EXHIBITING IRELAND IN THE SIXTIES: *ROSC*

by

ANTONIA LAURENCE ALLEN

B.A., Indiana University, 1996

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Fine Arts)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standards

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 1999

© Antonia Laurence Allen 1999
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Fine Arts.

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date April 28, 1999.
Abstract

1967 in Dublin, Ireland, an exhibition opened its doors to a suspecting public. *Rosc '67* was a work of art in itself. It purported to display work from fifty of the 'best' international artists in the world. *Rosc* was to occur every four years and be run by a committee who chose a jury of three to select works. Most of the art was contemporary, completed in the previous four years and displayed in a large hall on the grounds of the Royal Dublin Society, famous for its annual Dublin horse show. Like the celebrated Biennales which litter the world, *Rosc* was a product of its homeland, and it is my task in this paper to unravel the specificities of Dublin in the sixties to reveal the cultural significance of this exhibition. During this decade, Ireland was governed by a group of officials breaking away from a revolutionary-based nationalism. This sentiment had built Irish sovereignty on the power of Catholicism, rural life, and Gaelic history. The new nation was being defined by a group who saw the economic benefits of joining the European Economic Community, solidifying business ties with America and internationalizing Irish industry. No longer were the Irish 'dancing at the crossroads,' in Eamon de Valera's famous words. Instead, the avenues of economic expansion and global politics were eagerly trod. Given these initiatives, it is curious to discover that *Rosc '67*, while showcasing the world's contemporary art, chose to deny Irish artists a chance to exhibit their work. The Irish were represented at *Rosc '67* with an exhibition of ancient Celtic art.

My contention is that *Rosc '67* was a project reflecting the Irish government's plans to 'modernize' Ireland in the 1960s. In being represented through a series of contemporary art shows, Ireland could be seen as consistently tied to a 'modern' cultural project, and *continually* 'up-to-the-minute.' *Rosc '67* attempted to connect the past with a present tense and secure it with a future, by linking Celtic traditions with modern movements.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................. ii
Table of Contents .......................................................... iii
List of Illustrations ........................................................ iv
Acknowledgments ........................................................... vii

INTRODUCTION ............................................................. 1

CHAPTER ONE: AT FACE VALUE? DEBATING THE IMAGE ........ 9

CHAPTER TWO SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT: THE REACTION.. 19

CHAPTER THREE SHIFTING NOTIONS OF IRISH NATIONALISM .... 50

CHAPTER FOUR THE EXHIBITION THAT SWINGS.................. 69

CHAPTER FIVE RESISTANCE AND SUBJUGATION.................... 108

CONCLUSION ................................................................ 121

Bibliography ................................................................ 124
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Illustration Description</th>
<th>Page #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td><em>Rosc '67</em> catalogue cover by Patrick Scott</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Toko Shinoda. <em>Genji</em>, 1967 Oil on Canvas 20.25 x 53.5 ins. From Hilary Pyle “Rosc ’71.” <em>Ireland of the Welcomes</em>. 20 (1) May-June, 1971:22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Francis Bacon. <em>Study for a portrait on a revolving chair</em>, 1967 Oil on Canvas 78 x 58 ins. From <em>Rosc ’67</em>. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967: 24</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td><em>Tau Cross</em> from Killinaboy, Co.Clare. Date Uncertain, Limestone, shaft 43 x 12.7 cms., transom 38 cms, in length. From <em>Rosc ’67</em>. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967:131</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Photograph depicting annex off the main hall at the Royal Dublin Society which contained <em>Rosc ’67’s</em> Celtic section. From Hilary Pyle “Rosc ’71.” <em>Ireland of the Welcomes</em>. 20 (1) May-June, 1971:21</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Carved Stone from Turoe, Co. Galway. Early Iron Age, Granite, height 120 cms., diameter 91 cms. From <em>Rosc ’67</em>. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967:127.</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Sandstone three-faced head from Corleck Co. Cavan. C. 1st Century AD, height 32 cms. From <em>Rosc ’67</em>. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967: 132</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Pablo Picasso. <em>Grand Profil</em>, 1963 Oil on Canvas. 51 x 38 ins. From <em>Rosc ’67</em>. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967: 87</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Jean Dubuffet. <em>Cuisinère à Gaz II</em>, 1966. Oil on Canvas 51 x 38 ins. From <em>Rosc ’67</em>. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967: 24</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 12  A page from the *Book of Durrow*. 7th Century AD, .......................... 47
Colored Pigments on Vellum 9.75 x 5.75 ins. From *Rosc '67.*
Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967: 185

Figure 13  "You go first, Macmillan, and see how deep it is."  ....................... 59

Figure 14  James Johnson Sweeney and Michael Scott at *Rosc '71* .......... 68

Figure 15  Robert Rauschenberg. *Axle*, 1964 Mixed Media 108 x 240 ins. ...... 73
From Hilary Pyle "Rosc '71." *Ireland of the Welcomes.* 20 (1) May-June, 1971: 24-25

Figure 16  The Irish Pavilion for the New York World’s Fair of 1939 ............. 77

Figure 17  Cecil King. *Oblique*, 1972 Oil on Canvas. ............................. 82
From Roderic Knowles. *Contemporary Irish Art.*

Figure 18  Photograph of *Rosc '67* visitor gazing at Barnett Newman’s .......... 84
*Whose Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue II*, 1967
Acrylic on Canvas. From Hilary Pyle "Rosc '71.” *Ireland of the Welcomes.* 20 (1) May-June, 1971: 19

Figure 19  Mainie Jellett. *Achill Horses*, 1939 Oil on Canvas. .................... 88

Figure 20  Evie Hone. *The Four Green Fields*, 1939 Stained Glass. ............ 89

Figure 21  Sean Keating. *Men of the West*, 1915 Oil on Canvas. ................. 93
Figure 22  Camille Souter. The West, 1964 Oil on Canvas. ......................... 95
From Roderic Knowles. Contemporary Irish Art.

Figure 23  Photograph of visitor reading catalogue ......................... 98
inside main hall of Royal Dublin Society at Rosc '67.
From Hilary Pyle “Rosc ’71.” Ireland of the Welcomes.
20 (1) May-June, 1971:22

Figure 24  Aerial photograph of Rosc ’67 at the Royal Dublin Society. .... 100
Interior design by Patrick Scott, installation directed by James
Johnson Sweeney. From Hilary Pyle “Rosc ’71.”
Ireland of the Welcomes. 20 (1) May-June, 1971:22

Figure 25  Photograph of visitors surveying the paintings at Rosc ’67 .......... 102
From Hilary Pyle “Rosc ’71.” Ireland of the Welcomes. 20 (1)
May-June, 1971:23
I am indebted to the patience and endurance of John O’Brien and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, who have made it their business to inspire my work. Thanks must definitely go to all those who generously helped me in my endeavors to gather information for this project. First and foremost to Anne Hodge from the Irish National Visual Arts Library in Dublin. For the time and consideration given to me, I thank Ann Crookshank, Dorothy Walker, Declan McGonigle, Noel Sheridan, Pat Murphy, Rosemary and Sean Mulcahy, and Michael Gorman. I would also like to acknowledge the support of Eve McCallle who welcomed me to her city. Last but by no means least, my dearest thanks goes to Christopher Allen, for his constant support and encouragement which has allowed me to see this project to its conclusion.
For my grandparents
INTRODUCTION

The hall is immense. Muslin sweeps across the ceiling like cloud banks across a Kansas sky. The whiteness falls loosely to the ground surrounding painting after painting. It is dazzling. The paintings sway gently as children run amongst them. Someone dodges around one work to see another which hangs behind it. This is my first impression of an exhibition I never attended.

*Rosc '67* was the first in a series of contemporary art shows in Dublin. The series finished in 1988, and I arrived a decade later, in December 1998, to discover more about its inception. Not having attended the actual event in 1967 I had to rely on impressions gathered from newspaper reviews, and on interviews I conducted with individuals who organized and visited the exhibition. At one point I took a trip to the Royal Dublin Society, where the exhibition had been installed. A craft fair was in progress. I watched as people wandered past the stalls which lined the great hall. It was here that I stood and gathered my imagination. If I would have been an art student wandering into *Rosc* in '67, perhaps I would be overcome with excitement at the vast array of work on offer. Finally I could see for myself the American artists my professors were always raving about. Here was a Robert Rauschenberg hanging from nylon rope right beside a work by Robert Indiana. Behind me a Kenneth Noland and a Barnett Newman. Right next to me a wood and metal construction by Jesus-Raphael Soto from Venezuela reminds me of my own work, and I reach for my sketch-book.

How would it be different if I were a government official, a member of the tourist board who has worked on promoting this exhibition abroad perhaps? I have been told,
under no uncertain terms, that Rose '67 was to be my priority.¹ My gaze rests on a canvas by Roberto Matta Echaurren from Chile. I wonder about his world, which seems so full of confusion and fear. How does it relate to those Celtic sculptures in the annex I just passed? The 1ˢᵗ Century sandstone head looked three ways, seeming poised in an ever-watchful stance. Matta’s work contains the twists of bodies, constantly turning to check nervously for a threat behind them. Chile seems exotic. Does it not have the same history of colonialism as Ireland?

I would like also to become the art critic. Perhaps wandering through the exhibition quickly. I survey the work I think I have already seen. My mind really rests on the sights of Dublin I saw briefly on my way from the airport. Once I write the review I can check out the pubs. Perhaps I can find something unique at this Rose event, something new to write about. The Celtic section certainly grasps my attention. Exhibited “for the first time since the Norman Conquest” so the press release said. It’s a pity I have to traipse my way to the National Gallery of Ireland to see the rest. I will mention the filigree design, the attention to intricate detail, and sense of balance the ancient artisans seem to have grasped. This reflects well on the constructions of British conceptual artist Mary Martin I see here too. Her work is so well balanced and executed with formal ingenuity. I happen upon Greenberg frowning at a work by John Latham. He shares some notes he has already jotted down for an Artforum review. One paragraph reads:

For all its sins of inclusion and omission Rose turned out to contain a good deal of information about the present state of painting, even for someone familiar with the New

¹ Interview with Michael Gorman, retired member of the Irish Tourist Board and Rose '71 committee member, on December 14, 1998. Gorman told me “We were told that we were to give full cooperation to Rose, it was seen to be a way to promote Ireland as an interesting ‘with –it’ place to be.”
York scene, it offered another valuable opportunity to survey and compare. And maybe it was just as well that Ireland’s first introduction to contemporary advanced art on a broad front did include so much of the fatigue of the fifties, and the fatigue of painting on the Continent. At this point all the novelty and razzmatazz of the sixties might have been too bewildering. Let that be saved for Rosc 1971.  

I see his point, the pluralism of the work at Rosc does reflect a certain disregard for formal concerns. But the works can still be attended to in formal terms. I think the exhibition does a great job in allowing us to do this. The works have been juxtaposed so their shapes and contours can be assessed, free from the outside world. And there are no silly labels that talk too much.

Experiencing the exhibition through the eyes of a member of the Monuments Advisory Committee, I am disturbed at the reasons why the Celtic artifacts are placed in a separate annex, away from the main room of paintings. If I had not known better I would think the inclusion of these things were an afterthought, a way to locate the exhibition in Ireland. I remember reading about an art dealer in London, of all ironic places, who considered the omission of Irish artists a disgrace. Of course he represents Nano Reid, Louis Le Brocquy, and Patrick Scott. I also agree with the other gallery owner I read about, who thought the Irish artists were being “humiliated.” He blamed the organizers, not the jurors. The latter went by personal aesthetics, but the organizers had stipulated no Irish artists were to be shown. I think he wrote something like: “The implication is that the international "Rosc" painters are being brought to the country to show how it is really done.”

As I speculate here on how this exhibition was perceived by its various publics, I do so with the intention of bringing up some main introductory points in my discussion.

\[\text{From Clement Greenberg. "Poetry of Vision." Artforum. 6 (8) April 1968: 21}\]
concerning Rosc, in Ireland, during the late sixties. It is my argument that Rosc ‘67 utilized a nationalism based on traditions rooted in a Gaelic past in order to cement present connections with international modernity and project a global initiative. When Rosc opened to the public in November 1967, it purported to bring “World Art to Dublin” for the first time. It boasted a survey of the best contemporary art, bringing visitors ‘up-to-the-minute.’ The show also played host to an array of Celtic crosses, stones, jewelry, and manuscripts. The hope was that Rosc ‘67 would allow foreigners to marvel at the sheer creativity of the Irish past, while the locals could draw inspiring parallels between ‘the best’ contemporary art and their own collective heritage. To achieve this the exhibit was modeled against the Venice and Sao Paulo Biennales, while the art was selected by ‘experts’ and given absolute autonomy.

In arguing against the fetishization of the art object, Walter Benjamin, in his influential essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* insists on the political dimensions of art. Art can be seen functioning as a dialectic. At one time, it can be resistant to or independent from political doctrine as well as being in collusion with the forces of repression and control. Benjamin’s theory helps to explain how Rosc ‘67, as a cultural event utilizing the paradigms of modernism and primitivism, worked both to resist and to subject itself to dominant forces like colonialism. Benjamin suggests the relationship between an art object and the individual viewer is intensely informed by

---


INVALA: Rosc ‘67

5 This idea came from the introduction to Part IV “Aesthetic Theory and Social Critique,” of Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris (eds.) *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts.* New York: Phaidon Press, 1992: 293
mass culture, within which the object can be interpreted with sets of political, economic, or cultural references perhaps never imagined by its creator. Benjamin writes:

...by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental.6

This is a theory which hands the power of interpretation over to the viewer. It also grants an art object the ability to act as a vessel, within which cultural meaning can be stashed over time. In the case of the art on display at Rosc '67, visitors, whether art critics, local farmers, or students, would have brought their own references to each object. However, these same viewers were also supplied with a catalogue, an exhibition design, and the words of 'specialists,' like museum official and Rosc '67 jury chair, James Johnson Sweeney. An exhibition frames its objects, and adds to their contextual meaning. That a decision was made, for example, to make Rosc into a series of exhibitions occurring every four years must have played a part in how it was perceived by both its organizers and the receiving public.7

It is clear that Rosc was specifically modeled on the Venice and Sao Paulo Biennales, as I will explain later. This allows me to gauge that a series of exhibitions lured Rosc organizers because it was a format which could allow them to be seen engaging with modernity. The Venice Biennale for instance was born from a desire to represent the "most noble activities of the modern spirit." Originated in 1895, Venice has come to be one of the global sites at which countries display their place in modernity through the visual. Artists represent their countries, as much as they represent

6 Walter Benjamin. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Quoted in Ibid., 302
7 Ultimately, the shows did not follow a strict quadrennial pattern. This was largely due to lack of funding in the 1970s. The exhibitions happened as follows: 1967, 1971, 1977, 1980, 1984 and 1988.
themselves.\textsuperscript{8} The Biennale, as a series of shows, captures the contemporary moment on a permanent basis, and in this way aptly reflects modernity. One of the dominant characteristics of modernity and modernism has been described by contemporary writers, such as David Harvey, as a rupture from the past. Modernist writers, artists, and architects are those that attempt to solidify a moment within the chaos of the present. To reveal what the eternal might be amongst the ephemeral. To comprehend the present moment in order to initiate a process of change.\textsuperscript{9} My contention is that Rosc ‘67 was a project reflecting the Irish government’s plans to ‘modernize’ Ireland in the 1960s. In being represented through a series of contemporary art shows, Ireland could be seen as consistently tied to a ‘modern’ cultural project, and continually ‘up-to-the-minute.’ Rosc ‘67 attempted to connect the past with a present tense and secure it with a future, by linking Celtic traditions with modern movements.

This series show also has its pitfalls however. Most notably, the exhibitions become bound by an ideological framework created for the first exhibition. Put more crudely, the exhibition gains a reputation that is hard to shake. In modeling itself on the Venice Biennale for instance, Rosc ‘67 subjected the exhibition to the tradition of Classical, Western European art history. This is a history which has typically marginalized Irish art. In fact Rosc ‘67 did choose to exclude Irish contemporary artists, and it was this decision that haunted the organizers until the show’s demise in 1988.\textsuperscript{10}


\textsuperscript{10} Contemporary Irish artists were introduced into Rosc very gradually. This was because of the public complaint about their absence in ‘67. Rosc ‘71 contained numerous affiliated shows across the country, all
My aim is not to follow the development of Rosc from its inception to demise. Nor do I plan to theorize on the exhibition format of a series show. I propose rather to show how Rosc '67 was particularly well suited to Ireland's modernizing initiatives. And, to reveal how the format, content, and response to the exhibition in 1967 reached beyond purely artistic concerns.

Finally, I must make a brief note concerning the problems inherent in my research. Due to an absence of archival documents, my primary research has had to rely on an oral history of Rosc. This is a history composed of inconsistent memories of a thirty-year old process. For example, the only surviving members of the Rosc '67 committee, Ann Crookshank and Dorothy Walker, had diverging opinions on several issues. Those involved with the later Rosc's similarly told stories which often contradicted one another. The absence of an archive, documenting the process by which Rosc was conceived and managed, is indicative of the way the exhibitions were approached by its organizers. It was initially run out of the director, Michael Scott's, office as a side bar to his architectural business. Later in 1980, when Patrick Murphy took directorship, his office was used. There are vague recollections of papers being stashed in Scott's house, but no archive was found or created upon his death in 1988. As well as this, Patrick Murphy had not been given any files when he took control of Rosc '80.

had the Rosc logo but each had to find their own funding. One example was The Irish Imagination 1959-1971. This was curated by Irish, New York-based curator and artist Brian O'Doherty. This show traveled the United States in the following year, and was sponsored by a private and anonymous individual. Rosc '77 was the first exhibition in the series which included Irish artists in the main show. However, the choices were controversial since the two artists chosen, James Coleman and Patrick Ireland (Brian Doherty's alias since 1972 when he changed to protest the military presence in N. Ireland), both lived and worked in the United States. Rosc '80 included seven Irish artists. This was critiqued for being overly generous. Rosc '84
had ten Irish artists but they were separated from the main exhibition. And finally, *Rosc '88* displayed seven Irish artists who were fully integrated into the exhibition.
CHAPTER ONE

At Face Value? Debating the Image

“Dublin had no real modern art in ‘67” one of the Rosc organizers told me on a recent visit to Ireland. I had trouble believing this statement then, and a few months later my suspicions seemed to be more than confirmed. In discussions with some of my peers, my attention was drawn to the cover of Rosc ’67’s catalogue (Figure 1). The image on the cover is one of curious simplicity. It is one of those images which seems so obvious at first glance. A large round shape optically expands outwards, pushing at the sides of its square frame. This central shape is surrounded by an ethereal redness, which seems to oscillate between solidity and intangibility: here one minute and gone the next. This formalist ‘push and pull’ of negative and positive space was not where my reading ended. This was when the layers of meaning started to unpack themselves. The exhibition and its discourses were revealing themselves to my eyes as I looked closer.

The cover of the catalogue was created by the same man who designed the interior space of the exhibition, Patrick Scott. In 1967 Scott was a well regarded Irish modern artist living and working in Dublin. His work had acquired international recognition by 1958 when he, along with fellow artist Patrick Collins, was selected to show at the Guggenheim International Exhibition in New York. Alfred Barr, the director of the Painting and Sculpture Department at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) at that

11 Interview with Ann Crookshank, Director of the Art History Program at Trinity College, now retired, and Dorothy Walker, art historian, on December 7, 1998. Crookshank and Walker are the only two surviving members of the Rosc ’67 committee. This was Crookshank’s statement, she was speaking of the reasons why she felt Rosc was a necessity at the time.
time, purchased Scott’s work *Woman Carrying Grasses* for the Museum’s collection. Knowing this, and then discovering that Irish contemporary artists were intentionally excluded from *Rosc ’67*, allows Scott’s image to take on new meanings.

The art of Ireland was only represented at *Rosc ’67* by a Celtic past, suggesting perhaps that the amorphous shape on the catalogue represents a dolmen or an ancient stone. The earth tones certainly suggest the potential for such a reading. What then of the redness swelling from this central form? Could this be the Isle of Erin, with the bloody effects of terrorism seeping from its shores? The ambiguity of abstraction remains a central feature in the power of this illustration. As a non-representational image, *Rosc* is promoted by a floating signifier: a sign with flexible and irresolute meaning. A sign is dependent on each viewer’s cultural references. In outliving the physical presence of the 1967 exhibition Scott’s image becomes a receptacle within which meanings intended, formed, and retraced can be discovered. It is here I can empty the image to find the elements which bind my discussion of *Rosc*.

The reference to Celtic stones in a modern abstract form allows me to postulate that the exhibition was actually validating Ireland’s artistic role in modernity. The suggestion being that Ireland’s art, in its Gaelic form and in the work of contemporary artists like Patrick Scott, negotiates the problematics of abstraction. These are problems being ‘mastered’ in the work of the international contemporary art exhibited at *Rosc ’67*. On the other hand, when I take into account Scott’s inability to exhibit in the show, purely because he was Irish, I am also tempted to view the exhibition as promoting global art to be a stimulant for local modern practices.

---

Jury Chair, Sweeney, pointedly remarked, in an article published a month before the exhibition opened in 1967, that pre-1200 Ireland had welcomed influences from the outside world and, as a result, Irish art had been ‘great’ in these times. The article continued to postulate that, due to Britain’s colonization process which took effect post-1200, Ireland relied on what was ‘familiar’ rather than “seeking the stimulation and fertilization of the unfamiliar.” While indicating the power Irish artists may have gained from resisting British cultural forms, this statement denies the presence of an Irish artist who resisted in other ways. What about those who may have blended local and Anglicized forms in order to gain power within the dominant Anglo classes? Sweeney also infers Irish art was only at its best when it experienced cross-cultural fertilization. This makes a case for *Rose’s* role as a valiant match-maker: bringing foreign art into Ireland in hopes of once again giving birth to artists of high caliber. This article seems to lend the power of Irish artistry to an outside source, by asserting:

The organizers of *Rose '67*, in bringing together in a single exhibition the great art of Ireland of those centuries and the foreign contemporary art of today, did so in the hope that the value of welcoming such fertilization from abroad, which the older art evidenced, might encourage a wider interest in Ireland today in what is happening in the world of art outside Ireland.\(^\text{13}\)

In negotiating between the readings of Celtic art, the power of Patrick Scott’s image for *Rose '67* does not rest at any one explanation. As well as a reflection of the stones within the exhibition itself, the image could be translated as the pupil of an eye, magnified to such an extent that it becomes an abstraction. This eye, perhaps bloodshot, gazes at the viewer. It is a gaze that successfully holds its audience captive, by creating a lure which encourages a desire to look. Laura Mulvey, in her attempts to relate Lacanian

psychoanalysis to film, has revealed how the positions of looking are shared by the camera, the spectator, and the characters. It is the characters in the film who are perceived to dominate the position of looking. This is what maintains an illusion of reality for film viewers, who assume control over their positions of looking. Yet spectators are actually captive to the film’s gaze because, through narrative or camera technique, the film plays to viewers’ unconscious desires or fears. This control over the gaze happens in an exhibition space as well. Visitors may assume control over their gaze only if they are conscious of the mechanisms which are in place to influence the way they look. These influences may include how space is organized, which art is chosen, how works are juxtaposed, and what images are selected to market the exhibition.

Accompanying Scott’s image, reproduced on posters and pamphlets as well as the catalogue cover, is the exhibition’s title: Rosc ‘67. The presence of a Gaelic word to headline the exhibition highlights the power of a Celtic gaze. The term ‘Rosc’ actually refers to a plethora of images, all of which revolve around notions of sight and literacy. It was chosen, on request of the exhibition organizers, by a Jesuit scholar. This scholar’s choice of Rosc was approved because of its associations with a variety of terms felt to be relevant to the project. The meanings of Rosc include: eyesight, a battle cry and a poet.

This use of a Gaelic term references a concern to foster the Irish language in the every day. This had been most predominantly insisted upon by Eamon de Valera, the republican leader who had dominated Irish politics since the revolutionary risings in the early years of the twentieth century. By 1967 the eighty-five year old de Valera was the

---

President of Ireland. During the revolution, and throughout the struggle for an independent republic, all public life was informed by an ideology of cultural nationalism, steeped in the revival of Gaelic culture. Education was run by State and church bodies, as were public cultural events which focused solely on the promotion of Gaelic dance, song, and history. However, it has been recorded that by 1966, mostly due to high emigration, poor job prospects, demands of tourism, and a foreign influence through the media, the population of native Irish-speakers was less than 70,000. This figure estimates a 20% decrease in Irish speakers since the foundation of the State. Other statistics reveal that, by the late 1950s, only an average of 1% of listeners tuned into the radio to hear news read in the Irish language. This is compared to 41% of listeners who preferred English language news.

The presence of Anglo-American programs on the radio was also due to its reliance on private funding. Thus, despite being the mouthpiece of de Valera’s government, the radio had to meet the demands of its sponsors. By the 1950s the program line-up consisted of the cheapest and most popular shows, which were largely the foreign-produced ones. It was the 1961 inauguration of Ireland’s first national television station, Telefís Eirrean, which provided new fuel for an Anglo-American influence in

---


13 Ireland officially became a Republic in 1948
Irish culture. \(^{19}\) Television was also privately financed and, after its first decade on the air, 70% of all programming was imported, mostly from the United States and Britain. \(^{20}\)

In a 1963 report, published by a commission on the restoration of the Irish language, the apparent failure of de Valera’s program of Gaelic revivalism was documented. The report pointed out, for instance, that some of the only youth who had knowledge of Gaelic were those learning it to pass exams for positions in public office. \(^{21}\) These disappointing results put the new Lemass government under pressure to ‘save’ the apparently dying language. The response was a 1965 White Paper dedicated to the restoration of Gaelic. While this official document recognized the importance of using the Irish language in public life, it also noted the vital role of English in a country wishing to globalize its economy. \(^{22}\) The use of a Gaelic term to head an exhibition in 1967 ties nicely into these official Dublin attempts during the mid-sixties to publicly revive the use of a native tongue. In fact, Rosc ‘67 was a project organized by a group of individuals who were intimately tied to this new government’s initiatives and global concerns.

The decision to use the term Rosc can be seen as an assertion of Gaelic power. It gave the exhibition a ‘unique’ Irish quality, distinguishing it from other contemporary art shows in Europe and America. At the same time however, the use of Rosc induces another set of readings. For instance, that this Gaelic term was never fully explicated to the public, before or during the exhibition, meant its meanings remained elusive to many viewers in 1967. This gave Rosc a powerful mystification which allowed it to function,

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 72
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 80
in Roland Barthes terms, as a meta-narrative, or a ‘myth.’ On the first level, Rosc is a signifier for a ‘fundamentally Irish exhibition.’ However, on another level, because of the exhibition’s focus on foreign art and ancient Celtic artifacts it sends the following message: the Irish penchant for the visual existed once, and just needs the assistance of a validating force like international modernism to be realized again.

The English title of the exhibition, *The Poetry of Vision*, was a rough translation of the term Rosc. This served to illustrate the formalist rhetoric which Rosc ‘67 organizers vigorously advocated. The exhibition itself was designed to allow works to stand alone, without explanation. It was inferred that each art work was a poetic translation of modern life, born from the mind of a visionary. Each juror was invited to write a foreword for Rosc ‘67’s catalogue, and one response encapsulates the macho modernism which underlay the exhibition’s production. It is Willem Sandberg, in a Joycean ramble, who summons the meaning of art at Rosc:

- the relation between man and man
- the relation between man and his environment
- far away and nearby
- changes constantly

- today quicker than ever

- living in the reality
- behind the façade of appearance
- the great artist is the first
- to sense these changing relations
- he renders them visible, audible, palpable
- creates their expression

- he assists us to discover what happens
- to penetrate, to understand

- the constantly changing forms of art
- cannot be measured
- by existing standards

---

22 Ibid.
they grow by new rules of their own...  

Here we have the assumption the artist is male, stands alone in his environment, communes with that environment, and exists above the rules of humanity. It is the English translation of *Rosc* which helps perpetuate this stereotype of the artist as shaman. As well as this, *The Poetry of Vision* references the quintessential stereotype of the Irish as innate poets. Vision is acquired with poetry; as Sandberg’s foreword encapsulates so deftly. The English title works to legitimize *Rosc ’67’s* role in Dublin as an altruistic ‘educator,’ announcing itself as an art teacher for a nation of poets. Indeed *Rosc ’67* was marketed in press releases as a ‘rare opportunity.’ It was defined as an anomaly within a culture known for its literary, not artistic, prowess.

Patrick Scott’s image, which became a logo for *Rosc ’67*, contains the layers which exist beneath the surface of this ‘vision’ *Rosc* officials were promoting. As well as a dolmen, the Isle of Erin, or a dilated pupil, Scott’s image accommodates the formal critique I have just mentioned above. That the logo for *Rosc ’67* resembles the color field paintings of artists being praised in the formalist terms of critics like Clement Greenberg, would not have gone unnoticed at the time. Greenberg’s words describing the work of a young artist Jules Olitski for example, could easily apply to Scott’s image for *Rosc ’67*. In 1966 Greenberg writes of Olitski’s “penchant for elliptical shapes, warm color, and open fields.” He celebrates how color and shape dominate Olitski’s linear drawing, so each painting becomes a discussion on the play of “that less apparent kind of

---

drawing which consists in the fusion and diffusion of color areas." For Greenberg, the meaning and brilliance of Olitski’s work, lies in his ability to guide color and shape into a place which creates a suggestion of depth, while also adhering to the two-dimensionality of the canvas. Scott’s work can be seen oscillating in these conditions. Thus, as a logo for the exhibition, it could have served to remind the knowing eye that *Rosc* was a show concerned with formal aesthetics.

In 1967 Greenberg published an article in *Artforum* entitled “Complaints of an Art Critic.” In this article he defined aesthetic judgments as: “immediate, intuitive, unde­deliberate, and involuntary, they leave no room for the conscious application of standards, criteria, rules, or precepts.” He goes on to confirm his belief that only those who care most about art, and pay it the most attention, can base these aesthetic judgments on objective principles. Thus *Rosc ’67*, through Scott’s image, can be perceived as an exhibition created on the principles of taste, denying the social relevancy of art, and assuming an objective position in its display.

In his review of *Rosc ’67*, Greenberg only praises the work of four painters: Ben Nicholson, Mark Tobey, Barnett Newman and Kenneth Noland. These are the men who were producing large (with the exception of Nicholson) ‘all-over’ paintings, taking their color to the edge of a canvas, and stretching the boundaries of shape and form. Art was considered high caliber, in Greenbergian terms, if its form alone supplied content. In this

---

26 Clement Greenberg. “Complaints of an Art Critic.” Originally written for *Artforum*. In 1967. Quoted from Ibid., 265
27 Greenberg. “Poetry of Vision”, 21
review, Greenberg picks these four men from the array of pop, conceptual, and neo-expressionist works which litter *Rose '67*. The fact that this exhibition incorporated many styles is a sign for Greenberg that the tradition of painting was tired. However it may, more precisely, signal the slippage of Greenberg's influence over artistic production by 1967. While the rhetoric of formalism is utilized at *Rose '67*, therefore, the paintings the exhibition includes were not necessarily produced with formal perimeters in mind. It is through Patrick Scott's single image that I have found trails to a hidden series of discourses, which will help me understand why *Rose* appeared in 1967, and why it caused the reaction it did.
CHAPTER TWO

Something to Talk About: The Reaction

By the time Rosc '67 ceremoniously opened on November 13th in Dublin, the media brimmed with discussion on its validity. The debate revolved around two seemingly basic questions. First, if this event was so important for the Irish, why were there no Irish artists exhibiting works? And second, why were ancient stones and monuments being taken from their sites in the country by foreign jurors, for an exhibition which seemed to laud international artists. One editorial yelled: “I really cannot see why an international committee which excludes any Irish representative should be allowed to decide what should happen to antiquities of Ireland.”

The Rosc committee explained their position in terms of aesthetic license. It was insisted that all three Rosc '67 jurors were from outside Ireland, to insure that a broad and outward-looking focus was maintained for the exhibition. It was also pointed out that the jurors felt unqualified to assess Irish works because Ireland was ‘unfamiliar’ territory for them. “In the case of Irish painting...” Sweeney had believed, it was felt that it would be presumptuous for a group of foreign jurors to make a selection from native work which was relatively unfamiliar to them. As a consequence it was decided to represent Irish art, not by contemporary examples of the past four years, but by masterworks from various quarters of Ireland which had been produced in the great ages of Irish art, namely before the twelfth century of our era.

Two things were to make this decision acceptable. First, Sweeney had written several articles on Celtic art, and saw himself as an ‘expert’ of sorts on Irish history.

---

29 James Johnson Sweeney, Chairman of the Jury. From Sweeney’s speech on October 2, 1967, Rosc '67 Press Reception at the Royal Hibernian Hotel in Dublin. INVALA: Rosc '67
30 Sweeney, “Continuity in Art”, 83
31 According to public relations documents for Rosc '67, Sweeney was commissioned by UNESCO to write on Irish illuminated manuscripts for their series on world art. INVALA: Rosc '67
And second, when the jurors had visited the Irish National Museum, while visiting Dublin to meet with the Rosc committee, they had seen the Museum’s collection of Celtic gold and antiquities for the first time. All three men had marveled at the formal parallels these Celtic artifacts had with the modern abstraction they were choosing for Rosc ’67. These similarities gave them the ‘familiarity’ they were comfortable with.

That the members of the jury were Sweeney from the United States, Jean Leymarie from France, and Willem Sandberg from Holland, meant the centers of North American painting, Northern European painting, and Southern European painting were covered. And, it was soon clear that the tradition of painting would serve as the foundation for Rosc ’67. The majority of artists on exhibit were painters. Everyone included had worked in a major European or North American center for painting, like Paris, New York, London, or Amsterdam. Special care was given in the catalogue to treat the exceptions to the rule. John Latham for instance, was an African-born, London educated artist, who had just recently lost his job at St. Martin’s School of Art in London for destroying a library copy of Greenberg’s 1961 book Art and Culture. Latham was represented at Rosc ’67 by two works, composed of books, cement, and canvas. However, both works hung neatly on the wall, and were only formally labeled as ‘assemblages’ in the catalogue. No mention was given of their relevance to the contemporary moment.\(^{32}\)

\(^{32}\) Rosc 67. 62. The recent work I mentioned, which resulted in Latham’s dismissal from St. Martin’s, was titled Art and Chew. Latham checked Art and Culture out of the school library in August 1966. He then proceeded to organize a session with students and friends at which time pages were torn out, chewed, spat into flasks, submerged in sulfuric acid, sodium bicarbonate and yeast, and left to ferment. When Latham received a notice in May 1967, urging the book’s return to the library, he distilled the liquid, placed it into a glass phial, and labeled it “the essence of Greenberg.” This is what was returned to library circulation. Incidentally, it is amusing that Greenberg would chose the words “bad taste” when reviewing Latham’s works at Rosc ’67. See Greenberg. "Poetry of Vision", 21
Also evident was the Westernization of ‘Eastern” artists. Japanese artist Toko Shinoda for example, was described in an almost apologetic statement: “Lives in Tokyo but exhibits in Europe and America.” Shinoda’s art must have been considered ‘safe’ for it reflected the suitable characteristics of a modernist aesthetic. *Genji* (Figure 2) was a large canvas containing gestural movements of paint, entirely abstract, and easily translated as a statement on form and the ‘tradition’ of painting.

Each artist’s place in *Rosc ’67* seems to be validated in the catalogue with affiliations to approved art ‘centers’ and large international exhibitions. The catalogue format consisted of an alphabetical listing of the artists. Each received a double spread with an enlarged black and white photograph of one art work placed adjacent to a brief synopsis of his or her career. The American artist Mark Tobey is represented by five works, the most allowed to represent any one artist. The short synopsis of his life and work, talked of extensive travel, his introduction to calligraphy and Zen, and vaguely referred to his “great influence and importance in the developments of the fifties.” The narrative then goes on to hint at the long list of prizes he has won. Actually mentioning only one, the prestigious Grand International Prize at the ’58 Venice Biennale. Tobey’s international fame may have made it safe to acknowledge that he did not reside at the center of the art world any more. Instead, he lived in Switzerland. A small nation, perhaps perceived as an artistic haven for its sublime landscapes and neutral international stance, somewhat like Ireland.

The contemporary artists were listed first in the catalogue. The Celtic Arts section followed, and the book concluded with a photographic collection of every contemporary

---

33 *Rosc ’67*, 97
Figure 2    Toko Shinoda. *Genji*, 1967 Oil on Canvas 20.25 x 53.5 ins. From Hilary Pyle “Rosc ’71.” *Ireland of the Welcomes*. 20 (1)May-June, 1971:24

34 Ibid., 110
work not already shown. By placing the Celtic objects after the contemporary works the
catalogue avoided the trap of guiding the viewer through a historical trajectory, which
has a tendency to imply the work of the present is more ‘advanced’ than its ‘primitive’
past. However, the absence of a critical text in *Rosc ’67*’s catalogue placed the artist in
the role of autonomous creator, and the work of art in a position of authority, speaking
for itself. The only texts available were: an introduction by Michael Scott, explaining the
jury system and thanking particular individuals, and the forewords by each juror.
Sweeney’s contribution evincing the notion that art needs no explanation. He wrote in part:

> The ideal in painting and sculpture is an objective reality which is the product of an artist’s
> personal selection of natural shapes and colours, their abstraction from nature and
> reconstitution into an individualized form which can be admired for itself, that is to say for
> the order it embodies.\(^{35}\)

The catalogue listed all 50 contemporary artists in a way that stresses the
importance of their global training and exhibition careers. Just one example is
Rauschenberg, whom the catalogue described as having studied at the Académie Julian
in Paris, the Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and the Art Students League in
New York. And, his teachers are all listed: Albers, Motherwell, Tworkov, and Kline.
This emphasis on the benefits of globalism are also felt in the plurality of work at *Rosc
’67*. The wide range, spanned from the silk-screens of Rauschenberg to the large gestural
canvases of Pierre Soulages, the optical illusions of Victor Vasarely (Figure 3), and the
comic book canvases of Roy Lichtenstein. Despite this pluralism however, only two
women were among the selection in 1967, Lee Bontecou (Figure 4) from the United
States and Mary Martin from Britain. Apart from the lack of females in the show, the
Figure 3  Victor Vasarely. *Goyo*, 1965 Indelible tempera on board 30 x 30 ins. From Hilary Pyle “Rosc ’71.” *Ireland of the Welcomes*, 20 (1) May-June, 1971:26

35 Foreword by Sweeney. *Rosc ’67*, 14
Figure 4  Lee Bontecou. *Untitled*, 1966 Mixed media 30 x 30 ins.  
pluralism of styles in *Rosc '67*’s selection may be considered as an encouragement for Irish artists to find a niche of their own in the global art market. However, there is an underlying inference that this niche could only be acquired if validated by an approved center. The fact that many twentieth century Irish artists, such as Louis Le Brocquy, Jack Yeats, and Anne Madden, had already been internationally recognized in cities like Paris, Milan, New York, and Venice by this stage, seems forgotten by *Rosc '67* organizers. Also disregarded is the power Irish artists may have gained from resisting the peripheral status of their own city. Perhaps some chose not to exhibit in large shows for ideological reasons. No Irish artists were exhibiting at the Venice Biennale at this point for instance, due to a furious disagreement between painter Jack Yeats and Italian officials. This dispute had taken place in 1960, as a result of officials hanging Yeats’ paintings in a dark corner of Venice’s ‘multi-cultural’ pavilion.\(^\text{36}\)

The one Irish artist whose works were displayed at *Rosc '67* was Francis Bacon. This choice is interesting considering Bacon’s scarred childhood relationship with Ireland and his extensive unsettled life in Britain. Yet *Rosc '67* did not promote Bacon’s Irishness. There was only a small line in the catalogue, noting that he was born in 1909 in Dublin. In a press release for *Rosc '67* he was actually referred to as English.\(^\text{37}\)

Bacon’s presence in *Rosc '67* was documented by two images studying the human form, both completed during that year. The angst and violence centered on the body in these works, could be understood as a self-reflexive account of Bacon’s personal struggle for identity in Britain. This was the country which had forced him from his home-land for wider prospects, only to re-claim him. One of these images, *Portrait on a Revolving*
Chair (Figure 5) recalls the isolation and awkwardness of a session at the mercy of a psychoanalyst. The pinched face creates a sense of repressed anguish, or the expression of a desire for hopes, dreams, or fears. The hands placed firmly in the lap protect and satiate these emotions. The chair, seated on a pedestal, has the effect of turning the body into a museum piece. The figure sits waiting to be analyzed and deconstructed.

Bacon's work in this show was symbolic of the struggles Rosc '67 may have presented to its audience. This was a moment when the cultural shifts occurring in Ireland were rupturing certain notions of nationalism. For most of the twentieth century, de Valera had couched Irish nationalism in terms of an allegiance to the Catholic Church, and a rural, frugal life, in which people gained contentment through hard work and simple pleasures. As Brian Kennedy, an Irish art historian, has written, de Valera would have considered the 'fine arts' a "part of life in the mansion of Anglo-Ireland." Thus, as an independent nationalist fighting for the end of Partition, supporting the arts would have been antithetical to de Valera's ideals.

...it was believed that the fine arts were not part of native Irish tradition. De Valera knew that it was politically viable to support what were perceived to be naïve art forms...[he] believed in an Irish culture comprised of native sports, music, dancing, story-telling, folklore and literature. He would take time to assist cultural endeavour if it was in spirit with his religious and nationalist beliefs. In the task of nation-building, de Valera saw it as essential to promote activities which were rooted in the traditions of the majority of the Irish people.  

---

37 World Art in Dublin
38 Partition refers to the separation of the six counties of Northern Ireland from the South. The direct result of the Home Rule agreement, made official on the declaration of the Irish Free State in 1922.
Figure 5    Francis Bacon. *Study for a portrait on a revolving chair*, 1967  
Oil on Canvas 78 x 58 ins. From Rosc '67. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967: 24
Francis Bacon and his oil paintings therefore, would have been displaced from de Valera’s Irish majority. In 1958 however, Fianna Fail came under the leadership of Sean Lemass. Lemass shifted the government’s focus to shaping Ireland into an urban industrialized nation. And, by the sixties, those who were with de Valera’s politics were seen as ‘with’ the past, those with Lemass were the future. *Rosc '67* was organized by a set of people who overtly positioned themselves with the latter forces of power. From this perspective, *Rosc '67’s* message read: the ‘best’ art from a modern world will stimulate local artistic practices so Irish arts can begin to compete on global levels. Bacon’s work can reflect this global success. Yet, if this aspect of Bacon was to be celebrated why was his Irishness downplayed? It is almost as if he was considered too Anglicized. The question is, does *Rosc '67* have the potential to carry a positive assertion of a modern Irish identity? To answer this adequately it is important to understand where *Rosc '67* was being built from.

Primarily, the exhibition needs to be understood as a product of a developing elite class in sixties Dublin. Its organizers were architects, professors, museum directors and curators, art critics and ‘fine art’ collectors. Each member of the organizing and honorary committee was tied to government organizations, as well as European and American businesses. Why then, in an exhibition attempting to project a nationalism

---

40 Eamon de Valera, President of Ireland, was the Patron; Charles Haughey, Minister of Finance, was the Honorary President; Members of the Executive Committee were: Michael Scott (Chair), Ann Crookshank, Dorothy Walker, Cecil King. Also present were: M.K. O'Doherty, a representative from the tourist board; P.J. Brennan, a representative from the Irish transport authority; and, Robert Figgis from the Arts Council. These latter men kept tabs on the committee proceedings, because their organizations had donated funds to *Rosc '67*. There were twenty-two people on the Committee of Honor. These were individuals who had assisted *Rosc '67* in some way. Names include: Sir Basil Goulding (President of the Contemporary Irish Art Society), Fr. Donal O’Sullivan (Director of the Arts Council); Rt Hon. Earl of Rosse (President of Friends of the National Collection of Ireland); James White (Director of the National Gallery of Ireland); William
rooted in economics and modernity, would *Rosc '67* represent the Irish nation through relics of the past? One reason might have been to validate Irish art pre-colonization. By omitting art post-1200 the exhibition refused to show art created under hegemonic British rule; a rule still evident with the issue of partition. However, the reaction to the exhibition suggests a large percentage of the Irish public perceived *Rosc '67*'s aims in a different light. Many felt that *Rosc* was trying to prove a point that no 'real' contemporary art existed in Ireland, and that international modernism was required to validate the status of Celtic objects. There is no doubt that many voices were excited about this massive show, which was bringing work in to Ireland only previously seen in books and slides. However the specific exclusion of Irish artists, and the decision to take ancient stones from their resting sites into Dublin, alienated many viewers who felt *Rosc* was emitting an unjustified authority.

The public debate centered on the rape of history and rights to ownership of culture. These are similar issues at stake for many contemporary indigenous people who are demanding the repatriation of sacred objects, antiquities, and land, from governments and museums.41 Voices heard in the media during the run-up to *Rosc '67* argued that,

---

41 I am referring here to concerns in the 1990s in North America, which have resulted in legislation like the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). This federal mandate orders the return of burial goods and sacred, culturally significant, artifacts to contemporary tribal groups with which they are most closely affiliated. One of the most recent pieces of legislation on the repatriation of land in Canada is the Nisga’a Treaty. This treaty attempts to re-allocate land to a group of First Nations in British Columbia. For a set of varied opinions on who should be controlling the cultural property of Native Americans and the First Nations in Canada see: James Clifford. “Four Northwest Coast Museums.” *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display.* Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (eds.) Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991:212-254; Marcia Crosby. “Lines, Lineage and Lies, or Borders, Boundaries and Bullshit.” *Nations in Urban Landscapes.* Vancouver, B.C.: Vancouver Contemporary Art Gallery, 1997; Jeanette Greenfield. *The Return of Cultural Treasures.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989; Diana Nemiroff. “Modernism, Nationalism and Beyond: A Critical
each monument contained a history of survival against foreign intervention, and yet thanks to *Rosc* the antiquities faced decimation in the hands of the Irish themselves. Due to the lure of private interests encouraged by the forces of capitalism, some perceived *Rosc* officials were removing monuments for their own profit.42 The insistence on having everything in Dublin emphasized, for some, the growing power of an urban elite. This worked to rub salt in the wounds of rural classes, whose history reflects permanent struggle against the British rule which emanated from Dublin. As an urban event, *Rosc '67* was perceived by many as a project designed only to stimulate finances. It was attacked for its blatant attempt to cater to high-income tourists, attracted by the sensational primitivism of an Irish culture coupled with the conveniences of a modern city. *Rosc '67* was viewed by many as Dublin’s golden egg, not Ireland’s as a whole.43 As a consequence, the committee was painted as a band of elitists. *Rosc '67* became a vehicle upon which these elite were seen validating their positions within Dublin society. This self-aggrandizing behavior colored the entire production, as one letter to the *Irish Times* reveals.

These gentlemen, American, French and Dutch, are not passionately interested in showing Celtic sculptures to the Irish public; they are interested in creating an exhibition... Art, according to this notion, is simply that which can be exhibited: to all intents and purposes, paintings and sculptures alone... Our important art exhibitions, with their aura of international prestige, are the chief festivals of an idolatrous cult, whose followers will naturally consider that to bring to Dublin for exhibition a carved stone cross which has stood in a field for a thousand years (nobody looking at it most of the time) is to confer on it, at last, the supreme honour.44

---


43 This was clearly felt by the *Rosc '67* committee, and reflects their decision in 1971 to spread the exhibition further afield. *Rosc '71* involved art exhibitions in towns like Galway, Cork, Limerick and Waterford.

The public particularly resisted the use of Celtic antiquities at *Rosc '67*. For instance, archaeological students protested at sites which had monuments slated for removal. One specific monument, the Tau Cross (Figure 6), was stolen by youths, and almost immediately re-appropriated by the farmer whose land it had stood on. Then State archaeologists decided to recommend that stones not be removed from their rural sites, out of a concern for their fragility. The debate really stepped up when the Finance Minister, Charles Haughey, helped the committee jump various financial and legal hurdles. Haughey over-rode advice given by the Monuments Advisory Committee to leave the stones at their sites, which caused one member to resign in protest. Haughey then ordered the stones bought to Dublin by the Office of Public Works, giving them full police protection. And, he deemed the RDS, the site of *Rosc '67*, a museum for the period of the exhibition. This particular move solved a legal issue concerning the conditions under which cultural property could be utilized. A writer from Dublin saw *Rosc '67* typifying some of the deeper socio-political problems evident in Ireland:

I have been convinced for some years past that the most powerful cause of the massive emigration from this country over the past century and more was the loss of a sense of meaning, tradition, and self-worth in countless local communities throughout Ireland...this sense [of worthlessness] has been fomented by the arrogance and lack of concern of city and town dwellers, once more exemplified by the disrespectful and haughty procedure of the *Rosc* committee and of their instrument, Mr. Haughey, in the monuments affair.45

Haughey's image in the press and with the farming community in 1967 was particularly bad, which may shed extra light on why moving these monuments caused so much public agitation. Haughey had been promoted to Minister of Finance in 1966 by a new Taoiseach, Jack Lynch. But ever since 1964, under Lemass, Haughey had held the post of Minister of Agriculture. His last year in office had been inundated with protests and
Figure 6  *Tau Cross* from Killinaboy, Co.Clare. Date Uncertain, Limestone, shaft 43 x 12.7 cms., transom 38 cms, in length. From *Rosc '67*. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967:131

demands from the National Farmers Association (NFA). This all stemmed from an October 1966 march farmers undertook from Bantry Bay on the South coast. The farmers were dissatisfied with Haughey’s lack of concern for a government agreement drafted by Lemass, which had guaranteed that the NFA would be consulted on all agricultural policy. In 1966 Haughey had refused to sell cattle stocks when their prices had plummeted, due to closed EEC markets and strikes at many British ports. Hundreds of protesters marched into Dublin and camped outside Haughey’s office for days. He exacerbated the situation by refusing to talk to the farmers or the media. Because he refused to consult the NFA on how the cattle problem was to be solved, protests and rallies continued into 1967. And, by June, hundreds of farmers had been jailed after refusing to pay property rates or for leading strikes on producing commodities. All this had been either televised or published in the newspapers, alongside the debate surrounding Rosc ’67. One of the results of all this discontent came in the spring of ’67, when the National Museum refused to lend the antiquities Rosc officials had requested.

The ancient Celtic art chosen for the exhibition, consisted of sixty-five items considered the: “finest examples of another great period of abstract art.” Most of these objects were owned by the National Museum in Dublin. However Trinity College had agreed to lend the Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow. The Ulster Museum had agreed to lend the “Ballymoney” Brooch, “Bann” Disc, and a scabbard plate. And Armagh Cathderal was lending two carved heads and a “Tanderagree” figure. The decision to refuse Rosc officials access to their antiquities, led to a new agreement which

---

47 Rosc ’67 promotional leaflet printed by Hely Thom Ltd., Dublin INVALA: Rosc ‘67
included the National Museum in *Rosc '67*'s plans. The museum allowed the antiquities to be a part of *Rosc* if they were not taken off the premises. Although this would separate the sections, both exhibitions were to maintain a clear relationship by sharing the same interior design and *Rosc '67* logo. It was also agreed that the stone monuments which did have legal clearance for exhibition at the RDS would be displayed amongst a selection of international works in an annex. This was attached to the RDS's main hall by an open doorway (see Figure 7). Most of the large stones which lay at the heart of the controversy were in this annex, including: a 3rd Century B.C. Stone from Turoe Country Galway (Figure 8), the Newgrange stones from the burial mound outside of Dublin, and a three-faced sandstone head from County Cavan (Figure 9). The catalogue described these artifacts in a formal manner. While the modern art had needed no explanation, a double page was dedicated to explicating the abstractions of these Celtic works. This essay reads in part:

> It was an introspective art done by men who were preoccupied with spiritual values, who sought passionately after perfection, who, perhaps, over-elaborated their ornament through a *horror vacui*. Everywhere one can see the individual coming through, in his passion for detail, his odd quirks of humour; never does the workshop intrude on the individual...Now, after 1000 AD, many fine objects were being produced, but the fine flourish of the earlier years had gone. There is a feeling of mass-produced, industrial art, there is a sense of making-do with imitations, with the second-best. Rarely, at the end of the early Christian Period in Ireland, does one feel the soaring spirit of the individual artist: a plodding conformity had taken place.48

This text reveals how the art at *Rosc '67* could be viewed as both subjected to and resistant of hegemonic narratives. Apart from assuming each artifact was created by a male individual, concerned with religion and perfection, this essay places great value in

48 *Rosc '67*, 125
Figure 7  Photograph depicting annex off the main hall at the Royal Dublin Society which contained *Rosc '67's* Celtic section. From Hilary Pyle "Rosc '71." *Ireland of the Welcomes*, 20 (1) May-June, 1971:21
Figure 8 Carved Stone from Turoe, Co. Galway. Early Iron Age, Granite, height 120 cms., diameter 91 cms. From Rosc '67. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967:127
Celtic art. On the other hand, this ‘greatness’ is attributed to its provenance as a product of an individual. In specifically heroizing individual over mass production this text imposes a framework which eradicates cultural difference, and works to disempower local meaning. The Celtic works are seen through the lens of modernism, their value justified because of its adherence to a set of foreign rules. By omitting a discussion on the fields of production specific to post-1000AD, the article misses the opportunity to assess how the ‘new approaches’ it mentions could have been complying with or defying particular cultural shifts.

The modernist insistence that the “soaring spirit” of an individual artist created the ‘great’ Celtic art informs *Rosc '67* with a primitivizing rhetoric. In heroizing a past long forgotten, *Rosc '67* illustrates the Celtic as a totality. This serves to emphasize the plurality and ‘genius’ of contemporary art. In anthropologist Daniel Miller’s terms, this is a narrative which reveals the necessity of primitivism to modern art. Miller has argued that a modern movement tends to look backwards, in order to find a cohesive and social totality to authenticate its own self-expression.\(^{49}\) Celtic art is praised at *Rosc '67*, but is it elevated simply to authenticate the self-expression of the modern works also on display? A *Rosc '67* press release, distributed around American and European galleries and museums, may provide an answer to this question. It reads in part:

…modern art is no longer centered in any one country, as developments in America show. From the oriental-style calligraphy of Mark Tobey to the calm spaces of Rothko, the only trait that could be said to unite the American artists is that of modern art everywhere; individuality. Only more so in America…\(^{30}\)


\(^{30}\) *Rosc - World Art in Dublin*
Individuality is viewed here as the unifying force in modern art. The success of self-expression has been authenticated by the body of ‘great’ Celtic art described in the catalogue entry quoted above. I will explore the significance of the relationship between Ireland and the United States in the following chapters. Immediately however, I would like to explore this inferred connection with the past and present in more depth.

Sweeney wrote an article in 1967, published in a journal dedicated to the study of Catholicism, in which he suggested a similar syntax exists between the art of modernism displayed at Rosc and the ancient Irish work. The materials and forms differ, he claimed, but the objects share an ‘innate’ and ‘natural’ language which transcends time.\textsuperscript{51} Although Sweeney was careful to insist the exhibition was not trying to prove an evolution of form, or produce superficial resemblances between the ancient and contemporary, he did so anyway. He made two comparisons:

..there was no intention to point out superficial resemblances, let us say, between a Picasso portrait such as ‘Grand Profil, 1963’ and the first century A.D. three-faced sandstone head from Corleck, Co. Cavan. Nor was there any interest in illustrating an evolution of forms from the past to the present, let us say from the running lines of an interlace page of \textit{The Book of Durrows} and running patterns of a painting by Dubuffet such as ‘Le Bariole Mariole, 1964’. \textsuperscript{52}

The argument here is similar to one exhibited at MoMA in 1984. In a much critiqued exhibition, \textit{Primitivism in 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern}, African art and modern paintings were juxtaposed to explore their ‘similarities’. One such critique came from Hal Foster, who regarded the comparison of works, such as Picasso’s \textit{Les Demoiselles d’Avignon}, with certain African masks, as an attempt to reveal formal similarities which could authenticate the intuitive self-expression evident in the modern work. Foster wrote:
...this presentation was typical of the abstractive operation of the show, premised as it was on the belief that 'modernist primitivism depends on the autonomous force of objects' and that its complexities can be revealed 'in purely visual terms, simply by juxtaposing of knowingly similar works of art.'

The 1984 show at MoMA utilized what Foster called 'affinities' and 'universals.' These elements worked to erase difference and infer circularisms, by denying historical specificities. The modern was seen transposed into the tribal. The tribal was visualized in the object of modernism. What does this tell us about each object? Just that each was intrinsically expressionistic or expressive, Foster explained. What this strategy ignored was the significance of local meaning and what was at stake ideologically by comparing these objects. What was at stake were the effects of recoding. If MoMA had taken its own colonialist conditions as the object of critical discourse in this 1984 show, the museum could have theorized the notions of primitivism and effectively transgressed them. However, this show attempted nothing of the sort. Instead, notions of the primitive were absorbed into a body of modern art, producing a continual narrative which was locked in upon itself.

Declan McGonigle, the current director of the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) in Dublin, had a similar comment to make about Rosc '67. During a recent interview, McGonigle characterized Rosc as a missed opportunity. He said at one point: "Rosc initially was outside art being brought in...and there was a feeling 'how should we deal with this context?'...there was a clear sentiment that Irish contemporary artists were

---

51 Sweeney. "Continuity in Art", 82-3
52 Ibid.
53 Hal Foster. "The "Primitive" Unconscious of Modern Art." Originally written for October. 34 Fall 1985: 45-70. Quoted here from Fascina and Harris (eds.): 200
54 Foster's term, which is also the title of his 1985 book on art and cultural production. Used here in Ibid., 203
55 Ibid., 204-205
not up to it, and Irish historical artists were not up to it... therefore how do you take account of the situation?” There is a very problematic argument here which was not dealt with, McGonigle assessed. That is, *Rosc* was perpetuating a colonialist model which polarized external value and internal parochialism. He concluded, “although the idea of ‘otherness,’ is now almost a cliched term in international discourse, in 1967 it was relatively new... The potential existed here in Dublin for that discourse to take place, but it never did.”

In fact, Sweeney’s article was the only publication at the time which dealt with the connections being attempted between Celtic artifacts and modern art at *Rosc* ’67. Yet Sweeney never mentioned his personal investment in the show. Speaking in the third person, this article has a Greenbergian tone; one that assumes the critic remains an objective source of interpretation for art. Barbara Reise has explained Clement Greenberg’s brand of criticism in the following terms:

The philosophical form of Greenberg’s historiography is a quasi-dialectic progress in linear evolution; it is influenced by Marx, later dominated by Wolfflin, and thus tied to pre-Darwinian thought and to Hegel. His vision is limited to the optical form and mechanics of artistic material, untouched by emotional or conceptual associations; to style abstracted into formal movements; to movements limited by national boundaries and temporal epochs...

Sweeney’s use of Picasso and Dubuffet for instance, to draw parallels between the artistry of the ancient Celts and the modern man, relied on this evolutionary Hegelian history. And, Foster has pointed to a 1935 MoMA exhibition, *African Negro Art*, as being one of the first shows to engage the use of primitivism in elevating modern art practices. Sweeney was the curator of this exhibition. *African Negro Art* essentially

---

56 Interview with Declan McGonigle, Director of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Interview on December 11, 1998
deemed African art 'sculpture,' thus making it worthy of specific aesthetic judgment under the rubric of a Western sculptural tradition. This makes it all the more poignant that Sweeney was the one who finalized decisions to juxtapose the Celtic and modern at Rosc '67. And it was Sweeney who chose over 50% of the international paintings, and installed the show.

The works by Picasso chosen for Rosc '67 reflect the same 'affinities' Sweeney inferred modern art had with those tribal masks in African Negro Sculpture. Grand Profil (Figure 10) of 1963 and Grand Nu of 1964 are both oils on canvas, displaying Picasso's obsession with carving up the female body and his knowledge of African masks. In a formalist sense they aptly reflect elements of Picasso's stylistic progression: the angular facets of color; the play with three and two dimensionality; and, the translation of classical forms into representations which attempt to adhere to the integrity of a flat canvas. The profil and nu are almost a synopsis of Picasso's career. They exemplify the Cubism he is so famous for, and were probably viewed by Sweeney as proof that 'true' artistic geniuses can tame the tribal to create a visually coherent expression of modern man (gender specifics intended). Meanwhile, the object Sweeney compared to Picasso's image in his article is wiped of local meaning. The value of the three-faced sandstone head from County Cavan was placed in a formal exploration of lines, forms and depth. The description in the Rosc '67 catalogue, for instance, limited interpretation to formal appreciation. The three-faced head was described as "carved from a block of siliceous

---

58 Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art", 203
59 Crookshank interview
Figure 9    Sandstone three-faced head from Corleek Co. Cavan.
Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967: 132
Figure 10  Pablo Picasso. *Grand Profil*, 1963 Oil on Canvas. 51 x 38 ins. From *Rosc '67*. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967: 87
sandstone. The mouth is shown as a narrow groove, the nose is spatulate, the eyes round. Supraorbital ridges occur on one face.  

Sweeney also mentioned Dubuffet's work in his article to further his argument for the affinities modern artists have with the 'savage', and by consequence 'intuitive', mind. By the late sixties, Dubuffet was well known for his *art brut*, or 'raw art.' A style heavily informed by the art of children and the mentally ill. He believed this work was loaded with intuition and purity of thought, because it was completed with an untrained or untamed eye. It was the ability to transgress the reality we are trained to believe in, that Dubuffet admired and sought to achieve in his own work. Dubuffet's art has been described as a reaction against the preciousness and sophistication of a lengthy tradition of French painting, a tradition which had waned considerably against the strength of American art since World War II. For Sweeney however, Dubuffet's contribution to *Rosc 67* probably went no further than a specific formal appreciation for the artist's contribution to modern art history.

The works chosen for *Rosc '67* were from Dubuffet's latest *Simulacras*. These works were not, as in traditional painting, intended to be an illusion signifying a reality but rather, a physical reality signifying an allusion. *Cuisinière à Gaz* (Figure 11), completed a year before *Rosc '67* opened, refers to a common household item but is depicted in a doodled manner, as if squashed flat. The painting signifies that the reality of the gas stove has been absented. This begs the question: is it a gas stove at all? Does this gas stove actually exist? Because this philosophical quagmire rests in the formal

---

60 *Rosc '67*, 133
Figure 11  Jean Dubuffet. *Cuisinère à Gaz II*, 1966. Oil on Canvas 51 x 38 ins. 47 From *Rose '67*. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967: 24
Figure 12  A page from the *Book of Durrow*. 7th Century AD, Colored Pigments on Vellum 9.75 x 5.75 ins. From *Rosc '67*. Dublin: Hely Thom Ltd., 1967: 185
aspects of the painting, it must have stamped the work with authority for art historians like Sweeney, who were attempting to legitimize its presence amongst the ‘world’s best’ at Rosc ‘67. However, when Sweeney compared Dubuffet’s image to the Book of Durrows (Figure 12), he overshadowed the cultural complexities of each work. The lavish decoration and intricate inscriptions in the Book of Durrows comes from an entirely different set of precepts. Formal appreciation alone takes power away from its function as a book of Gospels, but also as a work completed under cultural conditions that may have dictated or enabled specific meanings. For instance, Liam de Paor has written of the controversies which surround The Book of Durrows. Some scholars believe it was a product of the Durrow scriptorium. Others speculate the book’s origins are not Irish at all, but lie in Northumbria. The book was copied from manuscripts at Lindisfarne monastery, and was brought to Ireland by monks returning after loosing a dispute over the control of missionary teaching in the Northumbria area. A Germanic influence has also been attributed to the manuscript, as it exhibits broad-ribbon, double-contoured interlacing. This was only found in Lombard metal work in 6th century AD, the date attributed to the manuscript’s production. And other interpretations place it as a direct product of Rome, as it is a relatively ‘pure’ version of St. Jerome’s Vulgate. Irish manuscripts recorded at later dates were all blended with the Gospels. As de Paor has noted, monasteries such as Lindisfarne in Northumbria, Iona in Scotland and Durrow in Ireland were all linked “under a common monastic jurisdiction, as well as by the comings and goings of monks, craftsmen, students and guests of different races.” Therefore, The Book of Durrow is a site of cultural exchange. It is a vehicle of

---

education, and a symbol of the wealth and power of the Catholic church. Its relevance to modern day Ireland is much more complex and politically loaded than *Rosc '67* gave it credit.

In promoting *Rosc '67*, Sweeney's article asserted the significance of Celtic Art, but at the same time tended to infer its presence in the exhibition as being purely incidental. While I find the Celtic works are used to validate the work of the international artists at *Rosc '67*, I also admit, that free of British influence, the Irish antiquities could have been viewed as positive statements for Irish identity. *Rosc* emerged at a time when nationhood was being re-articulated. There were many voices resistant to change, and a cultural event framed with familiar references such as the Celtic, Catholic and rural, may have worked to assuage these fears.

---

63 Ibid., 132
CHAPTER THREE

Shifting Notions of Nationalism

Irish-American historian Benedict Anderson’s phrase “imagined communities” is often quoted because it is an efficient and exact way to describe how nationalism is constructed. Anderson posits that nationalism does not mean self-consciousness, but invention, and the distinguishing factors between nations stem from the different ways a community is imagined by its members. He writes, “Communities are not to be distinguished by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”64

Anderson sees the transformation undergone by many societies, controlled by religion, into secular nations in the eighteenth century as a crucial shift in how these communities imagined themselves. For it was this transference, from a reliance on religion to explain unknown forces towards a faith that nationhood would furnish such answers, which began to complicate the foundation upon which each individual forged an identity. It was not that nationalism superseded religion, but rather, as Anderson explains, that: “nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being.”65 Religion has played a large role in constructing nationalist sentiment in Ireland. And it is during the sixties that the cultural systems supporting this national identity were being re-negotiated. As a product of its cultural moment, Rosc '67 was couched in a particular view of Irish nationalism articulated through new government initiatives. This chapter is devoted to understanding how notions of nationalism in Ireland become entangled in the making of Rosc.

In 1965, as \textit{Rosc} was being planned, Terence O’Neil, the Prime Minister at Northern Ireland’s Stormont, and Sean Lemass, the Taoiseach of the Republic, drew up the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement. The terms were that Britain was to remove all restrictions on Irish imports by July 1966, and Ireland was to remove restrictions to British imports over the following decade. This agreement was the product of a new economic focus for Ireland, signifying a moment when diverse views on Irish nationalism were publicly articulated. On the one hand, Lemass imaged Ireland as a nation of internationally competitive urbanites, whose outward pragmatic focus on economic integration into Europe and America, was aimed at illustrating a modern Irish state. On the other hand, a nationalism steeped in the republican movement to de-colonize Ireland, painted the modern nation as a rural and Gaelic one. An Ireland built on hard work, honesty, and a dedication to the Catholic church. This latter view was largely based on the politics of long reigning Fianna Fail leader, de Valera. His mission, since gaining the post in 1922, had been to de-Anglicize Ireland by: redistributing land; fostering indigenous business and industry; extending welfare provisions; and, placing trade embargoes on foreign imports. Power was heavily centralized in de Valera’s hands, and government rhetoric was inextricably tied to the revolution. This ultimately worked to validate state intervention in all cultural affairs.

By the late 1950s, as a direct result of de Valera’s strict reign over Ireland for thirty years, land holdings had been consolidated, agriculture was corporatized by a growing rural-bourgeoisie. Local industry had little competition and investments tended to go overseas. One historian gauges, that “by 1958 industrial wages were 50% lower

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 19
than other Western European countries, like Britain, and 80% lower than in the USA. Unemployment had trebled and 700,000 people had migrated since partition in 1916.\textsuperscript{66} Emigration figures reflect that there was a particular growth of discontent during the 1950s. The numbers rose from an estimated 18,000 during 1936-46, to 63,000 in the decade 1946-56. Then during the next five years (1956-61) the figures jumped dramatically to 42,000.\textsuperscript{67} In hindsight, it was becoming more evident that the government, with its intimate connection to the Catholic church, seemed to actually discourage social reform and education, and encourage emigration. The hope was that in controlling the population’s numbers, the government would be able to manage the ‘masses.’ This also meant the practices of the state could be protected and sovereignty would not be disrupted.\textsuperscript{68}

On entering the leadership of Fianna Fail in 1958, Lemass shifted the party’s energies into developing a strong urban business community. He did this by nurturing the new “post-revolutionary”\textsuperscript{69} bourgeois force, disregarding the primary position of both church and rural powers, and paying attention to the needs of the foreign business, government, and tourist. By luring foreign businesses onto Irish soil with tax benefits and lifting trade embargoes, for instance, the first half of the sixties (1961-1966) saw a

\textsuperscript{68} MacLaughlin suggests for instance that the Irish government actually encouraged emigration throughout the twentieth century, in order to maintain a status quo they could adequately control. Emigration as a double-edged sword is described, in Ireland’s case, as having “exacerbated the under-development of the country’s indigenous industrial base, while simultaneously consolidating the hegemony of rural fundamentalism, small farmers, and the rural bourgeoisie.” See Ibid., 142
\textsuperscript{69} This is a term used by Al Cohan throughout his book The Irish Political Elite. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Limited, 1972, to describe the new elites emerging under Lemass’ government in the sixties.
reduction in emigration and unemployment in Ireland.\textsuperscript{70} In bringing companies from the United States, Germany, Japan, and France into Ireland, Lemass was not only attempting to re-vitalize the economy, but also to induce a competitive spirit in Irish industry; to garner demand from foreign investors and markets. However, by providing more job opportunities in Ireland, it is clear in hindsight that Lemass took only a temporary edge off the need for domestic employment opportunities. He focused the energies and finances of the state on aggressive urban planning and industry, which built the image of a new nation at the expense of the rural classes. The populist notion that economic redirection could provide social mobility and material affluence, redefined the state in capitalist terms. This forced patriotism to base itself on concerns for liberalism, globalization, and corporate interests, and asked the Irish to effectively ignore the image of a sovereign localized nation, which de Valera had been promoting for years.

In domestic affairs de Valera had seen Ireland first as a sovereign state, in contrast Lemass saw the nation as a corporate state.\textsuperscript{71} The 1960s were defined by a push away from local concerns for an Ireland bound by moral and religious ties to a Gaelic heritage, and towards a nation bound by economic success and global interests. Lemass introduced the \textit{1st Programme of Economic Expansion} in 1959, by claiming in a speech at the Dail: “the historic task of this generation is to secure the economic foundation of independence.”\textsuperscript{72} Both the first and the second (1963) of these economic expansion

\textsuperscript{70} I must note, that the results of these decisions were directly felt in the 1970s when foreign companies began to pull out of Ireland due to the oil crisis. It was seen in hindsight that the economy had been built on dependent industrialization, which had produced a false sense of autonomy. The future \textit{Rosces} were affected by this recession in Ireland. Specifically, \textit{Rosc 75} never took place, having to be held off until 1977 when sufficient funds could be raised.

\textsuperscript{71} See J.J. Lee “Sean Lemass.” in J.J. Lee (ed.), 21

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 22
programmes, were aimed at encouraging private industry to invest in long-term planning. For instance, the government invited participation and advice from foreign companies, in an effort to motivate domestic businesses to plan their expansion into international markets. In 1961 the Committee on Industrial Organisation was devised to assess the condition of Irish industry in order to improve its competitiveness.73 Also in 1961, as a direct result of the scathing Scandinavia Report, the Kilkenny Design Workshops were opened, to specifically support and encourage Irish industrial design. Design was considered the cornerstone upon which finance, manufacturing, marketing, distribution, and servicing were built in business. To ‘make’ Irish design competitive the government had invited a group of Scandinavian designers to assess the state of current practices. The government also gave the Industrial Development Authority more power and resources during the sixties, in order to expand export-oriented businesses. As a result of all these efforts over 350 new foreign businesses opened up between 1960-69.74 Employment opportunities grew, as did the population and the general standard of living.75

Writers at the time, such as Al Cohan, described the increasing strength of interest groups, businesses, and local government under Lemass. “The business community is emerging as one area of potential pressure,” Cohan wrote. “Foreign investors...are bringing in demands to bear on the government.”76 In interviews, Cohan published in 1972, he found that those ‘elite’ involved with the revolutionary era were concerned primarily with the end of partition, the revival of the Irish language, and a fear of losing a ‘national culture’. In contrast to this, concerns among the “post-revolutionary elites”

73 See Brendan M. Walsh. “Economic Growth and Development.” In Ibid., 32
74 Ibid., 32
75 Ibid.,33-4
resided mostly in “economic matters – the ending of emigration, association with the European Economic Community, [and] greater industrial development ...” This shift in focus can be explicitly illustrated with the differing foreign policies of de Valera and Lemass. The former’s had centered on a concern to amass as much sympathy and support as possible for the Irish cause to end partition. De Valera, himself an American citizen, had consistently lobbied for support from the United States government. By the early sixties the position of the United States towards Ireland was defined and encapsulated by the Irish-American president John F. Kennedy. Kennedy made clear in a speech to the Dail (Irish Parliament) in June of 1963 that because Ireland was fighting emigration and poverty, and the subjugation of individual rights, it was a country of progress. “...today this [Ireland] is no longer the country of hunger and famine,” Kennedy declared, “it is not rich and its progress is not yet complete...[but]...it is a free country, and that is why any American feels at home.”

The Irish relationship to the United States is steeped in a history of emigration, but is complicated somewhat by Ireland’s independent stance against Britain. For instance, in 1949 the Irish government had turned down an offer to join U.S. and other European nations in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). NATO was a military pact largely maneuvered by Britain, with whom Irish officials would not align themselves. However, two years previously Ireland had accepted millions of dollars in aid from the United States’ Marshall Plan, despite remaining officially ‘neutral’

76 Cohan, 23
77 Ibid., 6
79 Despite this neutrality many Irish fought in World War II. Most Irish emigrants served in the British or American forces, and many Irish women emigrated to Britain to work in industries supplying ammunition,
throughout World War II. From this point, Ireland’s External Affairs Department had dedicated itself to sympathizing with the United States’ plans to protect the Atlantic against foreign, specifically Soviet Communist, occupation. It was in 1956, when Ireland decided to join the United Nations, that the country’s global role took on a new image. Ireland became an international peace-keeper: “promoting compromise” and “softening the extreme positions” of other governments. These ‘distinctive’ credentials were crafted and promoted by de Valera. They involved constructively twisting current perceptions of the Irish state. For instance, the political and economic weakness of Ireland globally was used as an advantageous position of neutrality in international affairs, and Ireland was promoted as an asset in the political negotiations of larger countries. The perceived isolation of Ireland was also marketed as a model for other countries who may have been vying for independence.

De Valera’s government emphasized an image of a sovereign and politically neutral Ireland, free of Anglo-influence. Lemass, on the other hand, promoted a nation integrated with the liberal democratic principles of capitalist societies, exemplified by Western Europe and North America. In regards to the UN, for instance, Lemass declared where Ireland’s loyalties lay, when he remarked in 1964:

We stand, as a united people, for the true democratic principles to which the free Western nations proclaim their allegiance - which are not anywhere better expressed than in our own constitution - and in opposition to the false philosophies of Communism and totalitarianism.

Clothing, and food to the war effort. For more information see MacLaughlin. “Social Characteristics of ‘New Wave’ Irish Emigration”, 42.

Ireland had applied for membership to the UN in 1946, only to be rejected by the Soviet Union because of their neutral military stance. See Paul Sharp. Irish Foreign Policy and the European Community. Aldershot, England: Dartmouth, 1990:40

Ibid.,38

Ibid.,41

By placing Ireland on the West side of the Iron curtain, Lemass was supporting the cold war rhetoric of Britain and America, and publicly stripping Ireland of its official neutrality. This speech can be seen as a direct response to President Kennedy’s speech in Ireland, given the previous year. Kennedy had paralleled the freedom and liberty of the United States with the goals and achievements of Ireland; and in doing so referenced Cold war initiatives:

The central issue of freedom... is between those who believe in self-determination and those in the East who would impose upon others the harsh and oppressive Communist system; and here your nation wisely rejects the role of the go-between or a mediator. Ireland pursues an independent course in foreign policy, but it is not neutral between liberty and tyranny and never will be.

By 1964 Ireland had individuals acting on behalf of the UN in the Congo, Cyprus and Pakistan. Their role as ‘international good citizen’ of the West was gathering global strength and recognition. Lemass was also to change Ireland’s relationship to Britain, and this was to cause enormous discontent in domestic circles.

The government felt that by coupling links with American ideals, business acumen, and membership to the EEC, Ireland could become a strong force on the world stage. At the beginning of the sixties Ireland had preferential trading access to British markets. Thus, when Lemass discovered Britain was applying to the EEC he followed suit. Ultimately, in 1963, both applications were turned down. This decision was largely the result of political machinations beyond Ireland’s borders. At this time the United States government was pinning hopes on Britain’s application, in order to protect U.S. trade interests in Europe. This concern is illustrated by the introduction of JFK’s “Grand

---

84 This was also the year Kennedy died. Therefore, Lemass’ speech in the following year may have been inspired by the words of this American President of Irish descent who had been assassinated for undetermined beliefs and actions.
Design" in 1962, a trade agreement designed to offset any internal trade advantages a unified continent may introduce. However, Kennedy's "Grand Design" included suggestions for a military mutli-lateral force, which would have immediately involved Europe in the Cuban-Missile Crisis. French president Charles de Gaulle openly objected to these ties to U.S. politics, and in direct response vetoed the British application to the EEC. A cartoon (Figure 13) in a Irish satirical magazine, the Dublin Opinion, comments on this situation, highlighting the fallacy of Ireland's claims to sovereignty. As Harold Macmillan, Britain's Prime Minister, prepares to jump into the waters of the common market Lemass is pictured on the same diving board, encouraging him to test the waters. The life preserver is aptly 'out-of-order,' and a question mark tags the eighth changing room. The question is, who will sink and who will swim? Who will be the eighth member of the EEC swimming club? The irony is of course that Macmillan and Lemass are tied at the ankle, and are at the mercy of each other's fate.

A year after the EEC applications were refused Britain placed a 15% levy tax on all industrial imports. This ultimately served to cripple the Irish export-industry, and was the moment Lemass decided to draft an official business relationship with Britain. It was this Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement which Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA which had been climbing back into the limelight since 1957, used to indict Lemass' policies as both regressive and self-colonizing. In 1965 Sinn Fein published a document

85 JFK's speech, Mitchell, 145
86 For an excellent description of this see Laurie Monahan. "Cultural Cartography: American Designs at the 1964 Venice Biennale", 379-381
87 John A. Murphy. " 'Put them Out.' Parties and Elections 1948-69." In J. J. Lee (ed.), 3. Murphy mentions that Sinn Fein re-entered the Dail in 1957, for the first time in 30 years, when they gained 4. Sinn Fein was originally led by de Valera, until his election to head Fianna Fail in 1926.
Figure 13  
“You go first, Macmillan, and see how deep it is.”
announcing its campaign of resistance against, what they now considered, a Unionist Fianna Fail.\textsuperscript{88} Sinn Fein argued that, by attending to economics alone, Lemass was validating the presence of British imperialism in Irish affairs.\textsuperscript{89} By this point factions of both the IRA and Sinn Fein were attempting to gain a support in the South which could match their success in the North. IRA and Sinn Fein membership was growing in the North as a direct result of increasing numbers of educated Catholic youth who continually faced insurmountable odds while searching for decent employment, housing, or social assistance. By 1966 the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Easter Uprising was stirring revolutionary sentiment in the South. And public incidents, like the destruction of Nelson’s Pillar in Dublin, were evidence that the ‘old guard’ were very much alive.\textsuperscript{90}

The new political elite in Ireland has been described as taking on “the smooth image of the swinging sixties.” And leaving behind the “simple virtues” of their founding fathers.\textsuperscript{91} One powerful tool emerging during the 1960s which contributed to the distribution of a new image for Ireland was the television. Through the power of media for instance, Ireland saw the visual images of the American civil rights movement. By 1966 Catholics in the North, involved in demonstrations and sit-ins, were chanting “We Shall Overcome” under the guidance of a Civil Rights Association.\textsuperscript{92} With television, a wide audience could immediately witness the disparities between old and new governing

\textsuperscript{88} ‘Unionist’ specifically refers to those who support the union of Britain and Northern Ireland
\textsuperscript{89} For details on this see Henry Patterson. The Politics of Illusion: Republicanism and Socialism in Modern Ireland. London: Hutchinson Books, 1989: 88-92
\textsuperscript{91} Murphy “Put them Out...”, 10
\textsuperscript{92} The civil rights association became a non-violent mantle for the IRA before the eruption of violence in 1969
forces in Ireland. For instance, in a television broadcast during the '66 Easter Rising Anniversary celebrations, President de Valera's speech is described as evidently 'old-fashioned.' He spoke the revival of a Gaelic language and a united Ireland, while behind him his young successors stood looking embarrassed and awkward as the tired dreams were wheeled out once again.93

De Valera's censorship laws had played a large part in manipulating what viewers could hear and read in the media. The biggest concern for the government was the promotion of positive images of Irish life, befitting de Valera's famous vision of comely maidens dancing at the crossroads. While these laws were not totally withdrawn by Lemass, and television was still controlled by the government, many books, plays and poetry previously banned for their antithetical image of rural life, were re-published in the sixties.94 Television has been called the first major threat to the Catholic church's ideological control over the population in the Republic of Ireland, as it opened minds, created dialogue, and produced a public critique of its patriarchy.95 The broadcast of issues previously tabooed in public circles, such as divorce, abortion, adultery, suicide, homelessness, and single-motherhood,96 also signals a slackening relationship between

---

93 Described by Murphy, "Put them Out...", 10
94 For example, in 1940 Patrick Kavanagh published The Great Hunger. This was a novel describing the social and emotional wasteland of rural life, and the sadistic ironies of the myth which forces a peasant into a lyrical landscape. In its opposition of de Valera's image of cosy-homesteading, The Great Hunger was banned on publication, and only released in 1964. A theater revival also started in the sixties, and plays like John B. Keane's The Fields (1966) were socially critical of the idyllic portrait of the rural West. The Fields revealed a place of violence and turbulence, hunger and desperation. Books were still banned in the sixties however, such as John McGahern's The Dark (1965) which depicted North-West Ireland as the epitome of social despair, due to encroaching industry, dissipating communities, and massive emigration. This directly critiques the affect of Lemass' economic nationalism. See Graham (1997), and Gibbons (1996), for articles on the representation and translation of rural and urban Ireland.
96 See Gibbons, 4-13, for an excellent description of several Irish soap operas, like Tolka Row (1963-68) and The Riordans (1965-79) which became extremely popular because of their breach of social taboos.
the church and the state. Religion had been sewn into Ireland's struggles with England. Catholicism provided the Irish State with a system which prayed on the faith and unbridled dedication of its public, giving little space for questioning the methods with which Irish independence was maintained. Religion provided the rhetoric by which the meek could inherit the earth, the poor gain eternal wealth, and the shepherd would lead his flock with unbounded altruism. Such shepherd figures are bountiful in Ireland's history of struggle against English hegemony: Daniel O'Connell or Charles Parnell for instance, as well as de Valera himself. By the end of the 1950s however, this machismo of the twentieth century had fizzled into a sad picture of heavy emigration and unemployment. Television helped to emphasize the fact that the image of the rural Gaelic Catholic Irishman was baring a slim resemblance to reality in the sixties. Instead, the country bore witness to the weight of Americans, Europeans, Protestants, urbanites, females, and youths in the economic and societal structures of the Republic.

Lemass’ government was restructured in order to focus specifically on new economic growth and development. For example, questions of partition and the Irish relationship with Britain, previously handled by the Taoiseach and his department, came under the government’s economic departments during the sixties. And, whereas de Valera had maintained strict control over cultural affairs, now the finance, industry, and commerce departments were responsible for these initiatives. Plus, in 1959, the

---

97 Sharp, 80
98 Sharp, 72. Divisions of government during the late fifties and sixties were as follows: “the Department of External Affairs looked after the ‘international milieu’, largely UN matters, while the Taoiseach [Prime Minister] and his department dealt with matters pertaining to Northern Ireland, and the Taoiseach and the ‘economic departments’, largely the Finance, Industry and the Commerce, but also the Agriculture and Fisheries, were concerned with British and European relations.”
responsibility for industrial design was transferred from the Arts Council to the Export Advisory Board. 99

The Arts Council is in fact a good example of how attention to cultural initiative shifted in Ireland during the 1960s. De Valera had not agreed to support the establishment of a domestic arts council. Instead, he focused his attentions on developing an Advisory Committee on Cultural Relations, which he utilized as a vehicle for cultural propaganda. As Kennedy explains:

It was argued [by de Valera] that cultural propaganda was ‘not “suspect” as obviously political propaganda tends to be’. Nor was it subject ‘to the conventional limitations which diplomatic representatives are bound to observe.’ Experience had shown that ‘foreigners who develop an interest in a particular aspect of a country’s culture are apt quickly to become generally friendly and sympathetic’. Another advantage of cultural propaganda was ‘that its primary impact is on the intelligentsia – the very people who, in most countries, are in the best position to influence press, radio, and public opinion. 100

De Valera did therefore present Ireland on a global stage, but he only initiated a one-way line of communication to meet a specific political agenda. When a coalition government briefly won over Fianna Fail in the elections of 1948 John Costello became Taoiseach. Due largely to the donation of a large collection of paintings to the Irish National Gallery by Sir Alfred Chester Beatty, an American born copper-mining businessman, Costello was persuaded to provide funds for an Irish Arts Council. Brian Kennedy describes this move as ‘enlightened’ but having more to do with politics than culture. 101

The political atmosphere was charged with optimism as the South officially became a Republic in 1948. This signaled a final break from the stronghold of Britain, that is

99 Kennedy (1990), 133
100 Ibid., 61
101 Ibid., 82
except for the question of partition with the North. The effect of becoming a Republic has been seen by art historians as creating a cultural consciousness, because:

As a sovereign independent state, the Republic of Ireland now had full control over its artistic heritage and its artistic future...As the only sovereign Celtic state, it also had a certain responsibility for the Celtic cultural heritage in general.102

During the 1950s the newly established Arts Council primarily patronized community arts and local cultural events. For example, in his role as Minister of Industry and Commerce, before heading Fianna Fail, Lemass was already exercising his preference for large city-wide spectacles. In April 1953 he organized the first of a series of cultural festivals, entitled An Tostal (the pageant). This Dublin-based festival’s official English title was “Ireland at Home,” and was a direct effort to capitalize on an Irish-American tourist. John Ford’s The Quiet Man had been released to American audiences the previous year, and Pan-American Airlines had urged Lemass to create some sort of national event which could provide a lure for the sentimental American wishing to return to his/her ‘roots’.103 It was a short-term solution to drum up tourism in Ireland, and was repeated annually until 1958 when it faded due to its un-profitability. What An Tostal illustrates is just how much power de Valera’s mystic vision, of a nation rooted in a Celtic past, was thought to contain. It directly played on the nostalgia of Irish émigrés around the globe, and was a profitable market Lemass was keenly aware of. He organized other events in the fifties which reflects this awareness. For instance, in 1954 Lemass brought the International Design Exhibition to Dublin. This exhibit, in its display of over 100 firms from around the globe, reflected the aims of Rosc in ’67 to expose Ireland to the ‘quality’ of international art. In 1954 Lemass invited Ireland’s industrialists to

102 Walker (1997), 35
witness and learn from the latest design techniques in countries like Canada, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States and more. 

In 1960 the Arts Council gained a new director, Friar Donal O’Sullivan, and things started to change. By November 1960, a meeting was called to discuss future Arts Council policies. Council members immediately drafted a list of programs considered ineligible for future funding, all of which featured traditional dancing, folk songs, music, ‘crafts,’ and storytelling. The Arts Act of 1951 had stated the Council’s responsibility was for the “fine or applied arts.” This November meeting sought to clearly define these terms in order to justify the exclusion of ‘traditional’ activities like festivals and parades. The Arts Council members explicitly judged the ‘fine arts’ to be painting and sculpture. This decision was swiftly seen by members of the Irish arts community as favoring practices rooted in an English language and tradition. And the Arts Council gained a reputation for installing a hierarchy which diminished the stature of Irish ‘folk’ arts. O’Sullivan also created the position of Exhibitions Officer in 1960 to increase the number of international exhibitions brought to Ireland and Irish exhibitions sent abroad. The arrival of Art USA Now, at the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in 1964, was a product of these new efforts.

Art USA Now displayed over 100 American artists from the collection of Mr. H.F. Johnson, Chairman of the Johnson Wax Company and a trustee on the board of

---

102 Kennedy (1990), 110
104 Ibid., 113
105 O’Sullivan held court over the decision-making process throughout the sixties until his retirement in 1973.
106 Kennedy (1990), 137
107 Ibid. Kennedy reveals that the French and British policies on arts were shifting to a much broader and more populist approach. Both countries were, for example, declaring that access to the arts was ‘a civil right’. Thus Ireland’s new conservative policies were not in line with “international trends on arts policy.”
MoMA. The exhibition was also underwritten by the United States Information Agency (USIA), a government arm responsible for distributing American cultural propaganda on a global level. As Eva Cockcroft has noted, in her 1974 study of art and Cold War politics, the United States government, through institutions like MoMA and agencies like the USIA, were actively using art—like Abstract Expressionism—to pit ideals of individualism, liberal democracy, and political freedom against the cold dark forces of Communism. Art USA Now specifically promoted its paintings to be “ambassadors of good will to all peoples,” and flaunted the work of over 100 American artists, from the ‘realism’ of Ben Shahn, to the abstractions of Adolph Gottlieb and Willem de Kooning.

As supporters of American modernism the Irish Arts Council, consciously or not, supported the U.S.’s cold war initiatives. By collecting Irish art completed in the style of the American mavericks and supporting cultural projects like Rosc ’67 the ideal of the artist as individual purveyor of freedom is feverishly upheld. Like the Venice Biennale Rosc ’67 could promote nationalist politics on a cultural scale. As a cultural event Rosc ’67 insinuated that ‘great’ Celtic art was produced by an individual. Then, this Celtic production was linked to the ‘great’ European and American artists of the 1960s. It is this connection that subjects the cultural content of Rosc to a political narrative. For at this very moment Ireland’s government was working hard to image itself as a global player, by encouraging increasing Irish participation in world affairs, as well as welcoming foreign government, businesses, and economic intervention. Rosc was a

108 Eva Cockcroft. “Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War.” Fascina and Harris, 82-90
project which could ably illustrate just how firmly Ireland was founded on the principles of freedom and democracy.

Kennedy refers to Fr. O’Sullivan, the Arts Council’s director, and Council member Michael Scott as having a preference for abstract modernism. For an in-depth description of this see: Kennedy (1990), 132-141
CHAPTER FOUR

The Exhibition that Swings

Rosc '67 was decided upon in 1964, while Michael Scott was recuperating from a heart attack and visited Sweeney’s home in County Mayo. Sweeney, having moved from MoMA to the directorship of the Guggenheim in the fifties, and then onto the Texas Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, was still intimately bound to the art establishment around the globe. Sweeney’s involvement in Rosc was predicated on an immediate agreement with Scott in '64 that he would chair the jury. He also expressed a desire to design a ‘unique’ exhibition to directly oppose the Venice and Sao Paulo Biennales. This particular aspiration may indicate a deeper investment for Sweeney in Rosc '67: to avoid national politics. In 1962, Sweeney had been invited to jury the American exhibition for the '64 Venice Biennale. He refused. Although his reasons are not explicitly clear, this American exhibit was being organized by USIA and had become entangled in American politics. In 1967 Sweeney told an Irish audience that national politics was one of the main reasons he had stayed clear of Venice. He pointed to three reasons Rosc was to differ from Sao Paulo and Venice:

1. The emphasis on nationalist interests through the national nomination of exhibits and their grouping in the exhibition in national sections. 2. The tendency of the jury to be influenced by nationalist prejudices and a consequent involvement in political intrigue in the selection of awards. And 3. The lack of first-quality work to support an exhibition of

111 James Johnson Sweeney’s resume goes something like this: 1945-46 Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Museum of Modern Art in New York; 1952-60 Director, Guggenheim in New York; 1961-1968 Director, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas (consultant director at the time of Rosc ‘67); 1957-1963 President, International Association of Art Critics; and, during the fifties and sixties juried at Venice and Sao Paulo Biennales as well as the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh.

112 Monahan. “Cultural Cartography...”, 408. In footnote #9 Monahan refers to a number of people who refused to jury the American show for the Biennale, James Johnson Sweeney, Walter Hopps, Martin Friedman, and William Seitz. Although she gives no specific reason for Sweeney’s refusal it is linked to the engineering that went into insuring a nationalist agenda was pursued.
Sweeney structured *Rosc '67* with a different set of rules. These essentially read: based on aesthetic judgment alone three foreign jurors would select a minimum of two, or maximum of five, works completed in the last four years by fifty renowned artists. These rules would, Sweeney assumed, ensure a modernist project while ridding *Rosc* of nationalist prejudices. What Sweeney did not take into account however is that by referencing the Biennales he made them a touchstone from which many critics compared the project of *Rosc*. By attempting to counter Venice *Rosc* became tied to it. This resulted in *Rosc*’s uniqueness and allure residing only in its Irish location, ultimately nationalizing the project.

Dublin proved to be enticing to foreign critics for its supposed position as a contemporary visual void. As Sao Paulo had been in the 50s Dublin was an art world satellite apparently waiting to be centralized. The Biennale at Sao Paulo had proved an effective vehicle for this, *Rosc* could too. The beginning of *Rosc '67* review in *Arts News* encapsulates this assumption:

> Is there still an argument in the winter of 1967 for a big committee-driven international miscellany of recent painting? Before a ringing “No!” peals out from the metropolitan readers I must add a suffix: “in cities which don’t normally see the work in question....Dublin, for instance,” “No!” might well turn to “Yes.” For Dublin in November 1967 was still in pre-Amory era. No great single collective demonstration had ever been made. For a city with so highly developed a sense of civilization, art was in a curiously under-privileged position.\(^{114}\)

This approach to *Rosc* was taken by many foreign art critics. They frequently saw the exhibition as diamond in the rough. What is also interesting about this statement is


the writer's assumption that Biennales are now considered passé. Even if Ireland is welcoming a large contemporary art series show, therefore, it will not bring her 'up to the minute' at all. It is the definition of Ireland as 'pre-armory,' which conjures up the art critic's presumptions on the state of Ireland's art scene, and the role of Rosc 67.

Those who knew what the Armory Show was would remember the impact it had on the art of the American avant garde in 1913. As the first large scale public exhibition in America displaying the work of European abstract modernists such as Picasso, Duchamp, Matisse, and Kandinsky, the Armory Show caused a sensation. This was work which told a dramatically different tale of modern life from the American social realist painters at the time. Writing in 1950, at the height of Abstract Expressionism's popularity, art historian Meyer Schapiro credited the Armory Show as being the 'turning point' in American art. Schapiro commended the exhibition for awakening artists to fresh possibilities, forcing an awareness that a revolution had taken place in art, producing immense public debate on art, dramatically opening up a specialized activity for a greater public, and lifting the complacent provincial taste of Americans by forcing art to be judged by 'world standards'. The Armory Show was considered a lesson and program on modernity and internationalism, binding America and Europe in a "common cultural destiny." 1913 is often pointed to as the moment when American artists saw how they could gain their self-expression. As Schapiro writes:

115 In fact by 1968 the Venice Biennale, The Triennale in Milan and Documenta at Kassel were being demonstrated against by artists who saw their tactics as self-aggrandizing and catering to the tastes of wealthy dealers, gallery owners and collectors.
117 Ibid., 149-150
The individual, his freedom, his inner world, his dedication, had become primary; and the self-affirming nature of the new art, with its outspoken colors and forms and more overt operations, was a means of realizing the new values, which were collective values, for individuality is a social fact, a matter of common striving inconceivable without the modern conditions and means.118

Rosc '67 was given the same torch of modernity to carry into Ireland. It is almost as if the Americans are returning the favor, bringing the lessons of freedom and individualism back to Europe. It is not that American work dominated Rosc '67 but rather that the individual spirit was seen to infiltrate their work the most.119 The pop art of Rauschenberg displayed at Rosc '67, for example, illustrates a new wave of modern work which utilizes the popular culture of every day life to engage in a social commentary on art and politics. Rauschenberg's Axle (Figure 15) combines images of JFK, a bald eagle, an astronaut and space module, a diagram revealing the flight trajectory to and from the moon and the Statue of Liberty. All these images reference the American dream, encouraging men (specifically) to go boldly where others fear to tread, and manifest their own destinies. To an Irish audience in the sixties perhaps this recalls the generations who ventured to American soil based on these very precepts. However, there is an ambiguity which lies at the heart of Rauschenberg's work, and is underlined by two main elements. First there are images which clearly do not fit in this pristine narrative of un-restricted freedom; the 'Stop' and 'One-Way' signs for instance. And second, the superficial shiny finish of the silk-screen technique blends the jagged edges of each separate image into a unifying surface. This suggests perhaps that the cracks in the American dream are hard to see. It is a glossy verneer which does not scratch the

118 Ibid., 154
119 A press release, World Art in Dublin, I have already quoted on page 38 had claimed in part: "...the only trait that could be said to unite the American artists is that of modern art everywhere; individuality. Only more so in America..."
This questioning of the American way places an ambiguity on the notion of freedom and individuality, which takes me back to the question: what was *Rosc '67* for? Was the exhibition intended to take Ireland 'out of isolation,' as the Armory Show had claimed in 1913? *Rosc* officials certainly alleged from the start that Ireland had never seen such a show. This was true, but only to an extent. For years, both Sweeney and Scott had been involved in bringing international exhibitions of contemporary art to Dublin. Michael Scott had been on the Arts Council since 1959, and helped support the large international touring exhibition *Art: USA:Now* in 1964. Scott had also been a committee member of *The Irish Exhibition of Living Art* (Living Arts) since 1947. This was a project specifically created to support modern art in Ireland, which had also brought numerous international artists to Dublin. In a catalogue for the Living Arts tenth anniversary in 1953, for instance, the committee expressed their goals:

> Our work has a two-fold purpose: to exhibit whatever is vital, imaginative and progressive in Irish painting, sculpture and stained glass, and to bring to Dublin the work of international masters of modern movements not otherwise – or very rarely – seen here. Side by side with a growing list of native names we have, in the past decade, exhibited canvases by Cezanne, Manet, Renoir, Picasso, Braque, Lhote, de Segonzac, Miro, Modigliani, de Chirco, Max Ernst, Manessier, Bores, Piper and Sutherland, as well as a group of tapestries by Jean Luract. The present exhibition includes outstanding examples of Matisse and Rouault, together with five oils by Raoul Dufy, which has been promised by the artist to the Committee before his death this year. Our latest successful activity has been the showing of art films, both European and American to evening visitors to the exhibition.  

> Also in 1953, Sweeney, as the co-founder and first director of the Congress of Art Critics, brought the fourth international Art Critics conference to Dublin with the support

---

120 For discussion on this element of Rauschenberg's work see Monahan “Cultural Cartography...”, 388-391
121 Catalogue for 1953 *Irish Exhibition of Living Arts*. Dublin: Cahill and Company Limited, 1953. The *Irish Exhibition of Living Arts* was set up in 1943 by Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone, two cubist-inspired Irish artists who wanted to create an exhibiting space for non-academic work. During the forties and fifties the exhibition gained notoriety for being one of the most important shows for an artist to be admitted into. However, by the late fifties and early sixties it had become an institution in and of itself and was reviled by the new generation of artists.
of the Irish Arts Council.\textsuperscript{122} Then a decade later in 1963, the year President Kennedy visited Ireland, Living Arts showed seven new films "kindly lent by the United States Embassy on American Art." As well as the exhibition \textit{After Kandinsky, the realm of fantasy, the spatial concept and the new reality}, which showed the works of Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, Stuart Davis, Jasper Johns, Mark Tobey, Mark Rothko, and Corrado Marca-Relli. This latter exhibition was brought to Dublin with the aid of the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas. The acknowledgments in the catalogue to this exhibition read as follows:

\begin{quote}
The Committee wishes to thank James Johnson Sweeney, Director of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Texas, for the great trouble and care he has taken in selecting and obtaining the twelve important examples of Modern American Painting and in arranging for their packing and transport to this country.\textsuperscript{123}
\end{quote}

As Ireland moved into plans for integrating into the European Community during the sixties an increasing number of cultural events co-sponsored by the Arts Council, the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, and European cultural agencies, began to appear in Dublin. For example, in 1962 an exhibition of Marine Paintings by 80 French contemporary artists entitled \textit{Le Navire} was made possible in part by "L'Academie Française in Paris. In 1963 the exhibit \textit{German Sculpture after 1950} displayed over fifty German artists and was co-sponsored by the German and Irish Arts Council's, as well as the German Cultural Institute. In January 1964 an exhibition of Italian engravings in collaboration with the Italian Institute in Dublin was held at the Hugh Lane. And, in 1967, \textit{Dutch Contemporary Art in Ireland} was sponsored by the Dutch Government.

\textsuperscript{122} Walker (1997), 107
\textsuperscript{123} Catalogue for 1963 \textit{Irish Exhibition of Living Arts}. Dublin: Cahill and Company Limited, 1963
Michael Scott, as a member of the Arts Council and Cultural Relations Committee, would have been involved in all the exhibitions just listed. Scott himself had organized a show of Georges Rouault’s paintings in 1960, which the two latter institutions had funded. His role on the Cultural Relations Committee would have also given Scott the powerful responsibility of picking which Irish artists were sent to the large international shows in Venice, Paris, Milan, and New York. Perhaps the only thing known as well as Scott’s dominant position in the arts was his penchant for modernism. This influence was most obvious in Scott’s architectural work, of which his most celebrated project was the Dublin bus terminal, completed in 1953 to international acclaim. Scott also designed the Dublin Airport terminal, and the Irish pavilions for the New York World’s Fair in 1939 (Figure 16) and the Paris Biennale in the fifties.

Scott was already championing Ireland with a modernist aesthetic in the 1939 New York pavilion. The sleek contours, extensive use of steel and glass, and the inscription “Ireland”, rather than the Gaelic “Eire”, reflects a nation with ‘international’ aims. The only architectural adornments which depart from the purity of a Bauhaus utopianism are, “mother-Eire”, the shamrock floor plan, the map of Ireland in the reflecting pool out front, and the use of green and orange for the post and lintel door frame. These are all logos for an Irish nationalism which Scott has designed to be as unobtrusive as possible. The female body sinks into the white background, the map sits under the water, the doorway is dominated by the façade of glass, and the viewer can only see the shamrock design if they are floating above the building. Scott’s concern here

---

124 Kennedy (1990), 72. Busáras (the central Bus station in Dublin) is described by Brian Kennedy as, “the biggest single building project started in Europe after the end of the war. It attracted international attention among architects and brought Michael Scott fame and recognition.” It was funded by the government.
Figure 16  The Irish Pavilion for the New York World’s Fair of 1939 designed by Michael Scott. From Raymond Gillespie and Brian P Kennedy. (eds.) *Ireland: Art into History*. Dublin: Town House, 1994: 141
is how the perimeters of Irish nationalism can fit into the borders of modern architecture.

While his reverence for modernism can be illustrated in Scott’s own buildings it can also be located in his support for other people’s plans to modernize the Irish landscape. In the sixties, as a member of the Arts Council for instance, Scott gave architect Sam Stevenson full support\textsuperscript{125} for plans to replace a row of 18\textsuperscript{th} Century Georgian buildings on Hume Street in Dublin with new office blocks. There were protesters who did not see the value of destroying historic buildings, even if they were colonial remnants. One such individual involved with a conservation agency at the time was attacked by one of Scott’s architectural partners, Robin Walker. He called the protester conservative and anti-modern, insinuating that her lack of appreciation for modern architecture placed her firmly in the past.\textsuperscript{126} As an interesting aside the third member of Scott’s firm was Ronald Tallon, an art collector who was advising P.J.Carroll, Irish tobacco manufacturers who sponsored an annual prize at Living Arts and financed \textit{Rosc} ‘77, on the contents of their art collection.\textsuperscript{127}

By the early sixties both the Arts Council and Living Arts had become homes for a hard-edged abstract modernism. And Scott was dominating proceedings in both organizations. By 1961, for instance, a member of the Arts Council resigned in protest at

\textsuperscript{125} See Kennedy (1990), 139. This is just one ‘modernizing’ project which had been approved by the Arts Council, who constantly found themselves drumming up public controversy in the early 1960s. For instance in 1962 the Council supported plans by the electricity Supply Board to demolish a row of Georgian buildings. In return for the loss of the eighteenth century buildings, Dublin was to receive the winning design from an international architectural competition for modern buildings. The debate raged for three years, until 1965 when the buildings came down and the competition was organized.

\textsuperscript{126} Interview with Rosemarie and Sean Mulcahy on December 17, 1998. Rosemarie was completing her Ph.D. in Art History at Trinity in the early sixties, under the direction of Anne Crookshank. Her affiliation with \textit{Rosc} came at a later stage, when the new director in 1980, Patrick Murphy, asked her to take charge of the 1984 and 1988 catalogues.

\textsuperscript{127} Ronald Tallon was also asked to curate the section of \textit{Rosc} ‘84 which displayed ten contemporary Irish artists.
not being consulted on a variety of decisions made by the director, Fr. O’Sullivan, and Scott. It becomes clear then that Scott and Sweeney were in powerful cultural positions, both inside and outside Ireland. Their friendship had culminated from years of involvement in Ireland’s cultural scene. *Rosc* was Scott and Sweeney’s project, and it grew under their specific tutelage. Crookshank and Walker gave me a vivid description of Sweeney’s influential role in the production of *Rosc* ’67:

> He was in charge, he hung the exhibitions and had a lot of authority in museums and galleries and knew everybody, and anything he asked for immediately came. He was really, absolutely, a vital link in the first two *Roscs*...it never would have got the kind of standing and quality that it had...his presence was immeasurable.\(^{129}\)

Sweeney’s ‘immeasurability’ is matched only by Scott’s position as figurehead and mastermind of *Rosc*, the one who gave the exhibition life. When agreeing with Sweeney to take on the project of *Rosc* in 1964 Scott willingly left the content side of things to the museum director and quickly worked on finding sponsorship. After returning to Dublin from Sweeney’s Scott approached his friend Tim O’Driscoll, the director of Bórd Fáilte (the Tourist board), and asked him to help fund the exhibition. Initially O’Driscoll considered the idea unattainable: too much money for, what was still seen in some official circles as, a ‘leisurely’ purpose.

Scott then tried another tack. At a party, thrown by O’Driscoll in the same year, Scott told the director of the Smithsonian, William Ripley, about his ideas for an exhibition in Dublin. “If you don’t do it, we’ll do it in Washington,” Ripley had said. On this cue Scott asked: “would you mind telling that man over there, Tim O’Driscoll, about it, because if he will agree to it, we will all be all right, we will get the money and

---

\(^{128}\) Kennedy (1990), 138. Kennedy quotes from an interview he conducted with Terrence de Vere White who stated: “The Arts Council was run by O’Sullivan and Michael Scott. I objected to the Director’s one-man based style, O’Sullivan only consulted Scott and meetings were a farce. I resigned.”
we can go ahead." The tourist board was thus persuaded to support *Rosc*. O'Driscoll then approached John Moore, the American Ambassador in Ireland and vice-president of W.R. Grace and Co. Grace was an American conglomerate which had recently opened up subsidiaries in Ireland. Moore was persuaded that in sponsoring *Rosc '67* his company would reap untold rewards. Grace's founding father happened to be of Irish descent. It was made quite clear, in a 1967 edition of a members magazine promoting *Rosc '67*, that Grace's moves into Ireland were viewed as a 'natural' course of fate. The business represented itself as the quintessential Irish success story of the emigrant returning rich from the land of plenty. By sponsoring *Rosc* in 1967 Moore publicly legitimated and valorized Grace's presence in Ireland. The 'fine arts' must have been considered a 'safe' vehicle to flaunt the success of capital enterprise. And for Grace its success on an international scale is reduced to the endurance of one individual Irish emigrant who grasped the American dream, which overrides the harsh realities of emigration, capitalism, and corporate profiteering. It is *Rosc '67*'s focus on self-expression, in both the Celtic art and modern paintings, which absorbs all other concerns for the sake of a tidy parallel to the importance of individualism. Both Grace and *Rosc* provide superficial reflections of Ireland's potential to both survive and meet the demands of a modern world.

The positions of all three other members of the *Rosc '67* committee, emphasizes the desire that this exhibition will have the potential to 'make' Ireland 'modern.' First, there was Dorothy Walker who aligned herself with Michael Scott. Walker had been

---

129 Walker and Crookshank interview
Scott’s secretary for several years, and was married to his aforementioned partner, Robin Walker. By the mid-sixties Dorothy had helped Scott set-up a design firm within the architectural business, and became its managing director. She later became an art critic, and Rosc proved to help her career in this direction. Ann Crookshank was also on the founding committee for Rosc. Crookshank had arrived from Northern Ireland in 1966 to take a full time position in the department of Art History at Trinity. Previously the Keeper of modern painting at the Ulster Museum in Belfast Crookshank’s views on the level of modern art in Southern Ireland by the sixties were made clear to me in a recent interview. Here, both Crookshank and Walker explain how the committee positioned itself in order to activate their intentions for Rosc ’67:

Laurence Allen: Why did you exclude Irish artists from Rosc ’67?
Crookshank: (adamant and v. specific) because we wanted to bring foreign art into Ireland because Irish people were not at that time traveling much, they didn’t have much money....and we wanted to bring foreign art to Ireland so that they would see it – and we were a group of four people doing this work and we thought we had a damned right to make our own decisions, and if they didn’t like it they could lump it, and they had to that first Rosc.
Walker – we didn’t lay down the law to the jury, they just selected it, they just didn’t select any Irish art.
C - no we did tell them not to pick Irish artists for that first Rosc, and I’m sure I was largely to blame. I have had the feeling for years that it is useless living in a vacuum and...criticizing our own art without ever having seen anything else and you don’t know whether it was good or bad in relation to the world. And no art gallery in Southern Ireland had been buying modern art, ‘real’ modern art – we had in Belfast but we were the only ones.  

When I asked Crookshank and Walker about the impact of the 1964 exhibition Art USA Now they could not recollect having ever seen it, and deduced that it must have had little impact. Their position maintained that Rosc ’67 was designed to be the Republic’s first major education in modern art.

132 Walker and Crookshank Interview
Figure 17  Cecil King, *Oblique*, 1972 Oil on Canvas.
From Roderic Knowles. *Contemporary Irish Art.*
The final committee member was Cecil King, an Irish artist whose paintings reflected the abstract modernism preferred by the Arts Council at the time. *Oblique* (Figure 17), although painted after *Rosc '67*, is a good example of King's work. The large red field of color interrupted by a black oblique shape resembles the work of artists like Barnett Newman, whose work was seen at *Rosc '67* (Figure 18). Newman's 'zip' paintings were considered ultimate expressions of a formal approach to painting by critics like Greenberg. Newman's work was consistently asocialized. The content was referred to as lying solely in the negative and positive 'push and pull' of color. In 1962, for instance, Greenberg had claimed Newman was one of the few painters creating a "new openness" for painting beyond Abstract Expressionism. Where the latter style of painting worked to "reduce the role of color" Greenberg described Newman's work as seeking "an almost literal openness that embraces and absorbs color, in the act of being created by it."\(^{133}\)

King's work can also be interpreted with these formal concerns. *Oblique* plays with fields of color in a way that opens up the canvas it is created upon. The black punches a hole into the red field, suggesting a negative space. Yet this oblique form supports a thin yellow line, which leans upon it from the right. According to the rules of optical perspective warm colors like red tend to advance towards the eye. As this red pulsates towards the viewer the small yellow thread arrests its movement by suggesting the black is in fact a positive space. Like Newman, however, King himself did not reduce

Figure 18  Photograph of *Rosc '67* visitor gazing at Barnett Newman’s *Whose Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue II*, 1967  Acrylic on Canvas. From Hilary Pyle “Rosc ’71.”  *Ireland of the Welcomes*. 20 (1) May-June, 1971:19
the meaning of his painting to a formal struggle.\footnote{For examples of the social investment Newman placed in his work see Bruce Barber, Serge Guilbault and John O’Brien (eds.) \textit{Voices of Fire: Art, Rage, Power and the State}. University of Toronto Press, 1996.} \textit{Oblique}, for instance, was completed not long after King’s \textit{Berlin Suite}, a series of paintings created in response to a visit he took to Berlin in 1969. The attempt to represent the angst of contemporary life in a city divided by an iron curtain may still be evident in his 1972 work. And may reflect closer associations with divided Ireland, as the troubles in the North were rampant by the early seventies. Ultimately, it is the use of modernist abstraction which gives King’s work international caché and this makes it hard to fathom why \textit{Rosc} officials would decide not to exhibit it in 1967. King’s contribution to the \textit{Rosc} committee was seen as more beneficial than his art could be. He was chosen by Scott for his highly regarded position in the arts community, and his ability to rustle up support for \textit{Rosc ‘67} in university and art college students.\footnote{Walker and Crookshank interview.} That King’s persona rather than his work was seen to benefit the project of \textit{Rosc}, seems to reflect the negativity leveled at local art styles in Ireland. And this is an attitude influenced by the way in which Irish modern art has been persistently written.

Art historians have tended to assume a smooth trajectory for the history of Irish art.\footnote{For examples of this see: Brian Fallon. \textit{Irish Art 1830-1990}. Belfast: Appletree Press, 1994. Kenneth McConkey. \textit{A Free Spirit: Irish Art 1860-1960}. London, UK: Antique Collector’s Club in association with Pym’s Gallery, 1990. And for a good review of both these books see Fintan Cullen. “Still a Long Way to Go: Recent Irish Art History.” \textit{Art History}. 15. September 1992: 378-83. One of the latest books on Irish painting in the twentieth century is an exhibition catalogue. The exhibit \textit{When Time Began to Rant and Rave}, was organized by the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and curated by James Christen Steward, Director of the University of Michigan Museum of Art. I have not read the book or seen the exhibition, but have surveyed a leaflet which attempts a comprehensive survey of the show which, according to Steward, attempts to pose the following question: “What did it take to be seen as sufficiently Irish or indeed to be a truly Irish artist?” The essay in this leaflet sweeps broadly over the twentieth century, applauding those artists who have always been applauded (such as Jack Yeats) without questioning these dominant narratives in Irish art history. One exhibition which did attempt to pose questions about the}
effective when informed by outside sources. Or that, the art work is autonomous, the politics of everyday life inconsequential. There also seems to be a heavy reliance on literary references to validate artistic practices. It is by weighing visual art on a literary scale, the artist is continuously likened to a poet. This serves to inform the stereotype of the Irish as literary geniuses, but does little to uphold the strengths of Ireland’s visual production. One of the most recent publications, completed in 1997 by Dorothy Walker titled *Irish Art and Modernism*, contains a foreword by the Irish poet and writer Seamus Heaney. He says in part:

This story of modern art has an altogether fluvial shape to it, with its source far off in the shaggy old out-back of male-dominated cultural-nationalist landscapes. Where the academicians were even more conservative than the clergy, the mystic was just silly and the real thing happened in France. There in unpipitous surroundings the headwaters of Modern Irish abstract artists began to gleam and discover a channel for themselves; the nomads of the source being Mainie Jellet and Evie Hone...[followed by]...Jack B. Yeats, the God of the whole river...the decades from the thirties to the sixties represented the gradual widening of the reaches and deepening of the flow until the increasing confidence of the cultural elite guaranteed a strong home-based art scene (at once signaled and verified by the epoch-making *Rose* exhibition of 1967); after which, in the subsequent decades, the river becomes tidal, as waves of international influences (and finances) came rolling in.  

Despite the fact this text is intended as a synopsis of a larger narrative it aptly reiterates the presumption that Irish modern art is a history of natural fluidity. As Fintan Cullen has suggested there is ‘still a long way to go’ in the writing of Irish art history. It is a history which has continuously avoided answering questions like: why were women so dominant from the 1920s through the 1940s? Or, what role did the art market play in making Jack Yeats “the god” of Irish art? And, can modes of resistance be seen in the

---

history of art, and Irish art specifically, was the Irish Museum of Modern Art’s 1994 show *From Beyond the Pale*, in which Shella-na-Gigs, paintings by famous European and American artists such as Picasso and Jeff Koons, and a variety of Irish and international artists were juxtaposed to question dominant perceptions of modernity, identity, history and gender.

work of the academics, clergy, and mystics of the Celtic revival, which Heaney just
deems ‘silly,’ and conservative?\textsuperscript{138}

In his foreword, Heaney also insinuates that Rosc ‘67 signaled and verified a
‘strong home-based’ art scene. Yet, by denying contemporary Irish artists access to
exhibit, Rosc ‘67 insinuated a lack of confidence in the ‘quality’ of Irish art. How could
Rosc ‘67 ‘signal’ or ‘verify’ a “strong home-based art scene” if it did not acknowledge it?
The answer lies in Heaney’s vague and misconstrued picture of Ireland’s domestic art
scene. The “increasing confidence of the cultural elite” he refers to, helped strengthen
only one sphere of modern Irish art. This was the sphere which had stemmed from a
cubist-inspired lineage, which Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone are described as instigating.

Images like Jellet’s \textit{Achill Horses} (Figure 19) and Hone’s \textit{The Four Green Fields}
(Figure 20), are considered to be the cornerstone of Irish modernism. These works used a
new abstract language which articulated Ireland’s place in the modern world. However,
this abstract style has served to erase the political potency of each image, because their
function is often reduced to a formal avant garde achievement of injecting the ‘new’ into
Ireland. Yet both Jellett and Hone were creating works that supported the nationalism of
de Valera. For instance, both \textit{Achill Horses} and \textit{The Four Green Fields} were chosen to
represent Ireland at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York.

Through the power of the horse, Jellett’s image declares the wealth and strength
of Ireland lies in its rural and untamed regions. It is a painting which captures the
freedom of the wild, suggesting perhaps Ireland’s affinity with American ideals.
Similarly, Hone’s stained glass immediately references the church. The institution that

\textsuperscript{138} Fintan Cullen. “Still a Long Way to Go…”, 378
Figure 19  Mainie Jellett. *Achill Horses*, 1939 Oil on Canvas.
was helping the State maintain sovereignty in Ireland, and an Irish unity across the globe. Amongst the slices of colored glass, while playing with the fields of color and light, modern artists would have recognized, Hone weaves in the message of freedom Ireland was endeavoring to sell in America. *The Four Green Fields* directly references the four provinces of Ireland; one crown is missing, as the province of Ulster lies under British law. A white hand brandishes a sword, challenging the hand of red defiance, while patiently the Irish harp waits for resolve. As a filter and distorter of light this stained glass covertly insists that Ireland’s rights to the North are divinely ordained. It refracts the program of cultural propaganda de Valera was relying on at the time to garner America’s support for partition. That these images do contain the nationalist narratives Heaney reserves for the mystics and academicians makes it clear how heroizing just their formal contribution to Irish art history distorts the picture. The complex potential of their works are reduced to Jellett and Hone’s roles as conduits, bringing ‘the best’ foreign art of the time into Ireland. One may say: ‘It’s not what we do with it, it’s just that we have it.’ Jellett and Hone are useful to modernists because they grant the Irish artists an authentic ‘modern’ identity. Yet, this is an identity which has become infused with insecurities. I think this is where the real reason for omitting artists like Cecil King and Patrick Scott from *Rosc ’67* lies.

Jellett and Hone had not been taught by Picasso himself, or even by Georges Braque or Juan Gris. Instead they were pupils of a ‘second rate’ artist in Paris. Thus the strain of ‘originality’ in Irish contemporary abstract painting was decidedly faint. As ardent modernists, believing in the value of ‘originality’ in art, *Rosc ’67* officials would
have considered Irish work to be of a lower pedigree than the 'original' art coming from international quarters. Rose administrators certainly favored the work of modern abstraction, as I have already suggested. This can be illustrated, for instance, by the exhibition Irish Artists 1967 opened by Charles Haughey a few days after Rose '67. Held at the Hendricks Gallery, on St. Stephen's Green in Dublin, this exhibit was largely a display of the Arts Council's collection, including works by: Patrick Collins, Barrie Cooke, Cecil King, and Edward Delaney. A coincidental show? I am not so sure. It certainly seems that a site separated from Rose would perhaps have been considered 'safe.' If these artists had been integrated into Rose '67, however, the artistic geniuses of the modern age could have been too easily spotted amongst their Irish groupies.

To emphasize this unwillingness to display Irish contemporary arts at Rose '67 it is important to stress that the exhibition was an expression of an ideological belief that Ireland was in the process of being 'taken out of isolation.' With neutrality in wars, and limited foreign presence in industry, the standard view in 1960 was that Irish culture had remained as static as its economy. In order to get it going again culture needed the same foreign infusions being encouraged for industry and business by the government. In 1971 Hilary Pyle wrote an article advertising Rose '71 for the Irish Tourist Board's magazine Ireland of the Welcomes. One of her first sentences derides the "isolation" and rural character of Ireland. Calling it an "impediment" to the country's image as a modern

---

140 An opinion voiced by both McGonigle in our interview and in an interview with Noel Sheridan, Director of the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, on December 12, 1998. McGonigle was a student in Northern Ireland in 1967. Sheridan had been a founding member of the Independent Artists, created in 1960, before he left for New York. He returned in 1967, before leaving a few years later for an extended stay in Australia.
state. Pyle’s description of Rosc’s role in Ireland emulates Schapiro’s account of the effect the Armory Show had on America in 1913. She powerfully illustrates Rosc ‘67 ‘taking over’ from London’s 54-64 show at the Tate, which had displayed contemporary international art of that decade. Rosc ‘67, Pyle marvels, opened the eyes of artists and the public alike, ‘jolted’ the unsuspecting tourist, and impacted the work of students.142

It was the work stemming from the social realist tradition of artists like Sean Keating which was held largely responsible for contributing to this image of Ireland as an isolated culture. Crookshank described the contemporary production of social realism in Ireland as being “pretty pictures with little color and quite dreary.” 143 Yet this description restricts the work again to only its formal elements, overlooking the discourses these works may have absorbed. Perhaps the presence of an empty landscape means more than the idyllic myth of the rural; perhaps it indicates the loss of life through famine, emigration, industrialization, and war. Keating’s Men of the West (Figure 21) has been described as exemplifying the idyllic agenda of de Valera’s nationalism, and therefore considered by modernists in the sixties as backward and ‘anti-modern’. Yet Keating’s image also serves as a commentary on the harsh realities of the Free State: the conflict and violence it was built on and the continual suffering it commands. It also holds a series of narratives which are highly influenced by international styles, thus countering the perception that Keating produced simple parochial images.

142 Ibid.,19-21
143 Crookshank interview
Keating was well aware of international trends and events, having been schooled in London and Paris before returning to work in Ireland. *Men of the West* reflects his knowledge of the American artists like Frederic Remington, whose illustration of the wild west were popularized through magazines like *Harpers Weekly*. Remington, who died in 1909, was known for his macho visualization of American life on the plains. Keating’s image of the cowboy with his neckerchief and shot gun, wide brimmed hat and steely glare, standing silhouetted against the span of the plains typified Remington’s style. American extravaganzas like *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show* were also being popularized in European cities during the early years of the twentieth century. And Keating’s image, completed a year before the Easter Uprising in 1916, absorbs the power and freedom which these images of the wild west modeled. Keating’s work may reflect a set of idyllic myths but that does not mean he paints for an isolated culture. Keating was painting a modern image for an independent Irish state, narratives still prevalent in the work of artists in the sixties. People like Camille Souter, Robert Ballagh, and Michael Kane were producing expressionistic and representational paintings with evident left-wing content. These artist do not fit into abstraction or social realism, but activate a realm in-between. This makes it harder to slot them into a fluvial history. Souter’s *The West* (Figure 22), for instance, oscillates between a abstract and representational translation of the land. It plays on Keating’s image of the west and King’s ‘oblique’ reading of the Irish landscape. Souter’s image has a muddied and gritted surface which creates a tactility referencing the real and dirty aspects of the earth. She refers to the physical presence of land, which upholds birth and life yet provides a map of violent death. The painting’s foreground is divided by dark shapes which morph into a barrier.
Figure 22  
From Roderic Knowles. *Contemporary Irish Art*.  
This occurs in the background too, as the suggestion of a horizon creates imaginings of a distant land, of borders, and of freedom. Completed in 1964, in the midst of urban expansion, this ‘dull’ picture, as it may have been perceived, contains a powerful narrative on the myth of rural life. It also questions the effectiveness of either social realism or abstraction to contain a language which attends to the everyday.

Souter was actually well recognized as an artist in Ireland by 1967. Her work was at the Paris Biennale in 1961, and she was chosen for the first exhibition installed by the Independent Artists in 1960. The Independent Artists evolved from a moment at the beginning of the sixties when opportunities for artists to show in Dublin were limited to the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA), the Living Arts, and a few private galleries. As a co-founder of the Independent Artists Noel Sheridan has called Living Arts the “new academic conservatism based in Dublin.” This annual exhibition kept a firm grip on which modern art the public could see, with a harsh selection process completed by a jury which continuously stayed the same every year. Michael Scott and Patrick Scott had been on the committee since 1953, and Ann Crookshank became a member in 1967.

New in 1960 the Independent Artists was founded to provide young and unknown talents with an annual public exhibition, but they received little official financial or moral support. Rosc ’67 must have seemed like the twist of a knife in the heart of local production. For the Arts Council was the country’s main source of funding for the arts and it heartily supported Rosc, while consistently ignoring the regions outside Dublin and art outside the boundaries of Council members’ preferences. For instance, in a report filed in the early seventies, which detailed the activities of the Arts Council from 1951-
1973, the total amount of grants-in-aid allocated by the State to the Arts Council was recorded as £798,081. Of this sum, the visual arts had received 42%, music 39%, drama 14%, and literature 5%. 73% of expenditures went to Dublin, 9% to Cork, and 18% went to the other twenty-four counties. In direct resistance to Rosc in 1967 a young filmmaker and artist, Colm O’Brien, organized Project '67. This was an exhibition in downtown Dublin which opened concurrently with Rosc '67 and displayed the work of young artists like Ballagh and Kane. O’Brien’s Project '67 was a powerful success, and resulted in the creation of the Project Gallery, an artists co-operative which still runs today. The Project Gallery provided a vital niche for artists in the late sixties, and continues an invaluable role lobbying for funding and providing an alternative exhibition space for struggling groups and individuals.

Rosc committee members, however, were not phased by O’Brien’s attempt at resistance in 1967. As Crookshank stated, Project '67 “was of no importance, the main point was the main Rosc which looked so beautiful.” Rosc ‘67’s focus on ‘beauty’ promoted a notion of art which was based on the aesthetics of taste. Sweeney, for instance, had believed from the start that by picking his two European friends to help him select paintings Rosc was sure to end up with the ‘best’ art in the world. The other element which would aid in this campaign to produce a site of exquisite taste was the exhibition’s location. And it was the site of Rosc ‘67 which ultimately played a huge role in cultivating an image of a ‘civilized’ ‘fine art’ exhibition. The main hall of the RDS was transformed from a generic rough hall, known especially for the annual Dublin horse

144 Noel Sheridan, interview
146 Kennedy (1990), 180-181
Figure 23 Photograph of visitor reading catalogue inside main hall of Royal Dublin Society at *Rosc.* '67. From Hilary Pyle "Rosc '71." *Ireland of the Welcomes.* 20 (1) May-June, 1971:22.

147 Crookshank interview
show, into a modernist white cube. By draping white muslin across the ceiling and down the walls an ethereal neutrality was created inside this space, accentuating each art work.

As Crookshank expressed:

The RDS had huge agricultural shows, in order to make it look beautiful we got Pat Scott, an artist of the highest caliber, who did a great deal of design work at the time, and he designed the interior, he hung it with yards and yards of white muslin so that all the beastliness was covered up and we had this lovely pristine white background... The first Rosc was probably the best looking exhibition I have ever seen.148

Looking in retrospect, Declan McGonigle made a connection between the site of the RDS and the arbiters of taste organizing Rosc '67. He remarked in a recent interview: "...in a crude way, the simplest short hand model they give is based on the Royal Dublin Society's initial shows... these being dog and horse shows which focus on pedigree... the owners of which received certificates assuring this pedigree."149 And the critics certainly understood the attempts made in Rosc '67's design to focus on the 'pedigree' of international modernism. One review read:

The hall is a vast, high, bare, echoing, draughty space, very ill-suited to the purpose for which it was now proposed. But by means of the familiar swathes of cotton, the height was reduced, the light was diffused and the bare cold aspect of the walls softened.150

Contained within the billowing white walls of muslin, the paintings were hung from the ceiling on nylon rope, and surrounded the viewers in all directions. One reviewer spoke of his view being encumbered in every direction by paintings swaying gently as people moved throughout the space. The feeling was as if "...the pictures... came out into the middle of the room... and told the visitor where he [sic.] could go."151 This description implies a certain interaction between viewer and painting.

---

148 Ibid
149 Declan McGonigle interview December 12, 1998.
151 Russell. “Rosc go Bragh”, 62
Figure 24  Aerial photograph of *Rosc '67* at the Royal Dublin Society. Interior design by Patrick Scott, installation directed by James Johnson Sweeney. From Hilary Pyle "Rosc '71."

Which leads me to believe that *Rosc '67* was concerned with its audience. Perhaps encouraging a more intimate relationship with art than other exhibitions which cemented paintings to the walls like dead trophies. Looking at interior photographs of the RDS during *Rosc '67* (Figure 23-25) it is clear that visitors could walk around, look underneath, and stand between paintings. This activity perhaps allowing people to gain a sense of control over their relationship with the art. The formal advantage in hanging paintings from the ceiling was the potential for each one to be reduced to just a shape, to be silhouetted and compared to its neighbor. The paintings framed each other. They were placed back to back, and lined in rows so that, depending where one was standing, one image foregrounded another. As a result the size and shape of each canvas was emphasized, and viewers received the opportunity to question how these formal elements directly affected a work.

It was Sweeney’s decision to hang the paintings like banners from the ceiling. He had used this technique previously at the Texas Museum of Fine Arts. But it was also a technique being used for another, entirely different, exhibition. At Expo’ 67 in Montreal, in a geodesic dome built by Buckminster Fuller, a central part of the USIA funded American exhibition was large-scale abstract paintings. These works were hung from steel cables and backed against white sail cloth panels. Critics described this as a display of “heraldic banners” celebrating America.152

The paintings at *Rosc '67* were described as having a similar heraldic effect. One critic described Barnett Newman’s works, also a main feature at the American dome in

Figure 25  Photograph of visitors surveying the paintings at Rosc '67. From Hilary Pyle "Rosc '71." Ireland of the Welcomes. 20 (1) May-June, 1971:23
Montreal, as ringing out "like a bugle," at Rosc '67. 153 The reference to the power of American painting to display triumph is interestingly echoed by a series of banners exhibited at the new Library of Trinity College, which opened in 1967. The banners had been designed by twenty American artists, and were transported from New York to Dublin to be hung in the library's main hall to celebrate its inauguration. Artists involved in the project included Lichtenstein, Warhol, Jim Dine, and Robert Indiana. Warhol was the only artist not included at Rosc '67. The banners are described as American flags by one critic, who wrote of Lichtenstein's "pistol-grip collage," and Warhol's soup-tin image. Jim Dine's banner was illustrated with a pair of red boots, and Indiana's portrayed the "Stars and Stripes". 154 Whether the connection was one of vulgar, brash consumerism, or the triumph of a liberal democratic statehood, those who saw the American images at Trinity would probably have linked them to paintings at Rosc '67, and vice versa. The opening of such a space, to transfer meaning from the exhibition to a university and back again, debunks the notion that Rosc was a neutral site, isolated from the effects of political, economic and cultural concerns. As I will show in the last chapter, education plays a large part in how the notion of culture is constructed. And the re-shaping of Ireland's education system in the sixties illustrates why the government would have considered Rosc a good investment.

The installation of Rosc '67 ultimately placed the art work on center stage. Each painting swung alone and spoke for itself. It was intended that the exhibition be didactic, but the assumption was that visitors would come and learn simply because the art was

154 Ibid.
deemed worthwhile by ‘experts’. I was told for instance that Sweeney had not wanted any pre-publicity for the exhibition. He wanted *Rosc* to speak for itself. To create a ‘big-bang’ on Dublin’s skyline.\(^{155}\) Adding to this, the attitude to education was that of favored disassociation. Any sort of outreach services for instance were considered by the committee as “other people’s business.”\(^ {156}\) Despite this attitude, work was done to publicize the event. For instance, during the exhibition, the Department of Education gave school children a day off, in order that they might travel to Dublin from rural areas. The *Irish Times* helped by sponsoring an essay competition on “What *Rosc* ’67 means to you.” Publicity was also sent around the globe. The Irish Tourist board, for instance, sent press releases and pamphlets to galleries and museums, as well as placing inserts in their members’ magazine.\(^ {157}\) *Rosc* also held a series of talks and tours, given mostly by Sweeney. As a self-professed ‘specialist’ on modern and Celtic art, Sweeney claimed ownership over the works in *Rosc* by asserting that ‘truth’ could be deciphered simply by decoding each object in formal terms. One writer to the *Irish Times* described Sweeney’s presence in the exhibition hall as resembling that of a lecturer invited to speak at a Rotarian club and pontificate on “Capital A-Art.”\(^ {158}\)

By transforming the rough into smooth with untouchable asocial rhetoric and copious yards of white muslin, *Rosc* ’67 created another realm for viewers which would take them beyond reality into the domain of ‘art.’ Hal Foster has noted that art becomes

---

\(^ {155}\) Telephone interview with Walker on December 15, 1998

\(^ {156}\) Crookshank interview

\(^ {157}\) Gorman interview. He told me that, mostly due to lack of time, advertising inserts were placed in their *Ireland of the Welcomes* magazine. This came out six times a year and went world-wide to over 100,000 subscribers at the time. Gorman estimated that membership included: those of Irish descent, those interested in education and literature in Ireland; as well as students, libraries, museums and travel agents.

disassociated from reality by means of the spectacle, which acts as "a simulated reality, a total illusion, a set of effects that consumes the primary event." He writes:

...spectacle operates via our fascination with the hyperreal, with "perfect" images that make us "whole" at the price of delusion, of submission. We become locked in its logic because spectacle both effects the loss of the real and provides us with the fetishistic images necessary to deny or assuage this loss.

In its celebration of particular Celtic strains in Irish society, as well as in the liberalizing effect of both the American and European presence, Rosc '67 contained a set of images which functioned to elucidate the power of individualism. The exhibition provided its Irish audience with a positive outlook, set in the future and based on the past. By concentrating on how the glory of Rosc '67 would bring unfounded success to future Irish artistic production, the lack of confidence Rosc exudes for local art is glossed over. The words of one art critic who attended Rosc '67, suggests it may have been the dazzling effect of the installation which worked to override any critical discussion.

In an ante-chamber stands a group of Iron Age stone heads and figures (there are more in the National Museum, alongside the rich hoard of early Celtic treasures) borrowed from the countryside to show how close their formal confidence and fluid decoration lies to today's preferences...passing slightly dazed through this chamber the visitor is launched into the main hall. Also silkily white, whose vast dimensions are aswim with paintings.

Rosc's picture of perfect harmony has been picked up by this critic. Who ends up being swept away by the titanic proportions of the exhibition itself. The white muslin walls of Rosc '67 literally muffle sound, the parallel perhaps being a padded white cell. This image suggests the presence of a hampered, distorted, and protected dialogue. Which makes me think of Foucault's notion of the Panoptican, the omnipresent form of

---

160 Ibid.
161 Gosling, np
surveillance which he describes functioning in places like the prison or asylum.\textsuperscript{162} Foucault asserts that the gaze of surveillance mechanisms in prisons work to “atomize and disindividualize power.” Similarly, the security cameras described ‘burning into the back of the neck,” by one visitor to \textit{Rosc} '67,\textsuperscript{163} work to distribute power “not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up.”\textsuperscript{164}

It is fair to say that \textit{Rosc} gained the reputation of being an elite club by being subjected to such systemic mechanisms. For instance, while the RDS met the \textit{Rosc} committee’s needs for a large space and low rent it also subjected the exhibition to a specific ideological framework they may not have anticipated. The RDS is located in the upper-middle class suburb of Ballsbridge, which acquired the postal code of ‘Dublin 4’ in the early 1960s. To understand the connotations of ‘Dublin 4’ it is necessary to quote journalist John Waters, who describes the concept as seen in the eighties. It is a specific ideology, propagated by a distinctly elite set of individuals who were inextricably tied to the ‘modernizing’ politics of Fianna Fail. This stems directly from the economic growth and societal changes of the 1960s. Waters explains:

\begin{quote}
Dublin 4 was an attitude of mind, an attitude that had become impatient with the reality of life in modern Ireland. There were those who held that the term defined a class of people who regarded themselves as the social and intellectual elite of modern Ireland, but who ideally would have liked to have been somewhere else. Others saw ‘Dublin 4’ as a new bourgeoisie, a class of people who had transcended their own class background, who were out to culturally colonise the country, who believed themselves to have an almost divine right to dictate the way it should be run. It was these voices which came from the radio, defined Ireland, treating the ‘country’ as a “bad dream, a mild irritation on the periphery of
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{163} “An Irishman’s Diary”, np

\textsuperscript{164} Foucault in Easthope et al., 86
its consciousness, a darkness on the edge of town. It wanted an end to all this fanciful talk
about an attachment to the land. It wanted to see itself as a modern, urban, industrialised
democracy.¹⁶³

_Rosc '67_ became a symbol of the ‘mild irritation’ this cultural elite had with
Ireland’s peripheral artistic status. And this allows me to speculate that _Rosc_ was
informed by a rhetoric marked with the effects of colonialism.

---

CHAPTER FIVE

Resistance and Subjugation

The politics of colonialization are less complicated than its cultural expressions and the psychology of those involved. The latter persist after the political apparatus of colonialization has been dismantled. The prerequisite of ethnic usurpation, the motive of economic profit, the requirement of social privilege, and the necessity of political control: these do not exhaust their own subtle forms nor the post-colonial guises they can assume. 166

Literary historian John Foster encapsulates why *Rosc* '67 could be seen as both resisting and remaining subordinate to colonial power structures. Just because the British forces have left the south of Ireland and that the country is an established Republic does not mean that hegemonic forces have been repealed. “Postcolonial” signifies the ending of colonialism, however with the issue of partition many would say colonialism is still very much intact. Luke Gibbons has suggested that colonial strictures have woven their way into Irish contemporary life.

This has less to do with the ‘unfinished business’ of a united Ireland than with the realization that there is no possibility of undoing history, of removing all the accretions of conquest – the English language, the inscriptions of the Protestant Ascendancy on the landscape and material culture, and so on. For this reason, there is no prospect of restoring a pristine, pre-colonial identity: the lack of historical closure, therefore is bound up with a similar incompleteness in the culture itself, so that instead of being based on narrow ideals of racial purity and exclusivism, identity is open-ended and heterogeneous. 167

As we have seen, the notion of Ireland as a nation was being re-articulated as increasingly heterogeneous in the sixties. The drive was led by a new set of cultural elites who were defining Dublin as an urban center. They attempted this by focusing on corporate interests, Ireland’s role in Europe, and its business relationships with the United States. The government’s economic restructuring encouraged the expansion of

167 Gibbons, 179
urban centers, specifically the country’s capital, by increasing employment opportunities and reducing emigration rates. Within all of this, art was being brandished to promote foreign culture in Ireland and Irish culture abroad. And, by the time Rosc '67 entered the scene, television had brought the visual images of this cultural change into the domestic sphere.

Reactions to cultural shifts seemed to have ranged from jubilation to despair. The rural population was generally dealing with industry encroaching into the landscape, a noticeable decrease in attention from the state, the emigration of youth to urban centers, and a system which increasingly relied on lobbying and corporate power to garner support from state officials. In the arts, finances were being channeled into Dublin-based and fine arts projects. During the sixties, it became clear that the interests of an Anglo-American urban culture were overriding rural, religious, and Gaelic needs. And, it was the Irish government’s focus on economics and trade during this decade, which allowed these feelings of alienation and discontent to be directly leveled at consumer capitalism. Rosc '67 caused discontent in the public sphere because it was seen by many as a spectacle of these new materialist concerns. Rosc was an event produced by, and catering to, an elite Dublin class growing fat on Lemass’ new economic initiatives.

For Situationist Guy Debord, the spectacle was the very “nadir of capitalist reification.” This is because a spectacle is an image masking a site of accumulated capital. In a spectacle, “…social process becomes utterly opaque and ideological domination [is] assured.” 168 Guy Debord stated his definition of spectacle in 1967 as: that which encapsulates “the prevailing model of social life,” and serves as a “total
justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system,” to ensure the “permanent presence of that justification.” Thus the spectacle is real, not an abstract entity outside society. Its existence, manifested for example in a large exhibition like *Rosc '67*, can be understood as a product of aims held by a society’s dominant group.

The spectacular element of *Rosc '67* can be illustrated by examining the exhibition’s relationship to education. *Rosc '67* was marketed from the beginning as a vehicle for a mass education on art. Underneath this, however, *Rosc* carried corporate interests and private motivations. Therefore, the rhetoric publicizing the event masked specific interests. In investigating the connections between education and culture, in a study of the sociology of attendance in European art museums during the sixties, the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel has helped me to understand the advantages of using a lens of education to promote an event like *Rosc*. In their conclusions, Bourdieu and Darbel postulated that the bourgeoisie secured positions of societal power through modes of distinction, and used ‘the love of art’ to do this. There are other classes, like the aristocracy, who assume rights to power in society through birth. Or groups, such as first generation entrepreneurs, who justify their positions based on the success of hard work and merit. The bourgeois classes legitimate their positions in society on the ‘innate’ possession of a “cultivated nature.” Cultivation becomes, therefore, a characteristic acquired by class, when it is actually rooted in education. Bourdieu and Darbel make it very clear that the link between culture and education is

---

168 Foster (1985): 83
always rigorously denied by the bourgeoisie. Only this way can an individual claim a 'cultivated nature' as a legitimate inherited privilege. This "inheritance" disregards a factual privilege of being in a class which is granted unlimited access to all educational institutions. Only through education can individuals gain the desired elements of a 'cultured' individual, like arts or philosophy.

A contemporary art show, such as *Rosc*, can be analyzed as an institution installed to ensure the profitability of bourgeois cultural inheritance. Whether conscious of their ideological positions or not, the *Rosc '67* organizing committee's decision to create a spectacle purporting to educate 'the masses' denies a bourgeois privilege on two levels. First, by promoting education *Rosc '67*’s presence in its urban landscape can be legitimated. The notion that the exhibition is available for everyone masks the realities of an unequal education system in Ireland, which has served to maintain class hierarchies. Second, bourgeois privileges are also preserved because the effectiveness of this 'education' promoted at *Rosc* is negligible. Over and above the lack of interpretive material actually created for the show an understanding of art, and the spectacle itself, requires extensive previous education. That the paintings at *Rosc '67* were wrapped in a formalist rhetoric indicates the priority of seeing art as a product of aesthetics. Relying on the judgment of taste assumes those with a 'cultivated nature' will see the benefit of exhibition's like *Rosc*. And, subsequently, those who complain about the presence of *Rosc* in 1967 are simply excused as 'uncultured.'

It is interesting that by the mid-sixties the unequal balance of education in Ireland was being redressed by the government. For example, a year before *Rosc* opened, the

---

171 Ibid., 110-111
Minister of Education introduced free secondary level education, closed small rural schools and provided free transportation to bring children to larger schools in urban areas. A 1966 white paper, entitled *Investment in Education*, listed these changes and signaled the government’s moves to weaken the hand of the Catholic Church in education. Previously, the main alternative to religious-run, often fee-paying, secondary schools were vocational ones. These latter institutions prepared students for skilled and semi-skilled manual labor. This division at post-primary level ultimately maintained class distinctions, and created a rift between academic graduates and vocational ones. However, as sociologist Patrick Clancy describes, the government’s intervention into education during the 1960s was very much based in economic motivation:

> By the 1960s there was a growing realisation that the structure of the post-primary system in the Republic was unsatisfactory. The new policy adopted was designed to erode the academic/technical distinction, to raise the status of the vocational school and to encourage the provision of a more comprehensive-type curriculum in both secondary and vocational schools...The desire to move away from a binary towards a more comprehensive system involved considerations of labour market needs, optimum utilisation of resources and egalitarianism.¹⁷³

The desire to change the education system is tied here to the government’s wider capitalist drive of projecting Ireland onto the world stage as a competitive European nation. Voiced in all this rhetoric on changing school systems was also a concern for increasing arts education. Gestures like the Department of Education granting children a free day from school to visit *Rosc '67* must have been good publicity for a government wanting to be seen improving education in the arts. Despite this, the students at the National College of Art (NCA) in Dublin were already protesting the effects of Lemass’ economic policies on art education.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 111
¹⁷³ Clancy. “Education in the Republic of Ireland: The Project of Modernity?” in Clancy et al., 477
The NCA students and some professors were angry at the college’s poor conditions, the lack of funding, and the resistance to changing an aging curriculum. The students had obtained an unpublished memorandum in 1967 written by the Department of Industry and Commerce. This department was directly responsible for the promotion of industrial design within Ireland. The memorandum essentially explicated reasons why the College of Art should not be the place to teach industrial design. It is a “matter of business,” the memo read, “Art is...an element in a designer’s professional training, but he [sic] also requires expertise in materials, construction mechanisms and production engineering...the College of Art is not the ideal institution to provide training in the mixture of skills required to be an industrial designer.”

The students were appalled at this distinction between the active role of design and the largely passive role of art.

In a seminar held in 1967 the spokesman for the Students Representative Council for the NCA, Paddy Gillen, spoke of the need to adopt a ‘visual education’ policy, not simply an ‘industrial design policy.’ Gillen asserted that the results of Lemass’ ‘economic’ approach to education mystified art practices and commercialized design. He went on to say: “Many art students feel that the Department of Education has no visual education policy and that this is why it has not acted to solve the problems of the college.”

This attitude towards arts education directly counters the image the government would have wanted to project. Supporting a large ‘fine art’ show may have been just the sort of thing that could cover up these nasty realities. The other advantage for the government in supporting a cultural event like Rose is precisely the view that the

---

175 Ibid., 515-516
arts have nothing to do with economics, and are purely apolitical. In 1966 poet and writer, Patrick Kavanagh, made a speech at an art opening in Dublin and with dry humor summed up his view of the Irish government’s attitude towards the arts:

There is a good deal of art activity in this country and it is receiving a good deal of official support, and the reason for this is that painting and sculpture is a branch of commerce – a safe investment, and safe from ideas.\(^{176}\)

Rose ’67 certainly gained a reputation for engaging with political officials. The exhibition’s ties to the Arts Council and various government departments, most notably Finance, Tourism and Transport, cannot be underestimated. One of the reasons Crookshank gave me for leaving Rose in 1980 was telling. She recounted: “I was pretty fed up with being mistaken always for a government department.”\(^{177}\) This assumption is not surprising. Having figures like Finance Minister, Haughey, as Rose ’67’s President, subjected the exhibition to a set of unintended frames. With his well-publicized lifestyle of yachts, estates, and womanizing, Haughey was paralleled to JFK by some for his charisma and charm, but defiled by others as a self-aggrandizing bad-mouth, with a deft hand at shady deals.\(^{178}\) Sitting at the right hand of the Taoiseach, Haughey was in a very powerful position to influence policy. Upon entering the finance office in ’66 he had immediately taken on the role of patron of the arts without official approval or disapproval.\(^{179}\) In his first budget speech, for instance, Haughey announced a £20,000 increase in the Arts Council’s budget. He also declared that, if Ireland was to become a


\(^{177}\) Crookshank interview

\(^{178}\) For a good survey of Haughey’s career and various attitudes towards his politics see Tryle Dwyer’s publication Haughey’s Thirty Years of Controversy.

\(^{179}\) See Kennedy (1990), 154. When he refers to Haughey’s dealings with art policy, Kennedy comments: “No Transfer of Functions Order was prepared giving legal authority to the change even though the minister told the Arts Council that he intended to request the Taoiseach to give him formal responsibility for arts matters, including the Council’s grant-in-aid.”
modern nation, an ‘enlightened’ government needed to respond to the needs of its people in their ‘leisure time.’ This statement reflects his focus and concern for the desires of a middle-class, whose leisure time was increasing as a result of the multiplicity of new professional jobs available in Dublin. It is a statement which forgets the students at the art college, and those portions of the population not experiencing such luxuries.

Two years later, in his ’69 budget speech, Haughey introduced a tax break on the earnings of artists who were producing works deemed of “cultural merit.” The scheme proposed: artists would be selected by the Arts Council, their art judged, and if deemed suitable they could claim tax-free status on all future works. Yet the notion of ‘cultural merit’ was sufficiently vague that choices ultimately rested on the subjective tastes of the Arts Council. As well as this, the scheme did not account for young struggling artists. Again, this is an example of how the arts were viewed by powerful officials at the time: as cultural validation for the desires of particular classes.

Many critics saw these art policies Haughey introduced as opportunistic gestures, and attempts to garner support from the increasing Dublin elite. As president of Rosc ’67, Haughey was the exhibition’s figurehead. One of his roles was to present a speech at the opening ceremony. In this particular speech, he condescendingly swept over the ‘monuments’ controversy to applaud Rosc ’67 as a project dedicated to the modernizing principles of a progressive Ireland. The speech was attacked in the press as being offensive to the Irish people, his words were described as “insulting,” exuding a “Dublin-
based mentality,” which underlined his presence as a “ministerial seal” for *Rosc.* The lure of *Rosc ’67* for the Irish government seems to lie in the exhibition’s ability to project a verneer of prosperity in Ireland. While the exhibition evidences the cultural success of a Celtic past it also articulates the official goals for a prosperous ‘cultured’ future. It does this while aptly masking domestic realities and inadequacies felt in Ireland at the time.

The exhibition signified a turning point for many local critics, who, after 1967, openly critiqued the Arts Council’s policies and demanded change. Colm O’Brien, with his *Project ’67*, was one of the first to openly resist the way art production was being manipulated in Ireland. Complaints started surfacing about the Council’s board, which had only one practicing artist, Brian Boydell, and no female members whatsoever. There was also growing resentment for the lack of support arts activities outside of Dublin were receiving. By 1968 Bruce Arnold, a Dublin art critic, was accusing the Arts Council of maintaining an art scene which catered to an exclusive middle-class. He wrote in part:

> Art in Dublin is a vicious, spiteful and rapacious business. It is concerned with reputation, with money, with quite formidable clashes of personality, with lies, with deceit, with bribery and corruption.

In 1969 the Arts Council’s sponsorship of a touring exhibition *Contemporary Irish Painting*, which excluded works from the *Independent Artists* and the Royal

---

182 “Haughey’s Opening Speech Attacked.” *Irish Times.* Tuesday, November 14, 1967: np INVALA: *Rosc ’67*. This article reports that the Chairman of the National Monuments Advisory Council, Michael J. O’Kelly said Haughey’s speech at the *Rosc ’67* opening was “insulting to the majority of the Irish people.” As apparently, Haughey attacked, “the President, Mr. De Valera, the members of the National Advisory Council, members of the Ancient Monuments Advisory Council of Northern Ireland, the Council of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, the Council of the Royal Irish Academy, the Council of the Cork Historical and Archeological Society, the Old Dublin Society, the Kilkenny Archaeological Society, the Sligo Field Club, Sligo Corporation, Kerry Archaeological and Field Clun, Ulster Archaeological Society and the people of Corofin and Carndonagh.”

183 Kennedy (1990), 157

184 Bruce Arnold. “Battle Lines.” *Contact.* No. 1 June 1968: 11. Quoted in Ibid., 156
Hibernian Academy, was attacked for its monocular view of Irish art.\(^{185}\) By the beginning of the 70s, it was being publicly announced by art critics such as Tony Butler, that State money seemed to be pouring into private interests.\(^{186}\) This sort of discussion tends to paint exhibitions like *Rosc '67* in hegemonic colors. It is a project which emulated the sort of colonial domination Ireland had attempted to shake. Yet *Rosc* was articulating a new vision for Ireland. By utilizing the tools left within Irish culture by colonial powers, *Rosc '67* can be viewed as resisting a history dominated by the Anglo-gaze. As Benjamin has suggested, “All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war.” The art-for-art’s-sake argument may aestheticize politics but it also indicates the very presence of a political formula in the first place, and thus the potential for sites imbued with this aesthetic value to become politically charged.\(^{187}\)

Although this is an exhibition formed by a certain group of individuals, invested in its success for a variety of reasons, *Rosc '67* held meaning for all those who visited as well. Because of its association with the Celtic, and its visual intent to provide a continuity between past and present, *Rosc '67* also contained a potentially empowering discourse for many visitors. The use of notions such as ‘civilized’ and ‘cultured’ within Irish history have been described by writer Luke Gibbons as a method of denying any moment of “primordial innocence.” Being viewed as ‘uncultured’ would somehow infer

\(^{185}\) Kennedy (1990), 160

the Irish were easy prey to conquest, or might serve to excuse the criminal act of colonization. Gibbons makes the following comparison:

If apologists for colonialism in the new world insisted on portraying America as 'virgin' territory, as if native inhabitants were simply hewn out of the rock formations which dominated the landscape, then it was decidedly in the interests of native Irish historians to deny that Ireland was ever in a state of nature, and that it was culturally inscribed from the dawn of antiquity.\footnote{Gibbons, 153}

\textit{Rosc '67} contains this narrative. The exhibition effectively linked Ireland's 'cultured' past with an educated present. The Celtic was illustrated as a foundation. And this renegotiated the dominance of a Roman and Greek classical tradition, upon which Western art has been consistently modeled.\footnote{Interestingly, Kenneth Clark's survey of Western history \textit{Civilisation: A Personal View} was published and broadcast in 1970 by the British Broadcasting Corporation. In his opening Clark stands on the South West Coast of the Isle of Iona in Scotland, pointing out to the horizon and to Ireland, stating that it was Columba's trip from Ireland which 'saved civilisation.' Clark's historical survey became very influential and Frascina and Harris, 306} However, how do we get past the fact that an Irish contemporary moment is absented from this narrative? I would suggest that perhaps a new moment is being created, by leaving out the art infested with an Anglicized vision. Yet could \textit{Rosc '67} be a fresh start, or a slate wiped clean, if it never approached this dialogue? Yes and no. Without sounding as though I am not taking a stand here, it is imperative to my use of art as a dialectic to infer that the exhibition was introduced and supported by officials \textit{because} it worked as an empowering tool for Irish culture.

On the one hand \textit{Rosc '67}'s reliance on trumpeting 'art for art's sake,' and formalizing art, suggests a dedication to a classically-based, Western art history. It is a narrative which can be seen as infused with colonial assumptions and essentialized imaginings, which have operated for centuries to define the Irish as 'different' or, more
precisely, as 'peripheral.' On the other hand, Rosc '67 could hold strains of resistance against the permutations of colonialism. Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci has theorized that the structures and tactics of dominant groups are often assimilated into subaltern ones. Subaltern groups are those socially subordinated groups that lack political power. In order to mobilize themselves effectively, subalterns adopt the framework of their oppressors, and 'beats them at their own game' so to speak. Recent writings on colonial alterity, such as Gayatri Spivak's discussions on her native India, reveal that nationalist rhetoric often adopts the hegemonic and patriarchal framework of the colonial power it resists. This can explain the patriarchy and essentialized rural mythology of de Valera's nationalist project, which seems to feed off a colonial stereotype that illustrated Ireland in sublime and picturesque terms. David Brett has described this phenomenon working in the Free State as subverting the colonial center from within. Brett writes:

To designate oneself as picturesque and to enter into complicity with metropolitan expectations is a kind of knowing self-marginalisation which is, viewed in the light of Rousseau, a re-centering of the world upon the rural and the picturesque in such a way as to designate the metropolis as the divergent and abnormal...

The hegemonic aims of the Dublin elite to modernize and urbanize Ireland in the 1960s can then be explained as a direct reaction to, and thus assimilation of, de Valera's rural focus. Where de Valera had used the stereotype of rural Catholicism to resist Anglo-norms and create Irish sovereignty, so Lemass took de Valera's rural myth to re-center Dublin. Ireland was re-articulating the importance of its metropole in the sixties, based on its potential as a tourist lure, as well as a site for business and industry. Thus in

imbues Ireland with a plethora of 'cultured' ideals. For more on this see also Thomas Cahill How the Irish Saved Civilization. New York: Doubleday, 1995

190 For example, Gayatri Spivak. “Subaltern studies: Deconstructing Historiography.” In Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak (eds.) Selected Subaltern Studies. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988

marketing itself as a “Celtic fringe” *Rosc '67* used a desire for seeing Ireland as the picturesque to lure the gaze of visitors. By using contemporary art in a way that emulated the Venice Biennale, Dublin officials placed the city on view as a central player in global culture. This could be viewed as claiming the rules of the colonizer. Rules which are a part of the modern Irish nation.
Conclusion

Riverdance, the 1990s Irish dance show originating from the Eurovision Song Contest in 1989, placed Irish tradition on a trans-European stage in a firmly modern and American context. Far from being a transference of power to the liberalism and modernity of the United States, Riverdance, it has been argued by Fintan O’Toole, has brought out a part of Irish cultural nationalism previously silenced by “a mixture of Victorian piety, nationalist purity and Catholic suspicion of the body.” As an integral part of a Gaelic tradition, dancing has often played a functional role in binding communities of Irish descent. O’Toole mentions New York in the 1950’s as an example. This was a time when the United Irish Counties Association organized “Feis’s.” Dance nights which mixed ‘high’ and ‘low’, ‘classical’ and ‘folk,’ music in an attempt to “legitimize the practice of Irish traditional culture in a modern urban context.”

Riverdance attempts to do this on a global stage with a flamboyant, loud, and fast-paced spectacle which fuses the ‘old’ with the ‘new’.

Riverdance is an illustration of Ireland taking its place in the “international melting pot.” It draws energy “as much from what it was saying as from what it did.” O’Toole believes: “What made it more than an international show-business product was the way it celebrated locked-up elements of Irish tradition. The way it became, quite self-consciously, a parable of the modernisation of Irish culture.”

However, things start to change when the leading dancer and choreographer Michael Flatley, an Irish-American who initially gave the show its unapologetic

---

192 Ibid., 151
193 Ibid., 152-153
brashness and glitzy quality, broke off from the group to create his own *Lord of The Dance*. O’Toole believes Flatley “danced on the grave” of Irish culture by attempting to create a narrative in which he as Lord presides over the show; fighting the demons and winning the maidens which adorn Irish mythology. Although Flatley takes traditional Irish songs, he never addresses their specific cultural context or meaning. O’Toole concludes that Flatley commits “cultural vandalism”:

What *Lord of the Dance* showed is how easy it is for Irish culture, in its adaptation to a global, commodified entertainment business, to teeter over the edge of boldness and into an abyss of banality, to mistake liberation from a repressive past for crass ignorance of the collective memory locked up in traditional forms...

It is this mediation between effective and destructive blends of the past and present I wanted to explore in this paper. My aim has been to illustrate *Rosc ’67* as a product of cultural mechanisms in operation during the 1960s in Ireland, specifically in Dublin. To reveal that this was a cultural event which could have lent credibility to the work of Lemass’ nationalist project. *Rosc ’67* exhibited a ‘modern’ European Ireland, which nurtured close and treasured ties with American corporatism and ideals of liberal democracy. O’Toole’s discussion on *Riverdance* reveals how the global tactics of cultural inventors must negotiate layers of memory, tradition, and knowledge, if they hope to maintain a constructive and critical discourse in their project. It is my conclusion that, while *Rosc ’67* seems to have captured its moment it did not do so with a critical eye.

*Rosc* effectively blended struggling notions of nationalism being debated in the sixties. Both de Valera’s Celticism and Lemass’ globalism are illustrated through the art displayed in the exhibition. Yet the struggle fought within its walls was not articulated
by Rosc officials. This seems aptly illustrated by the exhibition's downplaying of Francis Bacon. Bacon's work centers on self-examination, and constantly wrestles with notions of self-identity. That Bacon's work was at Rosc '67 suggests an acceptance of his role in contemporary art. Yet he was promoted as belonging outside Ireland's borders. One press release read:

Nearer home, there is an impressive English contingent, with new work by that great contemplative master, Ben Nicolson, and his almost direct opposite, the powerfully emotional Francis Bacon.  

Here Bacon is the savage, the intuitive opposite to a British painter's rational behavior. And there is no mention of his Irish heritage. It is interesting that in Rosc's assertion that a formalist rhetoric is required to ably judge 'great' art of the day, Bacon's presence is justified only by his 'emotional' abilities. I do believe Bacon's inclusion in Rosc '67 could be viewed as a positive reflection on the art of Ireland, but, more pertinently, I think his presence indicates the deep insecurity Rosc exuded for Irish contemporary art. Bacon's value lies in his international influence and experience, not in his identity as an Irish artist. In fact, Bacon left Ireland at a very early age for Britain and worked there most of his life. In Rosc's attempts to bring 'world art' to Dublin it manages to spectacularize Ireland as a society built on international integration as opposed to isolationism. Even the Celtic art is displayed for what it really is: an art born from international influence. Rosc '67 did bring home the Bacon, but only in an attempt to serve it to those who would enjoy its foreign taste.

194 Ibid., 155
195 Rosc - World Art in Dublin
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Crookshank, Ann. Retired director of the Art History Program at Trinity College, Dublin, and member of the Rose '67 committee interview on December 7, 1998.

Gorman, Michael. Retired member of the Irish Tourist Board and Rose '71 committee member, interview on December 14, 1998.

McGonigle, Declan. Director of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, interview on December 11, 1998


Murphy, Patrick. Director of Rose '80-'88

Sheridan, Noel. Director of the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, interview on December 12, 1998.

Walker, Dorothy. Art historian and member of the Rose '67 committee interview on December 7 and 15, 1998.

Secondary Sources


Barber, Bruce; Guilbaut, Serge; O’Brian, John (eds.) *Voices of Fire: Art, Rage, Power and the State*. University of Toronto Press, 1996


De Paor, Liam. Ireland and Early Europe. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997


Frascina, Francis and Harris, Jonathan (eds.) *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*. New York: Phaidon Press, 1992


Guinness, Desmond. “A Personal View of Ireland.” *Art in America*. 57 (3) May-June 1969: 92-95


Heron, Patrick. “A Kind of Cultural Imperialism?” Studio International. 175 (897) February 1968: 62-64


Irish Art in the Nineteenth Century. Dublin: Irish Printers Ltd. in association with Rosc ’71, 1971

Irish Directions. Dublin: Irish Printers Ltd., 1974


Rosc ’71. Dublin: Cahill & Co. Ltd., 1971


Rosc ’77. Dublin: Irish Printers Ltd., 1977


Squirru, Rafael. “Prizes without Pickets.” Art News. 73. March 1974: 80+82

Sweeney, James Johnson. “Continuity in Art.” Liturgical Arts. 36 (1) November 1967: 82-3


Turpin, John. A School of Art in Dublin since the Eighteenth Century. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd., 1995


“Rosc ‘71” Connoisseur. 178 (716) October 1971: 147

“Rosc ’71.” Art in America. 59 (6) 1971: 142-44


Young Irish Artists. Dublin: Irish Printers Ltd. in association with Rosc’ 71, 1971