Anybody walking around Dublin will find ample evidence in the squares and public buildings of the influence of Georgian England. But a visit to the National Museum of Ireland will show evidence in stone and metal of an ancient civilization with no obvious colonial connections. How do we relate these to one another and to any idea of an Irish tradition in the visual arts? Since the Vikings, according to a national perspective, colonial influence has destroyed native art, but according to another view, foreign influence gave Ireland most of what exists today. It is therefore, particularly appropriate to consider the issue of colonialism and the visual arts in Ireland, when 20th century definitions of Gaelic culture have been generated largely by rejecting a colonial inheritance. Outside Ireland in the successor states of the Old European empires, on the Continent itself and in Africa, the Americas, Australia and Asia, the issue of colonialism and its influence on the visual arts, has to be honestly faced.

In general, there appear to be two types of colonial experience:

(1) Where the incoming colonists become so numerous that they create a well established and long lasting tradition of their own, owing much to their Motherland, but moulded by local circumstances and in some cases, by the indigenous art of the native population. North and South America and Australia are examples of this. However this type of colonialism is also applicable in part to Ireland - particularly in the cities (which were originally Viking colonies), the long settled counties near Dublin and above all in the North of Ireland where the colonial plantation was most thorough.

(2) The second type of colonialism is where the incoming colonists formed an elite controlling the wealth of the land and thus the patronage of the arts, but were largely separated from a vigorous native culture of the majority. This was the situation with the subject peoples of the continental empires on the European mainland, and also in India and other Asian possessions. It is a concept of colonialism that is equally applicable to Ireland and its Rulers, especially in the 18th century.

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Irish art history can be viewed from two different and opposed interpretations, both of which are based on concepts of cultural colonialism. The first could be called 'The International View', the second 'The National View'.

A broadly 'culturally internationalist' attitude argues that most of the visual arts in Ireland originated from outside sources, e.g. the La Tène style of the Celts who invaded Ireland and totally absorbed the natives, the overwhelming impact of Roman Christianity and its attendant art forms, the influence of German Romanesque on Cormac's Chapel at Cashel, the interlaced decoration which was not unique to Ireland, but was found equally in Saxon England and Scandinavia and the immense contribution of the Anglo-Normans in spreading the 'Early English' Gothic style throughout Ireland in great stone churches like Christ Church Dublin, (the like of which has never been seen before in the country). There was the tremendous profusion of the urban crafts in Viking and Anglo-Norman Dublin which recent digging has revealed. Later, Irish versions of Elizabethian and Jacobean houses appeared as in Carrick-on-Suir and Donegal, just as the style of Sir Christopher Wren appeared in Robinson's Royal Hospital, Kilmainham. With the 18th century, there was a flood of English Palladianism, notably in the work of Sir Edward Pearce at the Bank of Ireland and Richard Cassells at Leinster House. International Neoclassicism influenced Gandon's Custom House and the Four Course just as the English Gothic revival influenced the architecture of Francis Johnson and J.J. McCarthy. Irish painting and sculpture in the 18th and 19th century cannot be understood without reference to metropolitian trends in London. Nathaniel Hone (the elder), James Barry, George Barrett all sought careers in Georgian London; Martin Archer Shee became President of the Royal Academy. Maclise, Foley and Orpen, all of Irish origin and training, made enormous reputations in London; Orpen in particular, by introducing the Slade School methods to Dublin, further extended English influence well into the 20th century. Towards the end of the 19th century, a growing French modernist influence competed with that of England. In the 1930's, Evie Hone (the great stained glass artist) and Mainie Jellett studied in Paris and sought to bring Ireland into the mainstream of modern art. The international interpretation at its best merely acknowledged Ireland's enormous cultural debts abroad particularly to England.

At its worst it was derisory towards anything that did not have an approved London stamp. Sometimes this interpretation has seen Ireland as an English colony in the visual arts, especially since the 13th century.

The National reaction against the internationalist, and largely British interpretation was strong. In the mid 19th century art historians like Mulvany began to disentangle and give credit to Irish artists. This historical work was continued by Walter Strickland and more recently by Professor Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin. The 19th century romantic movement supported a revival of interest in Ireland's visual heritage which manifested itself in the development of the discipline of Irish archaelogy. The focus here was clearly nationalist - on Pre-Norman Irish civilization, i.e. before Ireland was 'sullied' by English influence. Thus, the study of Irish Gothic and of urban archaelogy was regarded as unimportant, the argument being that Irish Gothic was simply the English influence and towns were seen as an alien element in Gaelic society which was 'essentially rural'.

The 19th century National movement, so strong on the literary side, had little to say on the visual arts with the notable exeption of Thomas Davis, an intellectual, fully aware of the importance of the visual arts in any civilization. It was not until the Celtic revival at the end of the 19th century that illustrations of Irish legends, silverwork, leatherwork and textiles, (based on ancient Irish examples) became popular. While the Celtic revival acclaimed the myths of ancient Ireland, it relied on the British arts and crafts movement and the teaching of places like the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London, to give the technical lead.

Nevertheless, the Celtic revival was an original Irish art movement, reaching international standards of excellence in the stained glass and illustrations of Harry Clarke. Irish romanticism undoubtedly led to the growth of landscape painting particularly in the West of Ireland.

With the setting up of a native Department of Education in 1923 in the new independent Irish State, cultural nationalism rose to an all time high. In that epoch of isolation of 'compulsory Irish' for schools, censorship of literature and popular clericalism, there

was a combative attitude in the country towards British and other foreign influences. This was understandable in the new State finding its own identity. European modernism in the arts made no significant impact. It was not until the 1940's with the Living Art group and the 1950's with the policies of the new Irish Arts Council and the Rosc Exhibitions of the 1960s and 1970s that international influences on the visual arts began to be more generally pervasive. Much of the 20th century culture was seen as 'un-Irish' to rural traditionalists. It was often not realised that abstraction was precisely the quality most admired in ancient Irish manuscripts. Even today 'native' and 'internationalist' concepts of art in Ireland have an ambiguous relationship.

Since the coming of the Anglo-Normans to Ireland in the 12th century, the English-Irish issue in the history of Irish art has been a complex one which does not admit of any easy generalisations. There is however, an important distinction that I would like to make (which goes to the root of the issue of colonialison), i.e. the difference between the autonomous actions of the colony itself and the dictates of the Imperial Government. The Anglo-Norman Colonial Settlers in Ireland became assimulated in the late middle ages and added to pre-existing Gaelic civilization by founding numerous abbeys and fostering the growth of towns. Likewise the new settlers of the 17th century in time identified with Ireland as their country (although remaining distinct as Protestants). It is to this colonial group, the Anglo-Irish, that the country owes the spread of Renaissance ideals, and the establishment of most of its cultural institutions on a voluntary basis, e.g. the Royal Irish Academy and the Royal Dublin Society. The latter was probably the greatest cultural legacy of the Anglo-Irish with its art school, (established in 1746 and now the National College of Art and Design), its Botanic Garden, its Zoo, its Library (now the National Library) and its Museum (now the National Museum). This form of autonomous cultural initiative by the Protestant upper class was beneficial in the long run, if rather narrowly based at first. Official Government patronage by means of subsidies from the old Irish colonial Parliament is to be compared to that of the original 13 States in America. Dublin officials, like the Wide Street Commissioners and Beresford (who brought Gandon, the Englishman, to build the Custom House) were alive to the international ideals of the Renaissance tradition. They encouraged the decorative arts e.g. Dublin plasterwork which owes much to French

and Italian Rococco design as well as the Pompeian Adam style.

However, there is another side of British colonialism and culture, which has a less pleasant aspect. Ever since the statutes of Kilkenny in the 14th century, London-based policy had been to stamp out all aspects of indigenous Irish culture. Since the Tudors, the English language and Protestant religion were exploited politically as a means of anglicising the population. Elizabeth I's foundation of Trinity College Dublin was part of the policy - although in time Trinity evolved into a liberal institution and a place of international learning. However, it was only after the political unification of England and Ireland in 1800 that the British bureaucracy sought to absorb Ireland in an all-British cultural context. The Board of National (Primary)Education was set up to do just this. Although the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts was granted a Royal Charter, it was denied a handsome State endowment of buildings (unlike its London and Scottish counterparts). The old R.D.S. art school, whose only serious defect was its lack of funds, was taken over by the narrow minded, centralised bureaucracy of the London Dept. of Science and Art from 1854 to 1900. This was a tragic example of British cultural imperialism whereby an irrelevant and alien system was forced on Irish pupils. The Irish National Gallery was founded more as a result of Dargan's exhibition of 1853 and its large art loan collection rather than as the result of an Imperial decision. Even the great Irish international exhibitions in Dublin and Cork received no State subsidies unlike the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 and the British exhibition which were heavily subsidised. While various Viceroys made soothing cultural noises, there was little of a positive kind achieved by the Imperial Government on behalf of the arts in Ireland. The sole important cultural achievement was the establishment of the Royal University of Ireland, subsequently reconstituted as the National University of Ireland in 1908, yet even here the Catholic University of Dublin initiated by the Irish Bishops and local academies like the Royal Cork Institution, had taken the initiative which the Royal University was designed to unify.

The distinction between the Anglo-Irish and the Imperial Government must be insisted on. Not only in the arts but in politics, the Anglo-Irish gave great leadership. Now that these families have existed for 300-400 years in Ireland, the appelation 'colonial' is irrelevant. Nevertheless, even in the early 1960s, there was much

indifference in Dublin to Georgian architecture as simply an English colonial left-over. The colonial issue remains live today in the 6 partitioned northern countries, whose majority are proud of their Protestant and British (i.e. Scottish) colonial past. Today the painting and poetry of northern artists is amongst the most lively in the island. The Anglo-Irish achievement in the visual arts need not be claimed or blamed as the result of British Imperialism in Ireland. Often what they achieved was against the apathy or hostility of London. It is a distortion of Irish art history to identify only with the rural and Gaelic element, with the Irish Bronze and Iron age decorative art, the early Christian era, round towers, high crosses and the few remaining crafts, as the only authentic Irish visual tradition.

One of the tragedies of the Anglo-Irish is that their leaders yielded to bribes in 1800 and voted themselves into political oblivion and the colonial parliament did not continue and broaden its franchise to incorporate the Catholics. The old Anglo-Irish Parliament had shown by its subsidies to Irish industry and the R.D.S., that it believed in playing a leading governmental role in supporting the development of the country and the arts. In the 19th century, the Imperial Government did not maintain this record and simply treated Ireland like a colony to be exploited for the benefit of England.

One of the great regrets of the Nationalist is that the Anglo-Irish colony ever became the dominant element after the defeat of James II, with his allies: the native Irish, and 'Old English' settlers and Louis XIV of France in 1690. The Irish Aristocracy called 'The Wild Geese' fled to make careers in the Royal armies of France, Austria and Spain. Yet, even if an Irish Catholic Aristocracy had been in control of the 18th century parliament, it is doubtful if the tenantry would have fared much better, although the professional classes would have. Just how 'Irish' would the art of such a Catholic aristocratic society have been? Ireland would have been a French cultural satellite with Louis Quinze instead of Georgian, with Dublin resembling Nancy more than Bloomsbury. What 18th century aristocracy had any time for folk culture? It was an era of Parisian cultural imperialism. Undoubtedly the Protestant colonial take-over in 1690 does make a strong break in Irish cultural history. A similar break comes in European History in 1648 after the end of the wars of religion and the beginning of the Ancien Régime, where rationalism rath

than religion was the driving force.

A succession of foreign influences over the centuries from Italy, France, Holland and England have stimulated architecture, planning, painting, sculpture, silver, glass, furniture, silk weaving and the establishment of Irish art institutions. To admit this is in no way to denigrate native ability, since very many of the practitioners of the above were of Irish birth. Now that Ireland has been politically independent since 1922, a culturally pluralist outlook may be possible in which the autonomous contribution of the Anglo-Irish colony may be subsumed into a definition of the visual arts in Ireland as the visual expression of all the people of Ireland. However, a synthesis must take account of the cultural contribution of the Northern Irish Protestant community (vitally important for any discussion of Irish Victorian industrial design in the linen trade and heavy engineering).

Despite the evidence of foreign influence in the twentieth century, one can still isolate certain Irish stylistic characteristics in the work of painters like Jack Yeats, Mainie Jellett, Norah McGuinness, Patrick Collins and Brian Bourke; for example Jellett, despite her cubist training, shows a flat, linear and colouristic quality which takes up an ancient thread; the landscapes o the other artists have qualities which can only be described as 'romantic'. When 20th century Irish art is compared to that of the continent, the individualistic aspects of Irish art become apparent and its remoteness from formal analysis, agonised expressionsim, surrealism, constructivism and pop art. Not all artists who work in Ireland have a characteristically 'Irish flavour'. In its quiet wayward quality one can isolate an Irish sensibility in the visual arts. It is possibly in the field of landscape above all, that Irish art is at its most characteristic. This relates back to centuries of rural experience, but also to the coloniel inheritance of the 18th and 19th century landscapists - and even further back to ancient Irish art with its love of flat pattern, fantasy and animals.