

AICA JAPAN CONGRESS 1998

Symposium "TRANSITION : Changing Society and Art "

■ Colloquium I *Memories and Visions : From Tradition to a New Identity*

Session 4 : *Western Identity*

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'Memory, the boon most necessary for life...' A Brief Review of the Role of Tradition in Modern and Post-Modern Irish Art.

However progressive their art may be, artists will always echo some image that we recognise from the past. In this way the spectator participant can connect with the visually innovative, or with totally original concepts. But there is something special about the art form or theme that sets out deliberately to recapture the remembered past, to reexplore old ideas, to manipulate traditional images. Perhaps the artist envisages a perfect expression in some past heroism or even in a simple custom and wants to apply this to a contemporary situation, or conversely to use it as an instrument of satire, in complete denial and rejection of the objective first sought.

Whatever image is referred to, the artist is redefining his/her own identity, partly through association, and of course through the form of reference or exploration. 20th century Irish artists have tended to remember inspiring images of the past for reasons of political and cultural identity. Irish creativity in all media was instrumental in winning the struggle for territorial independence. Most recently, Ireland's important role in the European Community, shaking up relatively new national foundations, has led to post-modern artists reassessing their cultural roots in various ways, sometimes associating their national psyche with wider, international cultures, but investing their art with peculiarly Irish tones.

Due to the new prosperity that Ireland now enjoys, younger Irish artists have a confidence in their art not experienced in this country for a thousand years. In the case of the artists of Northern Ireland, they have still to cope with political tragedy and uncertainty, and this continues to be reflected in their art. Other common themes are archeological, or philosophical, but the landscape still remains eminently important.