAD?

About two or three years.

Was Alan Green an external assessor when you were there?

No. Alan saw my work and as a painter he said that I was the only painter that interested him so we became friends.

Does he teach in an art school?

No. Alan is a professional painter. In the "I have to have twelve pictures done for a show in Germany next week" sense.

Were you there when Sean Scully came as an external assessor?

No. I never met him.

Did the Basic Design system that was developed in Britain in the 1950s have any influence on you?

Yes, we had Basic Design. Basic Design was composition studies, nature studies. Sculpture was low relief, deep relief and casting. With Basic design you touched everything. I just wanted more and more of that.

Did ROSC have an influence in the late 1960's?

If it did have an influence it had it in the way that it did on me, in the sense that it was still something that you couldn't do in the art school. And this shock, this cultural shock, was brought out of the art school into a wider context. So you had Colm O'Briain interviewing Sean Keating, really making a laugh of modern art. In that interview Keating was being laughed at and making a joke of himself as well. He was going around like something from another planet; being interviewed by a young man in flared trousers and high-heeled boots and in need of a hair cut. Everything for me was being debunked in that. It was horrible because I absolutely loved the big Jasper Johns paintings there, *Harlem Nights* and *Voice*, probably two of his greatest paintings.

So you were enthusiastic about ROSC.

Oh yes. And also the exhibition space in the RDS. I used to show with David Hendrix - there are a lot of overlaps here. I'm a student. I'm a painter. I'm exhibiting. I go back to art school. I'd already had a career as such. James Johnson Sweeney, one of the selectors of ROSC, came to Ireland every summer. Johnson Sweeney used to travel around the world - he had discovered the Easter Island heads - that's what he used to do. He went around the world right up to the time he died. He would go to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and pop into Ireland every summer to spend a holiday here. I, being the youngest painter in the Hendrix gallery, would be given the worst date for selling, which is the summer. So that way Johnson Sweeney used to see my work, and I got to meet him and know him, through David Hendrix. He was a wonderful man. At ROSC, because of the limited wall space, Johnson hung paintings freely, back to back, from the ceiling. The space was heated with these big electric fans. So this was a whole new way of showing art. It worked very well at the time. I'm not sure its the best way

to see a de Kooning, hanging freely in the middle of the room, without a wall behind it, you loose all that relationship between the brush and the wall that I was talking about earlier. But it was a very inventive way, as a curatorial piece of work it was a masterpiece. In the tradition of curating and hanging exhibitions it was phenomenal. I'm sure even to this day it was a great piece of work.

Do you know anything of the impact of ROSC on the Art College?

The leaders of the rebellion were not interested in modern art, that was a really obvious thing to me. They were people who were really not interested in art as such. They were the weakest artists, the weakest students, easily I mean by a long shot. Jean Lambert was very talented but he had no interest in modern art. He was very reactionary. Jean had no time for abstract art.

So would you say the student rebellion had more to do with politics than with art?

It had nothing to do with art, which is unfortunate. For me the great art movements that I was interested in were - you know Bogdanovich in Russia in 1912 and 1916 - he was Minister for Arts when Tatlin made his pieces, his sculpture for the streets. For me this was new art for a new revolution. For me Ireland never had that. We had a rising. We had a revolution. We got independence. And we kept on making this old English art. Where was the art to follow the revolution? The revolutionaries all fought for the poets, and the writers, and the artists. Revolution was fuelled by that kind of sensibility. It was for art, and the visual art wasn't there. So then these kids came along, these young men, and the same old thing was happening, whereas I was trying

to make an art that was relevant to contemporary life, to my life. To make it meaningful in some way. There is no movement. There is just me and some others like Domhnall O'Sullivan, who was as academic as you can get really, with a touch of Giacometti or vanity or youth or something.

He was involved in the student rebellion. He was in the student union?

Yes. He was the one who took the hammer to the plaster casts. I believe he went berserk.

Do you see any relevance in the question of English influence conflicting with Irish influence in relation to the college of art?

I do, yes, absolutely. It's a pity that Domhnall O'Murchadha was not a better sculpture. If he had been Brancusi I would really have identified with him. Or if he had even known of Brancusi I could connect with him somehow. To me he was making academic art. It's a shame.

For me there was nothing interesting happening in England. It was secondary to what was happening in America. Even later on, when I got to know William Scott, to me it still seemed kitchen bound. It did not compare at all with Rothko, who could just make the spirit soar.

So you were interested in the spirit and the emotion of the work.

To me it seemed that Irish art could, or should, have that. But I don't think we ever had art of the kitchen sink. Art in the Irish sense was a great problem because we did not know what that would look like. I had long discussions with people about seeing, about trying to see, and I knew already that I was no longer innocent. My first class with Terry Gayer, and also Miss McCarthy, and Ruth Brandt, and Lucy Charles showed me the shapes in between things for example. You know, after you draw an O or an I in Roman numerals you never see anything the same way again, that innocence was gone. So we were terribly curious to know what it would be like to actually look, to see the Irish landscape, just to see it. How would you see it? How could you see it freshly? The way Giacometti was trying to see a figure freshly. The only artist who actually took that up directly, as a project, in a very literal way, was James Coleman, in Connemara landscapes, which he did at that time. I went out and tried it. The work ended up looking like Fergus Kelly. Like a little bit of red in it, you know the little tricks, how to make a painting sing. Another moment you would see a Paul Henry. You just keep seeing these projections.

So one way or the other I ended up thinking the only place art could really come from was within yourself. That would have to be the source. The other students like Charley Harper or Tony O'Carroll or Colin Murray would think, "what will I paint about?" This thing about painting about things collapsed with American art. The artists embodied what they did. So Pollock was not about Greek mythology anymore. Pollock was mythology. It was as if Cezanne hadn't any mountain to look at, that he was just Cezanne without the mountain. That was the way for me. It meant that you would never be stuck for a subject because what was going on in your life would always be what your work was about. Rothko's dictum that all Rembrandt's paintings

look more like themselves than they do their sitters summarises that approach. That's where I come from.

APPENDIX 14

Professor Iseult McCarthy: Studied at the National College of Art 1950 - 1954, Lecturer in Design at National College of Art and the National College of Art and Design 1962 - 1985, Professor of Education NCAD 1985 – 1999.

Peter O'Neill - Could you tell me about your time at the College of Art when you started there as a student, what the system was like, who was teaching there at that time, and what the curriculum was like?

Iseult McCarthy - When I started in the College in September 1950 there was the School of Painting, the School of Sculpture, the School of Design, and there was a two year Preliminary School headed up by Jimmy Golden, which everybody did. Everybody went through two years of Preliminary School, and then took a further three years, making five in all to obtain the College Diploma - ANCA.

Now I in fact only did a year. I'd just had my seventeenth birthday the summer I started there. I was very young. In those days you did what you were told. Half way through my first year in the College - I was seventeen and a bit - the Professor of Design who was called Romein came to me, jabbed his finger at me, and said, "You will do Design". I don't know what I would have done had I had two years.

Was he the German guy or the Dutch guy?

Professor Herkner was German, well Austrian. He was actually from Vienna. Professor Romein, the Head of Design, was from Holland. But anyway, I did design. It was very different from what it is now. Because, even though I opted for design and went into design, we worked with the fine art students a great deal. There was far more crossing over. The boundaries weren't nearly as marked. All day students did three to four evenings a week in life drawing. There were very few evening students then. Des Carrick and Arthur Gibney were ones I specially remember.

Students?

Yes.

And who were giving the evening classes?

The evening life drawing classes were given either by Professor Sean Keating, Maurice MacGonigal or John Kelly. Outside in the hall I have a little pastel Sean Keating gave me as a present when he retired.

How did you find them as teachers?

Teaching in those days was very didactic. Looking back on it we accepted it. What would happen was, say in life class - if one was clever and had thought of it at the time one would have kept them - they would come along and do little doodles on your drawings, at the side of the page, and they'd walk on making no comment. But that was teaching, which really it wasn't. It didn't teach you how to *do* it. It just showed

you how *they* did it, which is a bit different. There was no mention of teaching or structure, and there was nothing written down in those days by way of course document. There was just the College prospectus.

You mean Curriculum wise?

Certainly not that we ever saw. There was a very broad outline. You probably have the early prospectus. That was all there was, which was very vague and certainly didn't give you any details.

So essentially it was the personality and the character of the teacher.

It was the personality of the person. Design was an extreme example because you were really a rubber stamp, or you were meant to be. There was one way to do it and you did it. So you learned how to do it in a certain manner, Professor Romein's way – or else! I think the same to some extent held true for painting. Owen Walsh was in my year, and James McKenna. Owen was more of a rebel and would have rebelled against the traditional approach, but remember at that time it was all so traditional. It was basically a progression. The idea was you went upstairs and started with ornament, literally ornament, acanthus leaves and so on. Then you progressed to sections of the face where you did a nose or an ear, eventually a head. Then, at a given signal, MacGonigal, or whoever was with you, would say, "now you can go on to the figure". That was kind of promotion or progression, and you went on to the full figure in the antique room. MacGonigal was in the antique class rather than Keating in my recollection. Eventually you got promoted downstairs to the life class.

Was this in the preliminary year?

Yes. You weren't allowed near a life class in the first year of the Preliminary School. Now you see I skipped Second Year, so I don't know what would have happened in that year. But I started in the Life Room as soon as I was put into the School of Design.

More of the same?

I'd imagine it was more of the same, because you had to go through this working from ornament, to sections of the face, to the head, to the full figure, you know, the discus thrower and whatever. All the old statues used to be there in the end room of the top corridor upstairs, where all the antiques were kept. And only then to the Life Class.

But looking back on it all and having been around the college for so long, what I particularly liked was the fact that there weren't the rigid boxes in terms of your discipline as there are today. In many ways I think, you know, looking at the college as it is today, going into this century as we're into it now, it's so specialised. It's like most other professions. You can only do *one* thing. It's actually much more difficult to cross over, which for an artist or a designer - I mean I happen not to believe that the boundaries between art and design are very neatly chop, chop, chopped. I believe they overlap hugely, and I don't know when or where one begins and the other ends. I

don't have that clear idea, except perhaps that a designer works to a brief, that's the only difference. Otherwise there isn't a great deal of difference.

That's interesting. That was one of the key aspects of the Basic Design system in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s, that there weren't any barriers between disciplines or faculties. It's ironic that the old system worked like that.

The old system worked like that totally freely. And drawing was common to all areas. Now I have always been saddened to see the way drawing was dismissed and downgraded in terms of its place in fine art, and for so many many years.

Did the system that you trained in then continue throughout the 1950s and 1960s?

It continued through the 1950s. Professor Romein retired in the late 1950s, as far as I can remember. I wasn't there at the time. I was working outside the college and hadn't begun teaching.

I think that was about 1958 or 1959.

Yes, and Professor Lucy Charles was appointed as Head of Design. And I came in to work in 1962 with Lucy. Design was in a mess then. I know you don't want to talk about design. I can talk much more fluently about design and what happened in design. But while there was a lot of change happening in design there was also change beginning to happen in fine art. Because although Keating was still there - I don't remember what year he left.

He finally left in 1959. But he continued taking classes.

Till when?

Ciaran Lennon was taught by him in 1965. I think he worked well into the 1960s.

He would have, because I knew him at both levels. As a student, obviously, he taught me, and subsequently being on the staff, tea in the mornings with Mrs. Dempsey was a great event.

He was there until 1965 anyway.

But there was great richness both for design people and fine art people in going to the same life classes and spending time in the life room. Some people were painting, some were drawing, you know, it didn't matter. Some of us did painting. I didn't do it because I'd skipped a year and I was always trying to catch up with myself. Which was a stupid thing for them to do to me. Educationally I wouldn't agree with it at all. I was younger than anybody else for starters, and who knows what I would have chosen to do in the college. Anyway, neither fine art nor design were specialised, in that the fine art people could wander into print and out of print, and into whatever. The design people did a lot of print, which today would be labelled fine print, and fine art. And no way could a design student go near it, which is ludicrous. But then it was regarded as a craft, almost. Fergus O'Ryan was in charge of print. Everybody went to it if they were

interested. You did whatever interested you. And in a sense you basically formed your own course.

The way the timetables were done was very interesting. At the beginning of the year you went to talk to the Director. Remember there were say thirty or forty students. I don't remember the exact number. It was small anyway. And he saw each student, and each student had an individual timetable. Now there were common things for whatever course you were following or whatever year group you were in. If you said you wanted to do a little painting he would say, "Good, now you go on Thursday". It worked like that. Of course we were time-tabled for Saturday mornings as well, you have to remember, for more life drawing. We did vast amounts of drawing. It was considered essential to do drawing.

In Design, where the first changes began to show, there was a consultant, Giles Talbot Kelly. He was English and he was in charge of a design consultancy. It was one of the first that was opened in Dublin. It was kind of trendy and fashionable. And he came in, and his idea was to throw drawing out the window. But it was part of that whole British thing. So they tried to get rid of drawing in design, but it didn't work and it never worked. There was probably a consultant in Fine Art too, but I don't remember, who was saying get rid of drawing, get rid of the tradition.

This was in the 1960s.

Yes the early 1960s.

Lets look at the changes that were taking place around 1969. Were you in the college at that time?

No. You see I was out in 1969. My daughter Emer was born in December 1968. So I was out for two or so years.

So you were coming in at the end of the troubles.

Yes. I came in at the end of the troubles, but I was also there at the beginning. Now again you see - my memory isn't that good in terms of dates and years! The other day there was a ceremony in the college to mark the College's becoming a College of the NUI. Garrett Fitzgerald was there as chancellor of the NUI and I've known Garrett for years.

So it's no longer NCEA?

That's right. The first graduates will be Dip. ATDs. They will get a H.Dip. in Education, the same as Trinity or UCD. And the first intake onto the degree courses will be this year, and they will graduate in 2004 with NUI degrees. There are three more years on NCEA degrees. The students want NUI degrees but they won't get them. It's only people who register for the first time this year who will receive NUI degrees. The people on one-year courses will of course be the first. Much to the chagrin of the director, who wasn't at all happy with the idea that the first NUI graduates would be from the Faculty of Education. He didn't think that was a good idea but there was nothing he could do.

So to get back to the troubles.

Sorry, I was talking about Garret Fitzgerald. Now I can't remember this - it can't have gone on after the Dail bill.

It did, I think.

It did go on, because I met Garret Fitzgerald and tried to bring him into the College. And I was refused permission to allow him as a TD to come in to look at the College as a friend of mine. But he told me that Justin Keating was refused permission as well. Which was an extraordinary attitude on the part of the College and Department of Education.

Who was in charge then?

The Department of Education refused. But I spoke an awful lot to Garret about the problems of the College at that time.

In the Dail Reports Garret has a lot to say about the troubles.

I was one of his main informants I think. And he actually said that, funnily enough, the other day. It was amusing, "This is how I knew anything I knew" he said, introducing me to someone.

So at that time then the situation was quite shaky?

Oh very shaky. I was there when the College was closed. Was that before 1968 or was it when I came back around 1971.

I'm not sure.

We used to go over and work with students in the National Gallery. Design continued on when Fine Art had abandoned teaching. We had to see students outside the College. We used to meet them for tutorial groups.

I'd say it was when you came back.

I can't remember.

Campbell was appointed in 1974.

1975 surely.

I'm not sure, but when he arrived there were pickets on the college.

Yes, it would have been then.

I think it began to quieten down a bit after the Bill. But it was shaky for a while. Charlie Cullen was still involved in some difficulties, as was Robert Armstrong.

There was someone else I remember. That's right, Charlie Harper.

Harper, Funge, and Hanratty were in charge of Pre-Diploma. They were all sacked.

Right. And Myra Maguire took over.

Who was she?

She was in charge of Pre-Diploma after Funge, Harper, and Hanratty. Myra was in Design before. Myra never worked as a designer. She was a genealogical artist and a brilliant one, heraldry and all that. But it wasn't one of the areas you could teach in Design, other than foundation design, so she went down to Foundation and eventually came to be in charge of it.

So what form did foundation take after Funge, Harper, and Hanratty left? As far as I can see they had a basic design system going there.

After they left it probably became more structured. But it didn't alter fundamentally. It remained Basic Design. Drawing from the cast was finished. Well, there weren't any casts left, hardly, after the troubles!

So from the point of view of design then, how did you find students coming out of Pre-Diploma?

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So from the point of view of design then, how did you find students coming out of Pre-Diploma?

I think most design people, and it would still be true today, would say that there was more of an emphasis towards Fine Art in the Foundation course.

And who would have been teaching in foundation that had a fine art bias at that stage?

Ruth Brandt, though she would say she was design. It all depends how you would interpret design as opposed to fine art.

Brian King and Charlie Brady taught there in the mid-seventies. From what I've heard it seems there was a fine art bias there.

Yes. The reason for that is that successful designers tend to go into design practice. And in fine art it is very difficult to make a living, let's be honest. Tom Ryan is one of the very few. And his paintings are very traditional, they have to be or they are not going to sell, to put it very crudely. Very few people can manage.

That would partly explain that.

It's one of the big reasons why getting staff in design is quite difficult. Designers actually lose money, as well as their freedom, by going into teaching. If they are good at what they do they will stay in industry.

Broadly speaking then throughout the 1970s and 1980s, from the point of view of design, was there any relationship with fine art, in the general context of what happened in the college?

No, I think once the real troubles began there was less and less of an overlap. It petered out. It tended to get more and more specialised. That was an increasing thing. If I were to look in a detached way at the college, over my lifetime within it, in terms of a letter v, it came inwards, and inwards increasingly.

So areas became separate, worked completely independently of one and other, there was no overlap.

Yes, basically.

Were you involved in the bureaucracy of the college, Academic Councils and so on?

Not until sometime after 1975.

Broadly speaking what was the structure of the college?

Board, Academic Council, and Faculty Boards.

And beneath Faculty Boards?

Departmental and staff meetings and such, of a less formal kind.

Did Faculty Boards have any responsibility for curriculum?

No. Nor in my view should there be. Course documents should be written at staff level. What's this they say, "a camel is a horse designed by a committee". A horse designed by a faculty board would be pretty ghastly.

In terms of staffing, could you compare the old system of staffing to the new system.

There were three professors - Professor of Painting, Professor of Design, and Professor of Sculpture. And you didn't have a Professor of Education for the simple reason that education, until much later, was controlled by the Department. Certainly until John Bullows' day Education was controlled totally by the Department of Education. They selected the students and they examined the students. So the College's role was to provide space and a bit of teaching.

So in relation to staffing who was under the professor?

Teachers - now called Lecturers - and the vast majority were part time until 1975. That was the watershed when permanent staff began to be appointed. Most of the staff were English at that time. Maire Gallagher described it as the Norman invasion. She dated things before or after the Norman invasion!

So under the new system it was head of faculty and then teachers?

Head of faculty, lecturers, assistant lecturers, and part time staff.

Could you give an overview of the situation in the college at the time of the changeover, between say 1971 and 1975, when the new system came in.

Well, the early part, 1971-1974, was obviously a difficult period. My recollection of exact dates and so on is quite cloudy and I wouldn't want to go into detail. But fine art had a lot of hassle and there were periods when the college was open and when it was closed. And their were lock-outs and lock-ins, and sit-ins, and sleep-ins. Design is all I can talk about with any clarity at that time because design, come hell or high water, continued to work away.

So it was able to function.

It functioned. We used to see students, in the periods when the college was closed, in the National Gallery and have tutorials there with the students. So everything just carried on as normal. They had regular tuition, albeit in strange circumstances. But life continued.

And when the new system came in how did it effect you? Did it come in suddenly or gradually?

It was fragmented, but at the same time it had a huge impact. We were all very conscious of the transition from a more free and independent structure to a more prescribed and rigid structure.

And could people locate it in their minds? Did they understand what it was about, what it was trying to achieve, where it was coming from?

I don't think so. Looking back on it I'd say there probably wasn't enough dialogue at the proper level. There was hole-in-the-corner dialogue, with people muttering in corners about this, that or the other. Mostly in terms of how it impacted on them or who said what to whom, but very little about principles or policy. I would feel there was a huge lack of dialogue and debate about the development of policy of the college and of its own philosophy, speaking now as an educationalist.

And were structures not put in place to deal with that?

Not adequately I think. More time needs to be allocated to the development of a coherent philosophy and policy for the College.

Was this during the directorship of Jonah Jones or before that?

No, Jones didn't come until 1974/5. Warwick's period was particularly difficult. He was a strange man. His idea of communication was more confrontational than communicational. He was a strong North of Ireland man, and I suspect, unionist, who

was more prone to telling people what to do than asking them what they thought or felt.

He had been in the Belfast College of Art for at least twenty years, I think. I can find very little information about him.

I think the Department of Education was desperate, and somebody recommended him. He was from the north and therefore he was nearer than somebody from England was. But of course the outcome was that when all the posts were advertised, all of the senior posts were filled by people from England. Which is why Maire Gallagher referred to the Norman invasion. So the shock to the college system was immense.

So people within the college then obviously felt that this was a difficult time.

Yes, and that's why I said there were mutterings and gatherings. It was a very unhappy time for the college.

So confrontation was inevitable in fine art.

It was interesting. Certainly in design it drew students and staff together in a much closer way, because the old staff, who had been with the students through difficult days, were closely associated with them and felt a bond with them. You now had a head of the Faculty of Design, who was Polish, who had a totally different approach. He was very confrontational in his style, coming via England to an Irish culture, to an art college which was very gentle about drawing out the individual, as opposed to

confrontation, and giving commands and orders. He had very rigid notions of structures and everything being measurable. It was a bit like the behaviourist approach in psychology.

That was Ozmin?

Yes.

Who was the other guy?

David Sherlock was Deputy Director. He was much different to Michael Ozmin in his approach. I think that he would have been a great asset to the college had he stayed in it.

Was he involved with any of the faculties?

No. He happened to be an industrial designer. So he had a natural sympathy and empathy - an understanding with and an understanding of design. He knew a great deal about it. But he was also a very sound person in terms of Education. Very few people disliked him. He was eventually hunted out not least because he was English.

Was he largely responsible then for instigating the new structures and making them work?

I suspect so, yes. He was Deputy Director as opposed to assistant director, which is interesting. He used a phrase in a memo which I remember thinking was amusing at the time, yet I retained it in my memory. He was all for what he called, and this is a direct quotation from a memo he sent, "interdepartmental cross fertilisation". This was an interesting notion. But his approach was very tolerant and quite interesting. I think that effectively, while he was very interested in design, he took a whole college approach. He went on to become director of a group of art colleges in London. He was very open to different ways of doing things, as opposed to taking a very narrow and restricted approach.

And how did that go down?

I think he did his best. I think it was very difficult for him because he was trying to cope with design, and fine art, and everything was in a state of flux.

Did the interdepartmental thing work out?

No it didn't. Because people were so insecure at certain levels that there was a great deal of empire building going on, and in order to consolidate your position you had to empire build. And so I think people endeavoured to make their fortress strong and impregnable.

So it was in this context that the Irish/English thing developed.

I wouldn't want to labour that point too much. In some ways it could be exaggerated. There is a sort of traditional thing in Ireland where you don't like people coming in telling you what to do because it has historical connotations. But at the same time I don't know that it was as strong as it seems or as it might read.

Certainly there was conflict. In relation to your study of fine art students at the college, which you did in 1978/9, did you, having interviewed them, think the conflict had effected them?

When I was a student in design, if we wished to get a diploma we had no option but to follow the style the professor dictated and that was prescribed for us. Now in my view that is educationally, and artistically, and aesthetically, an appalling thing to do to anybody. Because education should be leading out what's in the individual as opposed to prescribing for and directing the individual. Now I thought that was dreadful, and I thought that had totally gone by the time I went back to teach at the college in the 1960s. But in fact what happened in fine art post-1975 was exactly the same thing but in a different sense. It was the very opposite end of the scale. On the one hand I was forced into a rigid academic, overly academic, very old-fashioned design methodology. Fine art people from 1975 onwards were in my view forced to go down the road of adopting any other approach than the traditional RHA, traditional painting, traditional sculpture, traditional discipline road, where anything that had any kind of realism in it was decried. The whole notion of drawing as a language, drawing as a means of understanding, drawing as a means of communication – was if not exactly prohibited, it was certainly derided and laughed at. In my view there should be a catholic approach to the teaching of art and to the young artist. There is a validity attaching to any style,

and if what you believe in *is* your style you should be allowed to do it, and the choice of approach and the avenue you go down should be yours. I think that any art college of any strength should allow the two sides to live simultaneously together with neither approach being seen as of greater or lesser value.

Did you see any manifestation of that prescription in the students you interviewed for your M.Ed. thesis?

Yes. I tried not to impose my views on them or give any interpretation that might indicate to them what I thought, but certainly what I read or what they told me was very much indicative of the fact that they had to follow a style and they had to do it a certain way. And you could see in the work that most of them produced that their own level of skills was very low. I remember at the time hearing Campbell Bruce state that you shouldn't learn skills on an undergraduate fine art course. You should learn skills on a post-graduate course. Now I would happen to believe the opposite. You should learn the skills first and then learn how to disregard them or use them as you see fit. But I don't think you can make that choice until you have learnt the skills, because, for example, drawing is really the language of art. There is a grammar of art and a language of art, and I think both have to be developed before you can speak through the art you create. A visual language is every bit as valid as any verbal language, but you've got to learn it. Every language has its own modes of communication and they must be mastered before you can communicate.

I noted in reading your thesis that by contrast with other groups of students and artists there was a very high level of tension and frustration amongst the students you

interviewed. I'm just wondering could this have any connection with what was happening in the faculty?

I think it would have to have a good deal to do with it. Because at that time - it was 1978/79 that I would have interviewed these students - there was a great deal of tension. They could see Professor John Kelly, the former Professor of Painting, marginalised to such extent that he became pathetic, if not destroyed. Carey Clarke had similar difficulties but he was young enough to persist and to restore and build up his own legitimate position in Fine Art as an academic painter of repute. But John and Carey as people were undervalued and disregarded. They were made into models of what should not be happening and of styles that should not be seen to happen within the College. In short they were deemed unfashionable.

All of this culminated in 1979 in a number of students refusing their diplomas. Do you remember anything of that?

I remember very little of that to be honest. I think maybe it was because we were so inured to the fact that there were constant dramas happening in the College at that time that it sort of sailed by in some kind of way. But I do remember they didn't. There weren't very many students involved as far as I can remember.

So going beyond 1979 and into the 1980s and taking an overview of the college in the 1980s, could you tell me what happened?

I can't remember what year Theo McNab came.

I think it was 1987.

As late as that. And I can't remember when Rob and Nigel went.

Rob died in 1990 I think and Nigel left about 1983 or 1984.

In the early part of the 1980s gradually it began to change a bit, a bit. There was a greater level of tolerance of styles, but as I said tolerance isn't equality. This was merely allowing something, permitting something to exist, but it's not giving it equal status. And I don't think that the representational mode and the learning of skills have been given the status it should have in fine art courses right up to this day. If you look at sculpture for example, I know sculpture is one of the most volatile disciplines of fine art, and I've seen sculpture exhibitions in colleges in England over the last few years and I realise just how much everything is changing. Nonetheless I very much regret that while you have students working in the area of conceptual sculpture, that you can't also have students learning traditional skills like stone carving and so on. It doesn't happen any more. But I think that's sad, because if you consider the history of art right back to Egyptian ages and Pre-Christian art of all kinds, we have very rich traditions, and I don't think they should disappear entirely. I think it's a terrible narrowing. Art colleges all over the world, I think, are very prone to fads and fashion, and I think that's a mistake. I think the direction of colleges should be more universal and more catholic.

As Professor of Education at the college how did you find the students coming from the fine art area to your area?

We came around to a point where we had to run a drawing test as one of the admission procedures for entry to our Dip. ADT course. This was because so few graduates of the areas other than design knew how to draw, even at the most basic level. If you are talking about teachers, you can't try to teach children to make art if you don't know how to draw. How can you teach them if you don't know how? And that was one of the most appalling things that I have ever seen. I did at one time try to analyse, and I retained for a few years, the drawing tests coming from all of the colleges, but particularly from fine art graduates. I have to say that the standard in most cases was abysmal. Except for people who did it largely as an extra curricular activity and who saw drawing as necessary or felt it was necessary. Now I know I sound like a rigid traditionalist, but when you are talking to Tom Ryan you will find out that he is even more extreme than I am on this. But I still believe that the learning of skills is fundamental to any fine art course. It's fundamental to both the learning and to the teaching. Skills have become a slightly dirty word, except in design. Again it's an issue of fashion.

So would you say that less fine art people get into education as a consequence?

We always found there were some hugely talented people, and we've had some terrific fine art graduates over the years. It just became harder to find them.

Traditionally a lot of fine art people went into education because there were so few opportunities for them.

That's the tradition, and it is still so. Fine art people and craft people comprise the bulk of Dip. ADT students. (This will be H. Dip. ADE from 1999/2000 onwards) We are also trying to get design people in because it was important to get them into schools.

There have been problems in English second level art education as a consequence of the number of fine art people who go into education, without having learned skills.

That's exactly what I'm saying, it's exactly the same thing. It was very interesting to look at that. The selection process for Dip. ADT was an enormously broad way of assessing what was happening on the courses, because all the applicants were given the same opportunity to deal with the situation. It was interesting to see what they could do. And what they could do in some cases was horrendous and in others fantastic.

Do you remember anything of the 1985 seminar in Killiney?

Yes I do. I was at it and I remember it quite well.

Why was that set up?

The College Board I think at the time - Bruce Arnold was the Chairman - felt that there were problems in the College and that you really need to talk to people to find

out what is going on. If you are appointed to a state board, to an institution which you are not familiar with, you get a prospectus describing the structure, but you really don't know what's happening. There were problems in the College in relation to Design, because it was felt that it wasn't moving quickly enough in relation to meeting the needs of industry. There were major problems in Education. And there were problems in relation to Fine Art because it was like a cauldron left on top of the cooker for months or years, and it was boiling away and nobody quite knew what was going to happen. There were a lot of issues there. People didn't really know what was going on or whether the course was doing what it should be doing. Were students doing what they should be doing? And were the needs of students being met in terms of their education as fine artists? I think the Killiney Seminar was a general opportunity for the Board as a whole to familiarise itself with what was happening in the College. It wasn't just an examination of what was happening in the College. It was a huge opportunity. So that was really one of the major issues.

For the Board itself to understand what was happening in the Faculties?

Yes, and where they were at, and to meet the staff, and hear them, and listen to what they were saying, and the students. There was a student representative too. Andrew Bradly as far as I recall was raconteur. He wrote, I think, a large part of the report, if not it all.

And what was the outcome of the seminar?

I don't know that it changed anything significantly. I was in Education at the time. I'd only just gone into it and at the time was actually Head of Faculty. I was shakily easing myself into it and trying to solve the many problems I found one by one.

Broadly speaking how would you summarise the situation in the college in 1990. An overview as it were.

At the end of the eighties there was a gradual shift where there was a tolerance and a more open approach in fine art. You began to get the odd student from fine art who dared to paint in a way that was different. Who dared to actually use paint and even to show skill. And that was quite novel because it was still unusual. Going every year to the degree show was the best measure of what was happening. Installations and so on only began to come in Gwen O'Dowd's time in the late seventies. Gwen and Angie Benner and those were into installations. Angie had one down in the Project, I remember, a huge spider's web. That's the problem with students. Of course the problem with all art is that it builds upon itself and there really isn't much new. I mean most artists derive their work or get their ideas from other artists. So it's all sort of building blocks. But if you throw out one important aspect like skills you are going to lose skills forever, because that pyramid that's going up is excluding them.

There is a danger of developing a cult of newness, where fashion dictates.

Somehow it's unhealthy because it's not allowing for individual creativity in a real sense, because in most cases it's not built on knowledge. Except where you get an exceptional or very strong student. I think of fine art students I have known down the

years who had the courage to go their own route, and who have consciously built for themselves a library of skills that they can subsequently disregard and move away from. I am thinking of several people over the years, individuals, whose work dared to be different. But when you are young, and this is one of the most dangerous parts of such an approach, when you are very young you don't really want to be different, you want to be like everybody else. Putting your head above the parapet is risky.

One of the great dangers of third level art education is the influence of powerful personalities, which makes students vulnerable to manipulation.

Students by virtue of their youth and level of maturity want to be different, they want to be the latest. They don't want to be fuddy duddy and they don't want to be old fashioned. So new becomes a buzzword and that's the whole fashion thing. It's very interesting because it doesn't just apply to art today, it applies to music too, and literature. If you take clothes and look at fashion clothing today the whole emphasis seems to be about being different for the sake of being different, but that in itself imposes an enormous sameness.

I think there is an insatiable market for newness. It's a part of the market mentality. You must always have something new in order to sell.

I think in relation to your study Peter, just as we are talking, my own ideas crystallise or develop, or maybe come when they weren't there before. If you take art, I'm being critical of art because the grammar and language of art are being ignored in teaching. If you take English, the whole structure of English as you are taught at

school and as I was taught at school doesn't happen any more. What's the net result? Nobody can spell, nobody can write, nobody can speak properly. For example, we all did elocution in school. Everybody did it. You learned how to speak properly. It's the same with art. Everybody in the field should learn how to speak the language of art properly, then as artists they become free to use their art in any way they wish.

APPENDIX 15

Simon McLeod (1956 -) Artist. Studied at the National College of Art and Design 1977 - 1980.

Peter O'Neill - Describe your background before you came to the college of art.

Simon McLeod - I did a pre-diploma course in Dun Laoghaire College of Art in 1973 to 1974.

Who was teaching on that course?

Trevor Scott was Principal but he did a lot of teaching, Sean Larkin and Michael Ozmin did design. Peter Dowd was another teacher, but I did not have contact with him. He was a very respected teacher.

Were Coilin Murray or Ciaran Lennon there at that time?

Not at the time, but I got to know Ciaran about that time, and if anything he had a formative influence on me before I went to the National College of Art and Design.

What was the course like in Dun Laoghaire, just briefly?

For me at that time it was too structured. The obvious lack of a course later on in the college of art suited me, by contrast with that.

What was the course like in Dun Laoghaire?

In a nutshell I would, I suppose, say Le Corbusier, Bauhaus, design based, which as an aspiring painter did not suit me terribly well.

Was there an integration of design and fine art on this course?

Yes, it was a pre diploma course, but it was very design orientated, which was obvious from the first day there.

So when you came to the National College of Art and Design what did you find?

I gained direct entry into the fine art course - this was over 20 years ago- and I remember some initial printout, some initial guidance in a rather vague form.

Was this before you actually went to the college?

Well, no. But there was a project before you went in. A self-portrait, which, I suppose does make sense. I personally approached this in a very oil-on-board manner. I created an oil painting, which is what I would do today and which is what I would have done previously. A lot of people hadn't done the project. Those who had had all taken more or less the same approach. I do remember we were all told that a tape

recording or a photograph - I think video was a fairly new word in those days - but anything was a self-portrait. This implied that we had all been a little bit limited. Which is not to say that I was not complimented or encouraged. I was encouraged by two members of staff on what I had produced. I had also done a lot of drawing, which I had taken seriously. As I say, a lot of the students had turned up without anything. They were rather icily told that they would do it. I don't think any pressure was exerted on them. Anyway that was the summer project.

In September we were put on a drawing course with a simple dictum, the container and the contained. It was really quite open.

Can you remember how long that lasted?

A week or a fortnight, we had a model. We were given a life model which, naturally, a lot of people gravitated towards. The model was Thom McGinty, the Diceman. But anyway we were given a life model, and apart from that we were in a windowless room where we were to spend our whole first year. There wasn't a tremendous amount of anything else as I recall.

Do you mean projects?

No. I mean to draw.

So you could draw the model and that was it?

You could draw the model, there were coils of wire to draw, heavy wire, and a few baskets, a few of those plastic bucket chairs, a fan heater or two, not a heck of a lot to stimulate, and naturally - well not naturally but as it happened - a life model. That prompted the very first debate between staff and students about drawing the model. Not the very first, I should say the second, because the first was about approaching ones own being in a very literal way artistically, painting or drawing or using a mirror. Drawing the model prompted the very first debate. It was rather strongly put to us that it is not necessarily automatic, shall we say, to life draw, to draw from the model.

Were alternatives suggested?

Alternatives were alluded to rather that suggested. This I may say remained an issue throughout the three years that I spent at the National College. Some of the students went on to work more or less exclusively from the model for all those three years, but for myself, I didn't. In the intervening time between Dun Laoghaire college and the National college I had drawn the model at night classes, so I had quite a lot of experience in drawing the model. I had done a little of it in my pre-diploma in Dun Laoghaire and enjoyed it. For myself it's not something that I pursued very much during the three years, but that was a personal decision rather than a result of being under somebody's influence. That's one abiding memory. If anything it was the first big split that I was involved in.

The debate over the figure?

When we say the figure we ought to mean the life model, but we mean any figurative imagery, any transcription from reality into drawing or painting.

So how did the course develop after that, given that the course was organic and was designed to develop in response to the interaction of students and staff? What was the next step if you like?

My memory, as I recall, is that we split into three groups. The first group was painting, which was my choice, it would have been my choice today and it would have been my choice previous to entering the college. The second group was sculpture. And finally there was an odd group, most of whom went on to work in the print area, some of this group just remained isolated and were not part of anything. The odd group, up to the Christmas of the first year I remember, got the most teaching and all the visiting lecturers.

This was another issue, which arose fairly quickly, that the visiting lecturers were all imports and all very much the product of, and on occasion a recent product of, the English art schools.

Why was that group so heavily directed?

I think it may have been, at a guess, that they hadn't quite decided between painting and sculptor, so they were being helped to decide and given more projects. In our own case I don't really recall any specific projects in the painting area.

I don't remember any project apart from the one at the beginning, the container and the contained.

I do recall being shown how to make a stretched canvass. Previous to that I had painted on boards, on paper, and on bought canvases, which I may say I do today. But anyway I do remember a slight element of, if you like, arts and crafts, and being introduced to the idea that the artist does his own work from start to finish. Sending work to a framer, for instance, was anathema. It really was mooted to us that you take a completely independent stance from society and from the commercial, or should I say the market place. And incidentally there was no guidance whatever, that I can remember, about marketing your work afterwards. There were several very valuable experiences of showing work. The first of those was while we were in first year. It was held at the Grapevine Arts Centre where a lot of us got our first review in the *Irish Times*. Because it was outside of the institution, a lot, or some should I say, of the prevailing arguments arose on the opening night. That was valuable. And later on there were exhibitions of our work at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, the *Alliance Francaise*, and one or two others. That was good, we showed our work really for the first time in group-shows, again with little or no guidance or advice from the college or from staff.

But anyway back to the course. I do remember a lot of fairly decent advice on preparing ones own surfaces.

So broadly speaking would you say that you were free for the three years of the course to follow your nose?

I valued having been in a foundation course that was very structured, but it did not really suit me. It may have been good for somebody else. The year 1973, when I started in Dun Laoghaire College, had I think 21 students, and only four or five of those finished, that is collected their diploma at the end. It was a massive weeding out of people. It was almost as if the course rather than the students was the chalice, the *raison d'être.* And of course at that time the school was promoting itself, it was attempting to go third level.

So it was very concerned about standards?

It was very concerned about standards and everything being written down and ratified. If anything I preferred, in my own case, the freedom in the NCAD. It was initially of great value, and in the year that I went in there were a number of older students, by older I mean twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, rather than sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen. I was seventeen when I started in Dun Laoghaire and I had finished school that year. I had worked the summer and so on but to this day I would be rather against people going directly to Art College from school. I have always thought that going directly into college was a bad idea. I do think a couple of years out helps. I do think experience of the way people will treat you and relate to you in a working environment is good. But anyway there was a goodish - a goodish - start in that respect, allowing for the lack of course and so on. The freedom was good.

So broadly speaking would you say that this freedom suited you and helped you over the three years?

Yes but it wasn't terribly long before the rot began to set in.

What was the rot?

There were two main issues. One was complete indifference to the physical surroundings of the students by the administration. Again, as somebody who has literally painted just anywhere, I have never needed or never required, and indeed have never had, a purpose built studio with terribly pristine surroundings or correct light or anything. At the moment I am painting someplace which is virtually condemned, which quite reminds of me of the college premises in Clarendon Street where we worked as students. I have worked at home and on occasion the room where I have been sleeping. I love to work like this because it is intimate and nobody else is responsible.

Anyway, I remember three winters without heating in the college, and I also remember having to interrupt studies first off to complain, in fact to go on a one-day strike, about conditions in Clarendon Street. To me at that time the only problem with the strike was missing work. I naturally agreed with the strike, it was just one day.

There was this ongoing battle about conditions. When it came time to put on our diploma show and so on we had new premises, new, far from ideal and far from ready, premises in Moss Street. I think we had to move just before Christmas. That was far from satisfactory too, and it was also temporary, before the move to Thomas Street. One abiding memory of the college is the dirt and filth and general dinginess of the environment for working in.

Could you say something about the development of the course itself?

Several of the staff are now deceased and I have no wish to criticise anybody who is no longer living. So anyway there were two issues. One was the physical surroundings, and the other was the relationship between the staff and the students. This included the relationship of the staff to one and other. With the dividing up of the students into groups that took place pretty well straight away, there was also a very apparent and obvious dividing of staff into various camps.

And how would you describe each camp then? What were the identities of the camps?

I would like to precede that by saying that I would consider that period in the 1970's to be a rather arid period in the visual arts in general. I should say for my own part something about the influences on me. I had been pre-influenced. It all goes back to a show in the RDS in 1966 called *Art: USA: Now* where young Irish artists were exposed for the first time to the New York School, and to minimal art.

Can you remember some of the names of the artists that were in that show?

Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko, and basically the big names of the New York School, I know for definite because I was shown pictures at parties at home. There was one particular party, indeed, where one of the people, later to become a teacher at the college, who was influenced when young by this publicity exercise, showed me the catalogue of this exhibition and the "truth was revealed to me", which must go in inverted commas.

So the Art USA Now *exhibition influenced you?*

Yes, I was influenced, and I still respect those painters. I had a wish to create work that was minimal in content or in that vein.

And did you find support for your ideas when you went to the College of Art? Were there others that shared those aesthetic values?

My friend Ciaran Lennon had not arrived yet. He came later, I think in our third year. That bond with modern American art was already established which was fairly quickly spotted by the staff there. That was one strand in the faculty, if anything that was the strand where I was coming from. I had been virtually instructed by staff to disregard the German expressionists who had interested me before, and to take a very clean fresh new, and this almost goes in inverted commas, 'approach'. A painting is a painting and you are you, and there is a gap there. And that really you are being self indulgent or declamatory to have too much autobiographical input into your work, which hadn't stopped me, incidentally, from producing a self portrait. I still had a figurative interest. But as regards where I was coming from, that would be it. That of course tied very much into making a stretcher, which I hadn't done, and with the idea of a stretcher being a drawing, with the role of a gallery wall, and so on. Which naturally, though I did not realise it at the time, goes back to European ideas and the Bauhaus.

Anyhow sculpture was an issue, and very much so. I don't have any hesitation in naming the tutor, Nigel Rolfe, because for one thing he is still with us, which I am very

glad about, and for another, I imagine, I guess he would still hold the same ideas and the same beliefs. There was a key pronouncement which he made at that time - I doubt he would hold with this now - which was this, that there was no art in Ireland.

And how did that influence students?

It was something I was ready to dismiss, having had contact with artists already, and knowing, indeed, several artists, several practising painters and exhibiting painters at that time. Painters is a key word here because according to the sculpture area - terribly polarised, excessively polarised - painting did not exist or should not exist or was outdated, along with working from the figure. This included, I may say, any sort of representational sculpture, and the work of the Americans that would have featured in the *Art: USA: Now* show in the RDS in 1966. If my memory serves me right that would have included George Segal and possibly Edward Kienholz. They would not exist because they were producing something that was permanent and that related to earlier art. In a word, performance art was in, what used to be called time-related art; everything else was out.

How did the sculpture area impact on the painting area? Were they two separate areas? Was there a cross over?

We were on the same floor, the first floor of Clarendon Street. What happened immediately was that the sculpture area was cordoned off, on that floor, with polythene.

Could you say something about that?

Well what I would say is that there was an aggressive approach, there was an immediate cutting off of students from each other.

Initiated by who, by which group? Or was it a spontaneous thing, did people isolate themselves?

Its hard to know but I think the sculpture students were being made to feel exclusive and being put a certain way, pointed in a certain direction, away from the other students, which I would not agree with.

So division happened on the studio floor?

Oh yes, before the Christmas of the first year. What happened immediately was that certain of the sculpture students decided that they were not going to the history of art lectures. The history of art lectures were of great interest to me, and, if I remember, first of all were Renaissance oriented, Italian Renaissance orientated. I remember learning a little about Bernini for instance who I had not completely taken on board before. I remember being very interested myself. I can remember arguing with the sculpture students on this issue. I remember saying it was a challenge, and I remember that being flatly rejected. It was apparent to me at the time that this was under the influence of a particular staff member, and again it was very much to do with taking a stance, taking a stance and having an attitude.

So there were two factions then. What was the reaction of the painting students to that? Was it hostility?

I think, I know, a lot of hostility was implanted.

By staff?

Yes, but again we were all younger then, and this was 1977. The whole culture was rather hostile. It was evident in advertising and in graphic arts. Something that remained an issue throughout the college too was the rock music scene at the time, which probably in art schools, at a guess anyway, always has. Everybody was aware that the Beatles had gone to Art school, and half of the groups of the sixties had gone to art school. Something else happened - and this was a very English phenomenon - punk rock, which was fresh and all about having an attitude and being hostile. It was about living in the moment, leaving nothing behind, dying early, being extreme and what have you. This fag end of culture, punk rock, was mentioned on the first day. Also on the first day the split between painting and sculpture was mentioned, in a slightly jovial fashion. But that impression, that reality, that fact, was put forward on the first day.

That there were separate areas?

Well that sculpture would win against painting. Actually this position was put forward in the context of a football game. Sometimes for recreation we had football

games, and sculpture always won. A joke OK, but it wasn't a joke later on. This conflict remained for the three years a feature of life in the college.

So you have mentioned two factions now, you have mentioned the painting grou,p you have mentioned the sculpture group. You have mentioned that one was more aggressive than the other was. How did the traditionalists fit into that polarisation, those who had been in the school since before 1971, the more neo-classically inspired teachers and students?

Cary Clarke, who I am pleased to say again is still with us, was able to, as far as I could see, discuss anybody's work with them. He was generous in his praise and also able to point to where he was, he was able to outline his position. But in a general way, without putting it forward as the truth. For him, figurative painting in the past - classicism, realism, technique - was an avenue rather than the only way. Carey Clark remained in constant contact over the three years and as I say was adaptable and generous. He was I suppose a traditionalist. It is worth mentioning here, even in the context of American art being very prevalent and influential, that Andrew Wyeth and others of that school of American Artists would have featured in the *Art: USA: Now* Show as well, and it was no harm, not as the new art of America but as the enduring tradition. From my own part he was the traditional aspect of the college.

If you were to summarise the factionalism that had developed at that time how would you summarise it?

Well at the time, during the three years, one would have said English/Irish, but it was a lot broader than that.

So there was an aggressive modernist avant-garde in the sculpture area, there was a painting area, which was traditional in the sense that traditional materials were used, but it was broad in the sense that it could take on board expressionism, minimalism and some aspects of figurative work.

If anything, as I have already gone over, the use of the figure was quite frankly discouraged, unless you wanted to go into that. But you were then aligning yourself. That was in the late 1970's. Nowadays with the - I don't want to say resurgence with regard to figuration, which was something that never really went away - new interest, the new marketability of it, nowadays it would not be an issue, but then it was, you were putting yourself back, back in inverted commas, by doing figurative work. But you were also putting yourself into the hands of the traditionalists and in that context and at that time into what would have been termed the Irish art camp, meaning the RHA, which at that time spelt the pre-Revolutionary, before the changeover in the school.

And what would you say about drawing, how was drawing seen? Not drawing in the figurative sense but drawing in the broad sense.

Drawing was re-christened mark making. The head of the Fine Art Department handed me a book of Jasper Johns drawings which I had already seen from one of my *Art: USA: Now* friends. Drawing was encouraged to exist, not in its own right but to

show the flatness of the surface, to demonstrate the flatness of the paper. Drawing as a means of putting thought on paper was another big thing repeatedly put to us. This implied that sketchbook drawing and figurative drawing was somehow derivative and reactionary, out of date.

So, broadly speaking if you were to summarise your whole experience of the college as an artist, as a practising artist, in terms of its influence on you at the time and how you see it in retrospect, how you saw it affect other people, as a course within itself, as an integral thing, how would you summarise the whole thing?

I'd say from my own part it has taken me a long time to recover and I was teaching for nine years after I left college. A few people have said to me that they went teaching because of what they went through in the college. They said that they had no wish and had very little inclination to practice as artists, and that they rather felt that the future was closed and that they couldn't aspire to anything, a number of people, not everyone.

And how would you say it influenced your teaching?

I taught in Dun Laoghaire College of Art. I thought drawing for eight years, figure drawing, and I tutored for painting. If anything I was rather more enthusiastic because of the way I had been steered away from it.

You felt like going back to it?

I have to say that it was contact with people since leaving the college and immediately after, it was keeping up with friends that I had made in the college and maintaining contact with other people that re-introduced me to figurative painting. I don't even like to say figurative painting, I prefer to say painting in general, actual painting, without the polarities and the doubts.

So would you say then that broadly speaking the Fine Art faculty tried to change the whole idea of what art education was about and that for you in the long run it didn't actually succeed in doing that because you went back to what you would have been doing anyway?

We started by asking about a course. There appeared to be no course, but rather subtle, and often frequently less than subtle, suggestions about what art should be and what way you should be going which would have been following the dictum of highly defensive and highly opinionated individuals. Art education to my mind should be bringing out what's there and helping somebody to discover themselves.

And are you saying that the course didn't do that?

I'm saying it didn't, but only by reaction. I'm repeatedly saying that there wasn't a course that I could see. And I know for sure there were problems in the administration about implementing a course.

So there was no apparent course and yet there was an effort to direct people in a certain way?

Initially, but even that seemed to die off. There was a shocking lack of enthusiasm.

Are you saying that people were left to flounder then?

Rather much, and also expected to learn by example, what would have been like the *atelier* system. If the staff had been working in the college that might have engendered a little more belief. This is not to say I had no respect and affection, indeed, for some of the painting staff. I do think the aggressive attitudes were damaging. That's not to say that I haven't found working as an artist since then the same in terms of public opinion and the art market, they are the same sort of attitudes in different clothing if you like. In that way it was an education. It was never going to be easy. These days I find if I am on my own and in trouble with a picture, which is not a rare occurrence, there is no body there to help you.

APPENDIX 16

Gwen O Dowd (1957 -) Artist. Studied at the National College of Art and Design 1976 - 1980. Taught at the National College of Art and Design 1980 - 1986.

Peter O'Neill - Tell me about your time at the National College of Art and Design.

Gwen O'Dowd - When I was in pre-diploma I knew nothing at all about an art college so I was going to be very vulnerable. I just took everything on board that I was given to do. Things like the colour wheel and so on. It was a good thing to dabble in all the different areas, that was what pre-diploma was meant to be about. The big thing was to try to get into fine art, so you had to do well in pre-diploma.

So you wanted to go to fine art?

Always, so exercises like the colour wheel were tortuous for me because I am not a neat person at all, I still had to it because I wanted to pass my exams to get into fine art.

Were the exercises in pre-diploma fine art oriented or were they more general?

They were very general, they were mostly fine art actually. They were dictated by the staff teaching there at that time.

Was Charlie Brady there?

He was, but I don't think he had us very much. We had Peter Grant, a stonecutter, a very nice man. Charlie Brady was there, but I don't actually remember Charlie until I came into first year in fine art. So I don't think I actually had him in pre-diploma. We had Ken Dolan and Brian King. They were the major fine art influence. Brian King eventually got promotion to fine art sculpture. They were the boys. They, I suppose, steered us towards sculpture or painting. And also we had one brilliant fine art project over in Clarendon Street with Rob Smith for two weeks, and that gave me a real sense of fine art.

And what was that project?

It was a life drawing project. We were all kneeling on the floor with newsprint, looking up at two models, which we had never done before from that angle, a simple thing like that, rather than sitting in front of a model. He put us on the floor and that captivated everybody.

So when you went into fine art, then, what was the program?

You started off in the first year with a series of projects. But I think they were just to help you, you were always expected to develop an interest for yourself out of them,

to get going. They were not an end in themselves like in pre-diploma where you did one project and then you did the next one. This was really a way of trying to find your own particular interests. So you might have done a life drawing project, and if you had a forte for painting the model or using the model in a figurative way then perhaps that was encouraged through that project or by the end of that project. But the main endeavour was really to find out what your own natural sympathies were.

In a practical way how was that encouraged? Were you told to do certain projects? Were they suggested? When you did a project were suggestions made as where you might take it?

They were open-ended. I remember one called the 'container and the contained' and that is as wide as anything. You could not really go wrong. They were there really to give you some kind goal to start off.

How many projects would you have to do before you found your feet?

They were not rigorously assessed in the sense that there were marks for each project. I think if you were still interested in say No. 2 project you continued that into the next project by gearing it for some kind of follow up.

What were the assessment procedures?

What they were, I think, were just a few of the tutors coming along and talking to you about your work. I never saw them as threatening, and I was never terrified of

them. At that time for me they were a positive thing. You got a variety of different opinions of your work at one time rather than just from your own tutor. I found it helpful because you could go on then from there.

And over the 3-year period of this course how did it develop, and how did your own work develop?

My memory of it was that it was accepted that you had self-discipline, and that you arrived in every morning and you stayed. I think that was the essential element of getting anything out of a course like that, because it is such an open-ended thing. It was your contribution that you were there and that you did the work. You were trying out everything that was available, and if you did not partake one hundred percent well then you were lost, and that's where half of the people I think drifted off in those first or second years really. A considerable amount of people anyway lost interest, or were not able to keep up that kind of self-discipline.

Did you find then that by the time you were finished you had found yourself, had found your feet?

No, but I knew I wanted to work. I knew that I could get up every morning and go into a studio set up and work all day.

How did you find it in the real world when you left?

I mean it was all a very gradual process and extremely difficult.

Was it a continuation of working in the college?

Yes. That's what I was going to continue doing. The one thing that you do then is just look for a studio and start off. Let's get back to the college then. My one memory, a very good memory, is that it introduced you to an awful lot of practising artists that Rob and Campbell brought over. There was a variety of people and there seemed to be an endless amount of visiting lecturers there of great reputation or varied reputation. They were the real world, there you were talking to these artists who were out there working away everyday and that made it a reality. They told you stories about the way they do things or the way they survive, or the type of studios they had, the whole art world thing, whatever.

How did the conflict between the different traditions in the faculty influence or affect you?

It did not really effect me at all actually. You mentioned that earlier on and I was thinking there was no negative influence there that I experienced when I was there.

Did you do work in the traditional way with any of the more traditional people in projects or whatever? Did you have involvement with them?

Probably not.

And you were free not to?

You were free not to, therefore, there was no complication at all. I do remember getting some very good recipes from that area, and I still have them. The more traditional people gave practical help that you would not have got from anybody else, but that was the whole college, you went and looked for whatever you could get from anyone.

Did you ever go to other facilities, like fashion and textiles, to work with fabrics for instance?

I worked there since, as a fine artist going in to teach them drawing, which was an interesting angle.

Was there any crossing over between facilities when you were in the college or more recently when you taught in college?

There was not when I was there, I don't know if they do very much now either. They go from perhaps photography and print to the fine art area. The only college I know that that actually works in is Cork College of Art. It has always been like that and it maintained that kind of thing. I think basically it has a lot to do with staff getting on with one another.

So there is freedom in Cork to move from one facility to another depending on your needs?

Well, yes, depending on agreement on the work, whether it needs it or not. They have a course down there that you can do which is fifty percent photography or fifty percent ceramics, together. You can also do fifty percent fine art. You can even do a seventy-five and twenty five percent mix as well.

That was the whole idea of this program which developed in Britain in the 1950s and it seems to me that the college did not seem to go that way.

No it never did, but I think it is personality based. The graphics area or the fashion area never got on with the fine art area. They were threatened by them. The fine art people got the most profile and everything.

Was that because fashion or graphics were more traditional and that fine art tended to be more radical and modern?

Maybe the profile of the fine art area was more exciting, whereas the graphics area would seem to be quite subdued.

Do you remember anything of Nigel Rolfe's influence in fine art, or do you remember him as a personality in the fine art area?

Yes I do. I think Nigel and Rob worked very much in tandem. They actually put a very similar amount of energy into their teaching and they became very involved. I think a lot more so compared to people in the same position today. What they put in was a huge amount. I think now people are not willing to put that much in, they are

looking after their own work and everything. They are not going to put the same amount of time into field trips, into trips to London. They are not going to put that same genuine effort in. Nigel's influence was equal to Rob's. I thought they were very exciting. I think Nigel tried to set up a confrontation between sculpture and painting when he marched all of the sculpture students over a few times. I think he did that in order to break it down into a more fine art thing.

Do you mean to break the fragmentation of areas?

Well, I though he wanted to merge it, and it should have been merged much more so, but geographically it was awkward because we were in two different buildings. But I do remember the sculpture students feeling kind of rebuffed or something by the painting students, or perhaps it was vice versa.

There was a lot of conflict there and there is still a lot of feeling about that instance when they marched over with the suits and all that.

It was one of those things you remember all right. I would have liked to have worked more in the sculpture area. But I suppose Nigel's influence there at the time would not have been in the traditional making sense. Though I do remember welding down in Clarendon Street.

There was a certain amount of sculpture done in Clarendon Street. I remember people like Jerry Cox for instance working down there.

Yes, he was about the most traditional of them, because Martin Folan and the rest of them in that area were mostly, in that particular couple of years, in Kildare Street. I remember Rob actually ended up teaching us welding downstairs in Clarendon Street, and then it became a fire hazard and we all had to get out.

How would you summarise, if it were possible, Rob's ideas and his approach to teaching?

I just think he believed in a way of working that he carried out himself for his own work that was based on drawing, researching, and getting enough material to work from, and then bringing that into the studio and trying to make something of it in a very individual way.

What were his ideas about drawing?

That was part of the process. He himself used drawing as a spinal artery.

Not drawing in the traditional sense then?

No.

How would you describe his approach to drawing?

That's part of collecting the source material I suppose. You would look at it, you would photograph it, you would draw it, you would paint it, you would do everything

to it, you'd gather all that stuff together. Drawing was only part of that. It was a tool. He would not have put a huge emphasis on drawing the end product, because that was not enough.

In other words drawing was a process.

Yes.

And it was part of an overall process.

Yes, and if you finished up with just a drawing perhaps that might not have had enough in it for him because there would not have been enough research into it - research isn't the word, enquiry, enquiry into it.

So essentially drawing was part of a process of enquiry and the result was a piece of art, the accidental result, as it were, was a piece of art which came out of this interaction.

Yes, an interaction with all of that.

And it could include all kinds of tools, drawing was not necessarily drawing with a pencil, it could involve tearing up bits of paper or throwing dirt. It was almost as if the act of working was perfectly in tune with your thinking; they were locked in together. That drawing was a direct reflection of thinking. Would you go as far as saying that, that in a sense it was like one of Nigel's performances.

Yes, it wasn't an end result in itself. You learned from it. Yes I would.

I think that it was one of the core issues of the program, it was one of the issues that Nigel and Rob were interested in. I think that project you mentioned, the container and the contained, was like a kick to start people on that road, and if they started and they seemed to be producing something the staff were happy to let that go, once they knew that you had got your teeth into something.

It was not an absolute. If you had not got your teeth into it then they would certainly come down on you like a ton a bricks, because they would know you were floundering, but if you are able to work you were ok.

That would account for the negative reaction to traditional drawing, because it was not engaging if you like. Arguably it was seen as the easy way out. You just put the thing there and you draw it, and you could keep doing that forever and ever. It was technically more proficient perhaps, but you would not necessarily engage.

Lets talk about your own experience in the college as a teacher. Which area did you teach in?

In fine art for most of it, but I did about a year of working in fashion and textiles teaching drawing.

And did you teach drawing in fine art?

No, painting.

What was the structure when you were there? What was the basic program, the methodology, the relationship between students and teachers, and so on?

I started teaching nearly the first year I graduated and that was in pre-diploma, so I went in there and I did projects with them. These projects could have been two or three week projects.

And what were your objectives in those projects?

My objectives were stimulated by my memory of going over to the fine art area to have a look at fine art when I was in pre-diploma. I wanted to give them something that they were not doing in pre-diploma. I wanted to give them some kind of different approach, and perhaps something that they could then carry on. So there was a fine art angle to my projects.

When you worked in fine art what direction did you take with students?

In fine art over the years I was working on a one to one basis, that's when I was really teaching there.

And were there projects or was it a tutorial set up?

It was a tutorial set up, but it was one to one.

So what was the program then? Would you go to a student and look at the work? Would you just meet them regularly and discuss what was happening?

Usually students picked you as a tutor, then you were assigned to this student, and you had to bring them through that third or fourth year. You were entirely responsible for that student. I found the onus far too much. You were working for five hours or six hours a week and you had maybe six to eight students to carry through the whole year.

Would they all have a similar style to yours or would they be working in different styles?

It might be the fact that you were a woman, that you were a painter, there were all sorts of reasons why you might be in demand, perhaps for having a particular personality.

Did you feel that your style of work would influence students?

Yes at times, but then most of the good ones would shake off any influence like you would have done yourself. You take an influence on board for a certain time.

Did you ever find the situation where there was conflict with a particular student because of a particular style, not that you would disagree with the style, but that they just could not connect with you?

Yes, but you have to work. It was difficult to get students to come in and get them to learn and to be enthusiastic. I mean that was the main problem.

How would you relate what happens in the Fine Art faculty with what happens in the art world, in terms of fashions, what was popular in the art magazines and so on?

I think probably nowadays they are following trends too much, whether we did that or not in our day I don't know. I don't think we did.

We were probably too raw in a sense, we were ahead of the posse. The college was transitional when we were there, from the old system to the new one, and then we had the energy and interest of Rob and Nigel as young people themselves to float over that. It is different now because there is so much coming at students from books, from television, and so on.

There is also this whole stardom thing, like the Turner Prize and the Glen Dimplex award for instance. I think to follow these things is a great mistake. You should not just work towards the Glen Dimplex or to achieve the Turner Prize. You should try to do something more sincere with your work that you are going to keep doing for the rest of your life. When all those prizes are gone where do you end up.

So how would you summarise the difference between the college when you were a student there and the college now?

I have worked in so many different colleges including Limerick and Sligo. They all have their different personalities. I think the National College of Art and Design is going through a transient stage at the moment, and it needs to. You need a change of staff every five years to be any help.

Would you say then that the curriculum in the College of Art, or any other college for that matter, is defined by the interests of the particular staff that are teaching, or is it defined by a course document which describes what the curriculum is?

The actual day to day system in the college at the moment I would have problems with. Too much onus is put on the part timers. They are only in there for a short amount of hours, and I think it is far too much responsibility. These are practising artists, and to be loaded with the responsibility of getting people through to a degree is not what they should be in there for. What they should be in there for is talking to them about day to day practical things, like being an artist in a studio

What would you say underpins the curriculum in fine art at the NCAD or in other colleges now? In other words, for instance, is there some core of drawing in the Rob Smith sense or is it much more open?

I don't think so. I have just been involved with fourth year, but they come through a whole process in first and second year, which is actually quite rigid. They are learning a certain amount of that traditional thing which we would never have learned. It is project upon project for two and half years and then they are let go in their third year. Then people like me come in and pick them up from that. They have just done projects

up to then and I think it's far too long. In Cork they would start doing their own work from first year onwards and you would just guide them.

Do you see any manifestations of that in the art world? Do you find for instance that people who came through Cork mature more quickly?

No I have never even looked at it that way. Though an awful lot of people from Cork seem to go to London to do postgraduate work, because there are a lot of English staff down there who have their own contacts. They have contacts with Chelsea and the Royal College, and the standard of work is good of course.

How would you say that the National College of Art and Design influenced your work?

It started me drawing. I did not have any work before that. If I was giving a slide show about my work I don't think I would show any work that I did in College. I would perhaps show the first show I had which was three years later, which was certainly a progression from what I was doing.

What is your working procedure? How do you approach making a painting?

Have you another five hours of tape?

Just briefly.

I carry on that method of working which I developed at college.

Do you always paint from source material, would you sketch that, remember that, photograph that?

I would do everything with it and then bring it back into studio, so it's a similar type of process.

What happens in the studio?

I would work on a series of paintings at the same time, from a wide variety of sources. It centres on the studio where you see it all, where it all comes together, and then you begin to make it work from that.

Do different paintings influence and feed off each other?

Yes, they would because they are done in series. A painting does not just finish. In fact I would not let it finish until the rest of the family were there with it. It is a direct continuation of what we were doing in the college, because my work is to do with the process it takes along time to build up, layer upon layer.

And do you think art school is a necessary thing?

I have always thought so actually, yes. I think a self-made artist has a harder time trying to understand basic things in my experience of them. But you know it is different strokes for different folks.

APPENDIX 17

Brian Palm (1957 -) Artist and Musician. Studied at the National College of Art and Design 1977 - 1981.

Peter O'Neill - Could you tell me something of your background before you came to the college of art?

Brian Palm - My name is Brian Palm. I was born in Hartford, Connecticut, USA, in 1957. My earliest art education began helping my father clean antique paintings he had collected in junk shops. My mother collected as well, but my father was an avid collector of early American oil paintings. My earliest experience of art was helping him take off the old varnish and dirt and grime, and watching these pictures reappear. Subsequently he assembled an extensive collection in the house. Many of these were from the Hudson River School, and they included a lot of strange pieces, unusual pieces, little naive early fragments, on wood a lot of the time, seascapes or landscapes or cherubs. He also managed to find a George Inness and an Alfred Bierstadt painting, as well as many other lesser but substantial finds. This led me to the work of Winslow Homer and other early American artists like Church, right through to Bellows and on to Hopper and the Wyeths. That was the American tradition of painting that I won't say I was steeped in, but I was familiar with. It included George Caleb Bingham, and Catlin's work of the Indians. But I also got exposure to, strangely enough, the work of

John Marin and Childe Hassam and painters like that. I think the other big influence probably would have been TV.

My father also admired Ben Shahn, although it wasn't the type of work he collected. So there was the beginning of an interest in more contemporary work there already. After a few trips to New York to visit the Museum of Modern Art I was exposed to Pollock and Rothko and some of the other Abstract Expressionists. When I got to Europe I was not just blinded by early American painting. Although that's pretty much what my natural instinct took me towards, landscapes, farmland scenes, seascapes, stuff like that, much less experimental work perhaps than was going on in Europe. I got an advanced placement scholarship when I was in high school to attend the University of Hartford Art School in 1975. That gave me my first encounter with conceptual art in an art college atmosphere. I did night classes in painting, and essentially I didn't get a lot from them. By that time I had developed a technique in oil paint and watercolor anyway. I just wanted to improve.

In 1976 I was offered a foreign student scholarship to the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, which I was more than happy to take. I sent slides and was accepted and I came to Ireland. My first experience of the college here was the initial meeting or interview when I went in to meet those in the college. Now I stress I had already been accepted.

You went directly into the fine art faculty and not into the foundation year?

No, I did no foundation. In fact I had been working in my fathers advertising agency for several years at that time, even though I was still at school. I worked quite a bit in the art department doing graphics, and lay out, and design, and paste up, and all sorts of different things. I checked printing, four-color separations, even proof

reading. It was very interesting, and I had learned a lot of skills. Because I had done a year or more of full-time work in an agency like that, I had a professional portfolio with slides and so on, so I went for first year fine art. I didn't really feel inclined to do foundation, which I think at that time was called pre-diploma. I skipped that and went directly into first year.

So your interview was for the first year of the fine art course?

Even though I had already been accepted by now I was called for interview, I didn't quite understand that, but that's the way it was.

When I got to Kildare Street (I had been in Ireland about four of fine months by then and I had traveled extensively through Europe) I got to the college of art for the interview, which seemed to be news to everyone involved, and between the jigs and the reels a few staff members gathered together in a room where they started looking at the slides very offhandedly, from the box, just holding them up to the window.

You mean they didn't have the proper equipment?

They didn't look at the slides on a slide projector. I also thought that for entry into a college it was interesting that they were seeing this work for the first time. Basically they attempted to dissuade me. And that struck me as strange. There were attempts to dissuade me with comments like "this is not really what we do here". I said, "But it's what I do and I want to do it here. And I want to learn more about doing it. And if in the process things that I'm doing change, if what I'm doing changes, well so be it. But right now this is my starting point." My work was very accomplished. I had always been told it was outstanding work, and I had no reason to doubt it. Suddenly it was

"well we don't do this, this isn't what we are interested in, maybe you should go back to America where they would be more interested in helping you with this type of thing". I basically said that I had already been accepted and that I had planned at least one year of the rest of my life here in Dublin, and I thought that this was just a formality. Well then there were hums and haws. Now, honestly, I believe there was an interest in getting a few shillings coming into the college as well as maybe having a bit of outside blood if you will. I think there was one other student who might have been there at that time; that is, another American student.

Betsy Ray?

Betsy Ray, exactly. Yes, she was a different kettle of fish. Spray paint and kind of spacey stuff.

Anyway, I persevered and I got in, and then I went back on the road again because we weren't due back until September. I went all through Italy and France, North Africa and Greece, and came back ready to rip. I recall on the first official day in the NCAD a bunch of students sitting around all of whom knew each other from the pre-diploma year. It was an hour or so sitting around waiting for someone to come in, and I remember speaking to a student beside me who looked like he didn't know what was going on either. It was like a little social gathering and they were all - well, "How did you get on over the summer", and so on.

Eventually a few staff members came in and the next thing I remember clearly was Nigel Rolfe saying 'look around, only two percent of you are going to make art, the rest of you are going to fail or quit or drop out. And I remember thinking to myself "I wonder who the other will be".

Nigel had this look; well it didn't impress me. I had been to New York City quite a bit, and this thing of one yellow sock and one red sock and this kind of overbearing demeanor that was supposed to intimidate. And I remember him saying one thing in particular: "We don't want to teach people how to draw, drawing is finished, imagine trying to draw a moving train, there is no point, you should draw with a video camera". I immediately thought that was bull. My bull alarm went off at word go with quite a few of the staff members. I had been hanging around with a lot of older people in the States. I had been working with older people, my friends were usually older. I spent a lot of time with my older brothers and their pals. These staff members were not much older than I was and yet there was an "us and them" attitude, a "we will tell you" approach. Maybe it's just my attitude, maybe its an American attitude, but I immediately felt that these guys aren't going to tell me a lot because they don't seem to have their heads screwed on all that much either.

Anyway we got settled in a little place in the college. It was kind of cramped quarters. Not that I needed luxurious surroundings or anything. But I thought it was particularly *ad hoc* the way things were done. "Maybe we can do this, and there's a bit of light there, and you can get an old piece of wood and flip it over and make a table out of it". It was quite primitive, but no one else seemed to mind, so: "When in Rome".

The first thing that I found disturbing about the college was that people began to wall themselves into little boxes. Everyone tried to separate themselves, which was fine, because I imagined if you were going to work you should get some kind of quiet work space. The school as it was - I won't say open plan because that sounds like it was architecturally designed. It was an old sewing factory. It was basically a sweatshop that the college had gotten hold of. I didn't think it was very safe. There were no fire exits for instance. It was essentially a death trap. People were using resin

without knowing how to use it. There were people smoking cigarettes and putting them out in containers that had had turpentine in them. A lot of them seemed like they were just kids who were at a safe warm spot between mammy and marriage. On the other hand I had always felt determined to be an artist, even since I was a little kid. And I just wanted to begin working.

It very quickly became apparent that there were some artists with a similar attitude; that is, self motivated. There were some who were obviously more advanced than others, and quite frankly they were a little older and had obviously been working as artists independently and didn't just have their pre-dip course as basis for what they were doing. I may as well say the artists I am speaking of are Francis Gaffney, Simon McLeod, and Mick O'Dea, painters.

The next image that comes to mind is one of people running in saying things like, 'Have you got a pencil? Have you got a rubber? Have you got a hammer? Have you got a nail? Have you got a bit of something here? Have you got this? Have you got that? People running in, out of control, not really directed, complete freedom to be untogether, which I found a great disturbance. I didn't really object then to the idea of people walling themselves in to get away from it.

The way I like to work is flat, when I'm doing watercolor or even painting with household gloss and varnish and stuff, rather than at the easel upright. Given this situation a chair is handy, and a desktop. Well I couldn't keep a desktop or a chair in one place. You just couldn't say "leave my workspace alone". You were constantly being invaded. There were people who would be sitting in your workspace drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes and hanging around all the time doing nothing. And I found it more conducive for my work to be outside in the city, going around and responding. I immediately began sketching and watercolouring outside of college.

Was that agreed with your tutors and how did that relate to the program in the college?

There were projects that were given, life drawing projects. I remember they were just sort of goofy in my opinion.

Did everyone have to do them?

I believe so, yes. I think the idea of them was to get people doing the same thing to be able to judge them. For example there was a drawing of a life model with a plastic garbage bag between her legs, so that it was not just doing a life drawing but then you had to draw the plastic garbage bag. I don't know what that was all about. I just didn't really have any interest in it. There was another sort of weird sculpture that was like a cage and you put the life model inside the cage, so instead of drawing the model you had to draw the bars. There were a few projects like that and quite frankly I thought they were banal projects in a very dirty, grotty environment. It meant nothing to me, absolutely nothing. I was much more inclined to go out along the canal and into the city.

From the word go most of what I got was negative; criticism, negative feedback. And, as I said, a seemingly overriding desire to stop me doing what I was doing and to try and make me do something else. If I did get anything out of that it was to try to experiment for a while with texture, now I wasn't really all that interested in experimenting with texture. I really wanted to paint.

I then went into a situation where I actively sought out and chose as tutors Carey Clarke, John Kelly, Charlie Cullen, and Charlie Brady, the more traditional handlers of materials. The whole thing of "painting is dead, drawing is dead, draw with a video

camera," that actually bothered me. Subsequently I used photography quite a bit and I experimented with a lot of different media, but I always maintain my interest in painting and image making.

We had these assessments where you had to be, I think, assessed quarterly. And most of my work was from the city of Dublin or landscapes from down the country. I found that some staff members for the most part thought that what I was doing was sentimental, quaint, trite, and had no intellectual content. Whereas, in fact, what I was doing was just responding to my environment and I was getting deeper and deeper into my own pool of skills. I was trying to hone my skills and to experiment with different techniques and media.

There was a dire shortage of materials in the college of art. I know that paint and canvas were unavailable. And most of the time many of the students that I knew, to be quite honest, had to steal and shoplift materials. The materials that were in the college, seemingly, were allocated to particular students, maybe that means co-operative students, I don't quite know. But there just seemed to be a constant series of complaints about their being no materials.

Now at the time, I think it should be mentioned, some students didn't have a pot to pee in, They were poor. And some were working as well, part time, in horrible jobs, or living in dire conditions in tiny little flats, bed-sits. It became quite clear the difference between someone with a very highly paid job in 1977 and a student, who at the time - you know you couldn't sign on the dole if you were going to college. There was very little work to be had. I myself, even though I wouldn't put myself in the poverty stricken class by any means, worked for eighty pence an hour as a lounge boy, I also worked in Boland's Mills. I would do gardening and stuff for the landlord to get my rent cheaper.

Now I think one very important factor in all of this was the fact that it was the punk era in Dublin, and it was a very aggressive time for music and for dress. There was a lot of scrapping going on in the streets between punks and mods and rockers and the whole lot. That aggression informed some of my work, not everyone's work. I feel definitely that some tried to hide from it through art and others embraced a sort of a punk spirit in their art. I kind of fell between the two stools. I never had any problem with aggression. I was and still am a very aggressive person. Where I come from it was seen as a positive attribute. Especially if you are an athlete or if you are going into business or whatever. Well suddenly everyone was aggressive. They were going around quite openly aggressive. One way that this manifested itself in the college, for instance, was some of the students having had enough - no heat for example - so chairs were chopped up and a fire was built in the middle of the studio space because there was no heat.

There was also a constant to-ing and fro-ing of camps. Those that subscribed to the "drawing with a video camera" group were set up in Kildare Street in sculpture. I guess this was to try and see if there were performance artists and installation artists coming out of that group. Otherwise traditional sculptors in stone or wood or clay or whatever, I found, were frowned upon. There was one staff member, Domhnall O'Murchadha, who I hardly knew, but everyone sort of held him up as what by all accounts to avoid: traditional, classical, Celtic style stone carver. I always liked what he was doing. It never bothered me at all. In fact I was fascinated by Irish history, and I used to make regular pilgrimages to monuments; castles, ruins, monasteries, Ogham stones, high crosses, graveyards, all around Ireland. And I learned quite a bit from Francois Henri's books and research into ancient Irish stonework and monuments. And then here's a staff member doing it in his own country, and everyone's just

putting him down because he is so: "Oh you don't want to do that". The two camps were very obvious.

What was the other camp?

One was painting in a traditional vein and the other was, I suppose what would be considered performance/installation work. They were at times simply broken down into painting and sculpture. I don't think painting and sculpture have this polarization, but as it was put across at the time there was a very definite attitude difference between those who were painting and those who were involved in sculpture. "Painting is dead" was the refrain.

There were those who took this attitude to heart. And there was one student, a great person, and a great personality, who wanted to stop this antagonism between the two camps. His mane is Martin Folan. He was working in sculpture over in Kildare Street. Even though a deep person, deep as an artist, he was a light-hearted guy, he sort of tried to bridge this weird gap which I believe really came from staff.

But Martin Folan said, "Let's cut this crap". Because a lot of students were disturbed by this. There was a lot of friction, and there was a lot of energy being dissipated in argument. Anyway a meeting was called between the different factions. So Martin Folan kicked the ball off by saying "there is too much vibe between the two camps here and lets try and figure out what is going on". Unfortunately the students really didn't do much of the arguing at all. The big student confrontation became a personal argument between two staff members and that was the end of that.

After that I pretty much lost interest in staff teaching. I went specifically to Carey Clarke and learned perspective, and I was laughed at for it. They thought, what an idiot, because I was using this ancient system of vanishing points, whereas I learned

how to do it. I mean at the time I was going purely by eye, *a la* early Breughel who didn't have a scientific system of perspective. I learned one, two, three point perspective and how to do this thing. It has kept me in good stead. That was a valuable lesson.

In order to get out of that environment, both the physical environment in Clarendon Street and the sort of frictional environment, I went to the print department in Kildare Street and learned how to etch. I subsequently spent two years producing etchings over there, still maintaining my main area of activity, still being a painter. I was officially listed as studying painting, and if I were to get my diploma or degree it would be in painting, even though I was doing a lot more drawing in the streets and etchings over in Kildare Street. Interestingly enough, I sold a lot of the etchings just the other day. So I'm glad I learned that ancient technique which hadn't changed since the days of Rembrandt and Goya. But there was a reluctance to have me switch to print as my main area, the head of print was not interested in having a student switch into print half way through the year.

When the final bell rang at the end of the first year I had found that I really wasn't interested in working indoors in Clarendon Street, and there was a sort of reluctance to have me on my own out in the streets just drawing. There was an attempt by Rob Smith to try to bring me back into the fold and teach me what he knew. But by my second year I made it quite clear that I was doing my own thing and would not be dissuaded. I have my own ways of learning, from books. And that's what I got most out of the college in terms of learning. I got it by going into the library at night and studying from whatever sources they had there.

I finally realized that in order to get anything more from the college I had to try to learn things that I did not know how to do well. So I got into photography, into

developing and printing photographs, because that was something that I could do there with the college facilities.

The darkroom was basically a dusty wooden box that you worked in. In fact I had to nail the door shut because every time I went in there to work people would come running in and out the whole time. You couldn't say you would be there for two hours or three hours or eight hours. I just became cold to people banging on the door saying, "I want to see if my films are ready". "Well tough, I'm working in here, and I can't take dust and stuff when I'm working." I realized that if you wanted to bend the rules or ignore the rules; that was easily done. There wasn't really anyone going to hassle you once you had enough work around assessment time and you could stand up for what you were doing, I don't think they really wanted to throw anyone out at that point. But there were some students who quite clearly weren't going to make it. They were just not able to pick up on what was going on around them. They didn't fit in anywhere, not with the interested students, not with the disinterested students, not with the interested staff, not with the disinterested staff. I believe some of them didn't make it.

But for the most part there were a lot of people hanging around doing very little. There were some heads who would build their little environments and they would sit in their environments drinking coffee or holding hands with their girlfriends or whatever they were doing. There were a lot of excuses for not working. People used to experiment, drag rubbish in. They would go out and drag stuff out of skips and bring it in and throw it around and see what it looked like. I quite frankly found a lot of it babyish. Now that was just me.

What challenged me most was the artists that I worked with. Their ideas, their discussion, that crucible of dialogue challenged me far more than any staff member. I did not want to become a realist painter of landscapes. I was working in a different

area already. I was working with collage and coloured pencil and various types of media. And I didn't want to go out and just do scenes of Wicklow. That wasn't really my thing. I love doing that but that wasn't the end all and be all.

I started experimenting with photography, as I said, and I got into the photo-collage/montage thing, and before long I was making artwork based on the destruction of Dublin, which was happening at the time. I also got deeply into conservation and politically active work in the Wood Quay debacle. I also got involved in other little *causes celebres*, like Harcourt Terrace and Molesworth Street. A lot of the buildings were being demolished at that time to make way for the city we have today. I guess I was lucky to see Dublin changing. It was sort of painful in one way because entire communities were being shifted out and broken up, and office blocks were being built in the city centre where there had been a community, or where there still was a community hanging on against the demolition and the jackhammers.

I found that all the work that I was doing melted into one, fed into one overall way of working. I used photography for example for its immediacy. I couldn't draw quickly enough to capture most of the changes taking place in what I was looking at. I began documenting parts of the city and the people who were disappearing. Now I have thousands of negatives of Dublin in the seventies, and Ireland, but mostly Dublin. I began to assemble montage paintings where I'd put photocopied photographs on wood and then paint them, and I'm still working in that vein at the moment. I'm making better art than ever as a direct result of having been in the college.

Although much of what I'm saying is negative I personally got a lot from the college. I did have very definite verbal arguments with staff and I challenged staff. And a lot of staff I think felt threatened by me, by my loud brash American confidence for one thing. Then I would go out and play for example on the college

soccer team with Nigel Rolfe, so I wouldn't hold this against people. I got very friendly with Rob Smith even though at one point we were polarized. There was a lot of that "well that's not going to work" attitude, and that only made me determined to make it work or to try to make it work or at least to take pleasure in a certain amount of failure. Then in the midst of all this the college moved from Clarendon Street to Moss Street. Which was the same again. People were running through. There was no room to work. And yet there was this big video room that was being built. They spent all this time and energy building a big video room. Just in time to have somebody break in and steal all the video equipment. There was a carpeted sound proofed room with nothing happening in it. You couldn't paint in it because you couldn't get paint on the carpet. So I definitely went out on the street. In fact in my final year in the college I hardly spent any time there whatsoever.

Could you summarize your experiences at the college of art?

Quite simply, nothing stopped me. I would not be stopped, I would not be ridiculed, I would not be put down, and I would not allow the lack of support to spoil it for me. In the end I got an honors degree, BA.

Some staff members stand out as having helped me a lot. Johnny Kelly, the printer, was very good. Charlie Brady gave me one of the best pieces of advice ever: "Use bigger brushes". He also said at one point, because I was thinking too much about things, "Go home and have a shower". Eventually I found that by not being afraid of certain staff members I prevailed. Eventually we made our peace and as long as they weren't being threatened everything was OK. I was no longer a threat when I left the college, and basically I started having a good time. In the college it was tough for some people and not for others. I got through it ok and I'm very happy I did because

Dublin is a different town now than it was then. To summarize, I would say I was personally strong enough not to let this stuff dominate me. I won't say it didn't distract me, but there were those who didn't know where they were going and were happy to go wherever they were led. I was not among them.

APPENDIX 18

Nigel Rolfe (1950 -) Artist, Studied at Bath Academy of Art 1971 - 1974. Lectured at the National College of Art and Design 1974 - 83

Peter O'Neill - I'd like you to talk about your background.

Nigel Rolfe - I think English society is a really odd one. I have it stuck in my throat for a long time, that Yeats quote about the Irish. What is it? "The past is full of promise and the future is full of regret." The English have a strange flip on that where they still honour the past absolutely. So their society has a conservative historicism, especially in the arts. That's the kind of model, so the Royal Academy has not changed - I was there Monday - it is very much like the NCAD when I first came there, rooted in tradition. It's a place where nothing seems to change.

One interesting thing that I have found in going back down to those levels of questioning is that I keep asking what causes that to happen, that unwillingness to change, that basic conservatism. The only conclusion that I can come to is that it is deeply ingrained in people's thinking. Campbell Bruce claims that a lot of it is because of the class-based aspect of English society. He has said that a lot of people in power and in the educational system come through the public school system, and because they come from an elitist system and because they are part of that elitist system they perpetuate it.

I suspect that that is absolutely true. There was one year in the Royal College when I had to show Prince Philip around the sculpture exhibit, so you had this situation where people you had been working with, people you had been teaching with who were radical and genuine suddenly appeared incredibly narrow, austere, small minded royalist, ignorant really. But absolutely in power. Dialogue between the two positions was completely impossible, because the Royal College had the Royal in its charter - now it's Tony Armstrong Jones the photographer who was married to Princess Margaret - and that whole business. It's the whole kind of Di phenomenon and the incredulity of the liberal classes about it since then. Just this last week it was still on the moral minds, being discussed again. And I have seen Will Self, Martin Amis, a number of people really, discuss it very well in terms of how it exists, but in the end that is the root of it. And I think Campbell is right to that degree, that it runs because of classification. The core of it is the monarchy. And it devolves its power, so when you go to Oxford you know you are tampering with that, you know you are not coming from the will to be free. I think the fight in the individual is very interesting, because the fight ultimately to be any kind of an artist is the notion of freedom.

For the artist it's that struggle that's important.

That's absolutely right, that's what you set up, that is what every young one, every old one, everybody who ever approached it, is setting up to do.

The trick is not to let that struggle become part of the system.

I think if you make that your job then you are sunk. The other thing, I think, shared between here and there is islandness. Here is rather different to there. In a certain way I never felt the island nature of here. The islandness of it has this very strange aspect of east and west, which the island of England never does. There is a strange empiricism about the English Island. It thinks it is big enough and strange shaped enough to be a continent, but it is not. So it endorses its own practice. So it looks to Scotland in a very odd way and Wales in an odd way. But it is completely different in the island of Ireland, ultimately that's another problem. Because it is internalised it does not take from the world. It looks in on itself. I think those kind of questions on how art develops with education are very pertinent. Germany by comparison has a very old academic system. It has very much a live sense of history, so the young make a life approach rather than a structural approach. In England it's slightly different. I think about those things quite often while I'm watching European students in England, watching them trying to embrace what they can't understand, and it is very very hard for them.

It must be virtually impossible for them.

This week in the Chelsea Art School there was an American artist talking to me, and America to England is mind numbing. Its meant to be the same language, meant to be the same cultural approach.

The weird thing about that is that America in fact is the way England would have worked out had the situation been a little bit different. America is a condensed

version of England. That makes it all the more ironic then that there is a difficulty in understanding between the two. Oscar Wilde's comment comes to mind.

You see that amazingly with the whole affair of Louise Woodward. The Americans responded exactly how the English should have. They can't understand, because the English being literal wanted to discuss, the Americans just wanted definite answers, either this or that. I know that quite well from a long time teaching there, when you go to Yale, where I teach regularly, that's what counts, not what is pretended. Whereas in England its everything that is pretended. Living in Ireland, where there is a kind of romance of discussion or the potential for discussion, I am quite intrigued about that very success in England. It comes down to language a lot I think. The English are snowed by bullshit. They do like people who chat. They like it in a quite different way, in a standoffish way. I think the kind of things you are saying educationally, those kinds of fundaments, are really interesting. Like what set it up? Why is it where it is? What happens within it now? And the consequence of it, lately it's immensely political.

One of the weird things for me about England is this idea of revolution. The fact that England had a revolution early on created the assumption that because we had a revolution we are now liberal and that our rights are secure, so we can just carry on. Ignoring the fact that there is still a King, there is still an aristocracy, that ninety per cent of the land is owned by ten per cent of the people, or whatever, that there is no written constitution. While ignoring all these facts there is an assumption that change is unnecessary. There has of course been change in England, like in 1832 when the first reform act was passed, but the fact of these relatively moderate changes only make it appear that fundamental change is unnecessary. In France in the eighteenth

century it was precisely this resistance to change that caused the whole deck of cards to collapse. By contrast with England France keeps changing, it is now in its Fifth Republic, I think.

I came across of a lot, in that sense, at that *L'imaginaire Irlandaise.* The French are used to an astonishing degree of bureaucracy. It's like that joke about how many men it takes to change a light bulb. In Paris it takes 40 and there used to it. In the kind of capitalist world where I have been trawling, like in America, you have to have two guys to change the light bulb, but it has to happen. The French are very complex ones to talk about. There are some wonderful principals there, but deep difficulty in any sense of the imaginative.

There is a scariness about excessive bureaucracy, you could get lost in it as an individual and get swallowed up.

And you could never come out. I find it absolutely astonishing, like FIFA, at the recent world cup, in the end gives in to that French quirk, which is quite amazing. Did you read this about the world cup, every game they have to have a one-hour notice who the teams are.

Hence the problem with Brazil on the last day?

Yes, and forty-five minutes before the last game they changed, and no where else had that ever been allowed. They change the rules, but what it means is that all the rules for all the games don't mean anything. It is quite interesting. There are actually

no rules. Now you can change the players any time. So when the manager of the other side says, "That's who I'm playing", you say, "Oh I'm not playing with those I said I was, I'm playing with somebody else". So you can then change the precedent. I find it really interesting. On nationalism, I think it's probably a very old imperial model. In my kind of political professional involvement with the Royal College I find them terribly, terribly, ruthless at ground zero. They get to where they want to go very immediately and completely unequivocally. I've never known a situation like it before. And I suppose when you stray into undergraduate schools like Chelsea there just not in the same league in terms of that ruthlessness. It is to do with old imperial structures.

There is an idea of excellence, I think, that the structures symbolise, in other words the Royal College symbolises excellence in a way that a college one step down the line, say in Newcastle for instance, does not.

I came across that again and again. I feel like an ultimate bastard because I'm living in a situation of absolute excellence. So you meet this kid from Limerick who says I want to try - its a bit like Charlie Cullen's quote that enthusiasm is a bad thing - trying does not count for much. It's like, "Yea well that's acceptable". And I see myself often times thinking like that. Certainly operating on a particular educational level demands a kind of absolutist approach. Sometimes there are discussions -usually you are there for the candidate, sometimes some people have the privilege of being there for the subject. My job right now is to be even handed. It really is a buyers market these days. Usually the candidate will get the priority. The Royal College is one of those places where that is not the case. The subject is still the ultimate thing.

Places like the NCAD are nowadays, I suspect, a long way down the line, where ten, or fifteen, or twenty years ago that wasn't the case. There was a real opening. The NCAD feels to me like an institution that closed off when it should have been opening up.

I think it was opening but something changed.

Probably nationalism.

It must have been more than that. DCU for instance is quite radical; it is doing amazing work. Many people who work in the Irish media, for instance, have come through it, as have many who work in the area of language. Dun Laoghaire art school is another example of an institution that has changed.

It comes to a simple thing, doesn't it? It's the same in the Royal College, and anywhere you go, it's people. Things work if you have the right mix of people and the right kind of people, uniquely giving people.

But the structure has to be able to do that.

It has to be able to accommodate that.

We are dealing with levels beyond individual people where decisions are made. In the National College of Art and Design, for instance, decisions are made at board level.

I mean it was clear when I was expelled from the NCAD that it wasn't the government, it was something else. Largely it was the force of ignorance. At the time my big disagreement with the college was over post-graduate education. They wanted post-graduate studies but they actually didn't want to give it any work. So they named it and expected that just by naming it, it existed. To somebody who was actually working in it, it seemed really slight. I think they did that in many things. I think in fine art they mistook bureaucracy for education, and they actually thought they could organise a system as opposed to operating a system. I think it is bad thinking. I feel very like that. I feel at the moment they should have opened up or closed down. And the closing down, somehow, of history sealed it. And hermetically sealed it. And now I too look to places like DCU and Dun Laoghaire. I look to the kind of hope without.

What happens when the avant-garde becomes respectable, becomes part of the system?

They are very cliquish art schools, aren't they?

Particularly here because there are so few art schools. In Britain where there are so many different art schools it must be different.

I think that is interesting too in the case of London. I suppose I have known that particularly. I used to go around a lot of undergraduate schools, all over the shop, Holland and lots of places, and it tends to centralise. London is very peculiar because it is so multi-ethnic, its so anonymous, huge. And if you think about it, it really depresses

you, and if you don't think about it you function. It's a strange functioning. The undergraduates there are very sophisticated very early on. So you notice people in first year on a degree of fine art course, they have got a flat together, they've got a certain tough attitude to be able to cope in that place. So even if you are a young woman from Dubrovnik you have to get that much together.

But the thing about London is that it creates possibilities. There are opportunities there. Its a big place as you say, you can get some kind of work, you can get some money coming in, you will find some way of getting cheap accommodation. Because of its size you can do that.

It always ends up seeming much more middle class here; you are either tied to home or your not. And I know its speaking in general. There are many exceptions. I felt my time assessing at the NCAD was interesting because the candidates were always better than the institution. In a sense every year you were absolutely there for the people. And the conversation with them was much much better than with the faculty. So the actual bright hope still stays with the student. But the sense of despair about a kind of dyed in the wool, stick in the mud staff you don't get in the London schools.

How does America compare with here? My brief experience with America was that there was a great feeling that you can achieve anything, that it was all waiting for you.

There is a simple division and I have written about it quite a lot. The work ethic in America most certainly starts earlier, works later, and works. So the kind of carry on you get here you don't get there. If you go into the NCAD as a Senior Examiner you have a job to find someone before 11.30. In truth there might be a couple of kids in at ten but in the states they get them to start at 7.45, and they are up, and they are in there, and that actually produces what they've got. The simple proof is "a little idea carried along way". Whereas Europeans have an enormous amount of ideas and then they do nothing about them. Five at night and they are still in there talking about whether they should and the Americans have gone with it and gone somewhere.

Like Marcel Duchamp playing chess all his life.

It's exactly the same. I think you see that in Warhol's work, its one idea, one little idea, but by God it works. A very good salesman, and not much interest in what it's about as long as they can get up and get it out. The University system there is structured upon that basis, it's very talkative, very much like a New York conversation. It wants to yab a lot about this little thing that they haven't got much of. But also that memory, like we were talking earlier; it's a very big pyramid. You know if you have two hundred and fifty million people your bound to have a big base on a small subject. You've got a constituency you can pull up. They are very comparable like Yale and the Royal College.

Yale likes to get students from varied backgrounds. It specialises in difference, isn't that correct?

There are ten thousand graduate students at Yale, and twenty eight thousand undergraduates. Some schools I have been to in the last ten years, the University of Texas at Houston, for instance, are bigger still. The actual functioning of the University of Texas is like a small town. Cal Arts has a thousand art students in one spot. It's of standing, scale wise, which was previously unknown. The interesting discussion there is the united states of Europe *vis-à-vis* the United States of America. If the European network organised itself well enough you could have the same situation.

America is based on selling of course, and the whole idea is that the consumer rules. And the art student is a consumer of education.

It works like that. Like if I go to teach somewhere their attitude is that they have paid their money and if you are going to talk about a piece of cracked glass or some ceramic they are going to get their half an hours worth because they have paid for it. So in doing a week's teaching I see sixty people, half an hour up, absolutely right the way through. And they will take your life's blood because that's what they have paid for. The system in Europe does not work like that. In a way it does not matter what you say because the conversation is what's important. I always thought that the best thing here in Dublin was the potential for the mix of those two, it had an eye to America and it had the step off from Europe. And it could resort to a kind of Gothic internalism if it wanted to, but it could work its back off too. And that's something the English don't have.

The Irish have done amazingly well in America and yet by contrast until recently we did not do well here. I am always intrigued by that.

I am always intrigued by that. I think another thing to raise in that regard is just the pure geography. Historically, and this is really quite interesting, in the contemporary situation Brit-Pop does not exist in America. America treats Brit-Pop as it treats Pop art, the notion of popular culture, or the kind of post-Pop-art, Warhol really. Not even Geoff Koons, Koons didn't make it in his own culture. He still had to come to Europe to get back in America. I think his influence largely set up people like the Chapmans, set up the whole notion of a kind of Saatchi Brit-Pop style. You are what you say; not you are what you do, and that kind of notion of propagandist publicity, but in the greater subjects in America that is still completely new. It makes me think of landscape, I think of a lot of American art in a very perverse way, and therefore American art education is landscape art. It's about contending with being in this big place. In a strange way from Motherwell to post painter.

But America is about land. It's about an imagined space west. There is a sense of indefinite space there, for the taking, or at least they see it that way. In England, in Britain, there is a boundary. Americans approach the world the way they approach their own country. But that's another story.

I would like to move on now and discuss art education in Britain. I would like you to talk about your own experience as an art student in England and I would like you to talk about the structures you came through. I am making connections between the structure of art education as it was developed in Britain, particularly in the 1950s, through people like Richard Hamilton, Harry Thubron, and others, who developed

courses at Leeds and other colleges, and what happened here at the NCAD, through yourself, Rob, and Campbell particularly. I'd like you to talk about your own education, then describe what you found at the NCAD when you arrived, and then describe what you tried to do while you were at the NCAD.

When I was a kid I come from the rural working class. My dad was a farm worker, a milkman on a farm, and my mum also worked on the land. We moved to a place in Surrey at the edge of a consumer belt town, but still as farm workers. Then he got a job as a warehouseman in Sainsburys supermarket. I always thought my own earlier education was a bit like him moving up the food chain, so all my youth as a kid they would be discussing the price of things, but in reference to coming from the farm to coming to the shop.

When I was young - this is really pertinent to what you asked in relation to art school - I was the fourth child in eleven or twelve years. Nobody before me had gone to further education, and I was in a lot of ways a kind of an only child. I started quite young having a split personality. I lived in a kind of tendent world, not working class, towards the middle class, going to grammar school, on the other hand being expressive in a certain way, through music. It was very much tied to the beat generation, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones.

And very young, in my home town in a village hall, I saw the Rolling Stones, I must have been eleven or twelve years old then, and I stood outside. I can quite well remember it, and I talk about those kind of issues a lot in art terms to people who don't really know what I am talking about, in this kind of post generation. But I know art that I have seen, that has effected me in such a way, that I have never been the same again, and I can remember what it is. I can remember seeing Yves Klein or seeing

Joseph Beuys, and knowing, from that day on, that I am never going to be the same again. And that Rolling Stones experience as a young kid was probably the moment I stepped up this dialectic - this kind of schizophrenia - between wanting a creative identity and a proper identity. I think those two identities are really true, and I still see myself as an unsuited rebel, even now I am nearly fifty. I travel like that, I exist like that, and I existed in a place where that model was followed through.

So when I was fifteen I joined my first group. I was still in grammar school uniform and trying to be a nice middle class boy from the working middle classes. I can remember those things, and I think they are very true too, like my parents fighting to get me a new uniform or pay for the books. There were no grants, no money, and them working, going through their various jobs, arguing a lot and fighting a lot to try and attend to send this one child to further education, where none of the others had been. And that kind of climate, and all the time having this rebellious creativity, influenced me.

So I toured a bit with the group - I had been sent to piano lessons and I played the keyboard - and across all my time in grammar school there was this kind of rebel; I had shoulder length hair and used to do stuff like wear pink shirts when the uniform was meant to be white. I got taken up before the head master and told to conform, all the time with music as a kind of foil. In my hometown, Farnham, there was an art school. I talked about this story this week when I was teaching. I remember being somewhere and seeing art students, being in a park somewhere and seeing this group of people who were art students, and wondering what they were. Why did I go to art school? Two things: 1) I though it academicised rock and roll, and 2) I liked how they looked. I just liked the look of them. And I went to this foundation course in that town as a kind of rebel with a cause.

This was after you left secondary school?

Yes. This was after I left secondary school. I finished all my A levels, got reasonable A levels and very good O levels. I seemed to be academically bright, but I was very rebellious. I wanted to kick over the system, so when it was suggested that I go to university to study biology or mathematics, which happened to be my good subjects, I rebelled, and there was a huge grief in my house, especially from my mother, who had the idea that I was getting out of this system into this funny area. And I had been ok at art in school. I had gotten an art A level, but it was the kind of craft end, not in any way an expression of me. Then I went to a foundation course at the local art school, and I discovered that this art school was one of the art schools that had been involved in the Hornsey and Guildford sit-ins. And all the staff had been moved there to Farnham as a twining with Guildford art school to place them in a kind of backwater away from their rebellious construction.

What year was this?

1969, one year after the Guildford sit-ins in 1968. My direct influence at this time was from two of the guys who had organised the Guildford sit-ins.

Were they younger members of staff?

Yes. They were called Jack Milroy and Geoff Metcalf. Both of them were painter drawers, both of them were extremely anarchic and wanted to challenge. And the real

benefit of them is that all through 1969 and 1970, my two years at the college, Ivor Cutler just hopped me through, such an incredible rate of intellectual input based on what I didn't understand. Yoko Ono actually came while I was there two weeks, and she came in a white Rolls Royce with a photograph of Lennon. Lennon and her had been hired, and she brought the photograph. She stood it at the front and did this funny performance. I didn't know what the hell it was. The funny story is that Jack Milroy paid her with a photograph of the check. And there was this correspondence that appeared on the wall of the foundation course, a photograph of the letter she would have sent on receiving the photograph of the check, and Lennon had sent these funny little notes.

In my first year I did design. I tried to design record sleeves for the band I was in.

This was still your foundation year?

I had a kind of vision at the end of it that I should be an artist. Design was a kind of notion of functionality in that rebelliousness.

Was the focus of the foundation course on design?

No. It was broad based. It was a large foundation course, probably a hundred people, at that time extremely large, compared to this time. Now at Chelsea I have five or six hundred in foundation, in a much smaller premises. At the end of that year while still doing music I decided to be an artist. I stayed on and did a second year foundation becoming a sculptor. I worked by myself the entire time. And for the first time started to become academic.

This was your second year in the foundation area. Was it more open then?

Yes I was left free. At the end of that year I went to Bath. I had come across Robert Smithson and the idea of landscape art and I wanted to be in the English landscape. Bath was romantic and archaeological, but it was academic. I was starting to reason and actually to work out why I wanted to do it. Bath academy was an interesting place by default. All of this you know in retrospect, but at the time I think you follow your gut. Probably going to Farnham, a sense of rebelliousness like seeing this group of students, was then endorsed by knowing about the Guildford sit-ins. It was so close to the French sit-ins of 1968 and 1969 and the swell of the student upsurge in socialism.

Bath had had people like Howard Hodgkin and Richard Smith. It was called the Wessex school, and the Wessex school was a kind of internal landscape, anti-establishment, but not as far out as Cornwall. They developed a group of intellectual painters, people like Adrian Heath. And the school was very strong in painting in relation to the Slade School.

I went into a sculpture department where I was taught by Kenneth Hughes, and Mike Pennie, who were both academic formalists. On day one I rebelled. I went in to this class and they said you must model the figure. I said "why? You never met me before, how do you know I should model the figure?" From moment one I took this risk. They kept me but put me right outside the school. And three years I worked like that, just by myself, arguing the toss. Nick Pope was the year ahead of me. And also, in the year I was in there was an interesting artist called Stephen Cripps. He died as a

result of a drugs overdose. And Nick Pope went on to be a bright young hopeful sculptor in the Garage Gallery in London.

I got my first show in the Serpentine Gallery in my third year, and they had to make out that I had already left the school. There was all this kind of deceit between the Arts Council and the school because a student wasn't allowed to show. Ken Kiff the painter was one of the people in that show; quite interesting that one so young goes right to the heart of the English establishment as this kind of rebel. Nowadays I find that really funny, when I go back there to that gallery and remember being this kid who was twenty three or twenty two years old and in that time of leaving college. There was a job advertised here in Dublin at that time and I wrote and applied for it, out of Bath, degree level, undergraduate.

You just saw an advertisement in the paper?

Yes. The Wessex is archaeologically wealthy, and the logic means going to this archaeological place, Ireland. I knew nothing about the politics here, about being a Brit and coming to Ireland. I was unbelievably naive and very very energetic, and principled. I had run the students union at Bath, and I carried on at Bath with the kind of work I did that had happened in Farnham, and I brought all the kinds of people that they had brought to that school to Bath, but as the kind of bringer of that information. People like Dick Stanshaw, Ivor Cutler, not Yoko, because Yoko had already flown the coop at that stage.

And Bath was open enough to allow that?

Under a kind of socialist pressure yes. But working very much as a student's representative. I had learned that I had enormous energy, and I was using the energy in terms of work. So I ran the students union for two or three years of a three year degree course. I did very well in art history and kind of theoretical studies, and I ended up with the highest first they had ever had.

Had degrees come in at that stage in Britain?

It had just happened. It was a CNAA diploma when I started and it was a degree when I left.

Which was what, the early 1970's?

Early 1970's, 1974 I left and I think they came in in 1972. In 1971 when I went there you would get a CNAA Diploma.

So the curriculum at Bath was open enough to allow somebody like you to work freely and yet broadly speaking it was traditional.

It was very formal in sculptural terms. It was modelling and casting, not constructing. It already had the tradition of visitors, so that there would be a good broad base of visitors coming in. It is quite interesting thinking of it in those terms now, this place in rural England, and Bath is very rural, very particular, very romantic, in a set way. I remember the strong forces. Bath had a workshop called the natural theatre workshop who have since come to be one of the highlights of the theatre

festivals. So those kind of influences were very good. And the kind of precursor of the music festivals was also happening there. They would be involved with the art school.

It was residential and that's what's interesting. It was community based and virtually all the good things about all art schools I have ever been in - Chelsea when I started there was a small community, an internal one, and everyone related to everybody else and knew everybody else. And at Bath, the high spots of it were those kinds of things. You know, the student to student argument. And they gave a broad enough base of student input from really very formal people to more way out people - this guy Stephen Cripps was more way out than me. Jean Tinguely was his hero; he'd make explosions and fires. He was in my year, which was very small. There were six sculpture students in my year, so again you are talking about quite a small group. To the day I left I thought they hated me. I though I was a rebel and I was against the system, so eventually when you get asked back as the external assessor you begin to wonder what has gone on in the relationship.

The early years coming here, I think the politics of it are very important. Jonah Jones, I think, was the advisor to the old NCAD board, and they kind of moved him into this position of being director, and in part of that move he asked for younger staff to come with him. He was some kind of advisor as opposed to being a director, so they made him director. And he said if I am going to be director I'm going to bring these young staff with me. Campbell came as a result.

Did he know Campbell or did he just advertise for people?

He just advertised. I don't think there was any relationship between him and Campbell. So his kind of junta of Campbell, David Sherlock, Rob Smith and me - I

think we were the four and he was the fifth. There were five of us, and still that moment we walked into Kildare Street the students were on strike outside. Charley Cullen and Alice Hanratty were there. I think Charley Harper had gone to Limerick. There was a little of group of staff who were out picketing the very first day I walked into the place.

Can you remember what they were picketing about?

It was still a hangover of an academic fight between a kind of academicism and freedom of expression. I can't remember exactly but I can remember the kind of atmosphere. We were all interviewed off site. I was interviewed in Jury's Hotel for the job in October or November, and I started the following January. The reason we were interviewed off site was that they could not interview us in the building because of the students, and we knew nothing of it. I think it was terribly naive bringing a really young kid - can you imagine now bringing a kid off a degree course, a kid from Bath - to Dublin, its just astonishing. I think their reason for it was this rupture between the students and the academy. You had to have naive people because people with experience would never have done it.

Rob had done an MA. And we were fed into a really quite entrenched situation. O'Murchadha was head of sculpture. There weren't many staff in sculpture. What staff there were were kind of servants to craft.

They were technicians really.

That's right, Paddy Roe and Liam Roe, and the woman who taught foundation, and then I was the next one. And what was set up through Jonah Jones was the notion that the institution would be radicalised, so Campbell set a year structure and made the new incumbent year responsible to us. So Rob was put in charge of first year painting and me in charge of first year sculpture, and then as that year went through you stayed with it. And then the next year I was in charge of first and second year, and then by the end I was in charge of all three years so what you have done is marginalized the whole staff. And that's how it was done, but of course by then your experience is growing. There were many really deep and horrible in-fights politically about republicanism, Brits, and so on.

That English verses Irish thing seems to have been an issue.

And probably was set up in the first place. We of course were unbelievably naïve and the only thing that saved us was our humanness. What they hadn't accounted for was that the people we were with would be great people, so the kind of relationship with both Rob and me with everybody we ever worked with was always great because they were lovely people. And that thing I don't think could be brought into the formula. Campbell in a way played politics all the time, and he was slightly Machiavellian about what was happening, but at ground zero what made it terrific was that you had a great relationship. It was obviously very stressful and extremely stretching.

And did you have an input into the new curriculum?

Very much.

And Rob as well?

And that would have been a kind of direct carry on in the first place from my time in Bath, so I found myself doing formally what I would have been opposed to in that school. So there would be modelling and casting, studying the formal basis of form in sculpture.

As in working with materials?

Pretty much. Like showing somebody how to carve. In those days too I established the first equipment. I got the first drill. And it was that fragile. There was nothing. All there was was the notion of form. So the first thing was getting together a small workshop. Starting to try and make tools available. And we had people like Aileen Mac Keogh who is head of Dun Laoghaire Art School now, in that first crop of students in those first years, and then later on people like Alanna O'Kelly; all going through Kildare Street. I think the first move was to Clarendon Street, then we moved to Moss Street, and then Thomas Street.

Did the traditional staff that were in the college already have an input into the new curriculum?

They did. It was so deeply nationalist from O'Murchadha in sculpture that he was never going to be engaging about the subject. So it could never ever happen. As much

as he really wanted to like me he could never, ever, even look at me, and it was that deeply entrenched. So I made no relationship but kept trying to. Rob was brilliant; he was an absolutely wonderful human being in terms of taking on that kind of racism. And would actually confront it head on all of the time.

Did you find yourself developing a curriculum independently of those people?

Yes, really. But based with the students. That was the good thing, it was by need, and you could not make the theoretical jump that I really would have liked to have made. You could not go to content. But, then, those kind of issues then, it was unknown. You've got to remember in that period in the early 1970's there was still the idea of an avant-garde. So the idea was very modern, post-modernism hadn't happened. We were looking towards the rejection of an academy in terms of modern art practice, and that is a very avant-gardist idea. So each time you were looking for the author. You were trying to get each and every one of the students to have authorship. And I think that was what was going on, that was the kind of foundation in the terms of the curriculum.

In relation to developments in the 1950's and in particular Hamilton's focus on technology and materials which lead ultimately to Pop-art and therefore to the whole notion that process was important, did that figure in your thinking?

That would have been very well grounded, well established in England by the nineteen seventies. Somebody said it this week in teaching, that there was always a very strange relationship between America, American information, and England,

particularly in sculpture. There has not been that same resolve in painting for example. And it is part of paintings fault that it hasn't. But people like Robert Morris - I would have said that the two greatest influences on me as an art student were Robert Morris and Beuys; as opposed to Henry Moore. You would be looking into the socialism of Beuys and the ideas involved in his discussion. And Robert Morris, I think, in 1972, had a big show at the Tate. And that again was a moment where you had to bring on minimalism, you had to bring on some kind of notion of conceptualism, environmentalism. Do you know that Lucy Lippard book, *The Dematerialisation of the Art Object,* the kind of issues that she deals with were all in place, ideas about process and "form follows function". And already on that foundation course, because of Hockney and Hamilton, those kinds of questions would have been well thought through early on. I mean its difficult isn't it, the kind of dynamo of why. That question we touched on earlier of freedom, of why you work towards having a voice, and then what do you conceive it to be.

So in early education I think you do have role models to base yourself on, you do have heroes, and luckily for my time, I often think like that. Like I'm in my second year of art school and I go and see Joseph Beuys give a lecture. What kid nowadays could possibly - Sheila found a wonderful piece of writing from some kid in Cheltenham who said something like how do artists like Joseph Beuys and Gavin Turk want to be artists. I laughed for about two hours afterwards because of Gavin Turk being my student. I wouldn't hold them in the same planet let alone in the same line. And realising that I had seen Beuys, and I had seen the weight of that kind of intellectual rigour - the projection of the green party, a new socialist role for artists - in my second year in art school. And he coincidentally followed me to Dublin. During the first year in Clarendon Street, I'm not sure, it could be 1978.

I think it was 1977.

Beuys was here trying to set up the Free University, and I got him into Clarendon Street. One of the most incredible moments of teaching in my whole life was sitting in a room of twenty or thirty fine art students - painters and sculptures - and introducing Beuys to them, and them not knowing who he was. I remember Ray Murphy, he was a kind of big burly guy who ended up as a kind of illustrator, standing there saying who is this Joseph Beuys; And he's coming into the room. He gave an hour-long presentation to them personally, which is really quite remarkable, like the thought of that happening anywhere in the free world. The students were really terrific, you know. And he got to talking about his house, where do you live, stuff you would never ever find out and quite interesting really, so maybe quite big political things were happening without. And that's what started to blossom for me. I had to look at Dublin and the Project Art Centre and the things that were happening culturally because I was such a naïve really. I did not know where I was or why.

It seems a bit like being an art student all over again.

I always think like that. Like I thought when I went to Yale, "Christ I never got to be a post-graduate but at least I am going to have the best out of this and I am going to learn". And now I am in the Royal College I think exactly the same every day I am in there. What a study, what a great benefit to me these people, and I think if you go into life all the time like that it's a gift, really, because you are learning. I always feel real terror of those kind of jobsworth people, they think when they get the job they

have made it somewhere. This transformation of being job bound. I am now myself 25 years teaching and I am still on the shop floor, I don't have a desk or don't have a phone. I am still absolutely right there in the place where the work is made, and I only realised that this week. It is such a privilege really because I am still one of them and I am not - can you imagine what it would be to be a boss to have your desk and that world out there would not be the world you inhabit anymore.

I suppose it's the difference between teaching as a bureaucratic issue and teaching as a contact with students issue.

By the early 80's what had happened to me is that I was professionally stuck. I was away a lot doing performances and I had to work out if I wanted a job in a place or to be an artist.

What kind of hours did you do in the college when you went there first?

Enormous, probably from 8.30 in the morning to 8 at night, every day, five days a week, no days off, I was meant to have Thursday off but never took it. There were always things to do and I am still exactly like that now. And the people I know and have really respected have been people like that. People like Tim Mara.

Campbell was great at being able to filter through the nationalism. He'd find people like Paul Neagu who were politically correct because he was Romanian, but an interesting person. Or people like David Nash, who, although he is English, lived in North Wales. Campbell would find these people and feed them in. Tim Mara was found on that basis, he was London Irish. Another was Martin Parr. It was a

remarkable time really. Amazing to think that you come across those characters who then go on to be absolutely the top end of that subject in the world. He's got a lovely nose Campbell; he's got a great nous. What started to happen, I think, was that the generation of previous strong modernists here wanted it back, and I think he made the move to quick. I think Brian King and those people who were brought in were brought in slightly too quick. We had opened it up and held it open for four or five years, allowed through four or five generations. I always used to get on very well with John Kelly, who wasn't a bother to me really. I found him an affable old soul, much softer than O'Murchadha. But you see that in the subject, you see the kind of entrenched social realism, a kind of Catholicism, national sculpture, which you just don't see in painting, and I still see it when I drive around and see that kind of work which was done from the 1930s to 1960s - figuration in a dogmatic attitude.

That is what that era was about. It reflects the era.

Which O'Murchadha was trying to keep hold of.

To what extend were you aware in the mid-1970s that Ireland was going through a transition? And to what extent were you aware of the background to that transition which was manifested in the Living Art Group, and in the Independent Artists Group?

Naïve really, very naive from without, but you have to learn very quickly.

Did you see any reflection or influence of the Living Art group, the Independent Artists group, or the RHA within the college?

No. The RHA had held sway and still had its finger in the dike. The Living Art was the generous one to both Rob and me. We were invited into a Living Art exhibition that first teaching year in the national college. And Bobby Ballagh, to his due, and John Byrne, Mick O'Sullivan, and Brian King were absolutely generous, I think, to both of us. We were both shown in that exhibition. We were taken on board their community and represented their position really early on. It was essentially a modernist position. Then there was the Oasis Sculpture group, which was being organised at this time by Brian King and Gerda Fromel. Both Adrian Hall and I were invited into that group to found it. This was all in parallel with teaching and before I became involved in the Project Art Centre. Through all of this I became aware of what those forces were. The Independent Artists were always really quite republican and entrenched. They never engaged nor encouraged, and that's quite interesting to me because of Brian Maguire's involvement with them, and because of their involvement in the sit-ins. I suppose Charlie Cullen was seen as being more associated with them.

But I was very naïve, and the changes of a society are very hard to read when you are new in it. They are probably the most difficult things to call.

But you saw them in the sense that you saw the immediate effect of the Independent Artists Group or the Irish Exhibition of Living Art.

You take them on at a direct human level and by trying to deal with what that means to you.

And did they have an influence on the students then? Was there a faction, if you like, amongst the students that were associated with the Independent Artists? Was there a faction associated with the Living Art?

Most certainly, those three factions in painting and those three factions in sculpture. What predominated by the end was the constructive, oasis, faction in sculpture. Always, always, through all my time in the College of Art, even up to the early 1980s, broadly speaking those were the factions. I'd say with the fourth being a kind of Project/Grapevine Art Centre kind of Street culture. But there was definitely a formalism, a kind of RHA formalism *vis-à-vis* the notion of expressionism, of the Independents *vis-à-vis* the modernism of the Living Art, and certainly the strongest one was the Living Art. Bobby Ballagh, Pop Art and Brian King, a kind of structural conceptualism, were the big forces. And in a way the regret probably is that Bobby never got the painting job he should have had, because probably a lot of recent history would have been slightly different. I don't know why that didn't happen. He probably just didn't want to teach. But Brian getting that job at the time he did was absolutely right, in terms of that politics. The only trouble is it brought on a teaching class who had not taught, the expectation that if you could bureaucratise you could organise, if you were the right kind of artist. I think that was a failure. I think that that move should have happened when it did was the beginning of a kind of a culture.

That would have been the early 1980's?

The kind of people who were brought back in were essentially a 1970's group of modernists who were appointed into a kind of ownership.

And do you think that that tightened the structure within fine art and bureaucratised the whole thing?

Essentially yes, but it was too early. I suppose our own candidates, Aileen Mac Keogh, Alanna O'Kelly, the people who could have made changes there, have eventually been the strongest ones. Its no coincidence that Aileen is now head in Dun Laoghaire School of Art, because it was that kind of spirit of change which kept her wanting to change. I mean I often reflect on why I like teaching so much, and I think I never had people who gave back all that time in Bath Academy, unlike foundation course. It was all about what territory you could hold. And I wanted to go into it being generous. I wanted to actually be there, friendly. The seventies were about how much you could drink or who you could screw.

Here you mean?

No in English art schools. And I did not want that; I wanted to work.

That brings us back to the curriculum, which was about creating that space for people to work, creating a space that actually came out of the people themselves and that created a future space.

Absolutely, and the idea of that relationship, or the encouragement of that, as the topic, I suppose was the principle of everything I have done then, and since.

Does that idea feed into your work?

Yes, absolutely, by the notion of a kind of humanism first and Intelligence about it second. It's found in the human condition. I never realised then the potential for that critically. So having gone through Yale and through the Royal College, through all the schools at graduate level in the English speaking world really, the essential foundation of that was the establishment of workspace for people. And I still see our times now as very difficult ones in that there isn't enough vision; we are not in very visionary times educationally. It causes a great frustration, but no one has a vision for that space.

The NCAD in Dublin became very much what I can take not what I can give. And for me it's still what you can give, what you can bring to this. And I see those times in many schools like the Royal College being about what can I get out of it and not what I can put into it.

I suppose its about the difference between candidates - there is a certain candidate who wants to bring to it and there is a certain candidate who wants to take from it - and in the end the frustration of that with candidates and facility and everybody concerned, so its the kind of roots of why you are like that or what you think the subject is for you. I teach with a couple of people in America, on a critical panel in Philadelphia, who I find absolutely wonderful. But they usually seem to be an older generation. There is a kind of commitment, probably a modernist ethos - like post people tend to be calculators not leaders - and I still find them a great inspiration. Tim Mara was always like that; he was always a bringer.

That would tie in with the reconstructive atmosphere of the 1950's and 1960's and the fact that people saw a brave new world, they saw possibility for change.

And thought that they were going to take it, we were never going to have it like this before - never going to have it like this again. It is very complex, like Tim on the surface appeared different to how he was. He was very much a Jesuit, and there was something lurking underneath Campbell that tends to be like that. He is devious and stirring. I remember big arguments with Campbell and Rob in my first couple of months here about the pertinence of materials *vis-à-vis* painting - equipment, you know, like "should we get a video?" Huge arguments about equipping art students and they both saying that all you need is a pot, and me saying Christ. This is twenty years ago now. But I find them quite interesting discussions still; really, they're still central questions about use and some approaches of use.

How did you find working with Rob and how would you summarise Rob's contribution given that he is not around to do it himself?

He was such an organic man that he carried everything in the stuff of his being, and just being near him was great. He was the quintessential dreamer. He was a kind of out there creature, he was not an in here kind of creature. It was really a wonderful time with him. When you have racism and a fundamentalist right wing approach about what things are in art, having somebody like him about the place is just amazing. In that way Jonah Jones chose very well, because nothing could get to Rob. He was a very organic man.

He had been to art school in Manchester?

He had done an MA in Manchester; he had a hell of a chip on his shoulder, which I really liked. And the chip was a chip about working class, about the landscape, about changing the world, and so the kind of whole food, holistic, nature of him. I think he probably ossified at the college. And he should have moved on in my view because I did move on. But probably the last four or five years in the college of art were pretty redundant for him and he did not grow, and I think places always have to have growth.

In this study I am looking specifically at the period 1974 to 1987 when Campbell left, I don't really deal with the situation in the college since 1987. This period was a pivotal 13 years when a major change took place in the teaching of fine art. How would you describe the difference between the first five years and the last five years of that era?

Probably the time I know it well is up to until about 1982, I know just the move into Thomas Street and the change of regime. I became part time, I think, in 1980, so I actually started to pull off it but was kept on in a part time capacity. They were probably naive years the Thomas Street years. Somehow there was somebody with a vision that this was the Pompidou Centre, this designed re-use of old space. But I never quite trusted it, and I did not feel that it was very substantial for similar reasons that we said; the idea of it being a working class part of the city, the consequent protection of the dogs at night - who used to crap all over the building - to stop people breaking in to rob it. It had grown too big for its own boots but had not rationalised that growth well enough. But I think that was to do with Sheridan coming, to do with management and the kind of relationship with the subject. Foundation started to be too powerful with itself. There were kind of non-values really that did not think deeply

enough into the subject. But my kind of educational times then had really changed; I pulled myself off from a full time job to a part time job because I had already started teaching in America. I started in the Royal College first through Kathy Prendergast in about 1981 and was gotten into sculpture. This guy who was doing these performances coming into the most formalist sculpture department in the world, in graduate study, and having an influence. When you think of it now it just wouldn't happen in a month of Sundays. They wouldn't have anybody like me remotely near the place.

When you think of those times and you think of where that comes from, how things irrigate, how the world is, I mean all that I've said is astonishing, that somewhere in Dublin would take an undergraduate kid and another bloke from Manchester with an MA. Rob was very, very, human. I think what made the connection was that human connection with this kind of organic dreamer and the Irish psyche, and he made a direct connection. You could have all the kind of politicking, and nastiness, and reaction, in the world, and this bloke would carry it through just by being in the tribe of human beings. And I think that's the thread, the key thread. I think its something that even Campbell does not get, and he's a kind of Machiavellian operator, but it does not work on that level.

But it suited the job he had.

Yes, it suited it very well in that strand. It grew but it did not grow organically enough, there were kind of structural moves where human moves should have been made. I look at the years across the eighties as years of decline. It might be very much linked to my tape. I was growing at an unbelievable rate. It must be said it was all

because of Campbell. I realise now that it was my time of study. He was still teaching me like I was an undergraduate becoming a postgraduate. And I would say "but I want to go", and he would say "well go, get on with it". And I think that was really fantastic. Now of course all those people in Belfast like Alister Wilson, they are still in there in the same undergraduate teaching jobs. I've been to the States and back, Japan and all the way through the subject, arse in and arse outwards, and the only thing I got from it is that. I don't have a job or a salary or security, but what I did get is that turnover of discourse, and it is still very potent for me, that process. And I think Campbell was brilliant at pushing my arse out of it, just say you want to do that, get out and do it. It was brilliant. I think he wanted that for Rob too. But Rob wouldn't move. He kind of ossified. A lot of what that is tied to is a professional show. There was a huge amount of frustration in Rob about not getting shows, not exploiting the work, and it was very much founded on really wonderful work. He was a doer dweller in the house of painting. I think that energy fed that school, probably generations of people, which is wonderful really.

How did fine art relate to whatever overall program was driving the college at that time?

As far as I can remember there was never really any connection. It was always completely internal. Like your argument academically was held within the subject, how could we improve the subject, for instance, not how can we make reference to something else?

Was there any relationship between the fine art area and other areas of the college?

Not really, it was extremely limited. Like in the early years people like Paddy McElroy in metalwork to some extent mixed. Metalwork was better than ceramics and better than textiles, but very limited. I think its still the same probably in most art schools. In Bath where I was or in the Royal College where I now am there's a very limited crossover. Being in different locations probably helped to create UDI. So when the college was pulled back to Thomas Street it still carried on that kind of UDI.

What I have read about the development of tertiary art education in Britain after the Second World War shows a huge influence from Herbert Read and Walter Gropius, who themselves had been in the First World War. These ideas fed into minds that had been through the Second World War. Both wars confronted social issues and challenged the social fabric and the whole bureaucratic structure of British society. Out of all that came utopian ideas which envisioned art - if you think about Gropius it is obvious - as a core aspect of society, right across the board, and it did not matter whether it was painting or design or anything else, it was all part of the fabric of being human. It seems to me that as the 1960's developed in England the system tightened and people were put back in their boxes and these utopian aspirations and these hopes for change withered. Fine art maintained some kind of independence because within the fine art area there was still some kind of freedom, some kind of aspiration, but it did not go out from there. It did not become a part of how people think.

I think that's probably to do with money largely. You know that saying in architecture that there is no such thing as pure form because its pure form paid for. The question now would be always that simple, Do you do it yourself or do you do it to a brief, and how do they meet and how is that had? Here I would have thought because of the tradition of Kilkenny design that some progress had been made in relation to this. And I know Jonah Jones was instrumental in how Kilkenny was set up.

The three gambits would have been design, craft, and the fine arts. I think the very odd thing is to have something which is useless being tolerated or centrally placed. The tradition in America would always be that there are no teaching artists because they can make a living from the art. In England the tradition would have been of teaching artists because teaching would have been seen as a way of life. That would have been the past model. Now it's not true. I think it's quite problematic here. Here has to face the problem of engaging with some kind of network, but it can't turn to England because of its political history, it's not wealthy enough to engage with a bigger Europe, and in this thing its caught. It would be no good getting a French art education because their arts education is not very interesting. They follow ten or twenty or thirty years behind the English model. Ultimately it's how you make a network that actually feeds in enough to be changing, and I think the thing you have seen happening in the College of art is reinternalisation and recliquing. It's very much the problem we faced the moment we walked in. The students wedged it open. Probably four, five, or six years after the Guildford and Hornsey sit-ins Dublin did it, and they did it because they wanted to throw out the old academy and make something new. That wedged it open for a few years. Then it closed up again. It closed up with a different clique, a different model, but in exactly the same way. Now it is a conflict

between modernism and post-modernism. There is a modernist group who refuses to allow post-modernism in.

That's coming out in what I am discovering. That openness that post-modernism demands, which has its negative side. That aspect which is an open-ended relativism, which really goes nowhere, you mentioned Geoff Koons. The post-modern position threatens the modernist position, and that does seem to be the position up there now, that there is this new polarisation.

My time as external was exactly that. The students wanted to embrace the post-modernist time culturally and in terms of their own being, but in fact all the facility and the school itself was modernist, so that things were judged in aesthetics where they should have been judged in context. Things were set up in terms of the leading edge. And the kind of throw backs that I think you've seen artistically - I think the biggest sadness is the lack of communication between the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the college of art. You see the museums form and the museums time as very much a post time. There has been a huge separation between the museum and the college of art.

I was just thinking to day while passing through IMMA that the atmosphere up there felt like the college in the 1970s. It's almost as if the museum is the college of art twenty years later. Do you understand?

Yes I do. They think like that up there. I think that's very pertinent too, Pete Townsend and Mick Jagger and Eric Clapton all that kind of rock generation were at art school.

Its as if the art school was a structure that allowed that to develop, but it was not set up to allow that to develop, it was an accidental by product. But almost by definition to set up a structure to let that kind of creative openness happen will stop it happening. That's the weird thing about it.

That's the conundrum of the situation. You can't legislate because of the situation, and you need to be very wide-awake in the contemporary, because of the nature of our time, because of this kind of post retrospection.

Nowadays every foundation student, every pre-diploma student, let alone degree student, are meant to know it all from day one. The onus of that responsibility is terrible, like for me I could have the naiveté of failure. The aggressive naiveté of failure is what founded probably twenty years of work for me, of thinking I could break the rules. They are difficult because you get into that territory of born again, where you are in the attitude of what you are. I'm an old fart now and I am meant to be establishment, so the notion of establishment being someone like me, it's very odd, it is really odd.

Definitely.

And how do you then take stock of that.

It is very difficult for our generation to know because you have to get into the eyes of the next generation. Its very difficult to look at yourself and to see how they see you because we are interpreting everything in terms of what we knew, of where we are coming from.

I certainly read that generation in terms of Brian King. They are fiercely protected. It's the Bobby Ballagh syndrome. And he dresses it up as a kind of republican nationalism. Essentially they will not let the next generation through. The next generation cannot come forward and say we want that space.

I wonder was the original openness a consequence of the era that it happened in, that post-Second World War situation. And even though it's the 1960s we are taking about it was still informed by that utopianism which reflected the thinking of the previous generation. That utopianism came from an earlier generation and it took most of the century to get out, to actually develop, because it was frustrated in the inter-war years. Perhaps what you are talking about has a lot to do with that, with one thing leading into another.

It is interesting because I see that debate much better in literature than I do in the visual arts. I see people in literature being really interesting about discussing these things. On Monday, for instance, it came up, this pre-millennium thing. The idea of the millennium being an incredibly retrospective time. But artists have been persuaded of the I so much.

You mean the I as in me, me, me?

Yes, like the debate about Tracy Emin and her work. There's no discussion of the work, of the practice, of the greater context, where Will Self by comparison is very complex.

Tracey Emin, of course, would argue that Will Self and people like that represent the old system, the old neo-liberal - and male - intelligencia.

I'm just shouting through because I'm a voice. I don't buy it, I think fashion has become the arbiter. Aileen had me in as an advisor on appointments recently and that art school in Dun Laoghaire in relation to its institute status, and then DCU, I think those places are going to be the avant-garde of the future.

They certainly are breaking ground.

That's brilliant and I think that if the NCAD doesn't watch its arse it will turn around and be an academy.

That's exactly what's happening. The regional colleges are important too. We in England have been fed by Cork and Limerick for ten or fifteen years. There has been absolutely no hesitancy whatever for them to make a communication with English schools.

I was giving a course on professional practice at the NCAD and I was stopped doing it because of the politics. I was thought of as being absolutely bad medicine just because I had a go at them over them trying to introduce this graduate course. I just tried to stick up for the students really. What I was trying to do was stick my oar in

vis-à-vis the debate between modernism and post-modernism. They made a course on paper and asked me to review it. I reviewed it, but then I said you have got it on paper and now what are you going to do about it. So its no good saying we have got a post-graduate course, you also need space, you need people to teach on it. The one thing that really depresses me here is that unbelievable demand for post-graduate courses. Ireland should have a post graduate course in fine art. I think it's the attitude that's the problem. You can look at it two ways. You can either do it at foundation level, so at that moment of introduction you make such an enthusiasm that you need a course system to follow it, or you can do it the other way around, which is where I am. If you have a post graduate course undergraduate courses have to improve. You then have Ph. D.s, you then have the potential for a theory, and what this country doesn't have is that. It's got a wonderful candidature. It makes me very depressed when I know Belfast has completely ossified.

APPENDIX 19

Thomas Ryan PPRHA (1929 -) Artist. Studied at the National College of Art 1947-1950. Teacher at the National College of Art during the 1960s.

Peter O'Neill - *Could you describe the National College of Art when you were there as a student?*

Tom Ryan - I was a student at the Limerick School of Art and I had the great benefit of having a very fine art teacher. That was Richard Butcher, a Yorkshire man. Richard Butcher was a graduate of the Royal College of Art in London. He came to Limerick sometime in the late 1920s, having served in the First World War. During his period in Limerick he built up a body of persons who had a great regard for him and a great regard for his teaching.

He was a teacher in the only dispensation of any use to students; that is, he imparted knowledge. This was of practical value in the practice of art. He taught you how to carve, how to do metalwork, perspective, leatherwork, a whole dispensation of things that you carried with you. Rather like someone riding a bicycle, he learns and doesn't unlearn, it stays with him, and it's of benefit to him. Everything I ever learned from Richard Butcher was of benefit, stained glass, and all these crafts. I then got a scholarship to the National College of Art in Dublin, sixty pounds a year.

When was this?

Say I was born in 1930, late 1929, and I suppose I must have been eighteen or nineteen. That will give you an idea. So I went there. It was an extraordinary contrast with the college today. I remember taking digs on the circular road and going there by hackney cab. It was a hackney cab. It wasn't a motorised one. So Dublin was a different place. You could write umpteen bits of Angela's Ashes about Dublin at this time.

Where do you come from?

New Ross, County Wexford.

New Ross, a hopeless medieval dungheap of a place, I have no doubt, the same as anywhere else.

I agree.

That's why that man's book was so malign. It mentioned people I know. It was not written for the Irish people nor the people of Limerick. It was written for Manhattenites, who were asked to congratulate themselves on having escaped from Odessa, or wherever.

Well anyway, so I came to Dublin and I joined and so on, and met my teacher. I went straight into the painting.

You didn't do the preliminary course?

I didn't have to do that. I had done that. I remember Keating saying to me, "Hold on he said, I can't teach you anything, Butchers taught it all to you." And substantially what he said was true. What he did was he gave me some instruction that I didn't get in Limerick. Mr. Butcher would not allow me to paint. I could draw but I could not paint. He said there would be plenty of time for that.

So under Keating and MacGonigal I painted and I painted. First of all I did the classes from the antique. And they were absolutely emphatic; there was no question of doing your own thing. You had to do it and you had to do it correctly, plum line and so on. And that gave you a very valuable observation of the human form, admittedly in a frozen manner.

See that statue behind you, a plaster head. Well if you were to draw that and keep on drawing that you would of course develop a sense of the construction of the head, the projection of the nose, the anatomy of the neck and so on. It is part of that which you are invited to look at. And by looking at it, it came into your head.

Conjoined to that would be an awareness of anatomy, what's happening underneath, and Keating provided that, he was professor of anatomy. That was very valuable. Mind you some of the yokes he had to illustrate with were home spun, bits of rope; "Well, there's a muscle coming out here now, it's the lucimus maximus. It's like this, here give me a bit of rope." But it worked. The illustration of the backside or the front side was made up of all sorts of bits and scraps of things. But it gave you an idea. That's all it could give you. You could follow it if you wanted in a more absorbing way by going to the College of Surgeons. Or you could look at Gray's anatomy, which we had to look at. So again, that was the instruction that went into your head, so that when you do someone's head on their body you have an idea of what they were made of under the fabric of the skin.

How was Keating as a teacher?

Keating was quite a good teacher. He was a good teacher.

He was supposed to have been a very entertaining person.

He was. He wouldn't stand any nonsense. There was no nonsense tolerated at all. You were expected to be there on time and you went - well it was more liberal in the afternoon. But it was a long and quite a disciplined day. We began in the morning. We worked up to half past twelve, and then we came back at two and we worked from two till four, and then we went back at half seven and we come out at nine.

Did you have different teachers at different points of the day?

You would, there were different teachers.

How many staff were in fine art?

Well the total number, all together, I have an idea was something like twenty-nine or thirty, teaching. All of them with the exception of about four were part time. That was even if they had spent forty years there as Jimmy Golden did. You were still paid on a part time basis. And they weren't paid for the long days of summer, church holidays, state holidays, and whatever.

Somebody told me that Keating was in that position.

Yes, Keating was in that position, all his time there despite being Professor of Painting and that was one reason, there were a few reasons, why he stayed on so long. He stayed on so long because he had to stay on to make money, to get a salary. Although I would think that at that stage he didn't really need it. But the other was much more pressing. He had a studio there and he had the availability of models. So he used the models of the school as the models for his pictures. And I remember well hearing these two ladies at an exhibition looking at an Aran picture full of bauneens and hobbling bobbling, the whole paraphernalia of western sartorial presentation, and saying "Oh how very very Irish. You wouldn't get a face like that anywhere outside the Aran Islands", and the other one said, "You are quite right mother". Sure I knew it was Jose Ann Goulet, straight from Brittany. Keating used him all the time. I mean he wasn't coloured or he wasn't blue, or he wasn't Chinese. He was a perfect example of the western type. So Keating had a studio there, and he had models of his boats that he used and so on. And he had the outfits, and sometimes he would get students into it. You see by having students you had an unending litany of models should you want them. So there were practical advantages. But the disadvantage, if you like, was the monetary one, which wasn't as great as it might have been. So Keating stayed on. Keating was quite an inspirational man. He was also - he had great regard for the most unlikely guardian angel - patron saint - that was Tiepolo. He greatly admired Tiepolo, and the reason is obvious enough. Keating was a halting draughtsman, everything was inspected, everything was based on knowledge, and he was an anatomist with a covering of skin on top of it. And if you look at some of his pictures like the *Tipperary Hurler* they are really anatomy lessons, everything was rather clinical. Slow enough to

do. Sometimes you would see a fluidity in the skies. I suppose he greatly admired the ease of these Venetians, who could cover vast Croke Park areas of canvas and so on.

There was a very light touch to the Venetians.

A very light touch. These fellows didn't really have to learn themselves. They inherited their learning.

But anyway Keating was a very good teacher and he would speak about his admiration for William Orpen. He admired him greatly. Orpen was talented literally from the age of twelve on, a great natural draughtsman. I'd say that Keating wasn't a natural draughtsman. It's a curious sort of contradiction, do you know. I'd say in a way that Sean O'Sullivan was. Not anything as well informed, but Keating was a draughtsman. Probably his best work was in draughtsmanship in many ways, you know.

That makes sense. There's a fluidity about O'Sullivan and Orpen that Keating doesn't have. There's a worked on aspect that Orpen doesn't have.

That's right. I mean at fourteen years of age Orpen picked up a pencil and he drew splendidly. And it has never been seen in Dublin since. Augustus John was a very good draughtsman, but he began to stylise them very early.

I have a feeling that he didn't produce the quality that Orpen did. I haven't seen that many outstanding works. Maybe that's unfair to him?

Well I think so. I think later on he began to be tinted with the idea that he should be something slightly different. It's not that he was ashamed of his tradition, but malleable in a way in giving it a little but of coloration, and he took on the aspect of El Greco, the long head type of thing.

I think he had a notion of himself as the crazy artist, the avant-garde idea.

Well that came in when he began to wear a black hat. He brought it to Ireland in fact. The black hat was worn by people like John Kelly, and a lot of the literary people as well. And even by politicians like James Dillon from Ballaghadereen. That was brought into Ireland by Augustus John. Cathal O'Shannon, all these people of that generation, they wore that black hat.

So MacGonigal was there as well.

MacGonigal was there as well. MacGonigal was a better teacher at painting. MacGonigal wasn't a good draughtsman. He was an adequate draughtsman, not a real good one. But he was quite a good painter. His best work were the smallish things that he painted when he went to the west. Some of the west ones were all right, but later on Maurice was touched by the new dispensation, and he produced these extraordinarily bad ill constructed figure things with asses heads sticking out of them.

I recently saw a very blue painting of his in an auctioneers window on St. Stephens Green.

You saw a blue one, did you? I'll tell you what happened about the blue ones. It's funny now you should say that. It's hardly ever mentioned. There was a period when Maurice went blue. And he went bluer and bluer, and there was cerulean blue, and there was cobalt blue, and there was ultramarine and there was Prussian blue. The whole shagging thing was monochrome in blue, and this was hailed by the new people who were avid for converts. Tonally it would be very good you see. So he had these blue landscapes and they were getting bluer, and then he went off to Louis Cullen and got the operation that had been pending for a long time, on the eyes. The next year the landscapes had green grass, and grey skies, and red cows, back to normalcy. It was an eye condition.

That's amazing.

I have great regard and respect for MacGonigal. MacGonigal was a very good painter.

And was he more tonal than linear in respect to Keating.

They were just different people. It's wrong to make contrasts. He was himself. As I told you earlier I think that later on he began to be not himself.

And what pressures were causing him to do that?

We are jumping in time to the 1960s. We'll come to that.

So MacGonigal was there and Keating was there and Jimmy Golden was there. Jimmy Golden was there for forty or fifty years. Jimmy Golden was Professor of Perspective, and he instructed in perspective, and he was a master of the art of perspective. I remember doing a Roman Arch in perspective, which is a very tricky thing to do, getting your vanishing points and so on. Again, like riding a bicycle, once you get it into your head it doesn't require doing mechanically, it just is absorbed. Perspective is one thing, that's a discipline that anyone can learn, but aerial perspective is a notation of the eye, because from here to the Cross of Cong, three miles away there's a hundred thousand veils of vapour. The artist sensitive to a northern landscape like this would observe that, would begin to take it on, that's why the mountains of Paul Henry are blue. You know darn well they are not blue, they are made of granite. But of course he stylised the whole thing. But a good landscape painter.

Now there was also Professor Herkner. Professor Herkner was a very nice man. He was an Austrian. He got the job before the war and then he asked for leave of absence, which was readily granted, and he went back and he fought. He fought on the eastern front. Jim Nolan in particular was a friend of his. He was on the staff of some General. James told me that Herkner looked after his Alsatians because he was a little bit too old for the front. But he was apparently on the eastern front. Herkner as a student was at the art academy in Vienna, and was very friendly with a girl, and he used to take this girl out, and she was Hitler's niece. And then she took off with another fellow. And Hitler didn't like this other fellow. He wasn't up to the mark. Hitler disliked him. It was said, I don't know how true it is, that the only love of his life was his niece, I don't know. But anyway the girl committed suicide.

But Herkner was a very nice man. And he came back after the war and took up his job, much to the discomfort of Laurence Campbell. He was quite a good sculptor, a

very good sculptor indeed. There's a very fine piece of his work in the Phoenix Park. It's the Houston, you know, Houston Station. There isn't anyone in the country who could do it now. It is carved out of a piece of limestone, very very good indeed.

Michael Burke was the director, and Herkner and Professor Romain were the only established people in it. They were the only ones with pensionable jobs. Who am I leaving out? Of course the staff, the attendants. They were all junior civil servants. Tim Mulhall was the head attendant. Michael Burke was the director. He was a nice man.

D*id he have direct contact with the students? Did he monitor the students progress and so on?*

He didn't do anything of the sort. He stayed in his room all day and you never saw him in any room. He didn't instruct.

No I don't mean instruct. I mean was it his business to be aware of the students' progress?

Oh yes. It was a small place. Besides which it was a very good place to learn manners, because although the boys were mostly from, if you like, the artisan class and there were fellows with a bit of talent from places like - Where are you from?

New Ross.

They were from hopeless places like New Ross. They pulled their forelock and picked their nose for sustenance. The girls by contrast were not. They were all upper

class. Not very, some of them were in fact upper class. And so you were exposed to, not only their nice physical aspect, but also to their voices and their expectations of you. So in a kind of a way there was cross fertilisation.

Was there any negative aspect to that situation?

I remember a minister for education, and he said in the Dail - . There was some question about the college of art because it was in close proximity to the Dail - we all got to know each other, well not really know, to the passage of those people - and he said, "Its only a finishing school". In a kind of way he was half-right. You see, because they weren't going to be professional artists. They would just finish . . . and go of and get married.

Like Beatrice Glenavy earlier?

Well she was a fine painter.

I mean that was the social position she came from, middle class, well off, south Dublin.

She was the exception, she had talent. She had too much bloody talent. She was all over the place.

What did you need to get into the college? Was there an entrance examination?

You needed fifteen pounds.

I mean in terms of skill. Were you tested?

Well I was because I won a scholarship.

But those who didn't.

They came from, lets say Earleys now, talk to Willie Early, Earleys of Camden Street. Earlys of Camden Street had the largest manufacture of stained glass, of altars, of altar rails, of tile work, marble work. It was very very good. The Vatican Council killed that off.

Really?

Yes, because they began to change the churches. And all the skills, all the beauty, of the early part of the century churches, going back in fact to 1830, they were the makings of people like Earleys and Pearse. That's where Patrick Pearse's father came from. They all came to Ireland. There was a huge building of churches. Every town in Ireland, every village in Ireland had to have a church, a Catholic Church I mean.

Of course the Protestants when they were disestablished they had it built into the enactment's, the state enactment's, that the historic churches that they didn't use could never again be used for religious purposes by anyone. That's still in the legislation. Meaning that if the archbishop of Dublin wanted to say mass in Glendalough, the

holiest place in his Archdiocese, he couldn't do it. He'd be breaking the law. They held on to the two major cathedrals.

Anyway every village had to have a church and every town had to have a convent school. And the amount of building that happened from about 1830 was phenomenal. So all these firms were set up to provide for it.

That was t*he Pearses and the Clarkes and so on, Johnny Murph,y who ran the stained glass area of the college of art when I was there, and who now lives in New Ross, he did a lot of that work. Did you know Johnny?*

I did. He'd know all about that. The Earleys did a lot of that work. And afterwards they continued to make and repair windows on a small scale. There are some very good young people doing stained glass now.

Anyway, as with regards to the college of art, that was MacGonigal and Jimmy Golden. And Herkner was a good rather formalised, rather Germanic type sculptor. Stylised in the 1930s sense, but very competent.

Professor Romain was a Dutchman. There was a feeling that they should improve manufacturing, the appearance of things. And Professor Romain was appointed as professor of design. He was extraordinarily competent, but within his own aspect. Which again was a set piece, very much a Romain aspect. But superb, magnificent lettering, magnificent formal design, high competence. But the problem was that he produced little Romains. He was an extraordinarily difficult sort of person. But the students loved him.

Anyway, in the painting school you drew in the morning, you went to the antique class and you drew the heads, and later on you were allowed to draw figures, and then

you could go to the life class. Later on then we would be allowed to paint in the life class.

How did the part time teachers feed into that system? I mean essentially Keating was regularly doing anatomy, MacGonigal was there regularly doing painting, and what structure was there for part timers. Did they come in one day a week? Did they do a few hours?

Sometimes people who graduated would get jobs and would come back, but I'm talking about the primary figures. For instance Romain didn't have an assistant. Herkner did. He had Seamus Murphy. Keating would have had John Kelly. I forgot about Lucy Charles. She was part of the design establishment. She was preparatory design.

Was Domhnall O'Murchadha there at that time?

That's Donal Murphy. He was a very competent sculptor as well. So that's more or less it. And the academy exhibitions were held upstairs in the gallery, and that gallery had been there for - a man called Baker was the architect of the Dublin Society, not yet Royal. The Duke of Leinster sold the house in 1818. He hated the house. He went to a house in South William Street. And it was sold afterwards to the Dublin Society who had moved from Shaw's Court, Grafton Street to Hawkins Street. They had a very sizeable place there, with a magnificent display gallery. It was one of the foremost in Europe. Then they moved on the purchase of Leinster House to Leinster House and

they were in Leinster House till 1922 when it was closed by the state. And the Dail chamber is still, you can see by the aspect of it, the lecture theatre.

Did you teach in the college at any stage?

I did. So anyway I was there and I graduated, and I got my diploma, which was probably the last or the second last of the ones entirely done by Professor Romain. And I went back to Limerick. Mr. Butcher had died and I got a job in the art school in Limerick. Then they appointed a headmaster. A man named McEvoy, who was a Scotsman, a Glasgow Catholic. I say that advisedly. He was the first manifestation of the rays of the new sun. Limerick at that time, well there was no employment, there was very little anyway. He told the citizenry, "Send your children up here and I'll make them art teachers and they can get jobs", you see. He filled the place in no time, more so with amateurs, and they were all told to come along and do your own thing. So you couldn't give anybody instruction. You just walked around like the Nigel Rolfes of the world saying "work away, work away", not as Keating would. I had a whole clatter of very very good, superb drawings by Keating where he said this is the way to do it. MacGonigal would also instruct a painter.

I had been painting the figure once, painting very sparsely because paint was expensive and I couldn't afford it. I had little tubes, and I'd squeeze out a tiny little bit, mix it up with turpentine and put it on. And Maurice came in one day, he was tetchy you know, and he said, "Give me your brush". So I gave it to him. "Give me your palette" he said. "Where are your paints?" "There they are". I'll never forget it. He squeezed the entirety of every tube out. There were mounds of colour, he shoved it in and he began to paint the leg with big impasto. I thought, "Oh God, there's a months

money down the drain". And there were highlights on the knee, and highlights on the nose, he said that's the way to do it. That's the way to do it for him. So I thought could I keep the paint. He was great like that, when you needed a shock.

There was no such thing as backsliding, drifting, you had to apply yourself.

It was very disciplined, and it was a discipline that you lent yourself to because you knew there was great body of instruction built into it. It belonged to a worthwhile tradition. It's as though you belonged to the orthodoxy of the church and you weren't invited to become a schismatic or a heretic. You could do your own thing, of course you could, because every human being does. But you belonged to a rich body of instruction. And I think there is a great deal of acceptance of that.

So anyway I came out of that. So the headman was very pleased because there were people coming in giving their money. But they didn't last very long. You see they never got anything out of it. So anyway, he got as his helper now a fellow called Mainwaring who was from the same background. Mainwaring had more ability. And I was an embarrassment, so I had to be shoved out, marginalized, and finally got rid of altogether. Like what happened later on at the college of art. So I came to Dublin. I got work teaching.

Anyway after a while of that Michael Burke said would you take a part time job at the college of art. I said I would. So I worked there for about six or seven years. It was during that time that I painted the *Flight of the Earls*. Did you see my Exhibition?

Yes I did.

Anyway there I was. I painted that big picture. It was a reckless thing to do. Where was I going to put it?

Ciaran Lennon told me he was in the 1916 painting. He was a student at the college at the time it was painted and he said that you used students from the college as models.

It's true of everyone who was there. They were all in it. Some of them are legs some are arms. Keating is in *The Flight of the Earls*. Anyway, I painted that there, but it was a waste of time.

And would the government not buy paintings like that?

There waiting for the final accolades, RIP. So anyway, what happened then was interesting. I had a temporary job there and a body of students moved in who were different. They were different to our body of students, to the normalcy of students. They came in in the awareness that they were bearers of a new creed. The bearers of this new creed included architects who aspired to be persons of taste and often got government commissions to put up buildings of repellent aspect. The nephew of a minor politician who became head of the Arts Council, a Jesuit called O'Sullivan, and an Arts Council which in a kind of way was made up of thirty Lutherans banging their thesis to the door of the church in Wurttemberg. They were doing it in the exclusivist, limited domain of an esoteric companionship. They were the bearers of this new elevation. What happened was - there was a simple enough devise. All the money was channelled into their own areas. It was confined to the visual arts, entirely so. There

was nothing else. In Sean O'Faolaoin's time it became an absolute farce with brass bands and such. Anyway, they had very little money, so they got a bit more money, and it was all used for that purpose. And they aspired to have flurries with a bit of patronage, not out of their own pockets but public money. Of necessity if you wanted to elevate someone like Louis Le Brocquy - who of all people in the country is the most ill suited for any form of elevation as they are only now discovering. He has been very successful, a minor draughtsman, a minor painter, with a certain skill I suppose in design.

So the Arts Council had to have somebody who was going to be elevated as the star turn, and Louis was selected. And the total amount of state funding was going to Louis. It was a period when they had something like £75,000 and they spent something like £68,000 on Louis alone. And returning from a holiday, which O'Sullivan had spent with Louis in the south of France, and on the way back he spent the remaining amount of money buying the wife's stuff. The wife had one of her perennial displays in London, and he bought the entirety of what was left.

I've heard such stories before.

He once had an exhibition, or it was arranged that he did, in Japan. And some Fianna Fail supporter - Charlie was a supporter of his wife - some Fianna Fail supporter asked someone in the printing trade would he be responsible for the catalogue. So obviously he said yes, because it was the expectation. But the poor man was confronted with a mammoth amount of work. These were colour reproductions. They spent thousands and thousands of pounds on it.

But that was the sort of thing that happened decade after decade.

Didn't that all change when Colm O'Briain became director of the Arts Council?

No, it was worse.

No, what I mean is that the dominant old regime in the Arts Council was not happy with the changeover to O'Briain.

The director of the Arts Council was Monseigneur de Brun. He left, and Lemass was contacted by a Fianna Fail politician - so ex-president Hillary told me, why should I doubt it. He rang Lemass and he said, "I see the director of the Arts Council is gone now". "Oh yes" said Lemass who didn't have much dealings with this area at all. He said, "You know I was thinking that it's important to get the right man there". And he said, "I have a nephew", and of course Lemass immediately got the message, "I have a nephew, he's a Jesuit and I was thinking he might be considered for the post". Needless to say he got it. That's what happened. That's the way these things happen.

The first fellow to come into the college of art when they tried to get rid of my dispensation - I left, I walked out. What happened to me was the student revolt.

Were you there for the student revolt?

Yes. It couldn't happen in Trinity, it couldn't happen in Maynooth, and it certainly couldn't happen in Bolton Street. What happened was that people began to move into the college of art who were touched by this thing, by this Arts Council, because the patronage - it was a poor enough time - was being directed to that type of thing.

Certain figures were being elevated, of whom two ladies of middle class protestant extraction - if they weren't quite canonised they almost were - Mainie Jellett and the other one, I can't think of her name now. They were subject to latter day biographies. Anyway they had to have people. Louis was the daddy of the lot. Louis was very useful because he never embarrassed them by being around the place. They set the tone, the new Arts Council, with money, with public money, because they were buying, and they were buying exclusively that type of thing, exclusively. In my whole life I never got a halfpenny from them, nothing was ever bought, a drawing, a watercolour, in my life. I was never included in exhibitions. That applies to people of my ilk, my dispensation. So that obviously had a major effect. Then the students were touched by this because it was actually very easy to do.

So the first thing was to get rid of the old dispensation, so they went along with hatchets and they knocked down the statues. There was a general nihilism prevalent at this time and it couldn't find a better place to express itself than the National College of Art. As I say it couldn't happen in Bolton Street.

So anyway these people moved into the college of art, but they didn't move in with the sort of discipline that I was subject to because that would be hard work. They'd say "oh that's all unimportant" and they'd go into these little huddles in rooms and talk endlessly and so on. Everything they were against had to go. So they did the inanimate things. They broke the statues and it didn't appear in the papers. Three months afterwards there was a headline in the Evening Press: "*Statues broken in the college of art*". Three months old and the people in the Department of Education were either unwilling or unable or timid to do anything. So these lads were given free reign.

Now the next thing was to get rid of the staff. So people who were obvious practitioners of the old dispensation were targeted. MacGonigal left so they picked on

Micheal de Burca. Now Burke was given no power. He would have loved to get rid of the troublemakers. But it wasn't a normal place. It was a creation of the Department of Education. Anyway finally Michael Burke was shifted. Amid all this destruction people like me were being targeted, so I left. I left on the basis that there could be no employment for me, that there weren't available hours and so on.

I remember Charlie Harper was in my class. Charlie was an actor, a propagandist. There was an element of excitement too. They would all sit around together smoking very dubious substances. They are full of repentance now, they have hollow stomachs from banging their chests and saying *mea culpa*.

The people who couldn't leave, like John Kelly, they had a terrible time. It continued for years. Because what those students did was within the span of their student period. Then of course when they had to get a job a lot of them were subsumed and they became teachers. That's the way it was done.

One of the great contributors to that whole thing was George Dawson, a very nice fellow indeed. Now George was the granddaddy of the support group for the Charlie Harpers of the world. The whole thing had to be broadened out to get into institutions, because if you want to accolade the Le Brocquys of the world they have to be included in display cases which of their nature and identity have an enhancing quality about them. Anyway, they formed this thing called the contemporary arts society. The purpose of that was to promote this thing through the medium of people who did it.

Anyway, it was a Government state policy, state funded through the medium of a state institution - the Dublin Municipal Gallery of Modern Art - to support that aspect of the visual arts. It was a formal state way to ignore the tradition and the practitioners of the other tradition.

And did it have anything to do with the fact that it was new and mirrored our new international status?

Part of it was that as well, that's right. It was also about embarrassment. A feeling that here we were on the perimeter of Europe and somehow we were fuddy duddy. And we had old houses around the place called Georgian, so lets get rid of them, lets put up these ghastly buildings like these bad eastern European things. It was all part of that.

Could it have been a reaction against nationalism as well? Given that some of those artists who were rejected like Keating represented nationalism.

Yes, that's an interesting point. Keating was the painter of the troubled times. He was the painter laureate as it were, if you like for the Free State. That was an intensely Irish school of painting itself. Paul Henry was the same. Keating had to be denigrated. It was like the emperor Franz Joseph in Austria. You had to get rid of every Hapsberg in every hamlet. So Keating was professionally disliked, that was the way. It was a deliberate act. As a necessary adjunct to their strict policy, it was required that they have people on the daily newspapers and magazines who would express what was desired to be expressed, and so you had a fellow called Fallon. He was like Pius X11, he goes on forever. He was wound up by O'Sullivan thirty years ago and he regurgitated the same old psalms all the time. There were two forms of writing. One was dismissal – vituperation - and the other was enhancement. So to enhance Louis you had to denigrate Keating. So poor old Keating, a very old man, was actively

denigrated and abused, and Louis was elevated to the heights. That's the way it was done, and that was done using public money.

Where did the Independent Artists come into that picture, Charlie Cullen, Michael Kane and so on?

They were all aspirants. They were all stars in the ascent.

They would see themselves as different from the Le Brocquys and that group.

Everyone was looking for a bit of money. And the only source of money at the time was the Arts Council, outside of the people. Every one of those without exception knocked at the door of the Arts Council, and a lot of them were taken in.

One of the questions I want to ask is what relevance has the curriculum in the NCAD now?

None, none at all, students were forced to do a curriculum that had no value. And you gave the answer earlier when you said about the art teacher who had to relearn their business. And I know. I was on a board for years and I know. The parents used to come to me and say, "My boy went in, he was accepted". And the boy or girl was accepted because they had a portfolio and they looked at the portfolio and they said, "That's quite good, he can get in". He got in. He was hardly in when he was got at and told, "Give over all that. You can't draw from the nude". He couldn't do any of the things that he aspired to do to improve himself. That was all forbidden. And they came

to me and said, "My boy has had a nervous breakdown, my boy is terribly upset". They had actually been made sick by the bullying of these people. That fellow Bruce has an awful lot on his conscience. He should have, if he has a conscience. The things that man did to students. He forbade students materials, forbade them a qualification at the end of the year, and forbade them a diploma, unless they subscribed. They were an ignorant lot. They tried to get me off the board. But anyway to go back a bit, Michael was gone. Then they whipped up this fellow from Wales.

Jonah Jones?

That's right. Anyway this fellow arrived. And he arrived with a dog, a whippet. This was a miner's son type of thing.

That's right. I remember him talking about being a miner's son.

He was put in as the new priest of the new religion.

How was he chosen?

That was departmental. But they couldn't get rid of John Kelly. Carey bent with the wind. He became a reed. He bent down.

I think he suffered too.

He suffered in the capacity of his principles.

I think he was very upset by the whole thing.

It's easy when you come out with a pension. If he was out in the market place as I was. When I left that place I moved to the only place that I could move to and that was the Irish people. There was no one else. The only gallery in Dublin was Leo Smith, and I knew Leo. I never got inside that door in terms of a picture being bought - I knew Leo, and I got on with Leo - because Leo was entirely dependent on the Arts Council. There was a policy to get rid of people who represented the earlier tradition, and as far as possible to get rid of the physical artefacts that were in remembrance of that. Then put your own boys in. There were exceptions who they couldn't get rid of or who bent their heads to stay. Carey was one of these. But having said that, his one major ability came to the fore and he was greatly teased because he represented continuity.

And he was the only one.

There was Brett McEntagart.

He was in print most of the time.

Lucky guy and he never made a print in his life. Fergus O'Ryan who was in print before that was able for the whole lot of them together. He had a tongue like a razorblade. Fergus despised them. I despise them, every one of them.

Personality of course was important in the college. Personality was everything.

Little John Kelly was talking to me about that and he said he's a little terrier. Do you know John?

I do.

He'd say "go to hell". And he would be right. It would have worked. Big John Kelly wouldn't say that. I remember his wife Anna had to go up and begged them, begged them, not to terrify the man as he was. When he got out of the place it was too late.

Everyone I spoke to felt sorry for John.

The Scotsman was the main malefactor there. I had an exhibition in the Arts Club. Seamus O'Colman opened it, and Seamus said that I was very well trained. I thanked Seamus and said that it was absolutely important to get a good training, but the difficulty was now that it was very difficult for boys and girls to get this sort of training, because all these disciplines were not being taught like that now. Some days afterwards a round robin was contrived which was sent to all members of the staff, and signed by them, to have me removed from the Board, on the basis that I had attacked the teaching of art in the fine art section of the college of art. Jackie Stanley had done it. She was at the thing and she carried it out and that was signed by all the staff, Carey signed it too. And Carey was a member of the academy at the time. That's true. He

was afraid of losing his job and of falling out with the boys. He actually said that to me. That it wouldn't do to disturb them.

I think Jackie Stanley was a very influential member of staff.

That's true now.

And Campbell Bruce was an expert at dealing with bureaucracy.

He did it with George McClelland.

Big George?

Goerge had been a policeman and has a gallery in Belfast, highly successful. He has been living off it since. George, because of his age and experience he became a sort of a leader of student factions. George had got a scholarship from Belfast City Authority, he could well afford not to. George made a masterpiece, a cupboard.

I remember that well.

The scholarship was not renewed. So George queried it. The letter said something like 'we have not received a satisfactory statement from your tutors'. George went straight up to Belfast and went straight in and pulled rank, and he asked for an explanation. We got this letter from this man Campbell Bruce saying etc etc. George

got Mary Robinson as his Barrister. The whole thing was settled. Sheridan was party to that.

The reason Sheridan got in was that they wanted someone who would be favourable, and who was one of the boys. Where was he from? Half way between Ballymun and Florida. A public relations man type of thing, quite nice in many ways. He's doing a *mea colpa* every time he sees me. I half like him in a way. You could call him a phoney. You could do that. I was at a dinner one time and I said, "Do you see that phoney across the table?" He could take that. But you see the others wouldn't. They'd be all aggrieved. There was a suggestion that an American institution would be involved in the setting up of a formal art school of my dispensation in the college of art. That would be ok with Noel, because he wouldn't have to make a personal conversion himself. It would be done for him. And as well as that America means money.

But you are right enough. The *mea colpa* job is happening. They are all at it now. I have built up a body of supporters by not being mentioned, by not being applauded.

Carey is a very honourable fellow. I like Carey. I'm not being critical of Carey. I am in a way. I mean what I'm doing is presenting the situation and the absolute requirement is to earn a livelihood. You see Cary's situation was this: he had bought a house, he had his wife, he had two daughters, and he had two mothers. He had her mother and he had his mother.

It's forgotten that people have to earn a living. It seems so obvious. If you are rich you can paint what you like.

People who make their money from teaching have no idea what the market place is like. But then truly it is an ivory tower. That is, it is a place where you disengage from the market place. Up there you can do your surveys, and you can do this and that and the other, but down below someone has to sell something to make a livelihood. And I address myself to be the best available to the people. I'm lucky because I can do a whole lot of things. I can do portraits, landscapes, still lives, interiors, flowers, roses, and so on. I might be sneered at but people buy them, they take them home to the wife, the wife is delighted, they buy another one.

If you survive economically and feed your family that's an honourable achievement.

And when you think of that awful Fallon. The damage that he has done. He was a signalman out in front blazing this new religion which is hoary with antiquity now after fifty or sixty years and you are told it is new and exciting.

APPENDIX 20

Noel Sheridan (1936 -) Artist. Director of the National College of Art and Design 1980 - 1989 and 1994 - .

Noel Sheridan - I think I came to the NCAD in 1979. I was in Dublin in 1978 to visit my parents, my father - my mother had died and I had been away for twenty years. I was ten years in New York and ten years in Australia.

Peter O'Neill - *Working as an artist?*

Yes, working as an artist, as a painter. Then I became involved in the Fluxus movement and early moves in underground film making, but also painting. And I had a dealer, Leo Smith of the Dawson Gallery, later Taylor. I went to Australia in 1971 where I did a lot of performance work and what they called Post-Object work, essentially conceptualism. In 1975, because this art, if you like, still had problems getting into commercial galleries, you were getting the beginning of alternative spaces, and we started the first one in Australia, in Adelaide. I directed that from 1975 to 1979. And its brief was initially to accommodate everything that was happening in fine art by way of conceptualism or post-formalist art, essentially it was that maximalism, the anything goes idea. And it was very cohesive at that point. It later broke up into a

feminism, community arts, high performance, etc. At that time it was in flux and this centre was a support system for that work in Australia, and a lot of really interesting work got done. We spread the basis then to include contemporary music, contemporary dance, poetry, and so on, mainly because they were working with similar ideas, which could not get support commercially. There was that moment of flowering in the late sixties and early seventies where there was terrific interaction between all of the arts. But its primary drive was in the visual arts. There were various takes on it theoretically. I suppose one like Kaprow, not so much out of happenings, but out of that opening out. It even may have come out, in a remote way, from someone like Warhol. It was certainly anti-Greenberg. It was anti-formalist. It wasn't an essentialist view of art; i.e., that art is essentially one thing; e.g., it shows the means of its own production. You know, the formalist thing, how do you float colour? You drain narrative, storytelling. Everything that was more appropriate to other art forms should not be in the visual arts.

Was that in response to political issues?

Yes, I think it was. There was politics in it. Certainly it was driven by Marxist theory, Lukacs, etc. And at some level Greenberg's theory was seen as imperialist.

Critical Theory?

Yes, and sometimes that was very up front. The theory was based on taste therefore it was exclusive. That kind of thing, Beuys etc., led the art world, not every one of us, to community arts. That Joseph Beuys idea; everybody is an artist, artists

should be helping others express their own creativity. Some people thought that was too loose, they would, lets say, involve themselves with trade union work. They would do the newsletter, they would go into committees, and they would bring their skills in the service of, in that case, a revolutionary political idea. That was some. There were others then who simply didn't like the straight jacket and the sort of terminal problems that were left at the end of formalism. Like how do you float colour and that minimalist cul-de-sac?

You mean they had come to a dead end?

Well it had, for some. I mean Sean Scully is still working through it, so there's a sense in which we can exaggerate something's death. Painting is always dying. Has been dying since 1916 and Duchamp. But there is still interesting painting. Some simply said, "Let's open out. I want to make art about the things that interest me. So it's narrative, so what". That was the early performance work. It was, I suppose, a sculptural idea that the medium became the body itself. It was an extension of sculpture in that you were charging the space. It was off the pedestal. That eventuated in installations.

So it was very much the avant-garde versus the formalist.

Well, yes it was. Well, not everything really, except high performance. It's too simplistic. I mean the kind of things that Stuart Brisley - and I suppose Brisley was one who deeply influenced Nigel Rolfe. But when you saw Brisley's performances it was like an animated painting. The considerations of what made it good or bad were still

the formal ones, placement, location, and the aesthetics of that. But then others would - the whole Fluxus business would have been much more whimsical, much more Metaphysical as well. There were these shades within it. Then out of that was the beginning of feminism, among other movements.

So it's out of that background, and directing that space[1], and documenting it, and being deeply involved in it as a practice, as a politics, as a paradigm shift in relation to what the social role of art was. Did art have a social role? What was that social role? And there was a lot of theoretical speculation along that line. One idea was that art was unspecific experimental modelling.

So its a distinction between an experiment that has a closed goal like E=MC squared, the experiment to prove that is directed towards a proof. Whereas in art it's an open-ended experiment, it's do things to see what happens. And there was a permission for that. Early conceptualism could become very solipsistic and inward, like "I have these great thoughts, terrific art thoughts, believe me". Something had to be public to be art. And I had done a few works, particularly a big installation in Australia called E*verybody Should Get Stones,* so -.

I've heard of that.

Essentially it was about perception. It was about choice. It was about language in relation to art.

Anyway I came out of that. And I came to Dublin. I'd kept in some correspondence with Project, which was similar to what I was doing in Australia. And then, as I say, I

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[1] Experimental Art Foundation, Adelade South Australia.

was walking down Kildare street or something on my way back to Australia, and I think it was Campbell who said, "Are you over for the job?" I'd been away so long I thought it had something to do with the IRA. I didn't know what he meant. And then he said, "Well, they want to appoint a director". It's one of those accidents. It isn't something I ever thought I would do or not do. But he said, "Look why don't you just fill in the form". So I filled in the application form, put it in, and went back to find, I think, six months later that they wanted me to do the interviews. So I came in and did them. What was happening in the sculpture area and in the painting, I got the feeling that there was something - this was different. One of the real reasons it's different is it genuinely is beleaguered. It's not even getting support. But it was regional specific – Irish.

You mean within the college?

I mean within the college. I could feel there was real intelligence here. And much to my own surprise a kind of national thing. I don't believe that we are visually illiterate. I believe for a mix of economic, political, historical reasons we just didn't get into the visual arts. The money wasn't there but the talent was. So I could see that there was great talent, there were some really good ideas. There were people working through stuff. They'd be doing it in broom closets and under stairs. It seemed like it could not be better than this.

And so I came then to NCAD. First there was an appeal to the marks. And as I got into it there was an administrative need to bring transparent criteria to bear. I'd had some experience in Australia. We now have a card, which has been going for about twenty years, that allows you, whether it's representational painting, installation,

avant-garde, these criteria apply - the student can see what you are marking it against. The old thing of "I think this is a failure" and other people thinking this is a first, but no one exactly saying why, that had to be clarified. But what I was looking at was a real antipathy between the Irish here and the English teachers. And it was deep. And it was bitter. And one of the things I suppose that I bought into that was I was Irish but had a grasp of art issues across a range. So the irony of it is, and a lot of my own people wouldn't believe it, but "How could you be director with a Dublin accent like that? I couldn't get it, like we own ourselves. We can do this. Why can't we do this ourselves - confidence.

So that was difficult. I think I did have credibility with people like Domhnall O'Murchadha who was head of sculpture and deeply committed to, I suppose an extension of the arts and crafts movement. He had a belief in the deep mythology of Ireland. He was a beautiful Irish speaker. I could speak to him in Irish. It was lovely to listen to him. And I said to him, "Look I am not here to betray, I am not looking for the next issue of *Art Forum* to know what we're supposed to be doing". But it is difficult. How do you get the regional voice to come through that isn't parochial? How do you get us there?

Ok, so I suppose to some extent I had to say look, I'm not here with a particular agenda, beyond the fact we want to support the talent and we want to be open to whatever it is that's on. If kids want to do video, let's get video. You cannot go back to hand painting in oil on an easel and think that you have an art school. So there was a deep bitterness there. I think Campbell made the transition very well. He established himself as credible to the Irish staff. He gave it a great deal of time, and he was very sensitive. But there is no doubt that you will hear from people like Carey, and Carey will talk about John Kelly and so on. John Kelly got crushed in this. There was a

commitment to modernism in the painting area that was very European based. It was expressionist. It wasn't out of the Matisse line. It wasn't the high formalism of American art. People like Charlie Cullen and so on were deeply engaged with a very interesting take. Brian Maguire and Paddy Graham and the Irish artists who continued with expressionism were remarkable. They came into the frame with neo-expressionism but there was nothing neo about them. It wasn't a self-conscious sort of post-modern appropriation of an area.

They were at it since the 1950s.

They were at it in the 1950s and 1960s, and it was something to do with the catholic political pain chart. Now one of the things I was very keen to do is, people have got to talk about their experience. It's not like today, you find that everybody is under water because Bill Viola works with water.

Anyway, I began to see then that everybody was going back to the terror of confession and the whole pain trip of being a catholic, and after a while I had to say, "Look, no more candles. That's it for the black box with the purple curtains. Get over yourself". Now some brilliant people come up like the Blue Funk group, who went back into a revisionist history of the famine etc., political work. That was a very brief period. But it was very cutting edge and very political. I think all of these people have continued to do well. So - but then again you are talking about art education and most of your energy to some extent has to go into the pass student. All the teaching goes into trying with those - whereas the highflying people like Cathy Prendergast graduated from here when it was virtually a building site. Of course she got a first because she was good when she came in. So that's the other thing you've got to come

to terms with. You can't pretend that you can teach anyone to be an artist. One person can't do that. I don't believe everybody is an artist. I think there are certain people who are artists, but I believe that an education in the arts is a liberal education, just as good as their humanity subjects. I totally support that. But this thing of I'll go then, and after four years they will give me a document that says I'm an artist, and I will be one is (a) to miss the realities of life, and (b) to miss the whole point of what an art education is. You can put in the support system, you can have a world - and this is what was different – twenty-four hours a day where everybody is talking about art. That's different from the visual art world I remember in the 1950s when there were twelve people in it. You knew them all. There was Paddy Collins, and Gerry Dillon, and there was a bohemian Bailys drinking thing. This however is a place that is devoted to art, and people who want it have a fantastic library, have good tutors, and they can come through.

So when I came I say there was the Irish/English thing, and finally I made sure that that wasn't the perception. That I wouldn't stand for that. But at the same time if you had gifted people like Campbell you get behind them, and Campbell understood that.

In terms of the curriculum and how it worked on the ground, with students, what was the driving force? Were you as the director driving that or was it driven by the tutors?

I think it would have been driven by Campbell and the tutors, but I would have participated. Like the sort of things I'm saying to you are the kind of things I would want to see. I didn't want to see: this could be anywhere, you could be in Amsterdam, you could be in Perth, you could be in New York, and this is the end of year show. To

some extent it was a bit like that, inevitably. But it was to get in behind the particular, the quirky, and the "What is this voice that only could come out of this culture?" And to challenge that, you know, leprechauns and shamrocks rubbish.

An interesting thing came up that came out of the sort of activity I was in in the 1970s that beleaguers this place to this day, and I can't get through it, it's this distinction between art and craft which is media based. The idea that anything actually hand painted in oil is art whereas a beautiful hat by Philip Tracy isn't art. I don't get that. Like what I think is craft is that whose end is known from the beginning. In other words if you are doing action painting now it's craft. If you are doing Cubism now, that is craft, whereas something in industrial design, something in visual communication, something in fashion, can be. And that is a hard thing to get across.

Technically how would students move across, if they wanted to go into the fine art area?

Well it's difficult, sometimes after the first year. We have a numbers problem. We're very good now in craft. Craft traditionally, because it wasn't energetic and forward looking, it was hard to make up the numbers. Very often people in order to stay would go into craft. But now we've got terrific young people, you know the head of craft Neil Reid is a terrifically up to speed guy. The head of ceramics is someone who has a practice. It's sort of fine art like, he does figures and things, and we've got a terrific person now in metal, which is jewellery. It's very very good. And we've got glass. The craft is interesting

They don't share my view that we've got to blur these distinctions, they sometimes - like if I'm asking for more rigour in craft they think I mean you want us to make cups

and saucers. That isn't what I mean. I mean if you are going to take on fine art and installations you really have to address the history of that. It isn't enough to say, "Well I won't put it on a pedestal, I'll put it on the floor with stones around it". That isn't it. Yes, I thought the structure was ok. You could say, "Why do you need heads of faculty? Why do you need departments? You could do with this, that or the other. But the main thing is, if the people settle in, the first thing is to stabilise it. When I came I did an awful lot of interviews, and I was on the television station just simply to say to the people of Ireland, "Send your children here, it is ok. We will look after them. We're not maniacs running around smoking dope and drinking". This is a really important thing. And I think that's been - that's to some extent been established. We need now to lift the game, and I'm very interested in where it goes next, but that may not interest you.

Yes, there seems to have been the impression that things were getting a bit dodgy.

But they weren't getting a bit dodgy. What they were doing was being contemporary and open to new ideas. Now there was risk involved in that. But it's rather like going back to the church or sort of imagining there can be the old Fianna Fail. It's over, its over, and it wasn't that good when it was there, because everyone was getting it third hand, it was becoming a craft. Like if you are drawing from observation with shadow and shine and shade you are not making art. But for a certain kind of conservative view, you will get it from Tom Ryan and so on, is like the twentieth century was a mistake or it should never have happened.

So was there an attempt at retrenchment in the 1980s then?

No there wasn't. A very interesting thing happened. There was a move against a progressive development. One of the things that shook it though was that we got the award from the Tribune, you know that annual award. We did a decade show and that got the award of the year. And that changed those members of the board who didn't quite know what was going on. They realised, you know, that you can't push back history like that.

So the new system was allowed to continue then in its loose structure.

Well it wasn't that loose. I mean I thought it was pretty - look at the structures, which Campbell has probably told you. They come out of a foundation year that was very fine art based. They have changed that now so that it's as much design as fine art, but with a huge fine art input. That whole thing of dismantling your idea of art, copied photographs and all that, and get seriously into the whole history of the visual arts and as much of the twentieth century as you can get into. But the first thing was very basic. We came then from a five-year degree to a four-year degree, which was good. But the final year then was, I suppose, devoted to that final project that worked with the tutors. So I suppose - we had a lot of visiting lecturers. There wasn't a house style. That didn't bother me. I mean the thing they were saying that it was all a bit over the top, that's good for me. Where you are really in trouble is - lets say you go to Goldsmiths now and everyone's the new Brit Art, Neo-Conceptual, and just think this is easy, you could phone this in. But there was enough out there, you know. I would support risk. I would support ambitious failure. I'm not looking for the security at the

end of the year to see everything we saw over the past twenty years all over again. Now admittedly you take your chance with that.

It seems in England, from what I've read that art schools often specialise. So for instance the Slade has a particular angle, Goldsmiths has a particular angle, and so on.

I think that is a good point.

Mechanically how does that work?

The way it works is that, and it's an unfortunate thing, but as the national college you've got to do everything. Now anyone who attempts to do everything misses the precision of doing one thing really well. So I'm aware of that allegation. We've got to do wood, we've got to do heavy metal, we've got to do clay, we've got to do representational, so it isn't a place that's driven by one vision. Like look what we have. We've got Charlie Cullen who's head of painting, Ollie Whelan, who is a painter, who's also familiar with the IT equipment. He puts together the CIRCA magazine. We've got Robert Armstrong who is a painter, but who is doing his post graduate work in media. And then we've got David Godbold, who's like Nigel Rolfe in being up to the minute. "This is what they are doing in New York" kind of thing. So there's a good spread. There is a dynamic between that. We hope that the students get to make a choice, but there's no question that those options are there, and it's not the whole spectrum. For instance, I'm now doing an exchange with Lyme Academy in Connecticut, which is one of those schools that didn't change in the 1960s. It just

stayed with that atelier, representational thing, and they now came over here for six weeks and they bring the teachers with them. So in fine art it's all a constant thing of bringing balance and redress.

So students are free then to head into an area that they find an interest in.

That's right. And we bring people, because there is an argument maybe that in the revolution the drawing baby went out with the bath water. Did you see the drawing show I curated?

I did indeed.

The introduction I wrote in the catalogue to that is to try and place it historically. Because I was running out of time and space I didn't do the last section in great depth, like what's happening today. However, there is that thing, a belief I suppose, and this show was meant to underpin it, of the centrality of drawing. But the definition of drawing changes. Like, what is it? It isn't just drawing from perception, or the Tonks rules and so on. We have to take in everything else that drawing might apply to.

So how would you define drawing then?

Well I think, and I hope this isn't, you know, some people think it's all just so charming, but I think there is something to do with a body in the world that is reflected in the hand/eye/brain co-ordination of a representation that has a radical thing to it. Now it's at that point - as you know I open with Levi-Strauss' idea of the first mark -

how we perceive it, how its outside ourselves, and I think that relationship has to be maintained, but its in the face of - and its only a tactical thing. The software that you can get now is so speedy and so sophisticated. One reason, and its not the only reason, is that there is great power in drawing, you control, whereas with the software there is a danger it will control you, because it's so versatile, you start going off. People should do that, and there are great things to be done from it. But I would put that central, and arising from that to try and, if you like, incorporate it into the world we're coming into. It's not interesting I know for your study, but what is this virtuality that people are talking about. Is it that new? All art is virtual.

I think that whole post-modern thing is deeply exaggerated, it strikes me more as a subset of modernism, certain things have been discarded but other things appropriated. But what, like that never happened before? What are the African figures in the Avignon women by Picasso doing. Like we never heard of appropriation? And then there's the idea of, you know, these free-floating signifiers. You can just put these together, but what was collage about? What was Schwitters about? Does nobody get it?

This neo-conceptualism is actually about production factors. Everything is bigger, the technology and so on. But when you actually get to the idea, you are going down these corridors, light beams, turn to the right, you get some kind of light box with a very ordinary idea at the end. What is pumped up and what is supported is the idea of the expensive installation. Artists are now working on projects for two or three hundred thousand pounds and it's not serious if it isn't. The alternative spaces by 1980 realised this is not tenable, because actually we're in the frame now, we've more support now. So then they became contemporary art spaces. And really what you are seeing within that is a huge support for that 1970s work, in its new manifestation for

the most part. To what extent students can get that view is just something we just hope to do by giving them a theoretical base.

Well it's very difficult because students are to a great extent vulnerable to manipulation by the market. And what your saying there throws us back onto a political situation that has been argued before.

I still put up my hand if only as a sentimental socialist. I mean I never believed that dialectical materialism was a science, but I did believe in a better distribution of income. I did believe that you don't have to die because you can't afford the medicine. I do believe we've got to do something about this, but with the collapse of the wall it's amazing, people I knew who were up to here in Marxist theory and revolution, its like, "That wasn't me". It's like when people stopped having the long -.

Sideburns?

Yes, when they come they always had them and when they went they never had them. But they did. And I was - I didn't have this, "We've got to get out into the community", because what am I going to bring to a community that is impoverished, a community that doesn't have education, that doesn't have wages, that doesn't have employment? What am I giving as a artist? You think you've got problems. Have you thought about negative space?

In other words, are you going to condescend to them? How do you deal with that?

That's right. Now some people can do it.

Like Martin Folan in Limerick for instance. He does great stuff in the community.

He's very good. He's very credible. Brian Maguire is very credible.

Chris McGuire, who works here, is another.

That's right. There are people who can do it. But you've got to be honest with yourself. Like I backed the whole Portlaoise effort that Brian runs. We do all the money for that. I'm for it, but I'm also for trying to not be curmudgeonly in reaction. We knock Tom Ryan and Bruce Arnold because they don't move forward. But you've got to check in yourself that you haven't any dopey nostalgia about the 60s either. A lot of that failed.

But I think in an educational institution devoted to art that you should really accommodate all. It's your job to accommodate all. Let people themselves make up their own minds. Give them all the tools they need and let them off.

We had the difficulty not only in trying to do everything that's alive - because you see the modernist thing was about progression in depth, this idea that there were deep structures, whether they were Marxist in relation to a superstructure, whether they were Freud in relation to the unconscious. Everything was prefaced by the belief that there was something deeper, that if only you could get there you'd get the truth. Now post-modernism has given that up. Whether it's simply tiredness or whether its weary

of all these sort of agonised people who believe "go deeper, there's more, what's the next thing". And the trajectory of modernism was really rapid. Now people have gone back to things that passed too quickly. So it may be only a subset of modernism, this idea of post-modernism. The main thing is the surface. It isn't intended in the modernist way to be difficult. What you see is what you get.

Modernism pursued some truth whereas post-modernism denies that there is a truth. We just have what is. Everything is contingent.

Yes, that doesn't mean that - although in a funny way, Who we are talking about? I'm just trying to think whose work I like. I like the work of Bill Viola for instance. But it isn't exactly post-modernism. I don't think using video is post-modern. There is a deeply religious ambition in Viola, which I don't share, but I do share these wonderful images that he can bring. And it's true like Kefer is very - but I'm just trying to wonder who it is. I quite like Damien Hirst. I think Damien Hirst is interesting, but I don't think Emin is that interesting.

So you're still at this terrible business that's happening of, "I do video. I do installations", so what! What is it? Whereas, "I do painting", I look at that. I don't think painting is dead. I think someone's going to do a painting that is going to be terrific. And that the students have to. There's nothing you can do, they go up to IMMA, they see a huge installation, so at our end of year show they say they want that, so the maintenance on this is huge. Because you can't say, "Look get it simple we can't afford this". You've got to get behind it and try and bring that change, to keep something at the centre. What I think is - like this is a hot city at the moment, whether this is some urban myth of the Sunday supplements - but suddenly like Dublin is

supposed to be it. And so everyone is getting a lot of action. It's hard to get part time teachers. What I'm trying to do is what if it's Cologne tomorrow or Prague, are you strong enough to go through? Do you have enough?

But you see, then you are victim of the market. Culturally, Ireland is going to have a culture whether it's hip or whether it's not hip. A hundred years ago when people were poor and living in the middle of the bogs they had a culture, music, and storytelling and song and all that. It wasn't nostalgic and it wasn't bourgeois culture, it was a living culture. And if the fashion becomes Cologne in the morning Ireland still has culture.

It does. Now you have really hit on something very important. I think whether I have contributed - Campbell, everybody also, I don't know what they think, but what I think, is this all an attempt to, manure is the wrong word - but to get that ground work in? Because I think somewhere in the twenty-first century, I won't be here, but we will have the visual equivalent of the Joyce or the Beckett, maybe in a different form. But there's no way it is going to happen until you have the topsoil. That means a lot of people have to fall. A lot of people have to do stuff. And it all banks up. So it's starting to look like what we have in literature, what we have in music, we are only at the beginning of this. When I say the visual arts; a lot of people are coming through in film. But a lot of people may come through in the new cheap technology that were getting now, but that's ok. I don't think it has to be a great painter. I may be wrong in thinking it's going to be an individual, it could be a co-op. It could be anything. But nothing of true importance - that is, the Joyce, Beckett, Flann O'Brian, that is the everything. I don't think it's *Riverdance*, but it's whatever that thing, that great

tradition - someone has got to have done the research, someone has got to have dug it out.

To use the Marxist analogy the superstructure and the base?

That's right, it has to be strong. People have to be comfortable with it. People have to believe they can bounce in against it, they can extend it, all of that euphoria. It'll be rich. So it's a long-term project. But immediately you've got to deal with the day to day.

On a practical level, in terms of the curriculum, the thing that matters is the staff, those who make it work on the floor. Part of how you make that as the director is in choosing staff and in deciding who is going to be here, who is going to be there, who is going to be Head of Department. I'm asking you a question. Is that how the actual curriculum works, that the curriculum is in the minds of the actual tutors?

I think it is. I'll go on the record and say we spend years preparing a course document that's that size, that has every minute of the day, and we do that because that's the language of the system. We're funded here by the state, you can't just say we're doing our own thing. We do it, and we do it well, and we administer it well, and our money and our management of it is one of the real - we are looked on as a model within the higher educational system, administratively everybody is OK. But I do say to the staff, "I will speak to the document, I will make the thing". But my hope is that in behind that you are going to do what you know you're supposed to do, but we all know can't be articulated in a document. Not just because the nature of education is so

difficult to bring that kind of precise definition to, but in the visual arts, something is going on that is either above or below language but that is its own terms. The best criticism of art is other art. Like, to look at Impressionism then look at Cezanne, it's that contrast that gives you visually what is the difference, and of course theory and writing is important, but if you don't get it on that level - so there is that belief. Its up to you if you - so. If you get that wrong you can get it very wrong and it can retard things. But finally it is down to the character and talent of the staff.

Theory is becoming a big part of art now so the History of Art and Design and Complimentary Studies is important.

Yes I'd like to see it less separated. I wanted to try and get - you see people like Robert Armstrong and Charlie Cullen, they are deeply involved in the history of art and the theory, and I wanted to get some credit for what I was calling 'studio theory'. In tutorials people could say now Mantegna did it like that, and the foreshortening of that, and Manet's figure is the - that is all theory.

But how do you put that in as a mechanism in to a marking system?

You can't. Because administratively you now go for the twenty per cent to another building, and they are not keen to go into the studios. There is a traditional thing of "we can't deal with it till it's dead."

You're dealing with UCD and TCD history of art departments and their curricula.

That's right. It's a bit like that. That's starting to change. We're getting some very bright people who are so-called 'cultural studies'. I'm ambivalent about them, but certainly popular culture and those distinctions are starting to blur. Administratively it's just their training, they don't want to talk to an artist. They either don't want to know or they are in awe of it. It's like you could take a person in off the street, " Its all a mystery to me". I can't believe that my theory people are that remote. It's like the craft/fine art thing. I'm not getting any money to run a private art school. You know, I mean I sometimes think if I had this place I'd have these teachers, we would really drive it forward. But there is a price, there is no free lunch if you are taking state money. It's always on my mind, like parents, my responsibility to them, my responsibility to their child. That isn't Vincent Van Gogh, it isn't a high flier, it's a complex thing. I don't know. I did it, it's over. All I can say is it's a bigger place than it was, in so many ways its a better place than it was, and I think it has places to go, and it doesn't fall within your ambit but I have given deep consideration to -.

But broadly speaking it does because the philosophy of the place is being covered, and I am covering that change from neo-classical to modernist and I have to touch on the death of modernism because that is a major issue.

I'd like to ask you about the 1985 investigation into the college that was held in Killiney. Perhaps investigation is not the word.

That came out of that board and its beliefs. That is a difficulty. One board makes an appointment of a director and then a new board comes in and it has no reference. But when I was appointed it was with the idea that you've got to lead this forward, you've got to sort of defuse these tensions - I put a lot of time into that - defuse these

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oppositions, get this thing going forward. So I did personalise the job. I mean I went up front.

Is this in general or in relation to the Killiney seminar?

It may have led to the Killiney thing to some extent because my style was - I had stitched this institution on to my nervous system. I represented it. I'm not a CEO waiting till the board has a policy then I know what to do.

So you knew what you were going to do.

I knew what I was going to do and there was a clash then, because boards under the act generate the policy, and you can get a sort of CEO who just comes down at the end and there are things you do. It's not that I didn't do them, but I felt maybe that I knew what the - I knew this college couldn't go back. I knew there was no point. That led to - first of all a true thing, I was running this place on my own. I didn't have a finance officer. I had a registrar, but it was all very slight. I had no back up staff. So I was doing everything. So how I came out of it was I got some help, and maybe that was good because I was trying to do too much on my own. But there was a personality clash I suppose. They just thought, "If I was director I wouldn't do this". But they weren't the director, so there was that terrible thing of "we're gonna stop this guy we don't like". You are not here to be liked. Now I have a problem of - I think I can get credibility down the line - but I have a problem with authority. Like I didn't come into this, I had been an artist, I had been totally independent. I had to get used to this, and maybe I've got too used to it. Like I know how it works now. But while it was on I -

whether I provoked it or whether it was on somebody's agenda, but certainly there was that thing of "we're going to take this guy apart".

Was that the approach?

No. The approach was we really need now, we were just about stabilising, but people get that idea - the great thing to do now is have a real look at it. Throw everything up in the air. Let's listen to everyone. Now that's good if you can really control that, but to go out on the weekend and with staff, everybody, just giving an opinion. All you got at the end of it was what this place needs is a director. Because these people thought that we're going back to the old arguments. The board, I believe, supported the pre-revolutionary thing, and we had got staff like Campbell who were trying to come forward. We had got people then in fine art who had ideas other than, you know, the whole thing is gone, but is not seen in that sort of varied way. But you are looking at people who are, to be fair to them, are kind of looking for some corporate plan to have a predictability about it, and part of that was, I suppose, to chase me.

So what was the outcome then?

Nothing.

I just fizzled out? Things carried on?

Read the documents. There was nothing.

I've read them.

If you are in crisis there are only two things to do: one, change the rules, or two, keep the paper moving. Now it wasn't in my power at that time to change the rules. But not one member of that board ever came back. But I couldn't change the rules at that time. So it's all paper. But it was very stressful for me. I really think it wasted my time. Now that's my view. They may say this was the saving of the college, but you read the document. What did it say? Out of those documents what happened?

The document has very little to say. There's a submission by Professor Ozmin and a few pages by Professor McCarthy asserting their position and their ideas but apart from that it's people saying we do this and we do that, but it doesn't go anywhere.

Well it was just one of those - I don't know.

Were you there for the 1979 graduation ceremony when students refused their diplomas?

I had to pick up on the aftermath of that. And I did know, even though I had been out twenty years. I mean I can speak the language of both sides, whereas Campbell may have thought we will just keep pulling muscle and these people will fall. These people go back six hundred years. What they are defending is not nothing. Memory is different for both cultures. The English thing is let's get to the next - no matter what sleaze scandal they go forward. Here we just keep harping on. But anyway, we got in

and brought that through. But I was so, you know, I really thought like - like after ten years I took myself out of here. I think everyone should. Ten years, you realise you could phone this in. I wanted to get stronger. I wanted to do a terrific project in Western Australia, to set up an arts centre. And I thought I'll be stronger and they'll put someone in. Maybe it is true what people think about me, I have it like this, I listen to everyone. I say, lets go, you know. And I'm not defensive, but maybe that was wrong. So a new thing came in. But when I came back I saw we'd missed the IT thing. It's good that we missed the whole IT thing, because so many people jumped into it too quickly. But I came back and I had to wire the entire college, everyone is on the Internet. I had to bring it all up to speed.

So there's a lot of things happening. Like, the Head of Design is going, Theo is going. The Head of Print is going. This is a real moment for fine art; key appointments. Charlie may take early retirement. It's all going to be different. The big thing is the IT. I did put a multi-media department together.

You did?

Yes, It's just starting.

For all areas?

It will service everything, but mostly we will do a Masters in a kind of virtual reality, so that we have a philosophy that goes back into modernism, that is all part of the Cezanne's, is it? Isn't it? What is it? And that brings that right up to today. Were still working through that. But I think that's a great hope for the future.

I found it interesting that there are very clear connections between what has been going on in the college since 1974 and developments in English thinking I mean people like Whitehead, and Herbert Read, apart from the obvious influence from the Critical Theorists.

Its funny you picked Herbert Read. I think that whole Jungian idea of archetypes, it's a rationalisation for the dig-in of modernism that's going to bring something. It impacted quite a bit with Clive Bell and that kind of English thing.

Very exclusive as well.

Very exclusive in significant form and then into Greenberg. There's a politics about that, a politics about taste.

I find that interesting. Especially in relation to what Declan Kiberd says about Irish culture having a role to play in that context of contemporary theory. That's where we are. We are at that edge now. And also, unfortunately, we happen to be at the edge of post-modernism, so called post-modernism, which in many ways is only defined by what it's not; which is modernism. Which is something that history is moving towards and breaking through, and I think makes right now really interesting. That's why the changeover to your successor will be so important. It's a fascinating area.

I'd love to be doing it again. An awful lot of it was just the spadework of settling this place down. You have to appoint someone who can fundraise. The reality there is that you are not going to get any more money from the government, other than what we have. There are no more buildings. Any development, get it yourself. Someone who has that, who has that ability and track record, and then someone who is open to the future. I've a battle on at the moment with fine print. Fine print was the IT at the turn of the century. That was it. But it's now entered this exotic space. But it is difficult to get them to see. Look I'm talking about etching, lithography, silk screen, video, IT. It's all, you know: What is this pixilated world? Because you go into the IT you are still going down that 15th century space. It's that prospect - it hasn't even dealt with the shallow space.

Isn't that the problem with systems, they tend to find equilibrium. They won't go forward, they settle.

I think we've got to open that. And the other realisation is the college - and I say this and it's not a cliché at the conferring - it's only as good as what the students achieve. I don't care what kind of four-colour brochure, what sort of book, what sort of thing - have a look at the work, see what happened to them. Are they honourable? Have they done a good job? And it is that energy that sustains us. That is a bit Marxist, like the means of production, its the students, they have a value. I'm quite happy to understand that we contribute to it.

But isn't that one of the great contradictions of art education, especially in terms of critical theory. That you are actually destroying the structure and yet the structure is the only thing you've got.

The only reason I do it and I know this is a big Tony Cronin argument and I'm aware of it, I'm sympathetic to it. It's just that I think - I don't want it just to be theoretical. I want to talk about Ireland. I want to talk about redressing a history that was a rack, that I put it in, in spite of all the - your institutionalising art, your actually anti-art, you've got to be strong, to do that. People have got to wonder, like can you really be Derrida. When you look at the history of French philosophy, it's strength, it's density, it's that luxury of that little expresso cappuchino, but if your bringing it to a place that doesn't - why the hell would you destroy IMMA - at the same point you've got to say like this is us, this is ours.

APPENDIX 21

Lorcan Walsh (1952 -) Artist. Studied at the National College of Art and Design 1977 - 1979.

Lorcan Walsh - My first contact was with the College of Art was when I was 21. It was 1973 and I did the entrance exam. I got the entrance exam and I was called for an interview.

I was not accepted and I was disappointed. It was towards the end of the summer and so I phoned around a few colleges to see if there was any place where there was a space for a student available. Sligo Regional had opened an art department with EEC money, and it was in its second year, and I said I would go to that. It was a disaster. It was two rooms in a regional college and they hadn't a model. There were all these materials arriving in boxes and they did not know what to do with them. There were four lecturers and there wasn't a course structure. There was this vague thing called the Art Teacher's Certificate, and I did not want to do any of this as it meant you did mostly crafts and basic paintings and sculpture. But what was good about Sligo was that I had access to a few things that I had never tried before. I spent most of that first year clay modelling. And if there was a model in, which there was now and again, I'd work from her. There was no real discipline in the college.

I was working there for four years, but they did not know what to make of me and they let me do anything. They had no course structure at all. There were a few of us that were so used to independence that they let us work alone.

Peter O'Neill - When did you go to the college of Art?

In 1977 I decided to apply to the College of Art because I wanted some structure and discipline in my work. And I wrote to Campbell Bruce and I brought up slides of what I was doing. I couldn't really explain where I was at, but he looked at the work and he said, "Look why don't you come in here and do the second and third year and we will give you a diploma, what you need is discipline". He also asked me to do a drawing exercise over that summer.

So I went to Dublin the following September and I arrived with this drawing I had spent 40 hours on. He said, "Where are the rest?" And I said, "You asked me to do only one, I was working on the buildings all summer to make money to come here", And he said, "We will have to put you on probation". And I said, "OK no problem". He said that he was going to be my tutor, and I said "great". So after I started at the college I used to go over from Clarendon Street to Campbell's office and try to see when I could have a tutorial, but he never came. One day old John Kelly was looking over my shoulder while I was drawing from the model, because that was all I did when I went there first.

You had decided to do that yourself, to go into the model and draw, no one had told you to?

No. I just decided that as we hadn't a model full time in Sligo and there was one here that's all I'd do. So anyway, John Kelly comes in and was looking over my shoulder, he remembered me from the interview back in 1973. And he said, "You have

not been wasting your time in the last couple of years", because I had learnt to draw. So we got talking. And I started to tell him what I wanted to learn. He said, "Well what about showing me what you have been doing." I had loads of slides from my stuff in Sligo, so we went into this room where you could show slides, I don't know if you would remember it in the second floor, at the top.

I do, yes.

And he was in there and I was showing him the slides, and who walks in but Campbell, at last. And Campbell was really annoyed, which surprised me, and he said, "John this is my student and is not yours." And I did not know what the hell was going on between them. That was my first indication that there might be something negative.

Did Campbell realise that John Kelly had been talking to you?

No, I think it was a total accident, or maybe it wasn't, but I assumed that it was a coincidence. So anyway a couple of weeks later there was a life-painting project and six of us signed up to do it. It was a model sitting on a deck chair and we had to paint her from life. I approached it very systematically. I decided that I was going to draw it with charcoal, then I would fix it, and then I would paint over it. So I spent about two days just getting the drawing right. And I can remember on the second evening Campbell stopped me on the way out and he said the drawing was coming along well and I said, "Good, that's great, and thanks".

So when I started to actually paint it - because I was trying to paint it in a very classical way - I started to have great difficulty because I hadn't the ability to

manipulate paint when I was painting the human form. There were a few things that were going well for me, I had a good sense of tone and light and shade, but I still hadn't that feeling for paint. There were a lot of things I didn't know. Meanwhile the six of us were battling along with this, and John Kelly dropped down to see how I was doing.

Had Campbell set up this project?

I assumed Campbell had because he was around it a lot. He used to come in and give us all a kind of a talk every once in a while, he would remark on things. But anyway John Kelly came and he saw that I was in great difficulty with an area of the figure. He picked up the brush and he made this arm move. I didn't know whether I was annoyed because it was so different from the rest of my painting, or I was annoyed that it was so easy for him. At the same time I was shocked that he had this talent inside him, like I saw what he had. The whole thing in one way disturbed me, and in another way I was fascinated by it.

Campbell came in later on and he looked at how we were all doing and he said to me, "You are really working that arm very well in that area", and I said, "Well actually John Kelly painted that", and Campbell went pale. He did not like it at all. After that John seemed to give me more attention, Campbell just seemed to pull back.

I then started to paint skulls, and the reason why I painted skulls was because there was no colour in them, because I had been using colour for years and I had no real discipline. So I decided to do the exact opposite to what I was doing. I loved working from the nude but I hated the fact that I could never get the exact same pose again, that models had to take breaks. And I realised that the skull in many respects had a lot

of elements that the figure had, it had movement and the light worked off it the same. There was the same absence of colour, and light was reflected. There were a whole lot of things that were similar. And I discovered by my getting rusty sheets of metal and putting the skulls on the metal that certain colours were reflected. And because the lines had very set structures and there was a sense of space I decided this is what I am going to learn to paint. And that was all I did for the next 2 years. I just made ten paintings, and that's all I did. Now they were slavishly accurate. I still have two of them, and I can still look at them, and I still like them a lot.

Campbell remarked a couple of times that I was capturing the rust well, or that I had a feeling for that and I did not have a feeling for this. Except for Campbell and John the other lecturers kept away from me. I think most of them just thought that I was being some kind of freak, like someone who just wants to paint fish or something. I would not have interested anyone else, so I never had a conversation with Nigel Rolfe or Ciaran Lennon or Rob Smith or Jackie Stanley.

Anyway at the end of that year John Kelly organised this exhibition for the *Alliance Francaise.* They picked out six artists from the College of Art: Eamonn Connors, Jacqueline Corbiere, Pat Palmer, Ray Byrne, Jackie Sandom, and myself. That was the first time I ever showed work in public. Everyone else sold some paintings and none of mine did, but I got the best reviews in the newspapers

That summer I just worked on the buildings again and went back and kept painting skulls the next year. Campbell after that had no input in my development. He might appear now and again but he had lost interest. It was as if he had given up the ghost to John Kelly.

And you hadn't been assigned a new tutor?

No. But you see I suppose I should have, if I had known the way the system worked, which I didn't at the time, I would have played it differently, but that's another story.

So anyway in my second year I got interested in developing portrait painting. And Cary Clark used to talk to me about that, and I would go for the odd pint with Cary. He did not seem to have a philosophy. His whole mind seemed to be based on technique. Whereas John Kelly - I sensed there was a complete artist there. He said the problem with the universe is that we are each at the centre of separate realities. He used to say to me that there is an awful lot of pain in life. He was very sensitive and often he would shy away from me, but he was trying to get a relationship.

He was a shy man.

His sister had committed suicide that year and one of his children was dreadfully ill, and I knew his spirit was kind of broken. So I did not probe and I did not know enough anyway, I was very young and I did not know what I know now.

Cary would just discuss how to draw an eyeball or something. That would have been the height of it.

I used to drink with Charlie Brady in Grogan's ,and Charlie used to say that you are an artist, you have it, but this is going to take you time. As he said in the little essay in the introduction to his book, he asked a guy in the Art Students League in New York was his painting any good, and the guy said you have got mood, and you can't buy that or you can't get it.

I realised even then, even though I was very uncertain about what I was doing, I

realised I had a mood in my work. No matter what it was there was something there. I know about that now, where that comes from, but it's a gift anyway.

Things started to get bad around Christmas of my final year there, which was 1979. We started to hear from some of the lecturers that we were the least promising year that there ever was. It was very common to hear from the English lecturers that "the Irish were a visually illiterate race", which was an extraordinary assumption to make. And suddenly there was this nationalist versus colonialist atmosphere in the place. Cary Clarke told me one day that he was at a staff meeting - he was furious, I met him afterwards - and he said that Jackie Stanley had told him that one or two members of the RHA on the staff were two members too many. And so I realised there was an awful lot of stress going on. But I was not interested because I had seen similar stuff going on in Sligo amongst the lecturers, so I did not want to know. And then in January, no it was February, the beginning of February, things had got really bad. By then the level of criticism was raised and I was visited by guys that used never visit me before, and they would tell me what was wrong with my work.

So they didn't care and then suddenly they cared.

Suddenly they cared to tell me that what I was doing was wrong. And I began to doubt everything I was doing. And it was the most fragile time for me, because at that time my father had gone in for his final operation, and we knew he was going to die and that it was just a matter of time.

I just think that things come in threes. I was having great financial difficulties, I hadn't paid the final instalment of the fees, and the registrar was sending over things. This is where strange things happen. Like Cary Clarke knew my predicament, and for a

man that might not have been communicative and stuff, and might not have had a deep philosophical bent, he used to bring me in brushes that he had not used completely. And I can remember he was so worried because there was pressure being put on me that he offered to pay my fees. So what I am saying is there was a side to that guy that was not acknowledged. John Kelly knew what was happening to my father and he was a bit worried about me.

Anyway, the other students were all getting very rattled by this stuff and there were groups forming.

This was in Clarendon Street?

Yes this was in Clarendon Street. And as well, everyone in the place had been nearly poisoned when the heating had malfunctioned. All these things were going wrong. And there was a student down in the basement, I forget his name, he was a sculptor. He was getting lots of money for materials and we were getting nothing. And I can remember going over to Campbell and asking for money which was allocated for student's materials. I had never been given anything, and had been told that there was none available. And I can remember asking why this student downstairs was getting all this money. I was told that he was actually buying the materials himself, so I just accepted that. But it wasn't true.

Then anyway in February, I suppose this is a very important thing, Campbell came to us and said 'we would like you to put forward names for an external assessor. And I just suddenly got hopeful. I thought, We can all choose this person, so this madness, all this bickering might stop. At that stage it had gone so bad that Charlie Cullen had called a mass meeting to challenge Nigel Rolfe to a philosophical debate about things.

All these students gathered, you probably remember it. Nigel and his four or five lieutenants walked in, in suits, their transistor radio blasting and all that. So the antagonism was out, it was all out in the open. But you can understand, as well, from Nigel Rolf's point of view - at that time Domhnall O'Murchadha, the college director, would only speak to him in Irish. So the rift had gone right to the top.

We got three names of external assessors. I can't remember the three of them. I can remember Barrie Cooke was one of them. I wonder if Brian Burke was another, and Colin Middleton, the northern painter. I just know for certain that Barry Cooke was one. A few weeks later Campbell came back to us and said your external assessor will be Alan Green. I think that was the guy's name. He was a minimalist from England who painted unwavering lines of truth. We said, "What about the guys that we nominated?" Campbell said that they had no international significance. I must point out that Barry Cooke has in the meantime been the external assessor for a lot of English colleges. I can remember thinking that Barrie Cooke would have been a good choice because he was American and working in Ireland, and because all our year tended to be figurative it seemed to be sensible.

So anyway Alan Green comes over. And Campbell came to me and said you will like this Alan. I was somehow or other, in spite of myself, emerging as the spokesperson for our year, and I didn't like it. But it was my habit to speak what was on my mind.

So anyway this guy Green came along. Rob Smith had called in to my space the day before the guy arrived. And Rob Smith said I am just looking through your stuff.

He obviously had to familiarise himself with your work before the external arrived.

Maybe that was it, I don't know. And I think Rob had something to do with the selection of work for an exhibition to be held at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, because no one was selected from our year, maybe one or two. I realised then what our marks were going to be like, I realised we were in trouble. In other words they were publicly saying what they thought of the final year. There was more work in from your year than our year, even though we were the final year.

I organised another exhibition in the *Alliance Francaise* to show what we were doing that year, so I suppose I was sucked into the melee.

Anyway Rob came around and he looked at my work. We didn't have a conversation, he just made a comment and left. He said, "I can't get into what you are doing. I could imagine painting skulls if you paint the environment they were found in, if you painted the excitement of finding them on a mountain". I just thought this was a classic case of contempt prior to investigation, so I didn't even try to explain what I was about. And then the external assessor, Alan Green, came and he said, "These would be meaningful if they were found in an environment, otherwise I can't see any point in what you are doing". And I said that that was interesting, as another lecturer had the same opinion. I think it was just coincidence that both were looking at it that way. I just decided there was no point trying to explain myself because these guys arrive at conclusions before they ask you about your thinking. I didn't even try, I felt stupid and confused.

He told me basically that he would like to see some new work before the assessment, that really this is only a jumping off place. He came across as a friendly individual, but I was naive then. I had not the perception that you get with age, a student just doesn't. Like a handshake and a smile can be enough for the staff to cover their tracks. It wouldn't get them by in the world of business but it would get them by

in that college environment. I considered these guys knew something that I didn't. They held the mystery to art.

So anyway Campbell came to check out my reaction to Alan Green. I said he seemed ok and that he told me to change my direction, and although I have hardly any time to do it Campbell said, "Oh well you'd better. You had better really pull something out of the bag". And I said, "Well I have this small still life that I am working on here", and asked, "What if I continue on along those lines". And he said, "Yes, do that". So I switched from where I was and in two months I tried to produce four paintings, and none of them were any good because I was under pressure. I was too near them to know if they were good or bad, but they were not good paintings. In fact they were very poor when I look back on them. By the time the assessment arrived the war between the staff was crazy. I was very suspicious of the whole assessment procedure and I started to ask questions. Questions like, how are marks allocated? And are lecturers supposed to go around individually and not as a group? Were our portfolios going to be looked at?

Years before I worked in this job wrapping newspaper and there was a little knot that we used to wrap the bundles. I tied my portfolios with that knot so I would know if it was open or not. It is not the kind of knot that would ever be used in normal circumstances. And of course my portfolio was not opened.

After they had met John Kelly came out of the meeting white in the face, and I knew something was really wrong. I went to Kelly and I said, "What's the story?" Cary could not look at me straight in the face, so I knew something had happened. I went for a pint with Charlie Cullen and I realised that something was rotten up here. What transpired was that our year got the lowest mark ever in the college, I was given a pass. I think seven of us were given passes. No one got a 1.1. What had transpired

was that when one side marked some one high the other marked low. It had fallen into two divisions, the whole thing had come out, and it meant that all our marks were -.

That the war manifested itself in the marks.

Yes, completely. And we all met in Bewley's after we had seen the marks on the college notice board. And all the staff had run except one lecturer. I suppose this would restore your faith in humanity. Julian Campbell, who was in complimentary studies, wrote an open letter and put it beside the marks on the notice board. He said that it was unfair and that we were being abused. He put his job on the line. Which was quite amazing. Anyway we were all in Bewely's and there was a guy, I forget his name, he was the oldest of us all, he was a guy with a beard. He lived up in Dundalk.

I remember him well actually, but not his name.

There was another guy slightly older than me, a guy called Pat Palmer, well Pat had seen what was coming up and he refused to put anything into the assessment. Pat knew.

He lives in California now.

He is in California. He just said no way was he going to be humiliated, he saw it coming.

Pat was older too.

He was older. He had worked in the advertising industry, he just knew. But this other guy - I should remember his name - and everyone looked at him and he just said no, that he was walking away. He was not going to fight it. I said I am going too. Geraldine O'Reilly, a fellow student, said I am surprised at you Lorcan above all people saying this. Then I walked into it and I said, "Ok if you want to fight it we will fight it". "But you've got to remember it is going to be dirty. This is not going to be nice." I thought the first thing we had better do is inform Campbell that we were going to fight for a fair assessment and see if he can offer some solution. So I went over to Campbell's office and he asked me how come I did so badly, if I had had problems during the year. "I am not here about that", I said, "I am here about the marks, we are going to contest them". And he said, "Basically we can give you another year". And I said, "I don't want another year". I said, "There has been an injustice done here and we want that righted". And he said, "There was not any injustice, you were the weakest year and the worst year we ever had".

Some tutors favoured some students, and I suggested to everyone that they go to their tutors and say that they were on their side. So each side was being told that we were on their side and that we believed that the other side was to blame. And all this information started to flow. The first thing I got was from John Kelly, a letter which the external assessor had written to Campbell complaining about John Kelly's fossilised academic attitude towards art, and that John Kelly was harassing him during the assessment procedures. Then I got this report from Campbell's side about John Kelly never giving in formalised documents for a course. And John Kelly's reply saying basically that he did, but that they were rejected. Soon all this stuff started coming. I got minutes of meeting where it was said that two members of the RHA on the staff

are two members too many. It got very nasty, and some student said to me that I was being too Machiavellian, and in retrospect I wouldn't have approached the situation like that now. I was reacting to the situation rather than responding to it. And anyway we organised to take all our work down, and when the diplomas were being handed out we all went up to the stage and said, "Under the present circumstances I refuse to accept my diploma".

One by one?

One by one when our names were called. And the media were there. And we put together a heavy-duty press release about conflict among the staff. It got onto the radio and the newspapers started to get interested. The college got worried. And immediately we were told there was going to be an enquiry. So we stopped the thing and said fine.

Now the enquiry didn't occur until March the following year. And a few of us met up at the college. The inquiry was in Kildare Street. And I can remember going in with Moss Fitzpatrick and being introduced to Dermot Larkin, whom I knew. He was second in command to O'Nuallain in the Department of Education. There was a lecturer that was representing the teachers in the college of art, there was someone from the students union, and there was another person from the Department of Education. I looked at this body of inquiry and I knew we hadn't a chance. I knew from my knowledge of Dermot Larkin in the past, I knew he would support the status quo. Also sitting at the table was Mella Gibbons the college registrar. So I knew we hadn't a hope. And I went out and I said to all the students out there what I thought. And Gay Murray said, "No, we will get this over with". And it was put to a vote, and I

was voted down but I wasn't voted out. Everyone said, "But you go in and argue the thing". Moss came in with me. I tried to establish the ground rules. I said, "What are the ground rules for this". I said, "What's Mella Gibbons doing here?" She was secretary to the committee. So I said, "Are you going to write down the proceedings". She said, "I haven't short hand". I said, "Then there is no point in you being secretary to the committee". And she said, "I'm going to have my secretary come in and take the notes. Mella Gibbons insisted that she had the right to observe the proceedings." Immediately she established that no hearsay was allowed. She really chaired the proceedings. So when I produced the external assessors confidential report on John Kelly as item number one to prove there was a row between the staff, and the notes saying that two members of the RHA are two members too many, there was uproar about how I had illegal documents, and about who had given them to me. Mella was in all the time, and I would say what are you doing in this conversation, you can't be in it, so it became a battle to keep her out. Nothing was admissible no matter what. So then my next line of defence was saying that basically the external assessor, that we should have had an Irish external assessor, that Barry Cooke had as big a reputation as Alan Green. And then the first big surprise happened. In fact the major surprise. When Campbell had asked us to submit the names to him of an external assessor Alan Green had already been appointed.

So what had he in mind?

At that point we should have got up and left the enquiry.

How did that come out?

That came out through the lecturers' representative. He just had the notes of things. And he said hang on a second. That is the equivalent of the Watergate burglary. So like I don't have to tell you any more.

A year later we got the report of the committee. They took a sacrificial lamb, Ciaran Lennon's contract wasn't renewed. They said there was no breach of procedure. It was a big whitewash. But the evening of the enquiry, about two hours after the enquiry wound up. I went with a friend to check out the bar downstairs in Buswell's Hotel. And sure enough when we walked into downstairs in Buswell's Hotel there were two members of the enquiry, Larkin and the teacher's union lecturer, drinking with Campbell and his lecturers. When I arrived, everyone was embarrassed. We all knew the story.

The final thing I'll say, I think life is always very funny. A few years later my brother Eamonn was president of the students union. Eamonn was a design student. Eamonn and Bruce Arnold who was on the College Board were friendly, and they decided to start asking a lot of questions about the fine art department. Because Eamonn was in the students union he was on the board, they started to ask questions about course content among other things.

When was this?

The mid-1980s I think. It would have been after 1985 because I was very well known about 1985-1987. I would have had a lot of newspaper coverage and so on, and that is why this is important. My brother doesn't look like me. So I doubt if Campbell would have made the connection. Anyway, this enquiry was held out in a

hotel in Killiney.

This inquiry was at the instigation of the Board?

Yes. And the staff had to go in, each faculty, and say what exactly they are doing, and they have to submit themselves to questions. Campbell was asked about colour, "Do you teach about colour theory? He replied, "We have had great colour painters come out of this college, Cecily Brennan, Gwen O'Dowd, Lorcan Walsh." The unscrupulousness of it, no integrity whatsoever, none.

Somebody else said that to me, that in the last ten years Campbell has praised painting, painterliness, and yet when he was in college he was critical of anything that was painterly.

Because painterly wasn't fashionable them. There's no integrity. He appointed the external assessor and then asked us students to nominate an external assessor. I mean that says everything. Campbell knew that Alan Green would be opposed to everything John Kelly advocated. That is why he made sure Green was external assessor. Yet John Kelly was head of painting! We didn't stand a chance.

That's one of the things I'm trying to get to the bottom of. What was behind the curriculum? The Bauhaus was clearly behind what I went through.

And you have two or three generations that can't draw. Did you ever read the *Ebony Tower* by John Fowles? It's a wonderful story that describes that whole

phenomenon. It's just a story about this art critic. This kind of Campbell Bruce type, half academic half painter, going to France to interview this old master for a prestigious art magazine. And it is just wonderful. It just captures the whole nonsense of living entirely in your head. It shows you what an artist is. And what someone who has been produced by the system is.

Ciaran Lennon was an exception I think, though he wasn't that young.

He works as an artist. And of all of those he was the sacrificial lamb. That must say something.

So you would suggest that issues of curriculum content didn't actually matter at the end of the day.

They don't because - the main issue, what we were involved in basically was a fight for control between two factions who worked in the college. The Irish faction was a nationalistic one, and the English faction had the classic colonial attitude.

Even though they were liberal.

Their actions didn't show the ability to respect the opinions or ideology of other people who disagreed with their agenda.

I think one of the problems with the modernist/liberal position is that it thinks it's neutral.

It is a position in itself. It's no different than a missionary going out to Africa. Similarly they were imported in here because of the residual shame that the Irish had from being colonised. Right now if that same situation arose an Irish government would look towards its own artists, without any doubt.

Why did they go to England then?

It was typical then. Now there is a system of patronage there where they only look after their own.

Could it not have been accidental?

No it wasn't an accident.

So who decided, Somebody in the Dail?

I would imagine yes. It was a collective decision, and it was a knee jerk decision. It was a reaction. It was the classic thing of the so-called Dublin 4 mentality. It always looks, or genuflects, towards England.

What are your ideas about the hegemony of modernism within the college? Apart from you're own experiences.

Well I think what happens is - if you take any discipline, forget about art for the

moment, take literature. There's probably about four or five brilliant writers working at the moment, in the world. But the chances that we know about them are pretty limited. We might know about them in fifty years time or twenty. But what we will know about in the meantime are the ones that are easily digested and fashionable, and fashion generally dictates middlebrow culture. What we get in art is identical.

It often masquerades as radical.

But it's not. I like to call it the most recent avant-garde. It has to be new and it has to be vague. Style has to be more important than content. So in a way it's a true reflection of the human condition. The human condition has always been pretty basic anyway. The part of the human that develops spiritually, irrespective of what century or what era, tends to do so in isolation. So you get great exceptions of course.

My two favourite examples of that are Cezanne and Darwin. Both lived in relative isolation.

I think one of the great painters in Ireland at the moment is Charlie Brady. Another great painter is Paddy Graham, yet they have been ignored systematically until recently. What fascinated me - really I thought it was wonderful - was Charlie Brady's last opening. And because he is ill now, because it is towards the end of his life, they were making a TV documentary, at last. But very prominent people from IMMA and a former Taoiseach all arrived. They all knew when to crawl out of the woodwork.

One thing that interests me in relation to the teaching of art at the college is the

aspect of teaching which was started by Orpen, where the teacher focuses all his attention on a small number of students to the detriment of the majority. Keating did it and it was continued after 1974.

Lecturers have the power to mould students - what they often do is to give favoured students confidence at the expense of disregarded students. And the most important thing an artist can have is confidence.

Especially when they are young.

Absolutely, at the same time that's the greatest damage you can sometimes do them. You can make someone flower too early. Art is the long haul. Generally the tendency with an artist is that the work matures as they do. But some lecturers carry the vanity of making certain assumptions at the cost of everyone else's talent.

That is one of the key problems I have with the curriculum at the college in the period under discussion. It is the fact that it focuses on the few at the expense of the many. Surely a curriculum in an art school is about giving everyone that leg up, rather than giving that leg up to a few.

But you see it's a true reflection of the society that we are in, to focus on the few at the expense of the many. So it's not in any way surprising. Real teachers - people who are developed - are very rare, anywhere to the extent of truly respecting a student's uniqueness. I would imagine the tendency among failed artists, the type who too often teach in art school, is that they want their students to produce the work that they

imagine they themselves would have produced had they continued as artists. What drives these people is a longing to be immortalised. It's actually arguable that it is their own death they are denying. A great guy to read on that is Ernst Becker, *The Denial of Death.* It is not unusual for instance for philosophers to focus on the artist's dilemma to develop their own thought processes. Becker argues that the artist is different from all other life forms because he can produce his own symbolic reality. We are the only ones with a symbolic reality, and so the production of art is an extension of this. So its primary function is to deny the fact that we are both gods and animals. So I would often think that what drives an artist primarily, it may not be the engine later on, is this need for immortalisation, this fear of his own mortality. It's not surprising that you get some underdeveloped teacher in an art school who will want to be remembered as a mentor to a brilliant student.

That is very interesting.

So even though there may be fame, recognition, the whole lot, the question will arise for that student, what if I had been allowed to develop without such influence. Or in other words what is my true voice under all of this influence.

Brancusi's comment to Rodin comes to mind, when he was asked by Rodin to be his assistant. Brancusi replied that and acorn will never grow under an oak tree.

Absolutely.

There is a widely held belief in art education that only an artist can teach art. I'm

not so sure about that. What do you think?

The guy to read is Kimon Nicolades, the book is *The Natural Way to Draw*. I use that system to teach whenever I teach. And if I have a class of twenty people they are all amazed, as every thing they make is different from the person beside them, because it is based on drawing through the senses, not through the intellect. It's a very simple way. It's similar to the Suzuki method of learning violin. It is about developing the senses, drawing. Information best comes in through the senses, not through a process of analysis alone. The people who could really show you how to teach are guys who work with racehorses or athletes. Because they have to totally respect the nature of the animal that they are working with. They can't make the assumption that the athlete or the animal is the same as any previous one.

And then a class is an amazing dynamic. It works as a pack, almost. And there's a respect if as a teacher you keep everyone at an equal distance. And I've also noticed as well that if you constantly focus on someone's strengths and encourage these then the difficulties they have will evaporate as they develop their own natural ability.

The thing is to encourage the flower to grow rather than to force it to grow.

It's no surprise that the English are a race of gardeners, clipped hedges. If you ever look down on the country from an aeroplane or if you go Cheshire or places like that, there isn't a leaf out of place.

There is an aspect of the enlightenment about that. About wanting to control the world.

But on the other hand that same dynamic, that conflict, that reaction against control may produce something extraordinary. That conflict is starting to show how creative the Irish psyche actually is and how dull and conformist the English one is.

Look at the north of Ireland and the number of artists that come out of that conflict.

The other thing to consider is the idea that a colonised race is similar to someone who gets raped. The guilt and the self-hatred usually means that the victim will impose some fundamentalist belief upon him or herself to atone for the shame of being raped and humiliated by another. You will find that most colonised races will adopt a really heavy-duty religion, like in Iran with the fundamentalists when the Americans moved out. After the coloniser moves they continue to have a tremendous super ego bearing down on them which ensures the cycle of self hatred. What I am saying is that back in the college of art, at that point, all us students still had that mentality within us. We couldn't turn around and say "Go to hell".

One that did was Brian Palm. And he was American.

He was American, exactly.

APPENDIX 22

Ollie Whelan (1955 -) Artist. Lecturer NCAD 1979 - .

Peter O'Neill - Could you describe the curriculum that you found in the fine art department at the NCAD when you came here as a student?

Ollie Whelan – When I came to the NCAD in 1974 I had spent a year in the art school in Waterford. I went into pre-diploma. I think you know all about the situation in pre-diploma. It was fairly straightforward. It was interesting in lots of ways. Each group in core had one person in charge, so you could get somebody from glass or design or painting, whatever.

Each year was broken up into groups?

Each year was broken into different groups, and each group had a tutor. In my case it was glass, and Johnny Murphy was in charge.

Johnny Murphy? He was in charge of stained glass in the college.

Yes, so in my group we had a relationship with glass more than with anywhere else.

So does that mean that the core or pre-diploma area was part of the old system?

I think pre-diploma was still caught between the two positions. There was a feeling coming from pre-diploma and applying to get into fine art that fine art was a much more difficult area to get into because all of a sudden the people who were interviewing you were Campbell, Rob, and Nigel. There was a tension about that new grouping in fine art. Students now would know, generally speaking, what would be required from the department of fine art, but in those days you were very unsure about what these tutors were about or where they were going.

Because they were new?

Exactly, and a lot of pre-diploma work was craft based. One of the things that was interesting was that fine art had to select people on the basis of looking deeper into what students had to offer than just skill. They were looking for a lot more in terms of ideas and content.

And you as students didn't know that?

We didn't know that. In actual fact a lot of students had a very torrid interview, which was an eye opener as to the demands of fine art. A lot of the interview was left up to you. You had to do a lot of talking, and you realised that this was different. In the past it would have been purely on the basis of ability and that was it. It would have had very little to do with content. And also Campbell nurtured a lot of people who would have been from different backgrounds. He gave the feeling that nobody was

going to be discriminated against on any level. It was very tough, but you got a very humanistic approach.

After that we went into fine art, and the whole thing was buzzing from beginning to end. The first year was very much about projects, one week or two-week periods. In Clarendon Street Nigel and Rob worked together.

And did you have both Nigel and Rob for the whole year?

Yes, they worked together as a team. Everybody mentioned Nigel and Rob in the same breadth. I discovered later that there were disagreements between them as to the way things should go and the way things could happen. Nigel would have seen art as about very contemporary issues, what was happening now, what the issues were, and what was going on in that sense. Rob, who was still very much interested in that, set projects that saw art as a form of enlightenment, a form of self-knowledge, a way of gaining experiences, and even a kind of religious sensibility. I don't mean in the sense of Catholic or whatever, but some other experience like meditating, life enhancing. Rob saw art as completely part of your life, what you do every day, every minute. You're an artist, and that's what would matter to him. Nigel was the same, but with him it was very much about being professional, about what's happening at the moment, contemporary concepts.

And how did that approach manifest itself on a day to day basis?

For example, on one of the projects we got was to describe, on a four by four square, with any materials possible, something within that square. It was completely

against your traditional idea of what an art school at that point was. Everything was about the throwaway. It wasn't making a work of art, in brackets. It was totally experimental. It was about pushing the boundaries of language. For example, there was a life drawing project that we did using found material. We'd go out and find posters and stick them up as a starting point. There was never a sense of the hierarchy of materials. It was always low quality materials and the engagement of drawing something over time, rather than trying to copy something. We were trying to describe time with the figure.

Was drawing then a major part of the course?

Drawing was a major part of the course, yes, but it was as a documentation and ideas collecting, as opposed to a technical gathering or an academic gathering, kind of thing.

You mean as opposed to a skills/craft thing?

Yes, a skills/craft thing. It was more or less digging into the whole process as a way of putting together ideas very quickly. Now in some ways you would find some students who had really considerable skills who found this very difficult because they felt that their craft skills weren't improving, so you got a certain amount of conflict among the students beginning to occur. It's interesting, because in actual fact that occurred quite a lot over the first few years. It's very hard to say how long it continued. It would probably be the first eight or nine years. I'd say it even went

across your time. So there was a breakdown between the people who were interested in conceptual ideas and those who were interested in the skills/craft elements.

In the early stages, say 1975 to 1976, when you were a student, what was the situation in relation to the old regime, Big John Kelly and so on?

The incredible thing was the work rate that Rob and Nigel took on. It was quite unbelievable in actual fact. It's only now that I'm doing it that I realise the work rate. I have done it, but it's a totally exhausting experience. It's hands on all the time. It was their baby. It was new. They were young. They had a lot of energy. They basically took the whole thing on. The demands were exactly the same. They were equally professional and wanting. But there was a difference between the two of them. In actual fact that was a very good thing, because if you had got two of the same types in there we would have had a very different course. They took control of the first year. At that time it was a five-year course. They took complete control of that year and pushed it as hard as they could.

What were second, third, and fourth years like?

The interesting thing when I was going through then was the dynamic that was beginning to come into the system. There was a lot of interest from outside. Campbell knew a lot of either established or up and coming artists. You also had Charlie Cullen and Charlie Brady. The way I see it, from the point of view of students, there were three groups in the college of art, there weren't two as a lot of people thought.

In fine art?

Yes, in fine art. There was Nigel, Rob, and the artists invited in from the UK, who usually had Irish backgrounds. Then there was Charlie Brady, Charlie Cullen, and that group.

Would you call them the Independent artists?

Yes, the Independent artists. They were coming in, apart from Charlie Brady. And then there was the RHA group that included Carey Clarke, John Kelly, Fergus Ryan, and Johnny Murphy.

They weren't into the new program?

No. Some of them wore berries around the college. There was a "were the IRA" pretence happening. It was a psychological game. There was a certain kind of West-Brit thing, which sourced itself in the R.H.A and yet they were talking about nationalism, the whole thing of the Brits coming in and that kind of thing. In actual fact the funny thing about it is that some of that group of people were probably in some ways more British than Irish.

Their model was the Royal Academy of course.

They used to talk about India as if it were still part of the commonwealth, the Irish commonwealth. It was a bit like, tea at eleven, cream buns, and so on. So you got that

kind of thing hanging on in there. It was probably class based, but that was what was happening. I have to say that this was not all of the R.H.A people, but certainly there was a group.

In Clarendon Street studios there were no windows in that bottom floor, you were about a foot and a half from the lights. Day or night you didn't know what time of the day it was. So people would find themselves in intense projects till about nine or ten o clock at night. When you moved up to the next floor -.

In the second year?

Yes, in the second year. We used to go up and have a look at the guys upstairs, people like Robert Armstrong, Pat Harris and so on. We were the new kids on the block.

Did their work contrast with yours in that respect?

Yes, there was a contrast. It was almost felt that they were the tail end of something, and yet very interesting for that reason. They were doing a lot of interesting work. There were a lot of chips there. Whereas with us there was definitely a feeling that we were new and the thing was new.

This was in the second year as well?

First year, second year was very much self motivated. I don't know if you remember but the actual space was beyond belief. It was a shantytown. But what was

extraordinary was the people who were visiting at that time were, people like Gerard Hemsworth and Sean Scully. Also, the print department was beginning to change, there were interesting people coming in and out of there. And complimentary studies was about contemporary ideas. It was radical.

An alternative culture kind of thing? A Hippie kind of thing?

There was an element of that. Do you remember that magazine called *One World*, and all that alternative building and making an alternative life?

The Whole Earth Catalogue *kind of thing?*

Yes, that was in at that time. We made a Buckmister Fuller dome out of found wood, myself and Frank Flood and the drummer out of the Boomtown Rats, Simon. In actual fact it was interesting because there was so much going on. The Boomtown Rats used to come in and out in that first year. We used to bring in people, theatre acts and music, poetry readings and that sort of thing. So there was a whole range of cultural activities. And of course what happened then was that Joseph Beuys would turn up. I remember sitting in my space in second year and Joseph Beuys comes walking up the stairs. Of course this was perfect from an educational point of view, he believed in the open-university concept, and of course here were we, we were getting people in from every area possible. We were looking at the world as a whole rather than taking a single cultural viewpoint.

How did Beuys appear? Did Nigel bring him in?

No, I remember sitting in the room and Nigel was sitting beside me and he said, "Look who's coming up the stairs". From the point of view of students there's this big fur coat and the hat. So he just came in and walked around and was talking to students.

He was Nigel's guru of course.

Everyone at the time was looking to him to some degree. And don't forget that at that time Sean Scully was teaching part time, and Gerald Hemsworth, the guy from Goldsmiths and Winchester. Martin Parr was teaching photography. There was Tim Mara who since became head of print at the RCA, and Chris Ploughman who now teaches in Chelsea. So you had groups of people being brought in, but there were a lot of people just coming in. There's no way that Joseph Beuys was being paid. There were people coming in off the street. It was almost orchestrated by Campbell. At the core of it there was a kind of holistic education, which was very prevalent in the art world at that time, about a sustainable lifestyle and so on. Bit by bit it became self-directed and tutorials based. I remember some students would only talk to some members of staff and other students would only talk to others. Camps were definitely established.

What was the story in relation to choosing tutors? Did you choose a tutor or was your tutor chosen for you?

You put your name down and then there was a list system. You could prioritise and you picked first, second, and third.

This was in second year of course.

Yes, it was extraordinary. There was always one group that would put down Charlie Cullen, and then there was another group that would put down Rob and Nigel, and then there was another group who would put down Cary and John Kelly. There were definitely within the student group three different types of individuals in operation. In actual fact they practically set up camp in that way within the studio. And it's not to say we didn't all get on with each other, but there were certainly different kinds of philosophies in operation.

Were you in the college in 1979 when the students refused their diplomas?

Yes, I had just come back from a scholarship to Australia then.

So you weren't a student then?

Who was involved in all that?

Lorcan Walsh, Moss Fitzpatrick, Gay Murray, Geraldine O'Reilly and others.

They were just behind me. I had just come back. I know it happened. I remember talking to people about it, and I remember them saying that a certain type of work wasn't being supported.

Could you tell me something about assessments when you were a student?

Basically people would call around. There would be three staff on the assessment panel. I remember on one occasion they told me a time and I went out of the room - I built a room for myself and had a lock on it and I allowed certain people in. It was ridiculous really when I think about it, but it was just the way things operated at that time. If you just wanted to get on with it you could be quite quiet in you're room. They didn't really mind, as long as you were working, and of course I talked to Rob continuously, he was my tutor. Nigel was in and out, Charlie Brady I got on well with, Charlie, Sean Scully, and a few other tutors. There were occasions that you would find yourself - which actually can be a problem for some students - being talked to twice or three times daily.

Did factionalism manifest itself in any way in the assessment?

I remember on one occasion the assessment that I had was John Kelly, Rob, and Charlie Brady. That would have covered the whole gambit within the college. The fact is that Rob would give students a very hard time. One of the things about Rob as a personality is that he wasn't the easiest guy in the world to talk to. And he would sit there and say nothing and expect students to say everything. He would never give any indications as to his feelings or what he thought about. On occasion he would just walk

off in the middle of something. He was tough. He softened out later on, but at that time he was so demanding on what it was to be an artist, and he couldn't take the idea that it was just about making academic drawings. He found that very difficult to handle. This was a complete contrast to the other members of staff. So you got a kind of extremism, but that wasn't a bad thing for the student's education, because they could pick and mix. Students got that opportunity to make these decisions, but unfortunately some students ended up getting so wrapped up in the politics of the thing that they suffered. Everybody was angry about other factions. Unfortunately I think some students didn't allow for some members of staff to talk to them on any level.

The one thing I have to say in this regard is that some students felt that Rob was anti drawing. In fact Rob really loved drawing, which a lot of students didn't realise. He absolutely adored it, but he saw it as a functional thing.

And how did the situation in fine art develop when you came back as a teacher?

It was very interesting. I thought I was a bit young coming back, but at the same time the College of Marketing and a few other people were asking me to go and teach with them. I had already worked before college, so I had an idea of what was required of me, but Campbell had to bring somebody in for the other schools of thought in the college, to balance the situation. So for Campbell to get me in he had to get somebody else in, so as to balance the craft/conceptual elements out.

Did the other guy who came to create the balance stay in the college for long?

The two of us got on quite well. He was a still life painter. Also my feeling on things was that you could also give people information about the technical aspects as well as the conceptual element. I felt sorry for some students. That was one of the interesting things, because I was an insider I could feel empathy with them.

So as a teacher, what was in your mind in terms of curriculum, as a model? What did you have in the back of your mind in terms of what you were trying to achieve?

I think the first thing would have been the sequential element of the course.

Was it a smoothly sequential and organic development?

No, but I think that as time went on that did occur, and it did actually happen that way. It became clear as things settled down, as Nigel went his way with his group, and Rob went his way with Charlie, that's when I was brought in. I was new blood coming in. Campbell wanted new 'Irish' blood coming back into the course. So you had a balancing off. Staff were discussing the overview, the total thing, as opposed to the encampment that was there in the beginning. There were a lot of little skirmishes and battles, I have to tell you it was a very exciting time from the point of view of the students because, as I said, all options were available to the student. But it was very interesting, and you could put together your own parts and decide what you wanted as a student. From the inside as part of the students group it was a very interesting curse to be in.

Could you say then that the curriculum was defined by the people who actually taught?

Absolutely.

To what extent was an original document referred to in the sense of a template to work from that contained ideas, aims etc.?

It's very hard to remember in the scheme of things. I remember I sat down with Rob - I was a bit of an outsider as a part timer - Charlie Cullen, Rob, and myself sat down to put together a cohesive overview of the course, I can't remember the date. It was certainly clearer, and demanding.

Was there any documentation to go with that?

Yes, it's probably in the library. Campbell would have known where it went.

Is the present course document a development of that?

It is. When Rob got sick I more or less took over Rob's position. When the five year course was changed to a four year course a year had to be taken out of the system, and then the course had to be joined up again. That was more or less my job, it was in the third year that it had the most effect, but the system that actually operates now is more or less the same as the sequential course in terms of aims and objectives. There's also the fact that most of the students were in from a second level system that

wasn't that great in regard to art education. It's much better now than it was then. The fact is that a lot of students who were coming into the college had ideas about art which were dating back a couple of hundred years or so. The majority of students will tell you at this stage that their favourite artist was van Gogh, with no contemporary artists being mentioned. It was always exciting to have someone at an interview mention a living artist. An Irish artist let alone some internationally known artist would be impossible.

So the first year in the college was very much about stuffing in as much information as possible, in actual fact, the whole five years would be about the same kind of investigation. Expanding the possibilities and the visual language, showing where the whole thing could move, giving an overview of what's happening internationally. It was also about all the different levels to what the visual arts could be. As I said, with Rob for example, it was the whole earth idea. The idea that it can be a functional thing within society, that it has a place, that it's got to work within the strata of things. The other system, Nigel's, was about art working within the point of view of itself and understanding where it's coming from. So everybody had to be brought up to speed on the basis of that. So there's a real recognition, and I think this still hangs on. I think it's quite powerful in these respects, these first intensive projects. I remember Charlie and myself working on projects. Charlie will tell you even now, there were ten week long intensive projects. At times on my own I did ten week projects with third year, which were intensive, and they were sequentially put together, right across ten weeks, and they were exhausting but rewarding. Now with the fact that third year - sorry one year has been done away with - you have to condense the thing, you can't spend that amount of time on one project. Also the fact that a lot of the students are more educated when they come into the college. Their knowledge in terms of the world is

more complex. Also with the development of the course and the reputation of the college growing internationally there were a lot more people applying from elsewhere. That had another effect of everything within the course.

When did you loose the year?

That must have been 1990 to 1991, around that time.

Did that have something to do with the NCEA?

Yes, there was four years to a degree and that was it. It was in line with what was going on in third level country wide, and in Europe.

When was the course actually recognised? When did the NCEA give it its official sanction?

That goes back I'd say about six years prior to that. It might have been 1984 or 1985.

I'm trying to find out exactly when. The NCEA couldn't tell me.

I'll ask Charlie. It was very interesting between Charlie and Rob, because actually that became a new dynamic later on.

And interesting in relation to drawing.

And in actual fact Charlie was doing very complex projects, it was a very interesting dynamic between himself and Rob. I was worked with both of them. And both of them got on and didn't get on. There were artistic differences. What actually was happening on the first term was an intensive course which took people over completely, that demanded total commitment. Also the fact that you had these factions, so there was a lot to pick from. Initially the projects were very much based around Rob's and Nigel's ideas.

And their objective, again, just to summarise?

The objective was to actually open up the potential of what a visual art education was at that time. Because up to then it would have been drawing from the model only or plaster casts.

So you were breaking old paradigms, old models.

Yes.

And when students were broken, in a sense, where did the course go then?

Then you were left to your own devices. It was tutorial based from there on in, in second year.

So it was much looser for the students?

What actually happened was - it was looser, but what actually happened was that if people weren't doing the work then projects were set for them.

So there was a looseness, students did their own thing, but if they were drifting they were brought back in with projects.

I have to say though that the tutorials were intense. They still have that intensity. But at that time, within the crowded space of Clarendon Street shantytown that it was, you had to produce the work. But there was an extraordinary kind of tenseness about it. The education element was part of it. But it was about making artists and it was about making Irish art, developing the whole. It was the first real break, and a lot of students were involved with trying to break that mould anyway at that time. So these people were brought in to establish that, what all the students had gone on for ages about, library, information on international art, etc. It was a reflection of what was happening in the UK. So we got what we wanted. And of course we had Jonah Jones come in with a vision, who was a very liberal and an extraordinary kind of man, who had both traditions and could understand each position. Campbell as well had both traditions, he was a traditional artist in lots of ways, and with considerable skills, but he was open to new ideas.

He had been trained in the old system.

Yes, so his recognition of the two sides of this coin and, I think, in lots of ways Campbell wanted this mix and match. He wanted this layering of different types. I think

a lot of people have learned from that. That meant you got a real diverse education, the recognition that this college was not like English colleges, that it couldn't have a house style. The fact that it had to have many different styles and opinions was an added thing to the course. That had to be built into the course. You cannot have a house style from here, this is the National College of Art. There isn't any other one. It's not like Goldsmiths or Saint Martins or the Slade or something like that, where there's an established style, and you pick the college you want to go to because that's the style. Here there were many styles.

Do you remember a confrontation between Nigel and the painting students, or were you away for that?

Yes, there was.

Were you there for that?

I was there for that.

On that day?

Yes.

Have you any ideas of what that was about?

Nigel got very upset in actual fact. He was nearly in tears. He got very upset.

As I recall and as others recall, it essentially degenerated into an argument between him and Charlie Cullen. It had originally been intended to generate dialogue between the students.

I think just basically people were on a continuous tooing and froing. If I remember, that stand off was very much about the students getting on to Nigel about a lot of things, and not one thing in particular.

I was given contradictory reasons as to why it was organised.

I think there was something going on with regard to a lot of students, Nigel as much as Rob would probably be very dismissive of certain things. And that kind of attitude didn't go down very well with certain students and certain individuals. It's hard to know who is right and who is wrong, but the emotions were there. And the fact is that I think people just took Nigel on because Nigel's performance had come into play, it was clicking in, certain students were going with Nigel and he was very much involved with those people, as much as I was with Rob. Frank Flood was with Nigel, Eugene Tierny, all of that group, and then there was another group with myself, and Cecily, and Gwen, and people like that who were with Rob basically, and others with Carey and John Kelly, and yet others with Charlie Cullen and Charlie Brady.

And what was the 1985 Killiney seminar then? To what extent was that an effort to change the curriculum?

There were a few meetings at that time with Bruce Arnold. Campbell and everybody else was involved, we thought this was going to be one of those change things, because all the time we felt that things had to move on. We put everything forward to Bruce Arnold about what was happening, how we saw the course developing etc. Nothing seemed to happen after this meeting that we had. I think everybody was disappointed at the end of it.

On your end?

Yes, why that was is very hard to figure. But there was definitely a feeling that the agenda that we were putting forward was not what the meeting was about. That meeting out in the Killiney Court Hotel was an extraordinary event, because we had all thought, "great", because we were all wondering about moving on, masters degrees and the usual kind of thing. We all went in, sat down, and we realised from that moment on we were under the cosh. All of a sudden questions were being thrown at us from the Education faculty regarding the inability of students to draw. This was news to the painting staff and had very little to do with the agenda of that meeting, it was very disappointing.

In the traditional sense?

Yes, drawing skills, and that the fine art students were some of the worst students in this sense, this kind of implication.

So there was a different kind of understanding when you got there from what you had expected?

Absolutely, we were shocked. The staff were just about to explode. Because as far as we were concerned the idea of the education department telling us what art was, and yet sitting around that table, on the opposite side, were some of the best artists in the country. And we were told what art education was or wasn't! It was quite an extraordinary thing. At the end of the day Campbell handled it very well. He immediately said, "Look, hang on a second, this meeting has nothing to do with this. That's your opinion, that is only your opinion, and that's the end of that matter, and that was it". And we went on from there, but you got the feeling that the whole thing was set up for that very purpose, to put this argument across. It was very heavy in fact, initially, the way the argument was put up to us. The fact was, I must admit, Campbell was fantastic in those situations. In retrospect we were turning out some of the most important artists at that time, Cecily Brennan, Gwen O'Dowd, Mary Fitzgerald. But Campbell just basically cooled the whole thing down and it went off in another discussion.

And what was the outcome in terms of curriculum?

When was that meeting?

1985.

Well it was before that. We had just put that in before that, somewhere before 1984 and 1985. So we had a clear overview of the direction of the course. There's nothing like rewriting a course document to have every nuance sorted. We put forward exactly what the plan of action was to be. And you know one of the amazing things is that the first year, the first two years of the college thing was nothing but drawing. But it wasn't statues and it wasn't just figurative, and yet figurative was there. So we gave them the complete complex nature of how the course was put together at that point, in the sense of the sequential development of the individual. When I came in that was part of what I did. Third year was very much a project based year, but it then had to change to first term being project based, the last three terms being more tutorially based in order to get them ready for the fourth year situation. Prior to that there would have been a lot more projects in there.

Could you describe the changes in the curriculum between 1979 and 1990, for instance was it looser in 1979 compared with 1990?

I think it was definitely tighter in 1990. The difference was in 1979, the general opinion was that originally you went in and did really interesting projects. It was a bit hand to mouth. You got the feeling that the sequential elements were there in a general skeletal way. What was happening on the floor was more about trying to get information, to get people to open up, which was the right thing to do, but once we sold the thing it was new, so there were a lot of projects that worked and there were projects that didn't work. That's just the nature of things. And then after that there was a tightening up, a recognition of things that work and a recognition of things that didn't work. And I think, basically up to 1990 you got a lot more of an overview. It

became clearer, the sequential elements became clearer. Projects were placed in for very particular reasons. Even the staff breakdown was quite interesting. Carey was in charge of first year with John Kelly, Rob in charge of second and so on.

That was John Kelly?

Yes, Big John Kelly. John was an interesting guy in lots of ways. I think he had at that stage given up. Certainly he could understand what was going on in contemporary art, he had been to the States and he had been to New York. As far as I can remember from talking to him about it he was very interested in all that, Rothko in particular.

He was on one side of the club. In actual fact he was sensitive to the other side. But I think he kind of, he did feel - we used to find him later in his career almost sneaking around, and it was because he was the old school, but a real interest in what was happening.

But generally speaking the energy around the place was dynamic. I would say, and I know people would say yes or no to this, but from a lot of people I've talked to it was probably one of the most interesting art schools around, anywhere, at that time. That was because of the amount of people that were in the faculty, and certainly on the level of staffing, when you look back on the staff we had, they were some of the best artists anywhere. Most of them went on to do enormous things internationally. It's quite incredible when you look through the list. So on the basis of that it was possibly, probably, one of the most dynamic, most interesting art schools around. It was a magnet to people on the basis of that, and people did extra well just on the basis of being in the college. People that went on and started teaching in London, to the Slade, to the Royal College, to Chelsea.

Did many people go from here?

Martin Parr for example is on the board of Magnum and all that kind of stuff. He was working in a black plastic bag darkroom down there, living in Sligo. And Chris Ploughman and Tim Meara went off and took over the Chelsea print department. They wrote that book during that time that Andy Folan was around, a year or two after me, the definitive book on silk-screening. The photographs are from the college. You should look at that because it is quite interesting. It's one of the Penguin editions. It's quite incredible because it was in that scheme of things. So you've got that. And then Tim became head of the RCA print department. Chris went on to - he still does some work in Chelsea.

Did any students go on to England or America from here? For instance to do post-graduate work or whatever.

Well history says it. I mean some of the most interesting Irish artists that were around at that time were all from the college. If you think about all the names that were around from Mary Fitzgerald, to Gwen O'Dowd, Cecily Brennan, Paul O'Keefe, Anna O'Sullivan who is head of the Robert Miller Gallery in New York. She is one of the top people in the New York art world.

What about the girl who went to Chicago?

Maggie McGee, she is still there. She went into multi-media and was one of the forerunners in the multi-media area. As far as I know she is still there. Tony Carroll with other students went off to Italy and did the two years there. Funnily enough there was a certain group that went off and did the Italian school. Then there was the other group that was with Charlie or Nigel or Rob that went off and did - for example Andy went off and did his masters in the Slade. Tim Meara was his connection in the print department. There was a big knock-on effect. As I said, anybody that went over there practically knew all the heads of the colleges in Britain.

On a technical level in relation to tutors, because that's something that I'm looking at, was that a help in relation to post-graduate work? You mentioned Tim Meara at the Slade, did that help in terms of getting students in to do post-graduate study abroad? I mean were connections useful?

Yes, there was no doubt about it. One of the things about Campbell - and Campbell was quite remarkable in the whole scheme of things because he actually kept it together. The thing could have really exploded. It was electric. The fact that he could basically calm things down the way he could, and the fact that he had knowledge and ability in that academic field helped, as well as a knowledge of and interest in contemporary art and artists. He could cross the borders very easily and he could talk on either of those levels. Now the interesting thing about him being Head of Fine Art at the time is extraordinary because he had huge contacts in Britain. The point was that for that reason he could make contacts with people like Sean Scully. I mean the people we had in here were just unbelievable. If you look back at the part-timers list it's amazing.

I remember spending virtually a whole day with Sean Scully discussing my stripy paintings.

You wouldn't get that now. I mean Joseph Beuys doesn't turn up to the colleges in Cologne. He was being paid a fortune just to have his name over the door. And then he was coming into the college here sitting around having chats with people!

Nigel said that Campbell was Machiavellian in that respect. He was able to weave so well through complex systems and that that actually kept the thing going.

I would totally agree with that. Also the fact that he had an extraordinary ability to sit down and talk to the staff on the basis that he was one of them. You always felt that he was the one that was passing up the problems from the floor to management. You always felt that he was on your side, that you could bring any problem to him, his approach was, "You are my staff, I recognise your professionalism and this needs to be sorted out". And that would be coming from every angle. No matter who it was he would always try and sort out the problem. He had huge contacts throughout the British system. And for that reason he could get people into places, he could write to people, he could get people over from there. A lot of artists had high regard for him and for that reason we were very lucky, he could get people in. I remember him once telling me about the fact that he asked somebody if they had any ideas about up and coming artists that were good in the college over there that we could bring over here on a part-time basis, and somebody said there was a guy with an Irish background whose name was Sean Scully who could be interesting.

He also made those connections with America.

Chicago, Philadelphia, Charlie would remember this. I got a letter a couple of years ago form Chicago saying that we never keep space open for anybody but if any student from NCAD wants to come over they would keep a place open for them. They were impressed.

I talked to Grant Howie who went to Chicago.

The other thing, which was very important at the time, there were no barriers between sculpture, print, and painting. Even when I was part time I had people down in sculpture that I was tutor to. I was Grant's tutor. At that time you could have a tutor for two years. And that was a long time. You built up a relationship in that period. So with the five year system there was a very much in depth and strong relationship between staff and students.

So you had a four-year diploma and then another year. We did away with the diploma, but there was a time when people did a diploma and a degree, you know the complexity of all that.

That's very much in line with the aspirations of the people whose thinking underpins this curriculum, going back to the 1950s, to people like Herbert Read, and Richard Hamilton, and Victor Pasmore, and in particular the idea that there would be no rigid barriers between areas. They had of course envisioned it on a broader scale.

Another significant issue was the tutorial system, which was based on the master apprentice system. So what you are saying is that this system actually worked.

It still does. I'm tutor to people in fourth year and we still have that relationship. The only thing about the apprenticeship element was - I remember people talking about the college, even some of the people who were part of the revolution in here, one or two of them have suggested that the apprenticeship element should come back. The difference between an apprenticeship system and the system that we have, which is a tutorial system, is that in one you are slave to the needs of the master, whereas in this situation the master is a slave to the student.

As a tutor you mean?

Because in actual fact the whole course is geared around the development of the individual. That's a really crucial thing. If you've got a student in painting, and all of a sudden the student's work starts moving towards multi-media, you've got to go with it.

And students can do that now? They can move to sculpture to work?

Yes, I'd go over with them. If you look at any of the college journals you would find people might be in painting but they could be doing installation, they could be doing performance, they could be doing photography.

So that still works.

That still goes on.

Could you say something about assessments?

Some of the best conversations I've had about art have been at assessment meetings. Even Sean Scully, I remember him saying that there were intriguing conversations about what constituted art and what didn't. But there was murder too at those meetings. You would very often have one member of staff giving ninety and another member of staff giving forty five and in the middle of this, "Who the hell gave that forty five and why?" So you have to be answerable in terms of your marking and give good account of your reasons.

Did the external examiner have editorial control over marks?

Yes, and in actual fact the external examiner still has a lot of sway in the whole make up of the marks.

And does it still happen that you have someone getting ninety percent from one person and forty per cent from someone else?

Not as much as before, I would say the marks nowadays are much closer than they were then, you wouldn't have the dichotomy in terms of requirements. I think there still is a mix of staff in here. You still get people who are traditional painters. You get people who are multi-media, people who are conceptualists. So you get a melting pot,

but the extremities in terms of people fighting corners isn't the same any more. It's all art after all.

And is the structure of assessments the same? In the sense that you get one external examiner and a number of internal staff, and they discuss, and so on.

Exactly, what you get is an external, you get a person of your choice, and you get a person who is outside the department.

You mean from another faculty?

No, from print for example.

Head of faculty?

No the head of faculty never marks. Then you would have the head of painting or sculpture or whatever. Altogether it works out as five different staff. What happens is this. We all walk in with our marks and we thrash it all out among the internal staff. Then we all go away after major discussions, conversations, etc. Then we come back in again to meet the external member a week later. They give their mark, it could be very much the same or different, we thrash it all out again. Two thirds or three quarters of the students wouldn't have much of a problem as the marks would more or less be within a mark or two of each other, but there's always about one quarter who do not have that closeness. You'd have to discuss this, and in some cases there might

be a grade difference, and in other cases there would have been a mark difference, and they would be discussed. Then of course there is the twenty-percent thesis mark.

Which could throw the cat among the pigeons.

Completely, yes.

And is there an attitude to that from people who work hands-on as it were?

Well for example last year the external examiner in history of art thought the theses were remarkable for their quality. He said that he had never given ten first class honours. I think there has always been a tradition of good quality thesis writing in this college. The fact that they think that they are letting down their work if they don't get their written element together is important. A major issue in this whole thing is that the faculty of fine art became a separate entity. The faculty of history of art could have easily become part of the faculty of painting or design. You could have easily had a faculty with three art historians teaching in it who were under the head of faculty of fine art. It could have been interesting in the sense that these staff would be teaching on the studio floor with the personal fine art tutor.

Really?

It could have easily gone that way. We didn't have to have a separate History of Art Faculty. That necessarily didn't have to happen. Some people say it would have been very interesting to have it under the fine art capsule in that you would have had

people from that background out on the floor dealing with people as they work, and we might not have had the removal of students early on in the year because of thesis work. And then the fact that the demands of the HADCOM area are such that that has brought up the standards of the writing and ideas/concepts.

So broadly speaking HADCOM and the faculty get on well.

Oh yes.

So the students get on with it, get their twenty percent and that's it?

There might be a bit of shifting within the faculty in terms of marks, we might give a bit, take a bit. Once the HADCOM marks come in there is very little shift. We had a major discussion about that early on in Theo's time here. I was involved in it because one of my students just missed out on getting a grade up due to one mark. Sean Scully said "I'm sorry that was a mistake, I should have brought that student up". We went back to the faculty of History of Art to see could they give her that one mark. The situation in the HADCOM department was that there was no movement, this was it. So there is no give and take.

Is there any problem with a traditional line in HADCOM in the sense that they take a traditional approach to the history of art?

They have the same situation that we would have. They have a mix. You have to read through that *Thoughtlines* book. What you get is a real mix of ideas, hence the

name. Obviously students who are doing conceptual works will be doing that kind of thesis. And not all the time, but some students work within the parameters of the work they are doing. Some staff would like the idea that students write theses within the area they would be working in. Other members of staff would say it might be interesting to do something completely different and look at another area. So you do get within the scheme of things people writing very deeply about an area of their own interest, feminism for instance, or the work of Kiki Smith, etc. Then you might get other people who might write about something completely different, Persian carpets for instance. So you get a good variety of concepts and idea.

Could you say something about what's happening with the exchange with the Lyme Academy?

We just did a deal with them. They send six students over here and we send six students back. The funding seems to be in place for the whole thing.

Who is funding that?

The Lyme Academy is, but I think they have got involved with a few other people who have committed money, Irish companies, etc.

Why did they decide to come here?

They wanted to come to Ireland I think. There's a huge demand for that. When Erasmus started out I would say half my students would be gone and I would have

another fifteen here, and the amount of students who wanted to come here was unbelievable, from every area of Europe. And then the amount of students who did not want to leave when they came here was becoming problematic. The students that went out found that the kind of intense teaching they would get here, on the one to one, wouldn't happen elsewhere. You would be lucky to get a lecturer at all. This is in mainland Europe, but not say if you went to the UK or if you went to the States.

So is that finished?

Yes, well they moved on and it became more complex, and the financial element and the support to the student wasn't there as much. Well it's still there. I'm actually supposed to be going to Antwerp fairly soon. We have Pat Harris over at the moment.

Over here?

Yes, and a student from there over here, and we have a student over there. He feels that we are ahead in the way the course is structured and in the way that we are taking on board new technology. You can see here on the board on the wall, that's a system that I put into place where each staff member knows who they are seeing and when, in third year. What it is is that each student can look along there, and each week they know that there's one member of staff seeing them on one day. So they know that that's definitely going to happen, and on top of that they have me coming in and out talking to them.

And another thing is that each student has to meet each member of staff at least once because by the time they get into fourth year they have to make a choice about

who they want as a personal tutor. So they have to meet all the tutors. We have thirty students, so it can be complex.

Is the fourth year completely self-directed?

Yes, the first term in third year used to be intense ten-week projects. Now the first three weeks are about them making the work which they wanted to make over the summer. This allows them to settle back into the studio and establish a work practice and it follows on from what they did at the end of second year. After that it's about sources. The next six weeks really in third year are about that. For the first time they look at where all their sources are coming from, and for probably the first time they are told, "we don't want any art". In a way those six weeks reflect some of the project works that we took on years ago. In the sense that what you are saying to people is that, "Ok you have the wherewithal to do this but why are you doing it? And are you going on a straight line. Is this really what you want? Is this the medium?" So there is an examination of the core sources of their work, because once they finish this term they are on their way, and time is short with a thesis, etc. There's a six week period, then, which is all about not making art. It's about gathering, it's about sourcing, timetabling themselves, looking at other possible media. Is this the right medium for that context? Is the sort of work they are doing the right sort of work? So there's a core examination of content and means that happens very much in the first term of third year. I say to them, "bring everything in that interests you. Everything that is about you; what's in your room, your books, your videos, your photographs, your football team, Whatever it is, bring it in. Put yourself up there for a few days and have a look at it. Then edit back down again and see what the essence of all that is." You

get some very interesting results. But that in a way is probably a complex packaged version of what we were doing before. There are still students who want technical information, and we cover that, but second year would be the place where they would get most of that.

Because second year is more structured?

Yes, but no more structured than third and fourth years, but second year would be more project based.

First year is core?

Yes, they cover everything.

And do you have any influence on core or does core have any influence on you guys?

Yes, we are invited to have a look at portfolios when they come in and some staff are invited into fine art, to see slide shows, etc.

In core?

Yes, so that we have an overview of what's happening. The thing is that core is aware that students have to do an interview to get into the fine art faculty. So who we take in and who we don't bring in can say a lot.

So they can bear that in mind when they are creating their own course. So for instance if you guys would like more drawing they could factor that in.

And also don't forget, for many years, ninety five percent or some such figure of students who apply to the college of art want to do fine art. So the core has to give students an overview of all the other courses available to them in the college, because when they come in they know little of design, etc., and don't forget that second level wasn't teaching it. There wasn't a major amount of it out there, so when people come in you had to run through every possibility that was available in the college. Really interesting projects had to be run from core's point of view, and a lot of it in the early days was very fine art based. Bit by bit it has changed, with more design coming on board. So that whole thing has changed. What's happening now is I think that only thirty percent at the end of core want to do fine art because fundamentally they discover that what they always wanted to do was something in design.

So core works well in that sense.

It would be in trouble if it didn't. We have a lot of applications from the north, the UK, Holland. At the moment we have French, German, Dutch.

So you have more coming here now than ten years ago?

Then we had the Erasmus, plus the influx of mature students, that seems to have died down. They made up to one quarter or one third of the students. That's not the

case now. And the ratio of females to males, there were much more females, now it seems more balanced. So there are a lot of shifts and changes in society that are reflected here.

The main difference between then and now is that now we try to keep the options open covering a lot of different subjects. That disagreement among staff about the nature of art, it's not as aggressive, and people don't set up camps. They recognise that everybody has an opinion. And I think Carey at the end of his time here became part of that, there was a sensitivity towards what he had to offer. But there was certainly still, with some of the staff, animosity towards Carey because of things that happened in the past. It wasn't newer staff. In actual fact people in the staff just saw Carey as having a job to do, he had an area of work to cover and that had to be covered. And we still see that. As new staff came in things changed.

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