

PAINING THE IRISH CONFLICT:
THE BELFAST MURALS OF GERARD MO CHARA KELLY

by

DEBORAH SALEEBY-MULLIGAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of
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Abstract

Painting the Irish Conflict: The Belfast Murals of Gerard Mo chara Kelly

by

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This dissertation investigates the life and work of the Northern Irish muralist Gerard Mo chara Kelly. It chronicles the artist's development from his earliest drawings created in the late 1960s while he attended primary school to his well-known large-scale public murals of the late 1990s. Kelly was born in West Belfast in 1957 into a family with close ties to the Irish Republican movement. Throughout his career Kelly's work has been informed by his staunch Irish Nationalist ideology. I will examine his work from a contextual perspective, and will consider its relationship to the sociopolitical events associated with the conflict in Northern Ireland.

As a way of introduction it will briefly discuss the history of mural painting in Northern Ireland. It will situate the political messages of Irish Republican murals in the discourse of cultural nationalism by exploring their function as objects of resistance against British Imperialism.

In 1972 Kelly joined the Irish Republican Army and physically fought to defend his community from the British security presence in Northern Ireland. In 1981 he was

arrested and served over four years in Long Kesh Prison. During his incarceration, Kelly began to produce politically subversive artwork which asserted his Irish Nationalist ideology.

After his release from prison in 1985 Kelly turned away from physical force and began to fight the British establishment in Northern Ireland by creating provocative wall paintings throughout his native Belfast. These works depicted a wide range of imagery including memorial portraiture, Celtic mythology, and Irish history. They were used to educate his community and to express his Republican beliefs.

This study concentrates on Gerard Mo chara Kelly's artistic production between the years 1980-1998. I will place special emphasis on Kelly's view of the conflict in Northern Ireland as expressed through his public mural paintings.

Gerard Mo chara Kelly's role in creating a distinct Republican mural tradition in Northern Ireland has been greatly overlooked. I have undertaken this research in order to emphasize his significance in the history of Irish political art.

FOR MY HUSBAND JOSEPH

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the life and work of the Irish Republican mural artist Gerard Mo chara Kelly (fig. 1). Kelly, who goes by the name Mo chara, Irish for “my friend,” was born in Belfast on January 30, 1957. By the early 1990s Mo chara established a reputation for himself as the leading political mural artist working in Northern Ireland. His work is inextricably linked to the conflict in Northern Ireland, commonly referred to as the Troubles. Since the early twentieth century Northern Irish artists have created unique and inventive murals focusing on the sociopolitical events associated with the Troubles. These murals are predominately located in the ethnically divided neighborhoods of Northern Ireland’s two largest cities, Belfast and Derry. The subject matter of the work is tied to the ideologies of the two conflicting ethnic groups, the Irish Republicans and the pro-British Loyalists. Irish Republicans, also known as Nationalists, are predominately Catholic.¹ They are committed to ending British rule in the North of Ireland and to the unification with the Republic of Ireland to the south. Loyalists, who are predominately Protestant, are fiercely pro-British and believe that Northern Ireland is a British province. They are committed to retaining their union with Great Britain. Irish Republican murals are representational and narrative images where political subject matter, usually in the form of anti-British imagery, is the principal element of the work.

¹ The terms used to designate political affiliations in Northern Ireland are often open-ended. The term ‘Nationalist’ refers mainly to Irish Catholics who seek the reunification of Ireland. ‘Republicans’ have the same aim but they advocate violence as a means to achieve that goal. Similarly, ‘Unionist’ is the more general term referring to the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland who seek to maintain their union with Great Britain. ‘Loyalists’ represent the more extreme element of Unionism.

They are didactic and allegorical paintings whose themes include: memorializing Republican dead, commemorating Irish history and mythology, and commenting on social injustices (fig. 2). Loyalist murals, while also representational paintings, have historically been more limited in design and iconography and consist predominantly of pro-British imagery, in the form of emblems, flags (fig. 3), and the most ubiquitous image: a portrait of the British conqueror, King William III (1650-1702) on horseback (fig. 4), often copied from Jan Wyck's (1640-1702) portrait *William III*, 1692 (Collection of the Duke of Marlborough) (fig. 5).

Northern Irish murals are a vernacular community based art form. The muralists working in Belfast generally develop their mural designs individually, but they work in close consultation with their community and often employ local teenagers to assist them. Four artists have created the majority of Republican murals in Belfast, Gerard Mo chara Kelly, Danny Devenny, Marty Lyons, and Andrea Redmond. The Irish Republican political party, Sinn Féin, has commissioned many of the murals produced by these artists. In Derry, Republican muralists work as a group known as the *Bogside Artists*, which includes the brothers William and Tom Kelly and Kevin Hasson. Some notable Loyalist muralists have included the Derry artist, Bobby Jackson and the Belfast artists, Harold Gibson and Noel Large. The muralists are all self-taught artists with the exception of William Kelly, who received art training from Belfast Art College.

Between the late 1980s and the early 1990s Mo chara ² was the most prolific and creative mural artist working in Northern Ireland. During this time his work became

² For the duration of this study Gerard Mo chara Kelly will be referred to by his nom de guerre, Mo chara.

internationally recognized as a unique symbol of political Irish painting. Yet within Ireland art critics and scholars dismissed his work, and the work of other muralists, as being a form of propaganda, due to its overt political subject matter. Other Northern Irish painters who address the Troubles in their work, such as Dermot Seymour (fig. 6) and Rita Duffy (fig. 7) are accepted by the art world because their work does not seem to express a specific ideology and their preferred medium of oil on canvas conforms to art market norms. These works are often deemed to be acceptable because they do not overtly engage in politics. The Irish artist and writer Brian O'Doherty has noted that artists working in the context of the Northern Ireland's Troubles, whether they are aware of it or not, have themselves initiated "however indirectly a social action."³ Like most Republican muralists, Mo chara considers himself to be a social and political activist. Nonetheless, he believes strongly in the aesthetic value of his work and he considers his murals to be important works of art. He contends that in order for his murals to be politically effective they must first gain the attention of the viewer and this can only be achieved through an elaborate and eye-catching artistic design.

This study will attempt to show that Mo chara's murals are politically subversive statements that are grounded in a strong anti-Imperialist ideology. They are often created to highlight the social injustices experienced by Northern Ireland's Catholic minority (fig. 8). The strong message of defiance seen in his work shares many similarities with other anti-Imperialist mural movements throughout the world. Analogies can be drawn

³ Brian O'Doherty, "Thinking North," in *Thinking Long. Contemporary Art in the North of Ireland*, ed. Liam Kelly (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 1996), 6.

between Mo chara's work and the revolutionary murals produced in Central and South America, during the 1980s and early 1990s. Mo chara's work is similar to the murals produced by Nicaraguan and Bolivian activist artists such as the Bolivian painter Walter Solón Romero (fig. 9).⁴ Solón, an ex-political prisoner, is best known for his nationalistic murals that are filled with Bolivian cultural and revolutionary icons.⁵ Like Mo chara's work, Solón's murals are confrontational and they underscore the plight of the exploited indigenous members of his community.

Mo chara's work is also commemorative and in this sense it shares many characteristics with New York City's contemporary street memorial murals. These murals are also community based. They often memorialize victims of tragic deaths, such as in the work of the well-known mural artists, Chico and Pete (fig. 10).⁶ There are also strong similarities between Mo chara's work and the renegade East Harlem mural artists Hulbert Waldroup (fig. 11) and James De La Vega (fig. 12). Waldroup and De La Vega have produced highly controversial public murals that comment on racial injustices and an in the case of Waldroup, events of police brutality. Like Mo chara, these artists are

⁴ For further information on Nicaraguan revolutionary murals, see David Kunzle, *The Murals of Revolutionary Nicaragua 1979-1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Timothy Pratt, "Nicaragua's Pulse of Politics and Poetry," *Américas* 51, no. 6 (November/December 1999): 6-13.

⁵ For further information on Walter Solón Romero, see Mike Ceaser, "Artful Witness of Injustice," *Américas* 52, no. 6 (November/December 2000): 42-49.

⁶ For further information on memorial wall art in New York City, see Martha Cooper and Joseph Sciorra, *R.I.P. Memorial Wall Art* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), and on Chico and Pete, see David Gerlach, "Chico's Loisaida," *Mr. Beller's Neighborhood* (April 11, 2004) [website]; available from <http://mrbellersneighborhood/story.php?storyid=147>; [Internet]; accessed August 15, 2004.

highly committed social activists and their work exhibits a strong connection to the cultural heritage of the community where they live and work.⁷

Mo chara shares many characteristics with these successful international muralists, yet his status as an artist has been ignored or undervalued by the Irish art establishment. Although his work is well known outside Ireland and it has been illustrated in the scholarly and periodical literature of the Troubles, authors have rarely credited his work. His contribution in developing an important tradition of political art in Northern Ireland has not been considered, and his work has yet to be assessed from an art historical perspective. This study will present a thorough examination of Mo chara's life and work in its artistic, political, and sociological contexts in order to reveal the significant position he holds in the history of contemporary Irish art. It provides the first comprehensive study of Mo chara's life and work and will fill in the gaps in extant scholarship, by considering his murals as art objects, not merely as sociological expressions of a war-torn community.

The text is organized as a monograph and follows a chronological structure. It begins with an introductory chapter, "Political Mural Painting in the North of Ireland," which addresses the development of political wall painting in Northern Ireland and its

⁷ For further information on Hulbert Waldroup and James De La Vega, see Dexter Filkins, "Diallo and Controversy Return to the Bronx, as Art," *The New York Times*, April 25, 2001, B3, Ian Urbina, "A Jumping Fish in the Bronx Lands Its Creator in Criminal Court," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2004, B4 and Robert Waddell, "Muralists Turn Communities Nationwide Into Outdoor Galleries," *Hispanic Arts News*, Summer 2001 [journal online]; available from <http://www.latinoarts.org/archive/summer%202001/murals.htm>; [Internet] accessed September 1, 2005.

relation to the sociopolitical history of the conflict. An investigation of the published sources on Northern Irish mural painting reveals that scholars have interpreted the mural tradition from an exclusively sociological point of view and have not considered the artist's role in creating the work or the mural's aesthetic value. In this context, this chapter presents the case that the murals are not merely propagandist images, sponsored by political organizations, but are an expressive form of community-based public art.

Chapter 2, "Early Life and Work 1969-1980" focuses on Mo chara's youth and his early artistic training in Belfast, including an examination of his family life and the social activism of his mother Harriett Kelly, a prominent Irish Republican. The tumultuous political events that unfolded in Belfast between 1970 and 1980 greatly affected Mo chara. This formative decade, when he was between the ages of thirteen and twenty-three, is examined in order to understand the roots of his future role as an activist artist. In 1972, for example, Mo chara witnessed several civil rights protests in Belfast and Derry when unarmed Irish civilians were shot and killed by the British Army. In this pivotal year he joined the Irish Republican Army in order to defend his community from what he considered to be an occupying force. The end of the chapter covers the events of the years 1976 to 1980, when Mo chara was an active member of the Irish Republican Army and when he was arrested and convicted for possession of explosive devices.

Chapter 3, "Painting and Prison" covers the years 1981 through 1985 when Mo chara began to paint while incarcerated in Long Kesh, a prison outside Belfast. Initially, Mo chara produced small drawings by utilizing the tools that were available to him, such as colored pencils and wax paper, used originally to wrap butter. This chapter focuses on

the development of his painting style. It considers Mo chara's use of Celtic imagery, an ancient Irish style, as conveying strong political connotations. Mo chara's use of Celtic iconography, which included figurative representations of Celtic heroes, warriors, and battles, expressed a strong sense of cultural nationalism, much in the same manner that the Mexican murals of José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), Diego Rivera (1886-1957), and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974) quote the iconography of the pre-Columbian past. This chapter focuses on his prison paintings and notes the important influence they had on his choice of iconography in his later murals.

Chapter 4, "Murals without Masks" focuses on the years 1986 through 1990, the most productive of Mo chara's career. During this short time, he produced over thirty murals, the majority of them located in the Republican-dominated district of West Belfast. Key murals are discussed in terms of their subject matter, including images of Celtic mythology, memorial portraits of Irish historical figures, and commemorations of events associated with the Troubles. The discussion of each mural also focuses on issues of production, patronage, technique, and iconography.

The final chapter, "*Time for Peace/Time to Go*" will focus on the work Mo chara produced between 1991 and 1998. This was a period of great transformation for the artist. During this eight-year period Mo chara began to broaden his artistic skills by embracing a new medium, wood. He embarked on a five-year project to carve a large mahogany door that he decorated with intricate Celtic interlace designs using only a small penknife. Mo chara also continued to paint murals and worked collaboratively with other Irish Republican muralists in Belfast, including Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons. These

murals continued to focus on Irish nationalist issues but also approached the themes of peace and justice. The study concludes with a discussion of Mo chara's most recent work and his importance in creating a unique Irish political art style.

Sources

As stated above, the majority of both scholarly and periodical literature regarding Mo chara's work contains illustrations of his murals but these sources fail to identify him as the artist. The first scholarly publication to include images of Mo chara's work is Carmel Gallagher and Anne Hanratty's "War on the Walls," (1989)⁸ which appeared in the journal *Ulster Folklife*.⁹ This article uses Mo chara's murals for illustrative purposes only and does not credit him as the artist. Although this is one of the first studies to acknowledge the importance of Republican and Loyalist murals, the authors minimize the murals by referring to them as merely "political propaganda."¹⁰

⁸ Carmel Gallagher and Anne Hanratty, "The War on the Walls," *Ulster Folklife*, 35, 1989, 100-107.

⁹ Further sources focusing on Northern Irish mural painting in general include a special issue of the Irish art magazine *Circa* (January/February 1983) focusing on political mural painting in Northern Ireland. Articles in this publication include: Belinda Loftus, "Loyalist Wall Paintings," 10-14; Noel McGuigan, "The Open Air Gallery of Political Art," 15-18 and Des Wilson, "The Painted Image," 19-20. Belinda Loftus has published extensively on the iconography of Loyalist art forms including murals, parade banners, and postcards. See Belinda Loftus, *Mirrors: William III and Mother Ireland* (Dundrum, County Down: Picture Press, 1983); idem, *Mirrors: Orange and Green* (Dundrum, County Down: Picture Press, 1994); idem, "Northern Ireland 1969-1988, Enter an Art Historian in Search of a Useful Theory," in *Picturing Power: Visual Deception and Social Relations*, ed. Gordon Fyfe and John Law (London: Routledge, 1994), 99-133. Two texts have been published on the political murals of Derry, these are: Oona Woods, *Seeing is Believing: Murals in Derry* (Derry: Guildhall Press, 1995) and Tom Kelly, *Murals. The Bogside Artists* (Derry: Guildhall Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Gallagher and Hanratty, 100.

One of the main sources for this study is the work of the sociologist Bill Rolston who has published extensively on the subject of Northern Irish mural painting. Rolston's focus is sociological and he sees the murals as reflections of the two communities' unique identities. He acknowledges the status of the muralists as political artists. Although Rolston sees the murals as artistic forms of expression he sees them essentially as "products of artistic and political activity."¹¹ In the article, "Changing the Political Landscape: Murals and Transition in Northern Ireland," (2003)¹² Rolston stresses the political function of the murals. He notes, "Murals are, in short, not merely inanimate objects in space, but a dynamic element in the political process."¹³ This study will attempt to prove that Mo chara's Republican murals conform to this definition. It will outline the way Mo chara has used his work to express his Irish Republican identity and garner support for the Irish Republican cause.

Rolston was the first scholar to identify Mo chara, as well other Northern Irish muralists. In his publications, he discusses Mo chara's life and work in detail. His most comprehensive text is *Politics and Painting* (1991).¹⁴ This work provides valuable information on Mo chara's earliest murals painted between 1987 and 1989. Rolston has published three small catalogs titled, *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland*

¹¹ Bill Rolston, "Changing the Political Landscape: Murals and Transition in Northern Ireland," *Irish Studies Review*, 11, no. 1 (2003): 3-16.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴ Bill Rolston, *Politics and Painting: Murals and Conflict in Northern Ireland* (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1991).

(1992),¹⁵ *Drawing Support 2: Murals of War and Peace* (1995),¹⁶ and *Drawing Support 3: Murals and Transition in the North of Ireland* (2003).¹⁷ The first two texts (1992 and 1995) contain illustrations of the murals Mo chara produced between 1987 and 1995. *Drawing Support 3* contains illustrations of a few examples of the collaborative work Mo chara produced between 1997 and 1998. In “Culture, Conflict and Murals: The Irish Case,” an essay published in the exhibition catalog *Distant Relations* (1995)¹⁸ Rolston argues persuasively that the murals are works of art. This study will draw on Rolston’s work as a starting point, and it will elaborate on the artistic aspect of Mo chara’s murals by discussing the artist’s methodology, influence, iconography, and stylistic development.

The anthropologist Neil Jarman has also published extensively on Northern Irish mural painting. He has published three articles (1992, 1996, and 1998)¹⁹ and one text,

¹⁵ Bill Rolston, *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1992).

¹⁶ Bill Rolston, *Drawing Support 2: Murals of War and Peace* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1995).

¹⁷ Bill Rolston, *Drawing Support 3: Murals and Transition in the North of Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2003).

¹⁸ Bill Rolston, “Culture, Conflict and Murals: The Irish Case,” in *Distant Relations*, ed. Trisha Ziff (New York: Smart Art Press, 1996), 192-200.

¹⁹ Neil Jarman, “Troubled Images,” *Critique of Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (1992): 133-165; idem, “Violent Men, Violent Land: Dramatizing the Troubles and the Landscape of Ulster,” *Journal of Material Culture* 1, no. 1 (1996): 39-61; idem, “Painting Landscapes: The Place of Murals in the Symbolic Construction of Urban Space,” in *Symbols in Northern Ireland*, ed. Anthony D. Buckley (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen’s University of Belfast, 1998), 81-98.

Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland (1997)²⁰; each of these focuses on Northern Irish mural painting. Jarman describes the murals as “artefacts”²¹ that must be considered in relation to the sociopolitical context of the Troubles. He describes the murals as signifiers, which symbolize the identities of the communities where they are located. Jarman stresses the site specificity of the murals and he refers to them as “objects rather than images.”²² In order to strengthen his argument, Jarman illustrates Mo chara’s work extensively, yet he never identifies the artist by name.

In a 1992 essay titled “The Politics of Painting: Political Murals in Northern Ireland,”²³ sociologist Jeffery Sulka also refers to Northern Irish murals as artifacts. Sulka believes that the murals are “cultural artifacts”²⁴ that function as visual signs of resistance. Like Jarman, Sulka refers to Mo chara’s work in order to strengthen his argument, but he never mentions the artist by name. In this essay, Sulka organizes the history of Irish Republican murals into four distinct phases. The fourth phase, referred to as the “period of party-political murals”²⁵ is illustrated entirely by Mo chara’s work.

²⁰ Neil Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

²¹ Neil Jarman, “Painting Landscapes,” 82.

²² *Ibid.*, 97.

²³ Jeffrey Sulka, “The Politics of Painting. Political Murals in Northern Ireland,” in *The Paths to Domination, Resistance, and Terror*, ed. Carolyn Nordstrom and JoAnn Martin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 180-216.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

In the text *Signs of War and Peace. Social Conflict and the Use of Public Symbols in Northern Ireland*, (2001)²⁶ the ethnographer Jack Santino presents a study of the importance of public displays in Northern Ireland. Unlike Rolston and Jarman, Santino does not believe that Northern Ireland's political murals are reflective of the conflict; rather he sees them as integral and active parts of that conflict. According to Santino, "a great deal of the war...in Northern Ireland is not fought with bullets or bombs but with (or through) the public display of symbolic forms."²⁷ Yet, like Rolston and Jarman, Santino acknowledges the site specificity of the murals. In addition, he believes the murals "define the nature of a place"²⁸ and are used to "debate issues of power."²⁹ Santino stresses the performance aspect of the creation of a mural and he sees the muralists as active participants in the conflict.

Santino illustrates Mo chara's murals in his text. He acknowledges Mo chara's position as one of the leading Republican artists working in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, Santino's text contains many inaccuracies in relation to the history of Northern Irish mural painting. For example, he repeatedly claims that the Republican tradition of wall painting began in the 1960s when, in fact it did not emerge until twenty years later in the early 1980s. Santino's text also contains several inaccurate visual

²⁶ Jack Santino, *Signs of War and Peace. Social Conflict and the Use of Public Symbols in Northern Ireland* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

²⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ Ibid.

descriptions of both Loyalist and Republican murals. He misquotes the writing on one Loyalist mural illustrated in his text³⁰ and he incorrectly describes a mural painted by Mo chara as depicting “four” IRA soldiers “dressed in their military fatigues, brandishing automatic weapons.”³¹ This mural, entitled *Loughgall* (fig. 13) depicts six unarmed IRA men dressed as a funerary honor guard. Unfortunately, Santino relies on his erroneous description of this mural in order to strengthen his argument that Republican murals, and Mo chara’s work in particular, are painted as defensive messages and are indicative of what he refers to as an “‘us versus them’ mentality.”³² Santino attempts to prove the false notion that Mo chara is an active participant in the ‘us versus them’ mentality when he verbally inserts automatic weapons into the mural.

This study seeks to prove that Mo chara’s murals broke new ground by presenting nonabrasive images of the IRA (fig. 14). Mo chara turned away from these traditionally defensive images by painting murals that highlighted his community’s cultural heritage. Through his work Mo chara hoped to instill a sense of pride in his community and empower the political message of Sinn Féin, the political wing of the Republican movement. Rather than engaging in a violent war, as Santino contends, Mo chara’s work offers a positive and politically empowering message as an alternative to the reciprocal

³⁰ Santino makes several inaccurate statements in relation to a Loyalist mural illustrated in figure 7, page 39 of his text. The title accompanying the illustration “Cuchullain as Loyalist” is misspelled and should read, “Cúchulainn.” In the body of his text Santino also notes that this mural contains the legend, “Ulster’s ancient defender against the Irish.” The work actually contains the phrase, “Cúchulainn Ancient Defender of Ulster from Irish Attacks over 2000 Yrs. Ago.”

³¹ Ibid., 43.

³² Ibid., 44.

and confrontational violence that was often depicted in Republican murals prior to the late 1980s.

Two interviews with Mo chara conducted by members of the press have appeared in print. One by Victoria White, “Murals” in the *Irish Times* September 3, 1996 and another by Billie Cohen, “Gael Force” in *Time Out New York* May 3-10, 2001. These are important sources that quote the artist extensively and describe his painting process, influences, and ideology. In addition, Mo chara has written several *Artist’s Statements* throughout his career; these provide insight into his evolution as a painter and his personal and artistic objectives.

Methodology

This study employs a contextual methodology that considers the artist’s life and artistic output in relation to the history and culture of Northern Ireland by using the primary material, photographs, interviews with the artist, archival documents, and publications. The majority of Mo chara’s murals are located in Belfast and are easily accessible. In the case of murals that have been destroyed, this study relies on photographs and preliminary drawings that are located in the artist’s archive in his Belfast home and studio. Other major archival and library resources that were consulted are the Linen Hall Library, Northern Ireland Political Collection and The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum Library, both located in Belfast.

This study emphasizes the social, political, and cultural aspects of Mo chara’s work by following the Marxist methodological model put forth by the Siqueiros scholar Leonard Folgariat in his *So Far from Heaven: Siqueiros – “The March of Humanity” and*

Mexican Revolutionary Politics (1987)³³ and *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico 1920-40: Art of the New Order* (1998)³⁴ in which he discusses the corresponding relationship between art and politics. Folgariat establishes a corollary relationship between politics and art and stresses the autonomy of each. Mo chara's work will be discussed as art objects in their own right but their important relationship to the context of the Northern Irish Troubles will not be overlooked.

Mo chara's murals will also be situated in the discourse of nationalism. In this respect, the study follows the ideas put forth by the political scientists Benedict Anderson, in his seminal text *Imagined Communities* (1983),³⁵ and Eric J. Hobsbawn in his text *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1990),³⁶ which expands on Anderson's theory that the principle of nationality is "imagined" and is shaped by a false understanding of history. The historiography of Irish nationalism reveals striking similarities to both Anderson's and Hobsbawn's theories, which notes that the formation of nationalist ideology is greatly dependent on false notions of shared cultural and political identities. It is hoped that this study will show that Mo chara's passionate embrace of Irish nationalism is in keeping with Hobsbawn's idea that "nationalism

³³ Leonard Folgariat, *So Far from Heaven – "The March of Humanity" and Mexican Revolutionary Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³⁴ Leonard Folgariat, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920-40: Art of the New Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) .

³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

³⁶ Hobsbawn, Eric J. *Nations and Nationalism since 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

requires too much belief in what is patently not so.”³⁷ The next few chapters of this study will reveal the extent through which Mo chara’s public murals are greatly dependent on this imaged sense of nationalism.

³⁷ Ibid., 12.

CHAPTER 1

POLITICAL MURAL PAINTING IN THE NORTH OF IRELAND

Historical Background

The conflict in Northern Ireland has often been thought to be a religious war between Catholics and Protestants. The origins of this conflict, however, are much more complex and involve deeply rooted political, ethnic, and cultural differences. The key date of origin, which is often highlighted in the historiography of the Troubles, is 1170 A.D. This year marked the arrival of Anglo-Norman settlers in Ireland.³⁸ Over the course of the next five centuries the native Irish inhabitants slowly lost control of their land through the military, political, and social conquest of Ireland by Britain. Until the seventeenth century, the now predominately Unionist province of Ulster in the north of Ireland, was considered the most Irish part of Ireland. The historian Jonathan Bardon, who has written several texts on the history of Ulster, explained that until the early seventeenth century, Ulster was the most “Gaelic, the most impenetrable, and least known part of Ireland.”³⁹ He further pointed out that at this time the Irish chieftains of Ulster presented the most formidable challenge to English dominance in Ireland. The Ulster chieftains, including Hugh O’Neill, the Irish Earl of Tyrone, and Rory O’Donnell, Earl of Tyrconnell, engaged the British Army in what Bardon called, “the bloodiest and

³⁸ For more historical information, see timeline in appendix two.

³⁹ Jonathan Bardon, *Belfast: An Illustrated History* (Dublin: Blackstaff Press Limited, 1982), 5.

most costly” war fought during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) of England.⁴⁰ In 1603 after nine years of war, Queen Elizabeth’s forces defeated O’Neill and O’Donnell and in 1607 the chieftains fled Ireland. This event, known as the Flight of the Earls,⁴¹ precipitated the British colonization of Ulster. After their departure, the vast Ulster lands of O’Neill and O’Donnell were confiscated by the British crown and redistributed to English settlers. This land redistribution set in motion the Plantation of Ulster, a program that in addition to displacing the native Irish imposed a new culture, language, and political system upon the region. John P. Darby, the ethnic studies scholar who has published widely on the conflict in Northern Ireland, argued that the seeds of the Troubles in Northern Ireland took root during Ulster’s plantation.⁴² He noted that:

The sum of the Plantation of Ulster was the introduction of a foreign community, which spoke a different language, represented an alien culture and way of life, including a new type of land tenure and management. In addition, most of the newcomers were Protestant by religion, while the native Irish were Catholic. So the broad outlines of the current conflict in Northern Ireland had been sketched out within fifty years of the plantation: the same territory was occupied by two hostile groups, one believing the land had been usurped the other believing that their tenure was constantly under threat of rebellion. They often lived in separate

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5-6.

⁴¹ The Flight of the Earls took place on September 14, 1607. The two earls, along with their families, initially fled to France and then settled in Rome. For further information on the Flight of the Earls, see Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press Limited, 1992), 116-118.

⁴² John Darby was the founding director of the Initiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity (INCORE), a joint program of the University of Ulster and the United Nations University in Tokyo, which was established in 1991 to study the causes of conflict in Northern Ireland and other regions around the world.

quarters. They identified their differences as religious and cultural as well as territorial.⁴³

Darby also pointed out that the Plantation of Ulster was highly effective in suppressing the native population. He explained that by 1703 “only 14 percent of the land in Ireland remained in the hands of Catholic Irish, and in Ulster the figure was 5 percent.”⁴⁴ In the seventeenth century the now largely dispossessed native Irish became embroiled in the religious conflict fought over the future of the British crown. During the so-called Glorious Revolution, the Protestant Prince William of Orange of the Netherlands fought his father-in-law, the British and Catholic King James II (1633-1701) for control of the British throne. The revolution was fought largely on Irish soil. The most decisive battle of the war occurred in 1690 along the banks of the Boyne River in County Meath, Ireland. During this battle, known as the ‘Battle of the Boyne,’ William of Orange’s forces defeated King James’ army and therefore reestablished Protestant rule in Britain.⁴⁵ The newly crowned King William III’s victory over the Catholic James strengthened the Protestant settlers’ position in Ireland and ensured Protestant political ascendancy over the native Irish Catholics for centuries.⁴⁶ This pivotal event continues to

⁴³ John Darby, “Conflict in Northern Ireland: A Background Essay,” in *Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*, ed. Seamus Dunn (Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1995) [chapter of book online]; available from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/facets.htm>; Internet; accessed September 15, 2005.

⁴⁴ John Darby, ed. *Northern Ireland. The Background to the Conflict* (Belfast: The Appletree Press Ltd., 1983), 14.

⁴⁵ For further information on the Battle of the Boyne, see Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 162-164.

be an important cultural and political source of conflict between pro-British Loyalists and Irish Nationalists living in Northern Ireland today. Commemorations of the Battle of the Boyne are held annually throughout Northern Ireland. These commemorations are usually in the form of street parades and are accompanied by public displays of art including murals featuring the portrait of King William III (fig. 15).⁴⁷

These commemorations are organized by the Protestant and fiercely anti-Catholic organization the Orange Order, which was founded in 1795 in response to the growth of Irish Nationalist sentiment in Ireland. The Orange Order's mission is to uphold Protestant dominance in Ireland and to maintain Ireland's Union with Great Britain. The Orange Order remains one of the most influential organizations in Northern Ireland today. In addition to organizing the annual Battle of the Boyne commemorative parades, the order also sponsors the creation of William III imagery in the form of public murals, banners, and decorative street arches.

William III murals have become important backdrops for the Order's parades. Neil Jarman, who has studied Orange Order parades at length, noted that the organization views its parades and the decorations that accompany them as keys to maintaining and solidifying Protestant cultural dominance in Northern Ireland. These parades also feature anti-Catholic imagery such as the burning of Catholic symbols, including effigies of the pope. Northern Irish Protestants see William III's victory at the Battle of the Boyne as the

⁴⁶ In 1689, after King James II fled England for Ireland, William of Orange was crowned King William III of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

⁴⁷ For further information on Loyalist parades, see Jarman, *Material Conflicts*.

moment in which their legitimate right to the territory of Northern Ireland was solidified. This event is a powerful historic reference used in the framing of their national identity. Northern Protestants continue to make connections between this historical event and their current political fight to retain control of Northern Ireland. However, Northern Irish Protestants have amended the historical record of the Battle of the Boyne. For example, they have failed to recognize that during his campaign against King James II, William III was supported by the papacy.⁴⁸ Eric J. Hobsbawn has pointed out that it is precisely this type of “invention and social engineering” that “enters into the making of a nation” and that “nations as a natural God-given way of classifying men into an inherent political destiny, are a myth.”⁴⁹ Jonathan Bardon has also pointed out that King William III’s anti-Catholic stance was largely fabricated. For example, he notes that the king did not consider himself to be anti-Catholic and during his reign as the Prince of Orange in the Netherlands he restrained Protestant zealots “from turning on the Catholic minority there and also drew Catholic princes into his alliance against France.”⁵⁰

Today, Loyalist leaders erroneously call on the legend of William III to legitimize their supremacist ideology. For example, the obstinate stance of the Loyalist political

⁴⁸ The papal court formed an alliance with William III to fight against their common enemy, King Louis XIV of France.

⁴⁹ Hobsbawn, 10.

⁵⁰ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 151.

leader, the Reverend Ian Paisley⁵¹ against Irish Catholics is often brought out during speeches made in conjunction with Orange Order parades. In 1998, Rev. Paisley referred to the parade as representing a “day of settling” against Northern Ireland’s Nationalist population.⁵² Northern Irish Protestants, like Paisley, use King William’s victory as their founding myth and they see their identity as intrinsically British. The irony is that Northern Protestants are inherently Irish. As the art historian Brian Fallon has pointed out:

Irish Protestants are no less an Irish type or class than their Catholic compatriots ... Ireland is a land of very mixed traditions, racially, linguistically, religiously and politically; and though Irish Protestants have often in their history tried to pass as English, the pretence has deceived no one – least of all the English themselves. Yeats, the literary Anglo-Irishman *par excellence*, always remained an Irishman to his London contemporaries. The so-called Anglo-Irish, in any case, were far from being culturally subject to the English, whatever their political allegiances may have been.⁵³

In Northern Ireland many of the historical symbols that appear in murals are also based on misinterpretations of historical facts. For example, Loyalist muralists often represent King William III as an anti-Catholic and a defender of the Protestant faith. Thus, Jarman has noted that Loyalist artists have simplified images from the past in order to stress characteristics of the contemporary conflict. He further explained that this

⁵¹ The Reverend Ian Paisley (b. 1926) is the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the largest Unionist party in Northern Ireland, which he founded in 1971. Since the early 1950s he has been known for his staunch Loyalist ideology and his fervent anti-Catholic rhetoric.

⁵² *The Irish Voice*, July 15 – 21, 1998, 3.

⁵³ Brian Fallon, *Irish Art 1830-1990* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1994), 17.

process of simplification involved, “removing or ignoring extraneous details that blur the certitudes and so reduce the event or figure to little more than a schematic outline, the event or hero becomes mythified [sic] and decontextualised from any concrete past.”⁵⁴

Despite this continuous misreading of history, King William III’s victory at the Battle of the Boyne was a highly significant event that ushered in a period of intolerance towards Catholic in Ireland. Bardon noted that this intolerance did not emanate from King William III but was fomented by members of the British parliament. He states that after his victory the king “had to bow to the wishes of the parliament.”⁵⁵ In 1692, parliament passed the harsh Penal laws. These laws consolidated Protestant power and placed severe restrictions on Irish Catholics. Among other things, the laws prevented Catholics from educating their children, inheriting land, or bearing arms.⁵⁶ Darby also pointed out that the Penal laws were also directed against Irish Presbyterians.⁵⁷ This Protestant group, which traced their lineage to Scotland, represented a threat to the established Anglican Church of Ireland and a number of laws such as the Test Act, passed in 1704 prohibited Presbyterians from holding public office in Ireland.

By the second half of the eighteenth century Anglican Protestant settlers dominated Ireland politically, socially, and economically. At this time the local Irish parliament in Dublin was firmly under Protestant control. The historian Oonagh Walsh

⁵⁴ Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, 7.

⁵⁵ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 166.

⁵⁶ For a full text of the Penal Laws, see www.law.umn.edu.

⁵⁷ Darby, ed., *Northern Ireland*, 16.

has pointed out that this local parliament was open only to Protestants, and its members were “required to take an oath denouncing Catholicism.”⁵⁸ However at this time the economic prosperity brought about as a result of the Industrial Revolution led to a growing Presbyterian middle class. This Protestant group slowly challenged the established order in Ireland.

In 1791, Theobald Wolf Tone (1768-1798), a Protestant lawyer from Dublin, founded the Society of United Irishmen in Belfast. This organization called for the establishment of an independent and non-sectarian republic of Ireland governed by an Irish parliament that sought “to unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denomination of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter.”⁵⁹ The Society of United Irishmen consisted primarily of Irish Presbyterians but it gained modest support from Irish Catholics. In 1798, the United Irishmen staged an armed rebellion throughout Ireland. The uprising was put down and Wolf Tone was condemned to death by hanging, but he took his own life before the sentence could be carried out.

Wolf Tone is considered to be the founder of modern Irish Republicanism. In 1968, Irish Nationalists throughout Northern Ireland marked the bi-centenary of Wolf Tone’s birth by forming Wolf Tone Societies. These leftist organizations agitated for government reform by organizing social protests. Members of these societies also called

⁵⁸ Oonagh Walsh, *Ireland’s Independence, 1880-1923* (London: Routledge, 2002), 6.

⁵⁹ Ian Budge and Cornelius O’Leary, *Belfast: Approach to Crisis. A Study of Belfast Politics 1613-1970* (London: MacMillan Press, 1973), 10.

for the formation of a united Ireland. The historian Brian Barton has noted the importance of these societies in relation to the development of the Troubles. He stated that the social activism of the society's members "were to play a decisive role in destabilising the North."⁶⁰

Political groups throughout Ireland annually commemorate Wolf Tone's death. For example, Sinn Féin, the largest Republican political party in Northern Ireland, delivers important policy statements during the keynote address of its annual Wolf Tone commemoration. The journalist Tim Pat Coogan, who has published several texts on the history of the Troubles, described the commemoration as "an annual high-water mark of affirmation of Republican beliefs."⁶¹ In addition, Sinn Féin's political ideals are based on the same principles that Wolf Tone envisioned for the Society of the United Irishmen. For instance, Sinn Féin's primary goal is the establishment of a non-sectarian and united Republic of Ireland. In 1996, Sinn Féin's president Gerry Adams echoed the ideas of Wolf Tone by stating, "a peaceful, just and united society in Ireland must offer rights to everyone, Loyalist and Nationalist alike."⁶² He further noted more recently in 2004,

⁶⁰ Brian Barton, *A Pocket History of Ulster* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1996), 122.

⁶¹ Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace* (Boulder, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1996), 339.

⁶² Gerry Adams, "S É AN RUD É, CULTÚR, NÁ AN MÉID A DHEANANN SÉ," [Culture Is What Culture Does], in *Distant Relations*, ed. Trisha Ziff (New York: Smart Art Press, 1995), 229.

“there is no point in having a united Ireland if the unionists don’t feel comfortable in it. It is key that all people feel a sense of empowerment.”⁶³

In his 1991 text *Politics and Painting*, Rolston pointed out that Wolf Tone’s inspirational words were featured in Northern Irish Republican murals. He described a Republican mural in the city of Derry from the early 1980s that featured a portrait bust of Wolf Tone “with a quotation from him: ‘Too long we’ve borne with smouldering wrath the cursed alien laws.’”⁶⁴ In addition, Belfast muralists have commemorated the 1798 rising in their work. One such mural was painted to honor the Reverend William Steel Dickson (1744-1824) (fig. 16), a Presbyterian minister from Belfast who led the County Down contingent of the United Irishmen in the 1798 rebellion. This mural demonstrates the important role the 1798 rebellion plays for Irish Republicans today. The link between this eighteen-century uprising and the establishment of a united Irish nation corresponds to Benedict Anderson’s model for the formation of a nation. In his text *Imagined Communities*, Anderson notes that the concept of a nation came about in the late eighteenth century “in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm.”⁶⁵ In a speech made in 2000, Gerry Adams outlined Sinn Féin’s political objectives and reiterated Anderson’s

⁶³ Gerry Adams quoted in Paul Donovan, “Strong Irish presence at ESF gathering,” *The Irish World Online*, October 22, 2004 [newspaper online]; available from <http://www.theirishworld.com/homepage.asp?fname=2004-10-22%5Cnews%5C3.htm>.; Internet; accessed August 17, 2005.

⁶⁴ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 87.

⁶⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

theories. Adams traced modern-day Irish nationalism to the 1798 United Irishmen rebellion. He noted that this eighteenth-century rebellion led the Irish to form a non-sectarian force that would challenge British dominance in Ireland and he connected this historical event to the modern struggle for Irish independence by stating, “the dream of centuries of a united Irish nation could come about through the political strength of all the Irish people today.”⁶⁶

The 1798 rebellion alerted the British government to the growth of nationalist sentiment in Ireland. The government’s response was to pass the British Act of Union in 1801. This act established a formal union between Great Britain and Ireland. It abolished the local parliament in Ireland and instituted direct rule from Westminster in London.⁶⁷ Bardon pointed out that the Act of Union was in large part a response to the failed 1798 rebellion. He noted, “twenty years later the self-confidence of the Ascendancy was reeling in the wake of the Ninety-eight insurrection, and the government of Ireland had become utterly dependant on British military and financial support.”⁶⁸ The Act of Union gave Great Britain control over local Irish affairs and established seats in the House of Commons for the former members of the Protestant-dominated Dublin parliament. Thus, Ireland continued to be governed by an exclusively Protestant form of representation.

⁶⁶ Gerry Adams, (speech given to Friends of Sinn Féin, New York on January 13, 2000), Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union Hall, New York.

⁶⁷ The Act of Union, approved by the British parliament on January 1, 1801, established the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

⁶⁸ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 238.

Irish Catholics felt cheated by the act of Union and its failed pledge to grant Catholic Emancipation. Bardon further pointed out that a large portion of the native population gradually called for the repeal of the union.⁶⁹ In Northern Ireland, where differences of opinion between Catholics and Protestants were particularly acute, sectarian divisions began to escalate.

Throughout the nineteenth century several organizations were formed that called for the reestablishment of Home Rule and the repeal of the Act of Union. Some of these organizations were parliamentary, such as the Home Rule movement of both the 1840s and the 1870s. Others were more violent in nature such as the Young Ireland Movement and the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), a precursor to the Irish Republican Army, whose members were known generally as Fenians. During the 1850s and 1860s, Catholics joined the IRB in great numbers. Many joined as a direct response to the British government's insufficient effort to ease the suffering caused by the Great Irish Potato Famine (c. 1845-1849) that resulted in approximately one million deaths, largely from the Irish Catholic population.⁷⁰

In 1886 the liberal British Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898) introduced the first Irish Home Rule Bill in the British Parliament. Ulster Unionists vehemently opposed home rule and they held rallies throughout Northern Ireland to proclaim their opposition to the measure. Although the bill was defeated, its proposals for a devolved Irish parliament in Dublin sparked a debate that would dominate Irish politics

⁶⁹ Ibid., 242.

⁷⁰ For further information on the Irish Potato Famine, see Cecil Woodham Smith, *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-49* (New York: Old Town Books, 1989).

for decades. In 1893, a second Home Rule Bill was introduced and was consequently defeated in response to Unionist opposition in Ulster. The debate over home rule was divided along sectarian lines. The Protestant minority, based primarily in the north of Ireland, prepared to resist home rule by physical force if necessary. Conversely, Irish Nationalists began to call for full Irish independence. At this time Irish nationalism manifested itself in the formation of cultural organizations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association, founded in 1885 to promote Irish sports, and the Gaelic League, founded in 1893 to promote the Irish language and Irish literature. The militant Irish nationalist organizations, such as the IRB, continued to act violently against the British colonial presence in Ireland. In 1883, the organization carried out a series of bomb attacks in England.⁷¹

By the beginning of the twentieth century political divisions in Ireland were solidified and the sectarian divide became more apparent. In 1905 two diametrically opposed political groups were formed: the Protestant coalition, the Ulster Unionist Council from which the present day Ulster Unionist Party emerged, and the Irish Republican political party Sinn Féin. These groups went on to play key roles in the future of Northern Irish politics. Sinn Féin, ‘we ourselves’ in Irish, was a separatist party which called for the complete independence of Ireland and the formation of an Irish Republic.

When the third Irish Home Rule bill was introduced in 1912, the Ulster Unionist Council organized an elaborate public demonstration against the measure. The

⁷¹ Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA. A History* (Boulder, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1994), 12.

demonstration, known as Covenant Day, culminated with the singing of the “Ulster Solemn League and Covenant.” This document affirmed Ireland’s union with Great Britain. According to Barton over four hundred and fifty thousand Ulster men and women signed the covenant, “some writing in their own blood.”⁷²

Contemporary Loyalists in Northern Ireland identify Covent day as an important milestone in their history. For example, a mural painted in 2000 in a Loyalist enclave of West Belfast commemorated this historic day (fig. 17). In this mural the Ulster Unionist leader, Sir Edward Carson is shown singing the covenant on a table draped with the British flag. The mural exemplifies the symbolic importance of Covenant Day in relation to the founding history of Northern Ireland. In 1981, during one of the most contentious years in the history of the Troubles, Ian Paisley reenacted the events of Covenant Day by leading a Loyalist rally to Belfast’s City Hall to protest ongoing talks between the British and Irish governments on the future status of Northern Ireland. Paisley signed a new covenant based on the 1912 Ulster Solemn League and Covenant, which he called the ‘Ulster Declaration.’⁷³

The widespread Unionist support evident on Covent Day in 1912 led the British government to amend the Home Rule Bill to contain provisions that would exclude six Ulster counties from any form of Irish self-government based in Dublin. These six

⁷² Barton, 20.

⁷³ The rally was held on February 9, 1981. For further information, see Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 740-741.

counties contained a Protestant majority and later formed the state of Northern Ireland.⁷⁴ The amended Home Rule bill was approved in 1914, yet its implementation was delayed after the outbreak of World War I. Two years later in 1916, a group of Irish Nationalists staged an armed rebellion centered mainly in Dublin. The rebel leaders proclaimed an independent Irish Republic. The rebellion, known as the 1916 Easter Rising, took place between April 24 and April 29, 1916. During this time two Irish nationalist armies, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, took over strategic buildings throughout Dublin. After six days of combat, the British Army defeated the rebels. Soon thereafter, fifteen of the rebel leaders including the Irish patriot and poet, Patrick Pearse (1879-1916) and the Irish Socialist leader, James Connolly (1868-1916) were executed.⁷⁵ The executions increased sympathy for the rebel's cause and the fifteen leaders became martyrs in the minds of many Irish nationalists. Many scholars believe that the 1916 Easter Rising was the single most important event leading to the founding of the modern Irish state.

Irish artists and Northern Irish muralists have commemorated the 1916 Easter Rising in their work and have linked it to the present struggle for Irish independence in Northern Ireland. For instance, the contemporary Irish artist Robert Ballagh memorialized the rising in 1991 (fig. 18) and one of the first republican murals to be

⁷⁴ The six counties of Northern Ireland are Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Down, Fermanagh, and Tyrone.

⁷⁵ For further information on the 1916 Easter Rising see, Walsh; Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1999) and Max Caulfield, *The Easter Rebellion* (London: Frederick Muller, 1964).

painted in Derry memorialized James Connolly and Patrick Pearse (fig. 19). Today, Northern Irish Republicans honor the memory of these Irish patriots each Easter Sunday in what is one of the most important days in the republican calendar. Annual Easter parades, like the Orange Order marches but certainly less triumphal, are held throughout Northern Ireland. The largest of these parades, organized by Sinn Féin, takes place in Belfast. Sinn Féin often commissions Republican artists to paint murals on prominent walls throughout the parade route. One such mural, painted in 1990 by Mo chara (fig. 20) depicts the General Post Office (GPO) in Dublin, which served as the headquarters of the Easter Rising. The words of the rebel leader Patrick Pearse, who proclaimed an Irish Republic on the steps of the GPO in 1916, are included at the right side of the mural:

The fools, the fools
They have left us our Fenian dead,
And while Ireland holds these graves,
Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.

These inspirational words were included to stress the connection between the 1916 Easter Rising and the current struggle for Irish independence. Northern Irish Republicans see themselves as the inheritors of this revolutionary tradition and they feel that it is their obligation to carry out the wishes of these who were executed for their role in the Rising.

After 1916 there was a wellspring of support for Irish nationalism throughout Ireland. In the general election of 1918 Sinn Féin won a tremendous electoral victory by taking seventy-three seats in the British House of Commons. The elected Sinn Féin

members refused to take their seats and formed their own sovereign government in Dublin, which they named the Dáil Éireann (Assembly of Ireland). In January 1919, during the first meeting of the Dáil Éireann, Michael Collins (1890-1922), an Irish Republican from County Cork and one of the key participants in the 1916 Easter Rising, was appointed Minister of Intelligence and leader of the newly formed Irish Republican Army (IRA). With the Dáil's approval Collins launched a guerrilla campaign against the British government's presence in Ireland. This campaign effectively began the Anglo-Irish War (1919-1921).⁷⁶ The war was fought primarily between the IRA and a special British regiment in Ireland known as the Black and Tans,⁷⁷ for the distinctive colors of their uniforms.

During the war the Unionist majority in Northern Ireland called on the British government to create a devolved government in Northern Ireland. In 1920 the Government of Ireland Act was passed.⁷⁸ This law, also known as the Forth Home Rule Bill, partitioned Ireland by creating two devolved governments. The first, located in Belfast, had jurisdiction over six counties in the north of Ireland, and the second, located in Dublin, ruled over the remaining twenty-six counties. The Dáil Éireann refused to accept the provisions of this law and continued to fight its guerrilla war. In response to

⁷⁶ The Anglo-Irish War is also known as the Irish War of Independence.

⁷⁷ "Black and Tans" was another name given to the Royal Irish Constabulary, the British fighting force in Ireland between 1919 and 1922. For further information on the Black and Tans, see Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 467-69.

⁷⁸ The Government of Ireland Act was passed on December 23, 1920. The full text of the Act can be found at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/goi231220.htm>

the act, the IRA began a campaign of violence to destabilize the north. After three years of fighting Sinn Féin entered into truce talks with the British government. The talks ended in December 1921 with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.⁷⁹ This Treaty called for the creation of the Irish Free State⁸⁰ as “a self-governing dominion of the British Empire.”⁸¹ The Treaty effectively reaffirmed the partition of Ireland by allowing the Northern Irish government to remain independent of the newly formed Irish Free State (fig. 21). It fell far short of Sinn Féin’s goal to procure an independent republic for Ireland. In addition, it contained a provision that members of the new Irish Free State government were obliged to swear allegiance to the British crown. Despite this provision, the Dáil Éireann approved the Treaty by a narrow margin. Soon thereafter, civil war broke out in the Irish Free State between those who supported the Treaty and those who were against it.

The Irish Civil War (1922-1923) caused a deep split among Ireland’s nationalist population. IRA units in support of the treaty joined the Irish Free State Army, headed by Michael Collins, and those who opposed the treaty became known as the Irregulars. In May of 1923, after waging a bloody guerrilla war against the new Irish Free State, the Irregular forces declared a truce. In 1924, their leader Eamon de Valera (1882-1975) formed the political party Fianna Fáil (Soldiers of Destiny), and in 1932 de Valera was

⁷⁹ The Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed on December 6, 1921. The full text of the Treaty can be found at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/ait1921.htm>.

⁸⁰ In 1949, the Irish Free State government formally left the British Commonwealth and was declared a Republic. The country was renamed The Republic of Ireland.

⁸¹ Coogan, *The IRA*, 21.

elected to head the Irish government, a position he retained with only two brief interruptions until 1959, at which point he was elected the President of the Republic of Ireland, a position he held until his retirement in 1973.

In the newly formed British province of Northern Ireland, civil unrest continued. According to Darby, Northern Ireland “was born amid bloodshed and communal disorder...the nationalist minority refused to recognize the new state...at the very time when the institutions of the new state were being established, a considerable minority of its citizens were refusing to participate on committees or to perform any action which might lend support to its authority.”⁸²

The most contentious issue related to the formation of this new state was the establishment of a Boundary Commission. Under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty this commission was to draw the boundary between the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland. Unionist politicians, under the leadership of their first Prime Minister, Sir James Craig (1871-1940), believed that a six-county state, as opposed to the traditional nine counties of Ulster, would guarantee Unionist rule.⁸³ As Darby further points out:

The six counties had been selected rather than four or nine or any other number [because]...the traditional nine counties of Ulster held 900,000 Protestants, most of whom supported the British connection and 700,000 Catholics, most of whom

⁸² Darby, ed., *Northern Ireland*, 21.

⁸³ The ancient province of Ulster consisted of the counties of Antrim, Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Donegal, Down, Fermanagh, Monaghan, and Tyrone. The three nationalist dominated counties left out in the establishment of the state of Northern Ireland were: Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan. These three counties became part of the Irish Free State.

wanted to end it. However, in the six counties...the religious breakdown was 820,000 Protestants and 430,000 Catholics.⁸⁴

Therefore, in this new six-county state, Catholics were now a minority. The political and social institutions set up by the Northern Irish government excluded Catholics from power. For example, the government established a local police service, known as the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). This force was almost exclusively Protestant, and its primary aim was to control Nationalist resistance in Northern Ireland. Barton noted that Sir James Craig established the RUC because “his policy was...to expand the security forces under his government’s control and to extend its emergency powers so that, independently of London, it could cope with any disorder short of full-blown cross-border invasion.”⁸⁵

In addition, the Northern Irish government passed the Special Powers Act of 1922. This draconian set of laws enabled the civil authorities to intern suspects without trial. Over the next decade thousands of Catholic men were interned on suspicion of IRA activity. In 1922, the government abolished proportional representation for local elections and in 1929 for parliamentary elections. These laws particularly affected the Catholic majority in the city of Derry where gerrymandering tactics assured the majority of the vote would go to the Unionist minority.⁸⁶ Thus, in 1933 Sir James Craig declared the

⁸⁴ Darby, ed., *Northern Ireland*, 20.

⁸⁵ Barton, 38.

⁸⁶ For further information on the political system of Derry, see Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites. Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997).

Northern Irish parliament to be a “Protestant parliament and a Protestant state.”⁸⁷ Thus, Craig ignored approximately forty percent of the population of Northern Ireland who were Irish Catholic.⁸⁸

Four years later in 1937, the Irish Free State government drafted a new constitution that had far-reaching implications for the territorial status of the region. The constitution included two provisions, under Articles Two and Three, that asserted the Irish government’s territorial claim to Northern Ireland. Drafted in large part by Ireland’s Republican Prime Minister Eamon de Valera, this constitution defined Ireland “as the whole island of Ireland, its islands and its territorial seas.”⁸⁹ This provision led the IRA to step up its campaign to establish a united Ireland. In 1938 at its annual convention, members of the IRA voted to reaffirm their intention to fight for a united Ireland. To carry out this goal they approved a bombing campaign against targets in England.⁹⁰ The campaign was largely ineffective due to poor planning and internal disorganization.

In the 1940s and early 1950s, the IRA’s guns were mostly silent as a result of the Northern Irish government’s reinstatement of internment without trial, an action that was originally established under the Special Powers Act of 1922. At this time, living

⁸⁷ “Partition. A Protestant Parliament? Up to 1929” [website]; available from http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/timelines/ni/protestant_parl.shtml; Internet; accessed September 5, 2005. This statement is often misquoted as “A Protestant State for a Protestant People”.

⁸⁸ Darby, “Conflict in Northern Ireland: A Background Essay,” unpaginated.

⁸⁹ Raymond J. Quinn, “A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict,” *The Troubles*, 1 (2001), 46.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

conditions for Northern Ireland's Catholic minority began to improve. Darby pointed out that, following World War II, Northern Ireland experienced a period of economic growth and social stability.⁹¹ In 1947, the Northern Irish government introduced free secondary education to all its citizens. This led many of the region's impoverished Catholics to seek higher education. By the early 1960s the Belfast City Council was awarding over 1,000 University level scholarships per year.⁹² This boost in education led to the formation of a Catholic middle class and it was from this group that the voice of dissention was proclaimed. By the late 1960s, Catholic professionals became aware of the discriminatory policies of their government. For example in 1948 a Unionist Member of Parliament (MP) E.C. Ferguson representing County Fermanagh, expressed this discrimination when he stated:

The Nationalist majority in the county, i.e., Fermanagh, notwithstanding a reduction of 336 in the year, stands at 3,684. We must ultimately reduce and liquidate that majority. This county, I think it can be safely said, is a Unionist county. The atmosphere is Unionist. The Boards and properties are nearly all controlled by Unionists. But there is still this millstone [the Nationalist majority] around our necks.⁹³

⁹¹ Darby, ed., *Northern Ireland*, 23.

⁹² Budge and O'Leary, 164.

⁹³ E.C. Ferguson quoted in the *Irish News*, April 13, 1948, "Quotations on the Topic of Discrimination," Conflict Archive on the Internet, University of Ulster [website]; available from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/discrimination/quotes.htm>; Internet; accessed Oct. 5, 2005.

By 1968 members of the new Northern Irish Catholic middle class began to demand an end to this discriminatory ideology. In his 1997 text, *From Civil Rights to Armalites. Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* the ethnic studies scholar, Niall Ó Dochartaigh pointed out that it was the experiences of this new Catholic middle class that led to the formation of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. He stated, “the newly expanded Catholic middle class, working in...service professions, did not become integrated into the dominant Unionist middle class” but “served working-class Catholic communities and were aware of the grievances in these communities.”⁹⁴ This awareness led many young Catholic professionals to form action groups to press the government for improvements in basic living conditions for the poor. The largest and best known of these groups was the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association (NICRA), which was founded in 1967.

On October 5, 1968, NICRA, along with the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC), held a protest march in Derry to demand improvements in public housing. The march was blocked by the RUC who arrived to enforce a government ban on marches. The RUC physically broke up the march by baton-charging the protesters. Television cameras captured the RUC’s use of force and the incident generated large-scale public condemnation. This event is widely considered to mark the beginning of the modern-day Troubles in Northern Ireland. In addition, it persuaded many young Catholics to join the civil rights campaign and it sparked three days of rioting between Catholic civilians and the RUC. Consequently, Loyalists viewed the Civil Rights movement with a great deal of

⁹⁴ Dochartaigh, xv.

hostility and they stepped up their violent campaign against Catholic civilians. In 1969, a group of Loyalist paramilitaries ambushed a civil rights march that was traveling from Belfast to Derry and wounded several of the marchers. In Belfast, just after the summer parade season, Loyalist paramilitaries burned hundreds of Catholics out of their homes.

On August 15, 1969, the British Army was deployed to Northern Ireland to aid the now overextended RUC. Initially most Catholics welcomed the British Army and the relative peace it seemed to have established. Traditional Irish Republicans, on the other hand, did not give the army such a warm reception. Joe Cahill, a veteran Republican, described the deployment of the British Army at this time as representing a sad day for the province. He stated, "It brought tears to my eyes. Here was the enemy, the instigators of what just happened in our country and the people were collaborating with them."⁹⁵ Cahill, who was then Officer in Command of the Belfast brigade of the IRA, organized IRA volunteers throughout Belfast in an attempt to repel the Army.⁹⁶ His efforts were hampered by the IRA leadership based in Dublin, which since the early 1960s had been developing a strategy to move the organization away from armed resistance and toward non-violent Marxist politics. Therefore, in 1968 when sectarian violence broke out, the IRA was ineffective militarily. In December 1969, the organization split into two groups: the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), which advocated the arming and reestablishment of IRA units to defend Catholics from Loyalist violence, and the Official

⁹⁵ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 675.

⁹⁶ P. Michael O'Sullivan, *Patriot Graves. Resistance in Ireland* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1972), 241-244.

IRA, which continued to espouse its Marxist socialist ideology. In addition to defending against Loyalist attacks, the PIRA⁹⁷ also engaged in an offensive war against the British Army. In 1970 when the British Army infiltrated nationalist areas in search and seizure operations, the conflict began to escalate.

On August 9, 1971 Internment was reintroduced in Northern Ireland. This system was notoriously one-sided and resulted in a disproportionate number of Catholics being taken away to Internment camps for indefinite periods of time. The Troubles reached a boiling point six months later on January 30, 1972 when NICRA held a large public march through the streets of Derry to protest Internment. Members of the elite parachute regiment of the British Army fired on the marchers and killed fourteen unarmed civilians. Many of them had been shot in the back at close range. This event became known as Bloody Sunday. The events of Bloody Sunday alienated the nonviolent proponents of the civil rights movement and led to a windfall of recruitment for the IRA. Darby noted that during this time there was an increase in fighting “between the Provisional IRA and the British Army, with occasional bloody interventions by loyalist paramilitaries. The violence reached a peak in 1972, when 468 people died. Since then it has gradually declined to an annual average of below 100.”⁹⁸

In March of 1972, the British government attempted to bring an end to the escalation of violence. As a result, it suspended the local Northern Irish government and

⁹⁷ As the Troubles progressed, the PIRA would generally be referred to as the IRA.

⁹⁸ John P. Darby, “Conflict in Northern Ireland: A Background Essay,” unpaginated.

instituted direct rule from Westminster. In 1976, after several failed attempts to control the fighting that was spreading throughout the region, the British government reassessed its position. One of the first actions it took at this time was to remove special category, or political prisoner, status for those convicted of terrorist offenses. Therefore, Internment was phased out and the system known as 'Criminalisation' began. This system allowed for the conviction of members of paramilitary organizations on the grounds that their offences were criminal and a form of terrorism. Thus, Republican prisoners were viewed as common criminals. They were forced into traditional prisons and denied privileges formerly associated with political prisoner status such as the ability to wear their own clothing. Republicans refused to accept these changes and began a series of protests to regain political status. In 1981 a group of Republican prisoners began a hunger strike to demand the reinstatement of political prisoner status. Ten republican prisoners eventually died on this hunger strike. In death, the prisoners became martyrs to the cause of Irish independence, and the Republican community, from which they came, honored their sacrifice by carrying on their spirit of resistance. It was within this context that in 1981 Irish Republican artists, like their Loyalist counterparts before them, established a tradition of political mural painting within their community.

The Development of Political Mural Painting

The political conflict in Northern Ireland has been primarily played out in the streets of Belfast and Derry, the province's most populated cities. A wealth of political artwork, the most compelling of which appears in the form of street murals, has been

created by artists living in these cities. The murals are located deep within the urban confines of Northern Ireland's city streets. For the most part, they have been painted within low-income communities that are highly polarized and marked out by brick and steel barriers known as "peace lines." These demarcations ostensibly help to keep the peace by physically separating the two rival communities. The peace lines were initially built during the early 1970s by the British army. They consisted of temporary materials such as corrugated steel and barbed wire. Their effectiveness at keeping Catholics and Protestants apart transformed them into permanent features. The anthropologist Mary C. Kenney has noted that, by the 1980s, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive gradually replaced the temporary walls with more permanent structures.⁹⁹

It was within these highly confined neighborhoods that politically active artists began to create public murals asserting the political, social, and cultural heritage of their respective communities. Functioning as territorial markers to define the cultural makeup of the area, these murals are objects of political and cultural artistic expression that are addressed to both local and oppositional communities (fig. 22).

Both Republican and Loyalist murals were often painted as a response to the increasing violence that accompanied the onset of the Troubles. The murals were painted along the front lines of the conflict, and their production within this violent space became an extremely dangerous activity. The danger was particularly acute for Republicans who had been traditionally denied the right to publicly display Nationalist imagery. In spite of

⁹⁹ Mary C. Kenney, "Urban Space, Violence, and Identity in North Belfast," in *Negotiating Identity. Rhetoric, and Social Drama in Northern Ireland*, ed. Anthony D. Buckley and Mary Catherine Kenney (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 77.

this, Irish Republicans have continued to engage in the highly subversive act of mural painting and have used their murals as political weapons for attacking the British establishment in Northern Ireland. Their messages are often directed at the British government and its troops on the street. Loyalist artists, on the other hand, direct their work at their local community and create murals that celebrate their cultural heritage and emphasize their links to Great Britain.

The Loyalist Tradition

The tradition of mural painting in Northern Ireland began within the Loyalist community during the early years of the twentieth century. According to British art historian Belinda Loftus, Loyalists first painted political murals between the years 1908 and 1912.¹⁰⁰ Irish Republicans, meanwhile, did not begin to paint political murals until the early 1980s. This was largely due to restrictive laws, such as the Flags and Emblems Act of 1954, which effectively banned the public display of Irish Nationalist imagery, including the flying of the Irish Tricolor flag.¹⁰¹ Both Republican and Loyalist murals were painted as a response to the increasing violence that accompanied the onset of the Troubles. This violence was often played out on the streets of Loyalist and Republican

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed history of Loyalist murals, see Loftus, “Loyalist Wall Painting”; idem, *Mirrors: William III and Mother Ireland*, and idem, *Mirrors: Orange and Green*.

¹⁰¹ The Northern Irish government passed The Flags and Emblems Act in 1954. It was repealed by order of the British government in 1987. For further information on the act, see Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 604 and 632; Coogan, *The Troubles*, 48; Neil Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, 145 and Anthony D. Buckley, ed., *Symbols in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies. The Queen’s University of Belfast, 1998), 112.

neighborhoods, and the murals were depictions of the artists' direct response to the social politics of the city and to the violent events taking place on the street.

The increase of public murals during the 1980s related to the growing importance of the public landscape as a site for political activism. In an effort to highlight their political and social demands, both Loyalist and Republicans participated in political marches and riots on the streets of their communities. The streets were also an active war-zone in which gun-battles were a regular occurrence. This highly charged environment created fertile ground for the production of socially engaged works of art. Republican murals in particular became powerful signifiers that depicted and memorialized nationalist events. Republican artists became important witnesses to these events and took on a significant role within their own community.

Loyalist artists choose to focus on key historical events in order to stress their contemporary political objectives. The most commonly depicted event seen in Loyalist murals is the victory of King William III at the Battle of the Boyne. As noted above, William III murals are painted in conjunction with Orange Order parades to signify the Protestant conquest of Ireland. In a recent study of Orange Order parades, the anthropologist Dominic Bryan pointed out that the symbols presented in conjunction with the parades are part of a political performance in which Loyalists display their authority. He noted that in Northern Ireland, "part of the process of the political control of rituals is the attempt to control the meanings of symbols...there is a continuous attempt by those in power to impose an understanding of the parades that reinforces their political

position.”¹⁰² Bryan has also noted that these parades are important public testaments of “group identity” in which the elite of Northern Irish society attempt “to represent a unified community in contrast to other possible representations, such as those of class, denomination or perhaps generation, and in doing so sustain its own political position.”¹⁰³ William III murals articulate a sense of Loyalist identity and they present the founding myth that is at the heart of the Protestant ethos in Northern Ireland.

One of the oldest extant murals in Northern Ireland depicts King William III as a valiant hero (fig. 15). This mural was painted in 1969 by the Belfast artist Harold Gibson and is located on Apsley Street in a small Loyalist enclave near Belfast’s city center. The work features King William III astride a rearing white stallion. He is dressed in the red, white, and blue colors of the British Union Jack. The king’s horse towers over a wounded soldier dressed in the orange, green, and white colors of the Irish Tricolor flag. The artist depicts the superiority of British culture and military power over the indigenous Irish population. The Loyalist community to whom this mural was addressed would have seen the work as an allegory, which symbolized the defeat of their Irish Republican neighbors.

Belinda Loftus has pointed out that Loyalist artists have relied predominately on two portraits of William III, in their work: Jan Wyck’s *William III*, 1692 (fig. 5) and Benjamin West’s (1738-1820) *Battle of the Boyne*, 1778 (Collection of the Duke of Westminster) (fig. 23). These paintings could have been seen by Loyalist mural artists

¹⁰² Dominic Bryan, *Orange Parades. The Politics of Ritual, Tradition and Control* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 11.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

since copies of them could be found throughout Northern Ireland.¹⁰⁴ Gibson's mural, for example, is quoted faithfully from Jan Wyck's original portrait. By referencing these works of Great Britain's artistic heritage, Loyalists effectively stress their British cultural ties and proclaim their political superiority over Irish Catholics.

By 1969, during the beginning of Northern Ireland's recent Troubles, Loyalist artists used the image of William III less frequently in their work and they produced more simplified murals that consisted of paramilitary emblems and flags. From the 1970s through the late 1990s Loyalists created murals that emphasized the strength of their paramilitary organizations. These murals were painted as a direct response to the growing activity of the IRA. As the IRA stepped up its campaign to fight against the Northern Irish security forces, Loyalists, in a reciprocal manner, carried out random acts of violence against their Catholic neighbors. At this time, Loyalist artists created threatening images of violence in their murals. Masked gunmen armed and ready to attack featured prominently in their work (fig. 24). These violent images also included acronyms for Loyalist paramilitary organizations, pro-British flags, and other Northern Irish political symbols. The artists created effective weapons that could be used to bolster their community and threaten their neighbors.

The Republican Tradition

Republicans artists did not paint murals until the early 1980s, when a spirit of resistance spread through their community. Bill Rolston, the leading expert on Northern

¹⁰⁴ Loftus, *Mirrors: William III and Mother Ireland*, 24, note 2.

Irish murals, has pointed out that Republican murals did not emerge until the early 1980s because, until that point, artists did not view the streets as “fertile ground for oppositional art.”¹⁰⁵ Prior to this, the city streets were heavily patrolled by Northern Ireland’s Protestant-led security forces, and the average Irish Nationalist felt vulnerable and unprotected. As the IRA stepped up its campaign in defense of its community, Irish Nationalists felt a greater degree of protection and confidence. By 1981, the IRA’s presence as a defensive organization had convinced Republican muralists that the time was ripe to utilize the public space to paint murals. The murals they painted called for action against the government and became subversive objects of cultural resistance.

The initial production of Republican murals coincided with the contentious political events of 1981. As noted above, in 1981 ten Irish Republican prisoners held in Long Kesh Prison held a hunger strike to press for the reinstatement of political status. The prisoners viewed the hunger strike as their last means in their desperate bid to fight the harsh policies of the British government.¹⁰⁶ The Irish Republican hunger strike began on March 1, 1981 and ended on October 3rd after ten Republican prisoners had starved to death. The hunger strike galvanized the Republican community in Ireland and abroad and drew thousands of supporters to the Republican cause. It was marked by the election of

¹⁰⁵ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 73.

¹⁰⁶ For further information on the 1981 Irish Republican hunger strike, see David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987); Bobby Sands, *Writings from Prison* (Boulder, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1983), and Laurence McKeown, *Out of Time. Irish Republican Prisoners Long Kesh 1972-2000* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2001).

the leader of the hunger strike, Bobby Sands (1954-1981), to a seat in the British Parliament. Since his death Sands has been immortalized as a Republican martyr and his image has been memorialized in Republican murals throughout the streets of Belfast (fig. 25).

During the hunger strike period, Republican muralists proclaimed solidarity with the prisoners by creating social realist images juxtaposed with Republican political demands and slogans.¹⁰⁷ These murals became the backdrop of street protests and marches in support of the hunger strike. They were specifically directed at the British government and they became signifiers of the Republican community's political demands. One of the first artists to paint a Republican mural was the Belfast muralist known as Con. Con produced some of the most visually compelling work of this period. Very little is known of this artist and he no longer seems to be active.¹⁰⁸ According to Noel McGuigan, Con started to paint murals in Belfast during the summer of 1981.¹⁰⁹ Con's mural, *Long Kesh 1981*, 1981 decorated a small wall along the Donegall Road, a principal road linking Belfast's central motorway with the Catholic district of West Belfast (fig. 26). The image highlights the plight of an anonymous Republican hunger striker, who is presented as a Christ-like figure and is draped in the Irish Tricolor flag. In

¹⁰⁷ For further information on Republican murals from the hunger strike period, see Noel McGuigan, 15-18 and Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 76-89.

¹⁰⁸ Noel McGuigan discusses Con briefly in his article, "The Open Air Gallery of Political Art."

¹⁰⁹ McGuigan, 16.

this mural Con referenced the religious and political identity of his community and elevated the hunger striker to heroic, even god-like, status.

Con produced several murals during this period and often connected the hunger strike to the Catholic identity of the community. In one of his better-known works (fig. 27),¹¹⁰ Con painted an Irish hunger striker as a Christ-like figure clutching rosary beads. The Virgin Mary is depicted hovering over the bed and emitting rays of holy light. The large H in the background is an aerial view of Long Kesh, which is also referred to as the ‘H-Blocks’ for its unique architectural design. The artist further suggests the link between Irish Republicanism and Catholicism by including a quote from the New Testament, “Blessed are those who hunger for Justice.” Most of Con’s murals were destroyed soon after they were created. Yet, his *Long Kesh 1981* mural lasted over a year.

Republican murals, unlike Loyalist ones, do not remain on the walls for very long. These murals are often destroyed by the police or the British Army through the use of so-called ‘paint bombs.’ These ‘bombs’ generally consist of paint-filled balloons that are hurled at the mural. According to McGuigan, it was remarkable that this mural remained on the wall for close to a year, unlike other hunger strike murals, which were destroyed by the security forces soon after they were painted.¹¹¹ The destruction of Republican murals attests to their highly provocative nature. The creation of these works of art is a

¹¹⁰ The mural, which was originally painted on Rockmount Street in Belfast, no longer exists. A copy of the mural was recreated on wood boards by the Irish Republican muralists Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons in 1998. The photograph in figure twenty-seven is the 1998 reproduction.

¹¹¹ McGuigan, 18.

political act of defiance. While Republican murals are damaged continually, Loyalist murals are often protected and, in rare cases, physically preserved with the aid and approval of the government. For example, Bill Rolston has noted that when a popular Loyalist mural in Derry depicting King William III's victory at the Battle of the Boyne was in danger of being destroyed due to the redevelopment of the area, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive stepped in to save the work. The executive funded its dismantling and re-installation in an area approved by the Loyalist community.¹¹² No such fate has ever befallen a Republican mural. This dichotomy speaks to the government's fervent anti-Republican position and it is an indication of the Northern Irish government's sectarian bias during the Troubles.

Republican muralists have used their work to counter the power of this discriminatory government and have produced murals that depict the strength of the IRA. Between 1982 and 1987, IRA masked gunmen were the most commonly depicted images in Republican murals. These gunmen (and in some cases women) were painted wearing camouflage and holding rifles or rocket-propelled grenades (fig. 28). Rolston pointed out that quite a few of these 'masked gunmen' murals were copied from original photographs of IRA members either on patrol or working as an honor guard at a republican funeral. In these photographs, as in life, the gunmen would have been careful to hide their identity, and Republican artists always depicted IRA members with their faces concealed. Thus, in their murals Republican artists publicly proclaimed the strength of the IRA and its defensive ability against the British security forces on the street.

¹¹² Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 127, note 3.

By 1987, the production of Republican murals decreased considerably due to many factors, not the least of which was the lack of a clear issue such as the hunger strike. It was at this time that Mo chara emerged and changed the visual direction of the murals. In 1981 when the republican mural tradition began, Mo chara was serving a nine-year sentence in Long Kesh Prison for explosives possession. After his early release in 1985, he gave up his military service within the IRA and rejoined the republican fight by picking up a paintbrush instead of a rifle. He devoted himself to the political struggle for Irish independence by creating provocative Republican murals on the streets of his native Belfast and he soon became the best-known muralist working in Northern Ireland.

In 1987 Mo chara painted an elaborate and visually complicated image which glorified the IRA and its members. This work, *Loughgall* (fig. 13) represented a departure from earlier republican murals in that the image filled the entire surface of the wall. *Loughgall* was also one of the first Republican murals to depict members of the IRA unmasked and unarmed. Thus, Mo chara introduced a new form of republican imagery. Mo chara hoped that his community would see the work as a powerful expression of its political and cultural identity. He filled the work with Irish political and cultural references including an Irish high cross, Celtic interlace designs, an Easter Lily a traditional symbol of Irish Republicanism, and the rising sun (a reference to the youth movement of the IRA). In this work Mo chara commemorated the resilience and strength of the Irish Republican movement.

Although the work was directed at his community, Mo chara also sought the attention of the British security forces that patrolled the streets around the mural. He felt

the inclusion of the unmasked IRA men created an effective visual statement which the British forces could not ignore. Thus, Mo chara stated “I wanted to take off the hoods, and say to the British, this is who we are and we are a proud people.”¹¹³ Clearly, Mo chara attempted to engage his enemy in a direct manner. By unmasking the IRA men he conveyed his community’s sense of strength and confidence. Mo chara’s statement designated the mural as a form of protest art. Through this work of art he could confront the British Army in an effective way. Like his Loyalists counterparts, Mo chara featured specific historical events as a way to celebrate his cultural identity. Yet, unlike Loyalist murals, his work seeks to address the legitimate rights of Northern Ireland’s oppressed Catholic population who suffered countless abuses under the Protestant-dominated and anti-Catholic Northern Irish government.

Northern Irish Murals as Community-Based Art

Since the early 1980s, Loyalist and Republican muralists have responded to the events taking place on their streets by creating visually compelling works of art. In addition to physically marking out the areas of their community these artists created a type of political discourse through which they engaged with their community and the community of their enemies. Loyalist artists articulated the Protestant political position over Irish Catholics by referencing historical events, which depicted the Protestant conquest of Ireland. These artists reflected Loyalist resistance to the formation of a united Ireland that would potentially alienate them from Great Britain and place them in the

¹¹³ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

political and cultural minority. Republican mural artists, on the other hand, have resisted the British establishment by painting images which memorialized their fallen heroes and commemorated Nationalist events. The muralists of both groups have created violent images, which sought to intimidate their enemies and publicize their strength.

The signing of the 1998 Belfast Agreement (also known as the Good Friday Agreement) attempted to put an end to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Despite the peace that has fallen on Northern Ireland's city streets, mural artists continue to paint engaging murals in response to the political and cultural events taking place there and the tradition of Northern Irish mural painting continues to grow. Despite this, Irish critics and scholars continue to ignore this vibrant art form, which they consider to be a form of graffiti.

In 1984, during the height of the Troubles, the writer and art critic Lucy Lippard visited Ireland to select work for a contemporary Irish art exhibition in the United States.¹¹⁴ At the culmination of her trip, Lippard was quite taken aback to find that no political or activist art tradition had developed in Ireland. She was most surprised by the lack of attention Irish contemporary artists paid to the conflict. Later that year, in the Irish contemporary art magazine *Circa*, Lippard stated, "I saw very little activist art in Ireland, although I was told that I did see most of the activist artists."¹¹⁵ Lippard goes on to admit, "I am obviously not taking the Republican and Loyalist murals...into account

¹¹⁴ Lippard visited Ireland for ten days in April 1984. She was supported by the Ireland American Arts Exchange Incorporated to select work for the exhibition *Divisions, Crossroads, Turns of Mind, Some New Irish Art*. The exhibition was shown at Exit Art, New York in 1984.

¹¹⁵ Lucy Lippard, "Activating Activist Art," *Circa*, no. 17 (July/August 1984), 11.

here. This is clearly activist art.”¹¹⁶ The question thus arises, ‘why not take them into account here’? Lippard plainly stated that the Northern Irish murals are a form of activist art, yet she does not discuss their importance, describe their imagery, or list the muralists by name.

Lippard is not alone in dismissing the murals; the art establishment in Ireland has a long history of ignoring the artistic aspect of this work. Irish art critics and scholars have overlooked the work of Northern Irish muralists for the past twenty years. For the most part they believe that the murals are a form of political propaganda and they deem them unworthy of study. Bill Rolston pointed out that the art establishment in Ireland has dismissed the “muralists because they [the muralists] know nothing about the intricacies of contemporary art nor have a formal training” and the art establishment has failed “to recognize that there is often great skill in the art works that the muralists produce.”¹¹⁷

More recently, foreign art critics and scholars have recognized the importance of the murals as works of art. American art historian, James Christen Steward noted in his 1998 survey of twentieth-century figurative Irish painting that, “much of the most compelling art made in Ireland in recent years has been in the form of mural art on the walls of Belfast.”¹¹⁸ Steward acknowledged the mural tradition’s importance in the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹¹⁷ Rolston , “Culture, Conflict and Murals: The Irish Case,” 196.

¹¹⁸ James Christen Steward, ed. *When Time Began to Rant and Rage: Figurative Painting from Twentieth-Century Ireland* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1998), 8.

history of twentieth-century Irish art but ironically he does not include photographic reproductions of them in his survey.

In his text *Art, Politics and Ireland*, the Irish art critic Brian McAvera argued for the exclusion of Northern Irish wall murals from the discussion of art and politics in Ireland.¹¹⁹ McAvera saw the murals as merely “propagandistic” images that were uncritical and therefore unworthy of consideration. He stated, “people who work in these areas of the North... are not artists; they do not produce Fine Art. It is an apposite and telling fact that Sinn Féin/Provisional IRA have not, in over twenty years, attracted one artist of substance to produce either murals or posters on their behalf.”¹²⁰ McAvera’s contention that the murals are simply a form of propaganda implies that they function solely to spread the doctrines of a political organization (in this case he refers to Sinn Féin). According to this theory the role of the muralist is negated. The artist’s ideology and artistic creativity is ignored and he or she is seen as a pawn or standard-bearer for a larger political entity. By classifying the murals as propaganda McAvera invalidates the intention, technical skill, and approach of the muralist. Such a viewpoint makes it unnecessary to address art historical questions regarding the artist’s biography, methodology, training, and skill.

In his seminal text on community murals in the United States, *Community Murals, The People’s Art*, Allan W. Barnett pointed that community murals are a local art form

¹¹⁹ Brian McAvera, *Art, Politics and Ireland* (Dublin: Open Air, 1990)

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

and the political and social dynamics of the environment in which they stand must be considered. He stated:

The mural movement differs from previous modern styles, which have usually been short-lived, in that it is bound up with the converging of profound social forces- the yearning of artists for root, of working people for means of expression, of communities for control over their own existence. Professional artists are turning from private careers in the art market to the community and are discovering that art offers the fullest chances for creativity when it is most seriously engaged in common life. The survival and success of the mural movement in fact depends on the revival of local life and the movement of genuine, not token, community self-determination. The struggle is against the alienation of personal careerism, against the reduction of culture to commodities and manipulation, against work without imagination and art without practical utility; it is against the domination of the cultural and social dimensions of life by the privileged.¹²¹

It is precisely this sense of localism that Barnett described that makes Northern Irish political murals so distinct. The art establishment in Ireland devalues the murals in large part because they are a form of community art. In addition, the meaning and importance of this work can only be fully understood when one considers the location and context in which the murals were created. Northern Irish murals share this quality with most community mural movements throughout the world. In their text, *Toward a People's Art. The Contemporary Mural Movement*, which chronicled the community mural movement in the United States, Eva and James Cockcroft and John Pitman Weber noted that it is the local quality of a community mural that not only defines the work but leads to its under appreciation by the established art world. They stated:

¹²¹ Allen W. Barnett, *Community Murals. The People's Art* (Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1984), 19.

The quality of the murals “as art” has been questioned more often than has their authenticity of expression. This skepticism is in part natural. The murals are recent, diverse, scattered, only semipermanent, and of variable quality. It is, in fact, hard to gain enough of an overview to judge. At the same time, some of this critical silence represents social prejudice and ignorance of the aesthetics of murals. Too often the spokesmen of the official art world conveniently pigeonhole the new murals as “protest art,” as “minority art,” as “poor art for poor people,” in order to dismiss them from serious consideration. Murals, however, are not only protests, nor are they simply large paintings on walls; they are paintings wedded to architecture, public art conceived in a given space, art rooted in a specific human context. They are an art form in their own right.¹²²

The artistic merits of Northern Ireland’s community wall murals have most often come into question within the arts establishment in Belfast. In a recent investigation into the state of the arts in Belfast, the social historian John Gray noted that in Belfast, “our major cultural institutions have broadly failed to recognize the existence of the Troubles at all.”¹²³ Gray defined the attitude of the Belfast City Council towards the arts as having “been governed by the five p’s – paranoia, parochialism, parsimony, prejudice and puritanism.”¹²⁴ He further noted that while the vibrancy of Belfast’s local art forms are ignored by the city’s cultural institutions, international audiences have recognized their importance. He stated:

¹²² Eva Cockcroft, James Cockcroft, and John Pitman Weber, *Toward a People’s Art. The Contemporary Mural Movement* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1977; reprint, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), xxi-xxii.

¹²³ John Gray, “Culture is for Change,” in *Re-imagining Belfast: A Manifesto for the Arts*, ed. Mark Carruthers, Stephen Douds, and Time Loane (Belfast: Cultural Resolution, 2003), 9.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

Belfast's particularism has been a focus of international interest, at least at the level of curiosity – one thinks here of the popularity of tours of our paramilitary wall murals by the more adventurous tourists. It is the ... arts that have enabled Belfast, for the first time ever, to reach the world stage on its own merits. It is not that we can point to the great Troubles poem or play, rather to the honesty of explorations of lives lived in a troubled society. In this way or particularism strikes a universal cord.¹²⁵

In addition, Rolston has also pointed out that this problem emanates from Belfast's system of art education. Rolston noted that Northern Irish artists are often trained to avoid the Troubles in their work. He noted that in Belfast's most prestigious art college, the College of Art and Design students are encouraged to turn away from local issues in their work and explore international art styles. He stated:

Arts training takes place at the College of Art and Design in Belfast...it is clear from the course content, as well as from the artistic output of the students, that consideration of Northern Ireland society and politics is mostly avoided. Of course, this is not justified as cowardice or conservatism, but by defining the local as "parochial." In contradistinction, art colleges are concerned with conveying the "universal." The artistic imagination is said to transcend the merely local or contemporary. However, that imagination does give rise to different styles and the assimilation of those styles that are in fashion becomes the core of artistic training.¹²⁶

Northern Irish mural artists engage the Troubles directly and for this reason they are considered by many art critics to be unsophisticated. In a recent interview Jamshid Mirfenderesky, the director of The Fenderesky Art Gallery, one of Belfast's preeminent

¹²⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹²⁶ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 53.

contemporary art galleries, noted that Northern Irish political murals were “not really art, but are really just sectarian graffiti.”¹²⁷ Muralists, on the other hand, see their work differently. For example, the Belfast Republican muralist, Danny Devenny has noted, “A mural has to be visually focused.”¹²⁸ But he admits that in order to make a mural effective he specifically chooses an uncomplicated and straightforward design. He stated, “We try to make the image very simple, so that people can connect to it.”¹²⁹

Other muralists, such as William Kelly from the Derry-based Bogside Artists group, have been critical of the negative press they have received from the art establishment. In 2001, Kelly attempted to turn the table on art critics who have written harsh criticisms of his work. He noted, “mural painters, particularly ‘political’ mural painters, suffer from a prevalent misconception on the part of the ‘guardians of culture.’ Critical writing in art is a commodity like any other and so, like the latest fashion, is falsified in its contents with respect to the class or set whose values it supports and often informs.”¹³⁰ In a similar manner, Lucy Lippard pointed out that the power of activist art lies primarily in a position outside the art world. She noted, “Political realism is usually labeled propaganda...because it is so embedded in content, activist art often eludes art

¹²⁷ Mirfenderesky, Jamshid, typed response to questionnaire by the author via electronic mail, June 16, 2005.

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Hayt, “Art/Architecture; Far from ‘the Troubles,’ Agitprop for Both Camps,” *The New York Times, Arts and Leisure*, October 18, 1998, 36.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ William Kelly, *Murals. The Bogside Artists* (Derry: Guildhall Press, 2001), 99.

critics who are neither the intended audience nor as knowledgeable about the issues and places as the artists themselves.”¹³¹

Political mural painting in Northern Ireland is a form of cultural and community expression. Irish Republican muralists feel that their voice within the community at large is not being heard and they must create obvious and large symbols in the form of murals in order to address this problem. As the following chapters seek to illustrate, Mo chara’s work in particular is an important form of resistance art that expresses his social and political identity.

¹³¹ Lucy Lippard, “Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power,” in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis and Marcia Tucker (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 347.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY LIFE AND WORK, 1969-1980

Gerard Kelly, better known as Mo chara, was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland on January 30th, 1957. He was the sixth of ten children born to Michael and Harriett Kelly. The Kellys were an Irish Catholic family who lived in Ballymurphy, a working-class and predominately Catholic community located in West Belfast (fig. 29).¹³² Since the start of the modern-day Troubles in the late 1960s, Ballymurphy has been identified as an Irish Republican stronghold. In his 1989 text *Ballymurphy and the Irish War*, Ciaran de Baroid noted, “Ballymurphy is a name that has traditionally evoked strong reactions directly betraying the listener’s politics [and] in this staunchly Republican community,” and its residents have “been set on raising their children in a society free from British and Unionist repression.”¹³³ Many well-known Irish Republicans who played an important role in Northern Irish politics, such as Tom Cahill and Gerry Adams, lived in Ballymurphy.

Like most Ballymurphy families, the Kellys supported the Irish Republican struggle for independence. At a young age, Mo chara was taught to question British governmental authority. He was greatly affected by the rebellious spirit of his mother Harriet (fig. 30 and 31). Harriet Kelly was known within her community for her

¹³² The general term, Ballymurphy refers to a community in West Belfast consisting of eight low-income public housing estates. Ballymurphy is also known as Greater Ballymurphy or the Upper Springfield. Ballymurphy is also the name of one of the eight housing estates. For further information see Ciaran de Baroid, *Ballymurphy and The Irish War* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), xxi.

¹³³ de Baroid, 1, 386-387.

outspoken activism and her strong Irish nationalist beliefs. She left an indelible mark on her community and more importantly on her family. She instilled a strong sense of Irish nationalism in Mo chara and encouraged him to be politically active from a very young age.

Family Roots and Irish Republicanism

Harriet Kelly née Carson (b. Belfast, 1920, d. Belfast, 2002) came from a well-known Irish Republican family. Harriet's father, William James Carson, was an Irish Republican who worked as a secretary and fundraiser for James Connolly, one of the leaders of 1916 Easter Rising.¹³⁴ By the 1940s Harriet gained notoriety within Ballymurphy for her role as a leading member of the Belfast brigade of Cumann na mBan [Council of Irishwomen], the women's wing of the Irish Republican Army.¹³⁵ Mo chara recalled that when he was a young boy his mother often invited old Irish Republicans over to their home to reminisce about the past. These evenings were filled with talk of

¹³⁴ James Connolly founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896 and the Irish Citizen Army in 1913. He was executed by the British on May 12, 1916 for his role in the 1916 Easter Rising. For more information on James Connolly, see Desmond C. Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986).

¹³⁵ Cumann na mBan was formed in 1914 as an auxiliary to the all-male army, the Irish Volunteers. Cumann na mBan members fought alongside the Irish Volunteers in the 1916 Easter Rising. The organization went on to play a supportive role to the IRA during the Anglo/Irish war of 1919-1922. During the most recent conflict in Northern Ireland, Cumann na mBan functioned as a female fighting force and an auxiliary organization to the Provisional Irish Republican Army. For further information, see Lil Conlon *Cumann mBan and the Women of Ireland 1913-1925* (Kilkenny: Kilkenny People Ltd., 1969) and Margaret Ward, "Marginality and Militancy: Cumann na mBan, 1914-36," in *Ireland Divided Nation Divided Class*, ed. Austen Morgan and Bob Purdie (London: Ink Links Ltd., 1980), 96-110.

Irish Republican rebellions and they often culminated in the singing of Irish rebel songs.

Describing these evenings Mo chara noted:

As kids we used to stay up at night and listen to them talking and hearing the stories about the old IRA. Stories about the forties and twenties, stories about the B-specials¹³⁶ and what the RUC did and what the IRA tried to do to stop them. And how my mother's uncle was murdered by the Black and Tans and she used to talk about that with them. They were heroic people and we loved to listen in.¹³⁷

Harriet Kelly's position as an Irish Republican leader drew the attention of the Northern Irish security forces who kept a continual and watchful eye on her activities.

She was detained by the police on several occasions. In 1971 Harriet was imprisoned for six months for leading a protest against the British Army presence in Ballymurphy.

Harriet recalled that she "had served six months in Armagh [women's prison] in 1971...and had since spent a total of ten years on probation for anti-state activities."¹³⁸

Harriet's 1971 arrest and her subsequent imprisonment affected Mo chara deeply. At the time he was fourteen and he recalled that he watched in horror as the British Army

¹³⁶ The B-Specials were a legal armed Protestant militia formed by action of the British government in a bill passed on October 22, 1920. This militia consisted of local Northern Irish Protestants who patrolled the streets with guns later supplied by the police force of Northern Ireland. They were known to commit atrocities against their Catholic neighbors. In 1969, in response to the Catholic civil rights campaign, the British government disbanded the B-Specials. For further information see Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 475-76 and Barton, 35, 38, and 142.

¹³⁷ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

¹³⁸ de Baroid, 219.

stormed into their home and took his mother from her bed during the late hours of the night.

On August 9, 1971, the British government reintroduced the policy of Internment.¹³⁹ This policy gave the government the authority to detain suspects without charge for an indefinite period of time. Internment was directed disproportionately against Northern Ireland's Irish Catholic population. The historian Jonathan Bardon pointed out that the reintroduction of Internment in 1971, "was entirely one-sided. No attempt was made to arrest Loyalist suspects [and only] a few Protestants were arrested."¹⁴⁰ In his text *Patriot Graves. Resistance in Ireland*, the writer P. Michael O'Sullivan noted that many of those who were interned were innocent. He stated:

Not one Unionist home had been affected by the ravages of internment. I.R.A. intelligence had received reliable information. All were ordered out of their homes the night of August 8. The British troops caught a pitifully few I.R.A. men and almost none of its officers. There were, however, hundreds of innocent people roused from their beds on August 9, who were manhandled and jailed by an insensitive, repressive government. More than 1,000 members or heads of Nationalist households went 'on the run.'¹⁴¹

Joe Cahill, then the Officer in Command of the Belfast Brigade of the IRA, pointed out:

¹³⁹ Internment was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1922; it was abolished completely in 1980.

¹⁴⁰ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 682.

¹⁴¹ O'Sullivan, 113.

We had prior knowledge of it [Internment] being instituted, and the Chief of Staff [of the IRA] and I spent that weekend around the north of Ireland seeing various staffs, making preparation against internment, such things as insuring that men wouldn't be in their homes when the raids took place. When it did come on the ninth of August, the people's reaction was far beyond anything that I had thought could come. It was 100 percent opposition to internment and backing for the IRA.¹⁴²

On "Internment Night," as August 9th, 1971, came to be known to Irish Nationalists, riots and shooting battles erupted in the streets of Belfast's Catholic neighborhoods. Ballymurphy was the site of the night's most heated battles. During Internment Night, eleven civilians were killed within this small community. Among them was Father Hugh Mullan, a Catholic priest who was shot twice in the back by the British Army while he administered last rites to an injured young man. The events of Internment Night convinced Mo chara, and possibly many Irish Republicans, that armed conflict was the only way to remove the British military presence from Ireland.¹⁴³ O'Sullivan stated, "the support which the I.R.A. got from the people following internment left no question as to the strength of the Republican cause."¹⁴⁴

On August 12, 1971 Harriet Kelly organized a rally in Ballymurphy to protest Internment and to support the IRA. Her role as the leader of this rally eventually led to her six-month imprisonment.

¹⁴² Ibid., 243.

¹⁴³ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

¹⁴⁴ O'Sullivan, 113.

Mo chara participated in the anti-Internment riots that took place in Ballymurphy during August of 1971. He recalled, “I threw stones at the British Army and whatever I could get my hands on, if I had a gun I would have used it against them then.”¹⁴⁵ He was soon arrested for riotous behavior and was taken to the British Army barracks in Taggart Hall near Ballymurphy. While he was there, he was beaten and forcefully interrogated by the British soldiers. He recalled that he “was kicked, smacked, and generally beaten senseless by the bastards to try and get me to give names of family members who were in the IRA. At the time, I thought of my ma. She told me that if ever I was taken in, to say nothing just stay silent. So I did.”¹⁴⁶ Mo chara was charged with riotous behavior and released shortly after his arrest.

Throughout the fall of 1971, Mo chara regularly visited his mother in Armagh jail. At the time, he was amazed by her personal strength and political conviction. He noted, “seeing her there made me realize that you could not find a harder, tougher, and greater woman.”¹⁴⁷

Harriet’s strong temperament was brought out during the many anti-British protests in which she participated during her life. One protest was captured by BBC television cameras and broadcast around the world and it catapulted Harriet to fame. During British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s 1979 visit to Belfast, Harriet confronted the British leader and publicly jostled her before the cameras. Describing this

¹⁴⁵ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

¹⁴⁶ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

event to Ciaran de Baroid, Harriet recalled that she was so incensed by the treatment of Irish Republican prisoners that “I ran up with the intention of getting at her [Thatcher] over the Blanket Men.¹⁴⁸ I got through the bodyguards and they all got the shock of their lives. I shouted at her about the prisoners and the conditions they were living in, then I got arrested. An RUC woman went flying and they called up reinforcements.”¹⁴⁹ The police questioned Harriett at the time of her arrest, but she refused to speak a word and she was sentenced to three years probation. Until her death in 2002 at the age of eighty-one, Harriet actively supported the Irish Republican struggle for freedom.

Although not as well known and outspoken as his mother, Mo chara’s father Michael Kelly (b. Belfast, 1916 d. Belfast, 1990) was also an Irish Republican activist. Like Harriet, Michael was raised in West Belfast. During the 1940s, he spent several months interned without trial for participating in anti-state activities. Mo chara recalled that his father was not as overt about his political beliefs as his mother, but he too was clearly involved in political and military activity. As Mo chara describes it, “I would say

¹⁴⁸ In 1976, several Irish Republican prisoners in Long Kesh Prison began a protest against the British policy of ‘criminalisation.’ They refused to wear prison uniforms and clothed themselves with the blankets in their cells. From that time on these prisoners became known as the “Blanket Men” and their protest was known as the “Blanket Protest” or the “Dirty Protest.” For further information on the Blanket Protest of 1976-1981, see Tim Pat Coogan, *On the Blanket: The Inside Story of the IRA Prisoners ‘Dirty Protest’* (Boulder, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1980) and McKeown, *Out of Time*.

¹⁴⁹ de Baroid, 219.

that my father was a political activist in his day, but he would have been very quiet about it.”¹⁵⁰

In the summer of 1969 Michael Kelly helped to defend his community against attacks by Protestant paramilitaries. On August 14th, 1969 the Ulster Volunteer Force, a Protestant paramilitary organization, and the well-armed B-Specials attacked Catholic homes along the Falls Road in West Belfast.¹⁵¹ The attacks came in response to both the violent disturbances taking place between Catholics and Loyalists in the city of Derry and Irish Catholic agitations for civil rights, which began to surface in 1967. Bardon noted that during these attacks “Protestants surged down the narrow streets interconnecting the Shankill [Road]¹⁵² and the Falls [Road], tossing petrol bombs into houses as they went.... There was evidence later that fully armed B-Specials had lent their support to the Loyalist incursion.”¹⁵³ By the morning of August 15th, five Catholics were killed and over four hundred Catholic homes had been destroyed or damaged by petrol bombs. Bardon further pointed out, “most of those who lost their homes were Catholic.”¹⁵⁴

In their study into the causes of the conflict in Northern Ireland, the sociologists, Mari Fitzduff and Liam O’Hagan have pointed out that this event occurred because the

¹⁵⁰ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

¹⁵¹ The Falls Road, located in West Belfast, is populated predominantly by Irish Catholics.

¹⁵² The Shankill Road, located in West Belfast, is populated predominantly by Protestants, and is a Loyalist paramilitary stronghold.

¹⁵³ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 670.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Loyalist community felt its Catholic neighbors threatened its hold on power, and they noted that the events of August 1969 laid the groundwork for the conflict. The authors stated:

The eruption of violence on the streets [in 1969], and the whole scale movement of populations in urban areas into separate Protestant and Catholic communities led to the formation of local vigilantes that in turn led to the resurgence of paramilitaries in local communities...when it became obvious that those Unionists who were in power were not willing, or able, to address quickly enough the demands of Catholics for civil rights, the campaign gradually developed on the part of some people into a violent campaign which claimed that equality was impossible within the existing state structures.¹⁵⁵

Gerry Adams, who helped defend West Belfast against Loyalists attacks on August 14, 1969, considered this day to be the beginning of the modern-day Troubles in Northern Ireland. He noted:

As dawn rose on the morning of 15 August, it did so over a scene of absolute devastation. Six people were dead, five Catholics and one Protestant; about 150 had been wounded by gunfire and 150 Catholic homes had been gutted. A pall of smoke rose over the Falls [Road]. The old familiar landscape was shattered. The environment that I grew up in was gone. Forever. The self-contained, enclosed village atmosphere of the area and its peaceful sense of security had been brutally torn apart, leaving our close-knit community battered and bleeding in mind, body, and spirit. The everyday world in which we had passed our childhoods had been transformed, destroyed and a sense of devastation filled our hearts.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Mari Fitzduff and Liam O’Hagan. “The Northern Ireland Troubles: INCORE background paper,” [article online]; available from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/incorepaper.htm>; Internet; accessed September 15, 2005, unpaginated.

¹⁵⁶ Gerry Adams, *Before the Dawn* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1996), 105.

The events that took place during the summer of 1969 changed the social and political fabric of Northern Ireland and led to the escalation of violence that would be the hallmark of the Troubles. Bardon noted “By 1969 Northern Ireland was in state of near-revolutionary crisis...ancient hatreds welled to the surface in bitter violence that soon surpassed that of 1920-22. Northern Ireland became the most continuously disturbed part of Europe since the ending of the Second World War.”¹⁵⁷ The events of August 1969 led to the British government’s decision to send troops into Northern Ireland. The riots taking place in both Derry and Belfast placed an intense strain on the RUC and the British government deployed the army to alleviate this strain. However, the British Army’s presence added a new dimension to the conflict and would soon lead to an intensification in the fighting. Mo chara considered this time to mark a critical turning point in his life. He recalled:

I had a feeling, and I was very young at the time, in 1969 I would have been about fourteen, that this was going to turn into a war... I walked the Falls Road to the city center and I remember seeing a contingent of British Army soldiers marching with their rifles in sort of parade form and they came up and told everybody to get off the streets and that instantly brought back to me 1916. That this is what it must have been like when the British came into Ireland then.¹⁵⁸

Bardon pointed out that after the British Army’s arrival in Belfast, the city became a “war zone.” The Army began to erect peace lines to separate the two communities. Their initial role was to act as a peace-keeping force and their primary function was to separate the two ethnic groups. Bardon stated, “soldiers first blocked off

¹⁵⁷ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 623.

¹⁵⁸ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

the streets with knife-rests and concertina wire; later, sensitive areas were separated by walls of corrugated iron bristling with barbed wire.”¹⁵⁹

However, the British Army’s initial role as a peace-keeping force was short lived. On March 31, 1970 a provocative Loyalist parade passed along the Springfield Road on Ballymurphy’s periphery and a riot ensued between Catholics residents and the Loyalist marchers. The British Army arrived to quell the violence, but it soon became embroiled in the conflict with the Nationalist community. For the first time in Northern Ireland’s history, British soldiers fired CS gas canisters at the Nationalist community. Although the army had previously encountered more violent behavior from Loyalists, CS was never used against them. Despite its use of CS gas (also referred to as tear gas), the army could not stop the residents of Ballymurphy and the riot continued for three nights. At this time Loyalist paramilitaries, with the apparent support of British soldiers, invaded the community, injured many residents, and destroyed several homes.¹⁶⁰ Bardon noted that this clear show of collusion between the army and Loyalist paramilitaries led to support for the IRA and as a result the organization gained many new recruits.¹⁶¹

Mo chara recalled that during this time his father helped the IRA protect his community. He stated, “there was a lot of action going on. At that time, every able man was called upon [by the Irish Republican Army] to fight the British Army. I would also say that my father was involved then in defending his community and he took up the call

¹⁵⁹ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 671.

¹⁶⁰ For further information on the Ballymurphy riots of March 1970, see de Baroid, 41-45.

¹⁶¹ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 671.

and fought with them.”¹⁶² However, although he was supportive of the IRA, Michael Kelly was not an active service member within the organization.

Mo chara was influenced by the actions of his two older brothers, William and Michael who were both active Republicans. In 1971, William and Michael Kelly were arrested and interned in Long Kesh Internment Camp. This British-established camp was located a few miles outside Belfast and it was notorious for its abusive tactics. As Mo chara watched his brothers being taken away, he recalled that he “felt as though they were being put in a concentration camp. I remember my thoughts were of my mother and how she felt ... and her thinking that there was a strong chance of her sons dying there in Long Kesh.”¹⁶³

By the fall of 1971 Irish Nationalists accused the British government of singling out and brutally torturing Catholic internees in Long Kesh. The European Commission of Human Rights investigated these allegations and its report revealed “that internees had been punched, beaten with batons and forced to run over broken glass; that eleven men had been hooded, deprived of food, drink, sleep and toilet facilities, and beaten; that others had been blindfolded and thrown out of helicopters hovering just above the ground.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 684.

On September 2, 1976 the British government was found guilty of Human Rights abuses in Long Kesh. Gerry Adams, who was interned in Long Kesh in the early 1970s, recalls seeing British Army soldiers unleash attack dogs on internees. He noted that Republican internees in Long Kesh were singled out “for special attention as the British engaged in a grotesque exercise to test techniques, new and old, of torture.”¹⁶⁵ Mo chara’s brothers William and Michael were tortured during their time in Long Kesh. Their experiences helped to solidify Mo chara’s support for the Irish Nationalist struggle for independence and it led him to join the Ballymurphy chapter of Na Fianna Éireann, the youth movement of the IRA.¹⁶⁶

Early Artistic Education and Formation of Irish Cultural Identity

Mo chara’s Republican upbringing led him to explore the cultural, artistic, and historic aspects of his native Irish roots. Throughout his career Mo chara understood the historical and political implications of the Celtic Revival style. He considered ancient Irish art to be a symbol of Irish cultural nationalism. For over a century Irish Republicans have used Celtic designs to symbolize their resistance to British rule. For example, in her painting *Éire*, 1907 (fig. 32) the Irish Nationalist artist Beatrice Moss Elvery (also known as Lady Glenavy) (1881-1970) depicted Mother Ireland as a powerful Celtic woman

¹⁶⁵ Adams, *Before the Dawn*, 160.

¹⁶⁶ The Fianna Éireann were a Celtic tribe that lived in Ireland in the third century A.D. and defended Ireland against invasions. The youth movement of the IRA takes its name from this ancient group.

dressed in a green *cucullus*, or Celtic hooded cloak that is clasped with an ornament resembling the *Tara Brooch*, c. 700 (National Museum of Ireland, Dublin).¹⁶⁷

Elvery was one of the artists of the Celtic Revival (1830-1930). This cultural movement, centered in Dublin, was characterized by the resurgence of ancient Irish culture, language, poetry, mythology, and art.¹⁶⁸ The movement had many political implications. Some of its practitioners, including the writers William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) and John Millington Synge (1871-1909), and the artists George Russell (1867-1935) and Oliver Sheppard (1865-1941), created work that contributed to a growth in Irish Nationalism. Most of those who participated in the revival were staunch supporters of Irish independence. According to Father Jeremiah O'Donovan, a revival member, the Celtic Revival was intimately connected to the fight for Irish Nationalism. He noted that the movement "aimed at the creation of an Irish Ireland... and the development of Ireland from within by embracing language, literature, art, industries, and music."¹⁶⁹

The visual artists of the Celtic Revival produced decorative work based on pre-Christian Irish art. The most common motif used by Celtic Revival artists was the triple spiral design, such as the one that decorates the entrance stone to one of Ireland's earliest

¹⁶⁷ Steward, ed., 130.

¹⁶⁸ For further information on the Celtic Revival, see Jeanne Sheehy, *The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past: The Celtic Revival 1830-1930* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1980); T.J. Edelstein, ed., *Imagining an Irish Past: The Celtic Revival 1840-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), and John Turpin, *Oliver Sheppard 1865-1941* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

¹⁶⁹ Sheehy, 98.

historic sites, the passage grave at Newgrange in County Meath, Ireland (c. 3,000 - 2500 B.C.) (fig. 33).

Although the artistic style associated with the Celtic Revival diminished in popularity in the Republic of Ireland after partition was imposed in 1922, its ideals continued to flourish in Northern Ireland. Belinda Loftus has pointed out that beginning in the 1960s in Northern Ireland there was a resurgence of the Celtic Revival.¹⁷⁰ In many Nationalist areas throughout Northern Ireland Irish Republicans stressed their cultural resistance to British rule by promoting the language, art, and literature of Ireland. Republican artists embraced Celtic imagery in order to assert their distinct Irish identity. Loftus has further pointed out that Celtic imagery was one of the most prominent art forms found in Republican households in Northern Ireland. She noted that one of the most popular art forms in Republican homes is the Irish High Cross decorated with Celtic-interlace designs. Celtic interlace also featured prominently in Republican Christmas cards (fig. 34).¹⁷¹

Mo chara was introduced to the art of ancient Ireland between 1963 to 1969 while he attended primary school. Mo chara attended Saint Aidan's Catholic primary school in Ballymurphy. St. Aidan's was a Christian Brothers school, and was under the control of the Roman Catholic Church. The Northern Irish government allowed the Catholic Church

¹⁷⁰ Loftus, *Mirrors: Orange and Green*, 93.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

the freedom to organize the curriculum within its schools.¹⁷² Thus, the Christian Brothers of St. Aidan's devised a Catholic program that stressed Irish language, culture, and history. This curriculum was in keeping with the ideals of the Celtic Revival.

When Mo chara was seven his art teacher, Brother Carlin, introduced him to Celtic imagery. This ancient Irish art form, with its intricate designs and vivid colors, appealed to Mo chara's nationalistic sensibility. He received art lessons in which the Celtic-inspired imagery from the medieval Irish manuscript, *The Book of Kells*, late eighth century (Trinity College, Dublin) served as a model (fig. 35). Mo chara recalled that Brother Carlin challenged his class to reproduce a complicated Celtic design reproduced from *The Book of Kells*. Although he was young at this time Mo chara completed the task with ease. He noted:

The teacher showed us a Celtic design from *The Book of Kells* and he showed us how to draw it ... he actually gave us graph paper, he drew it on the board and we had to pick it out of the graph, it was going to be very hard, but I remember doing it and just letting the pencil lie on it and just trailing it across the paper and I remember bringing it up to the teacher and he held it up to the class and said, now this is the way you do it. I was seven years of age and to me it seemed very easy, but the other ones who were doing it, were trying too hard to figure it out. So that was a good boost in a sense, you know you are seven years of age and the master comes up and picks your work. I really liked that.¹⁷³

Mo chara seems to have had an innate ability to reproduce extremely complicated

Celtic designs. As a young boy he often sketched Celtic artwork as a hobby. Later in his

¹⁷² According to the Northern Irish Education Act of 1930, two school systems were allowed to operate in the state of Northern Ireland, the Protestant and the Catholic. Protestant schools were fully funded by the government but Catholic schools, which were considered to be the responsibility of the Catholic Church, did not receive government funding. See Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 503-506.

¹⁷³ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

career as a muralist his artistic style was characterized by the use of complicated Celtic imagery (fig. 36).

In his primary school education Mo chara learned Irish culture and history. Yet, he recalled that he was most interested in experiencing Irish culture through its ancient art forms. As a young boy he felt very excited by the Celtic imagery he saw in school. He noted:

I loved art in school but I went to art because it was better for me than to do math, or religious training, I didn't want to do that, all I wanted to do was art, I loved art, it must have been in my head then at a young age, that I wanted to do it. I basically am a person who loves to construct things, I like to make things. I like to create things...I said to myself this is what I want to do.¹⁷⁴

Mo chara's artistic education continued at St. Thomas's Secondary School in Ballymurphy where he worked as an assistant to the school's art teacher, Mr. Michael McCluskey (fig. 29). As an art assistant, Mo chara's duties included cleaning brushes, and mixing colors for painting classes. He remembered being very curious about all the tools he encountered in the school's art studio. For example, he recalled being fascinated by "the compass Mr. McCluskey used to draw perfect circles on the wall."¹⁷⁵ Years later when he began his first mural Mo chara recalled the device and used one like it to draw the circular designs in the work.

During his second term at St. Thomas's, Mo chara assisted Mr. McCluskey in creating a life-size fiberglass statue of St. Thomas to decorate the exterior of the school.

¹⁷⁴ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

¹⁷⁵ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

This was Mo chara's first experience creating a large work of public art. He assisted in all aspects of the work's production. It was a difficult and time-consuming process but he relished the challenge and felt that the experience was a great education for him.

Mo chara graduated from St. Thomas's Secondary School in 1972. This year marked another important turning point in his life. By this time the Troubles escalated to an explosive point and the political and social atmosphere in which he lived was spiraling out of control. On January 30, 1972 Mo chara celebrated his fifteenth birthday. This day was also marked by Bloody Sunday when the British Army killed fourteen unarmed civilians in Derry during NICRA'S march against Internment. Immediately following Bloody Sunday there was a surge in violence throughout Northern Ireland and as noted in chapter one, the event led to an increase in support for the IRA.

The horrific events of Bloody Sunday impacted Mo chara tremendously and it was one of the contributing factors that led him to join the Provisional IRA a few months later. Based on his Republican background, it would seem logical that Mo chara would join the IRA, yet when asked if he ever felt pressured by his family to join the organization he responded:

No, absolutely not. My ma never said we [he and his siblings] should. Actually she didn't want us to, because she didn't want to see us get killed. You see once you join up, you are guaranteed that you will either spend most of your life in prison or be killed. No, I don't think that I ever felt that I had an obligation to join the struggle, I just joined it because I wanted to join it, because I seen [sic] injustice and I wanted to fight it. And I was prepared to die. What was the big deal, because they [the British Army] were killing us anyway.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

By 1972, Mo chara believed that the only way he could contribute to the Republican struggle was to help to get the British Army out of Ireland through the use of physical force. He recalled:

I never was involved in violence in any shape or form until I began to see the British army attack my people. This was when I was thirteen or fourteen, that is when I began to riot and was arrested for the first time; to me if I hadn't had stones, I would have been throwing bombs at them. I would have done whatever I could have at that particular time when I was only thirteen. I would have thrown bombs; there is no doubt about it. I would say that most of the people who were out rioting would have thought the same as well. Because they [the British Army] were coming in snatch squads and arresting and beating people up, coming in and beating men, women and children. What were we to do, stand by and let them do it? I would say that I got involved in political action the first day I threw a stone. I was involved in attacking the British Army trying to drive the British Army out. So we could stop them from killing us and gassing us. The other thing that was important was Irish Freedom. That feeling I had for Irish Freedom still lasts today, that is exactly what I fought for and that is still what I hope to see before I die.¹⁷⁷

Mo chara's words echo the sentiment of many Irish Republicans who have felt compelled to fight against the British presence in Ireland. For example, the early twentieth-century Irish Republican Maude Gonne (1865-1953) stated, "I have hated war and am by nature and philosophy a pacifist, but it is the English who forced war upon us, and it is the first principle of war to kill the enemy."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ O'Sullivan, 118. In 1900, Maude Gonne founded of the women's Republican group, Inghinidhe na h'Éireann [Daughters of Ireland]. She is also known for her portrayal of the original Cathleen in William Butler Yeats' Irish nationalist play, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902). For further information on Maude Gonne, see Margaret Ward, *Maude Gonne: Ireland's Joan of Arc* (London: Pandora Press, 1990).

Mo chara was an active Republican fighter between 1972 and 1981, when he was between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. For the majority of this time, Mo chara had little contact with art. As he recalled his focus was “the struggle”¹⁷⁹ for Irish freedom. Although active within the army for nine years, Mo chara was hesitant to speak freely regarding this time of his life. In this sense he was following the advice of his mother to “say nothing” and “just stay silent” on the matter. Like many Irish Republicans, Mo chara found it difficult to discuss his involvement in the Irish Republican Army. He believes that his candor on the subject could be used against him in the future and he continues to uphold the organization’s code of secrecy. Yet, he believed strongly in his convictions and felt very proud of the part he played in fighting for a united Ireland. He described this in the following way, “Irish Freedom ... is exactly what I fought for...and that was the reason [I fought]. It wasn’t because I just fought people for the love of it. It was to see my country free.”¹⁸⁰

In 1972 Mo chara worked as an apprentice upholsterer at Charter Upholsterers located in the Falls neighborhood of West Belfast. He remained in this position for five years. In the spring of 1976, at the age of nineteen Mo chara married Colette Philips, a local Ballymurphy girl he had known since his childhood. The couple settled into a home in Ballymurphy and they had two children. The first, born in 1979 was a girl named Gerda and the second born in 1981 was a boy named Tony.

¹⁷⁹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

Early Political Art

In 1976 shortly after his marriage to Colette, Mo chara took up photography as a hobby. He recalled that he was fascinated with the art of photography from a early age.

He commented:

I was always interested in photography since I was very young. I remember when I was young there was this girl in Ballymurphy who used to always take pictures of kids on the street and she was the sort of local photography person. I always thought that was a great thing and I thought about doing that myself when I got older. So when I got just old enough I bought a wee instamatic and I always had it with me. Then, much later after I got married I bought myself a good camera, and I started taking photographs of people around my neighborhood. People who saw my photographs thought they were good. And soon I must have established a reputation for myself. But the idea for me was to just photograph what I was seeing because I thought it should be preserved.¹⁸¹

Mo chara photographed the events he witnessed on the streets outside his home. He wanted to capture the dynamic of the Troubles as they were being played out before him. After a few years of “establishing a reputation” for himself, Mo chara became a photographer for the Irish Republican newspaper *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. He worked for the newspaper between 1976 and 1979. Mo chara enjoyed the work because through his photographs he could inform the larger Republican community of the troubled events taking place in Belfast.

Mo chara’s photographs highlighted the atrocities committed by the Northern Irish security forces and the strength of the Republican community. Describing the subject matter of his photographs Mo chara noted, “It was just what you would expect to

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

see in a war zone, protests...people getting shot, beat up, getting hit with plastic bullets, being beaten up by the British army. I wanted to capture that all on film, but it was also really important for me to show my community fighting back, so I loved to photograph the resistance.”¹⁸² One of the most interesting photographs Mo chara took depicted an active service unit of six IRA volunteers with their guns drawn moving through the streets of Ballymurphy. The photograph was taken just before the Republican unit engaged the British Army. The image was reproduced in a mural by the Republican muralists Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons. It is located on the street where Mo chara took the original photograph (fig. 37).¹⁸³ Although journalistic in nature, Mo chara’s photographs were precursors to his later political wall murals. Like these photographs his murals highlighted the events taking place within his community and became an aid to understanding the history of the conflict.

The Divis Mountain ‘H’

During the fall of 1980 Mo chara produced his first work of public art. This work, entitled *H*, was a large earthwork in the form of the letter ‘H’.¹⁸⁴ The construction of the

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ The office of *An Phoblacht/Republican News* does not contain an open photographic archive and Mo chara does not have copies of these photographs. Therefore, I was unable to view Mo chara’s news photographs. I have relied primarily on my interviews with Mo chara for all information related to these photographs. In an interview on July 25, 2002 Mo chara informed me that the mural in figure 37 is based on his original photograph.

¹⁸⁴ Photographs of this work do not exist.

H earthwork was supported by the West Belfast chapter of the National H-Block Committee. This Republican organization, formed in 1979 in Belfast, was created to mobilize support for the Irish Republican prisoners in Long Kesh who were fighting for the re-instatement of political prison status.¹⁸⁵ In 1980, when seven Republican prisoners began a hunger strike, the organization intensified its campaign.¹⁸⁶ It held street demonstrations where marchers held banners and placards featuring artwork that called for solidarity with the men on hunger strike (fig. 38).

In 1980 during a meeting of the West Belfast H-Block Committee, Mo chara suggested that a large letter ‘H’ be erected on the side of Divis Mountain in West Belfast to bring attention to the 1980 hunger strike. The mountain’s prominent location meant that the work would be highly visible throughout Belfast. The H-shape referenced the architectural design of Long Kesh. The committee received the idea with great enthusiasm, went ahead with the project, and appointed Mo chara as its director. Mo chara assembled a team of about fifty people to produce the work. The *H* was created by

¹⁸⁵ When the British government instituted the system of ‘criminalisation,’ Long Kesh Internment camp was closed and a new prison, known as the Maze Prison, was constructed to take its place. Republican prisoners who refused to accept the removal of special category status continued to refer to the site as “Long Kesh.” In this study the prison is referred to as Long Kesh so that consistency with the artist’s statements can be maintained.

¹⁸⁶ The 1980 Irish hunger strike began on October 27, 1980. It was called off on December 18, 1980 after fifty-three days. The prisoners called an end to the strike because they believed the British government agreed to meet their demands. They later realized that they would not be entitled to political prisoner status and a short time later a second hunger strike, the better known of the two, began on March 1, 1981. For more information on the 1980 hunger strike, see Jacqueline Dana, “The 1980 Hunger Strike,” [article online]; available from <http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/1980.html>; Internet, accessed July 30, 2005; and McKeown, 72-77.

digging the letter's shape into the mountain, and filling it in with white lime. Mo chara recalled:

It took about forty or fifty people to do this. So we got up there and we dug it out to about forty-feet long and maybe about twenty feet to thirty feet and we poured the white lime...and someone brought petrol up with them and threw petrol up into the H and set it on fire and it was very effective. Everyone who saw it down here [in West Belfast] said it was class. And then people that were coming by on the M-1 [Belfast motorway] could see it; people who were coming in on airplanes could see it. The big H on the mountain. They would probably say what does that mean? I would say that that would be my first involvement in community-political art and it really made me feel great. It filled me with the idea that this was what I wanted to do.¹⁸⁷

Mo chara felt that the West Belfast H-Block Committee had been very effective in garnering support for the hunger strike and he continued to work with them. As he indicated in the statement above, he strongly felt that producing political art could be an effective way to press for political change. The H-Block Committee was a perfect vehicle for him to experiment with his new interest in political art. In one of the first articles to be published on Irish Republican art entitled "The Open Air Gallery of Political Art," the author Noel McGuigan noted that the H-Block Committee continued to sponsor the creation of a variety of public awareness works. McGuigan noted that, "on the walls and hoardings there appeared graffiti calling for 'the five just demands' [of the hunger strikers] and...on walls and roads were drawn outlines of coffins, three coffins were

¹⁸⁷ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

joined to form the letter H. Graffiti and posters pleaded ‘Don’t let them die,’ elsewhere the slogans demanded ‘Give them their rights not their last rights.’”¹⁸⁸

In addition to these inventive works of protest art, the committee also sponsored the creation of large letter H’s to be placed in highly visible areas throughout Northern Ireland. Mo chara joined other H-Block supporters in making these letters. He created several ten by fourteen foot high H’s made of painted plywood. He hung them from prominent locations throughout West Belfast (fig. 39).¹⁸⁹ He placed most of them on the tall electrical pylons in West Belfast. Mo chara believed these pylons were “effective because you could see the H from everywhere.” He also noted that “after I put one up on the Whiterock Road, someone went up really high and put a [Irish] tricolor [flag] on top as well. And you could imagine the RUC’s frustration. In 1980, could you imagine a tricolor flying so high and they couldn’t touch it, because of the danger of electrocution they were afraid to go up there and take it down? And so soon enough everyone began to put tricolors up on electrical pylons.”¹⁹⁰

The inclusion of the Irish Tricolor flag made the work more compelling visually but it also added to the work’s politically subversive nature. In 1980, the public display of an Irish Tricolor flag was considered to be a provocative action against the government.

¹⁸⁸ McGuigan, 15.

¹⁸⁹ Photographs of Mo chara’s pylon H’s do not exist. The image in figure 39 is a 2001 recreation of the pylon H’s that first began to appear in 1980. The H in this photograph commemorates the twentieth anniversary of the Irish Republican hunger strike of 1981.

¹⁹⁰ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

The Flags and Emblems Act of 1954 made it illegal to publicly display this flag. Since this was considered a prohibited activity, the simple act of adding the Tricolor flag to the work made it an effective artistic statement of resistance.¹⁹¹ Mo chara has continually used the Tricolor in his own art and he believes its inclusion adds a strong sense of cultural nationalism to his work.

Arrest

Mo chara continued to work with the H-Block Committee until the end of the hunger strike in December of 1980. During this time he was also on active duty for the Republican Army. In January of 1981 his service within the guerilla army and his burgeoning public art career were cut short. On January 13th, 1981 Mo chara was arrested while he was traveling on a road outside the town of Downpatrick in County Down, Northern Ireland. According to the government's arrest report, at the time of his capture Mo chara was driving a car containing "two beer keg bombs" that were destined for Downpatrick.¹⁹² The explosives made with a combination of fertilizer and nitrate had been put together by another member of his IRA unit. Mo chara was designated to drive the car into Downpatrick, turn on the timer for detonation, and call in a warning to the

¹⁹¹ One of the preliminary events leading up to the Troubles occurred in 1964. In September of that year, rioting broke out in Belfast for the first time since the late 1930s when members of the RUC forcibly removed an Irish Tricolor flag from the window of the Republican headquarters on Divis Street in West Belfast. For further information on the riots of 1964, see Jonathan Bardon, *Belfast*, 271; idem, *A History of Ulster*, 632 and Andrew Boyd, *Holy War in Belfast* (Tralee: Anvil Books, 1969).

¹⁹² *Belfast Telegraph*, January 14, 1981, 4.

police. But as he noted “an informer within the IRA set us up... and they captured us before it all could happen.”¹⁹³

After his arrest, Mo chara was taken to Crumlin Road Jail in Belfast, where he remained until his conviction on March 11, 1982. He was found guilty on three counts including “possession of explosives with intent” and given a sentence of “nine years, nine years, and six years.”¹⁹⁴ This sentence was later reduced and Mo chara served four years and nine months in Long Kesh. The years he spent in prison proved to be an important period of growth for him both in terms of his artistic and political education. They will be discussed in chapter three.

¹⁹³ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3
PRISON AND PAINTING
1981-1985

On March 12, 1982 Mo chara entered Long Kesh and began a new and intensely significant phase in his life. His experiences in prison continued to affect him deeply long after his release. The time he spent in prison had a tremendous impact on the formation of his personality and his political ideology. Also, during the four years and nine months Mo chara spent in Long Kesh he developed and refined his artistic skills.

‘Long Kesh University’

Although he received a small amount of art training in his primary and secondary school educations, Mo chara is primarily a self-taught artist. During his incarceration Mo chara took advantage of the educational facilities of Long Kesh. Under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, Republican prisoners in Long Kesh were able to develop an educational system. Education was an important component in the Republican fight against the prison authorities. Neil Jarman has pointed out that “the prisoners taught themselves political theory, Irish history and the Irish language.”¹⁹⁵ Mo chara noted, “the thing with the H-Blocks was that it was a place meant to break and destroy Republicans...but we used it against them and we turned Long Kesh into the ‘Republican university.’ That’s what it is called in Belfast, the university of Long Kesh because it was

¹⁹⁵ Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, 233.

in there that all of the ex-prisoners got their education.”¹⁹⁶

In his definitive study of Republican prisoners in Long Kesh, Lawrence McKeown, an ex-Republican prisoner detailed the formation of the Republican educational system. According to McKeown the prisoners “organized their own education programme [sic] which revolved primarily around lectures on Republicanism and Irish language classes.”¹⁹⁷ The curriculum evolved to include classes on Irish history, culture, and politics. McKeown explained that education was a primary concern for Republican prisoners. Although they were under the most severe restrictions and harassed by prison guards they found a means to educate themselves. For example, during the early 1980s, when they were confined to their cells for twenty-four hours a day, Republican prisoners engaged in a political debating system in which they shouted to one another across the cellblock. McKeown explained that, “without written material we shared what knowledge we had in our head such as Irish history, economics and geography. In one sense discussions and debates were a means by which to occupy our time but they also played an important part in developing a new approach to knowledge and what type of knowledge was important.”¹⁹⁸

By the time Mo chara was arrested in 1981 the Republican prisoners had established a comprehensive educational system within Long Kesh. Upon entering the prison Mo chara joined the Republican no-work protest. This protest, like the Blanket

¹⁹⁶ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, New York, April 30, 2001.

¹⁹⁷ McKeown, 41.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 70.

Protest, was established in 1976 and was one of many strategies Republicans employed in an effort to press for the reinstatement of political prisoner status. As a protesting or ‘non-conforming’ prisoner, Mo chara was confined to his cell for twenty-four hours a day. He was denied educational and recreational privileges and could not possess personal items other than a copy of the bible. The prison authorities also attempted to break the will of the non-conforming prisoners by isolating them on a cellblock which contained conforming prisoners. As the only protesting prisoner on his cellblock Mo chara was harassed by the prison guards on a continual basis. Understandably at this time he felt very apprehensive, yet he found some strength within the confines of his cell. When he first entered his cell he noticed that the previous occupant wrote the Irish words, “Beidh an Bua Againn” or “Victory Will be Ours” on the light above him. These powerful words had a profound impact on Mo chara. He recalled:

In the first cell that I went into in Long Kesh, someone had taken the brown masking tape off the window and had wrote [sic] on the light above me Beidh an Bua Againn [victory will be ours]...this was the first bit of Irish I saw in jail and it was a great inspiration that in the middle of all this turmoil someone could paint this, victory will be ours and it helped me to go on and to continue to fight.¹⁹⁹

These inspiring words conveyed a strong message of strength and perseverance and as Mo chara indicated, they helped him to endure his time in Long Kesh. Later, these words became the subject of one of his large-scale public murals (fig. 98).

While confined to his cell Mo chara’s attention also turned to art. He recalled that,

¹⁹⁹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

“I had nothing in the cell and there was no way of occupying your mind, so I started focusing on art and I started to make Celtic art.”²⁰⁰ Mo chara designed a three-inch Celtic harp, which he constructed from small pieces of paper that he obtained clandestinely during the short time he was permitted out of his cell. He described the process in which he produced this work:

I sculpted it out of bits of paper. I cut it out and drew it with bits of pieces of pencils that I got from other prisoners. And just drew it out. And I just hid it, just concealed it in my cell. It was the first piece of art I done [sic] that could be considered a type of protest, because it was Irish not English, it was something from my culture, not theirs and it made me feel good to know that they couldn't take that from me.²⁰¹

The prison guards later found the harp and destroyed it.

Mo chara was not the first Republican prisoner to create Celtic-inspired artwork. Rolston and Loftus have both pointed out that Republican prisoners began creating political art after the reintroduction of Internment in 1971. Rolston noted that during the early 1970s Republican internees established an Irish cultural revival. He noted:

Of particular interest as a form of collective solidarity and survival was the internees' discovery of political art. Wood carving, painting, and leather work were popular, and numerous artifacts – carved wooden harps, painted handkerchiefs and wooden plaques, and leather purses and handbags – began to emerge from the internment camps into homes of relatives and friends in the nationalist community. Celtic designs predominated, particularly in the wood and leather work. The themes of the paintings ranged from traditional nationalist

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

symbols, through copies of Che Guevara posters, to depictions of republican struggle...But the art work, even at its worst, was the most visible aspect of the cultural revival.²⁰²

Loftus characterized internee artwork as a type of craft and she noted that other common themes that appeared in this work included images of Mother Ireland as well as, “the phoenix emblem of the IRA, the heroes of 1916, chained hands, barbed wire hearts, prison hut interiors, guns and gunmen, but the most usual symbols are the harp and the Celtic interlace.”²⁰³ The artwork that Mo chara later produced during his time in prison depicted many of these common Republican symbols.

The Book of Conquests and Cultural Nationalism

By the spring of 1982 the restrictions placed on non-conforming prisoners had eased slightly and as a result Mo chara noted “some screws [prison guards]²⁰⁴ were just not going to bother with you if you had a book or something in your cell.”²⁰⁵ At this time Mo chara obtained books and drawing materials from other conforming prisoners. John Nixon, a Republican prisoner on his cellblock had a small library in his cell.²⁰⁶ Mo chara recalled, “One day when the screws were leading me out of my cell. I remember

²⁰² Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 74-75.

²⁰³ Loftus, *Mirrors: Orange and Green*, 93.

²⁰⁴ Republican prisoners refer to prison guards as “screws.”

²⁰⁵ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

²⁰⁶ John Nixon was Officer in Command (OC) of Republican prisoners belonging to the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), another paramilitary republican army, apart from the IRA, which was fighting to end British rule in Northern Ireland. Nixon was a member of the first Long Kesh Republican hunger strike of 1980.

yelling toward Nixon. I said, could you send me a book on Celtic art or anything on art, just not anything British. When I was walking back to the cell one of the guards handed me *The Book of Conquests* from Nixon.”²⁰⁷ This book, a collection of artwork by the Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick (b. 1948) became one of the most important influences on Mo chara’s artistic development.

The Book of Conquests recounts the mythological story of the Tuatha Dé Danann, believed to be an ancient Irish tribe.²⁰⁸ Fitzpatrick’s brilliant and visually complex illustrations are painted in a highly romantic style (fig. 40). The text is filled with images of powerful muscular warriors and voluptuous buxom goddesses (fig. 41). Fitzpatrick, a self-taught artist, has produced three illustrative publications on the history of the Dé Danann.²⁰⁹ His art is greatly influenced by medieval Irish illuminated manuscripts such as *The Book of Kells* (fig. 35). Fitzpatrick considers himself to be a Celtic Revivalist. He feels he is following in the tradition of his paternal grandfather, Thomas Fitzpatrick (1860-1912) the illustrator and founder of the Dublin based satirical journal, *The Lepraucan*.²¹⁰ In his online autobiography, Fitzpatrick described his art as being dedicated “to the perpetuation of a tradition stretching back to the farthest reaches of

²⁰⁷ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

²⁰⁸ Jim Fitzpatrick, *The Book of Conquests* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978).

²⁰⁹ Jim Fitzpatrick, *Celtia* (Dundalk: De Danann Press, 1975); idem, *The Book of Conquests*; idem, *The Silver Arm* (Dundalk: De Danann Press, 1983).

²¹⁰ Jim Fitzpatrick, interview by author, telephone interview between New York and Dublin, September 17, 2005.

The Lepraucan was in a political journal that was in print between 1900 and 1912.

antiquity.” He further stated, “I am proud of my racial and artistic heritage. I trace the ancestry of my art from its early beginnings in the spirals of Newgrange to its most gracious flowering in *The Book of Kells*.”²¹¹

Republican prisoners have used Fitzpatrick’s illustrations as source material for their political art since the late 1970s. A wooden plaque created by a prisoner in Long Kesh in 1977 (fig. 42) was based on the cover illustration for Jim Fitzpatrick’s 1975 text, *Celtia* (fig. 43). This plaque depicts a young woman in a long billowing robe who is surrounded by decorative embellishment painted in a Celtic-interlace style.

Jim Fitzpatrick’s illustrations of ancient Irish mythology have been criticized for their romantic depictions. In addition, Fitzpatrick’s accounts of the Tuatha Dé Danann are largely based on the “fireside tellings of the stories”²¹² he heard as a child while living in County Clare on the west coast of Ireland. Fitzpatrick readily admits “in the cause of good story telling, I have found it necessary to fill in obvious gaps in the original accounts.”²¹³ Bill Rolston has pointed out that Fitzpatrick’s work is thus a form of “nationalist mythologizing.”²¹⁴

The Book of Conquests can be considered a work of historical revisionism. Fitzpatrick presents a visual and written history of ancient Ireland that is nostalgic and

²¹¹ Jim Fitzpatrick, “Autobiography,” *Jim Fitzpatrick Online* [website]; available from <http://www.jimfitzpatrick.ie/auto.html>; Internet; accessed September 12, 2005.

²¹² Fitzpatrick, *The Book of Conquests*, unpaginated.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 36.

highly idealistic. Like many cultural revivalists Fitzpatrick fails to present the subject matter of his work in its proper historical context. In this sense, his art is very similar to the late murals of the Mexican artist Diego Rivera (1886-1957). For example in Rivera's murals documenting the Pre-Columbian civilizations of ancient Mexico painted at the National Palace in Mexico City between 1942 and 1951, Rivera created an idealized version of the past. In his 1993 text, *Mexican Muralists*, Desmond Rochfort noted that in these murals Rivera, "reduced the past to actions that confirmed a heroic history."²¹⁵ He further pointed out, "Like all heroic constructions of history, the reality often conspires to disrupt the heroic expression, stripping it of its luster."²¹⁶ By embellishing the past and manufacturing great stories of heroism, Fitzpatrick, like Rivera before him, provided Irish Republicans with visual symbols that they could use to strengthen their sense of cultural nationalism. Thus, in accordance with Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined community," Republican prisoners used Fitzpatrick's work in the formation of their own community by attempting to construct a shared sense of history.²¹⁷

By embracing Fitzpatrick's skewed visual interpretation of Irish mythology, Mo chara distanced himself from his true atavistic roots. For example, as the scholar David Lloyd pointed out, it is important to recognize that Mo chara "derives his iconography

²¹⁵ Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), 87.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ Anderson, 6.

not from ancient Celtic manuscripts but from Jim Fitzpatrick.”²¹⁸ Yet, Fitzpatrick’s illustrations in *The Book of Conquests* were a powerful affirmation for Mo chara during his incarceration. When Mo chara received this text, he studied it meticulously and his initial reaction to it was quite overwhelming. He described this in the following way:

I went back to my cell and I looked at it and it just blew me away...I read all about the Tuatha Dé Danann and I just decided then that I was a Celt. I found who I was again. I mean I always knew I was Irish but I didn’t know about the Tuatha Dé Danann. I didn’t know about all these stories and I was in jail and locked up and anything that would have made me a stronger Irish person in my identity was taken away from me. And so to get that book and to look at it, oh! I studied it and looked at it and read the stories over and over ... and I was overwhelmed with a sense of pride. The pictures of our warriors, well that was incredible. They were heroes and to me they were my saviors at that point.²¹⁹

Fitzpatrick’s work contained a powerful message of cultural resistance for Mo chara and its political implications confirmed his argument that the Irish had a separate and distinct history apart from Great Britain. He stated:

In Fitzpatrick’s work, I found something I could cling to ... this was my savior. To me this represented the spirit in me that says ‘I am Irish, I am a Republican and you have no right to be on our island and you never have. And no matter what you do to me, if you put me in jail, you are wrong. This is my island, you came, you invaded, and you took it. But, this is ours and you have to go, not me.’²²⁰

This statement confirms Neil Jarman’s observation that in Long Kesh the

²¹⁸ David Lloyd, “The Rediscovery of Kitsch,” in *Distant Relations*, ed. Trisha Ziff. (New York: Smart Art Press, 1996), 153.

²¹⁹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

²²⁰ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

“cultural expressions” of Irish Republicans often came in the form of Celtic mythology and as he further stated, this “might seem to be a natural and obvious step for a political culture legitimating itself through an anti-imperialist struggle of long duration and emphasising [sic] the importance of a distinctive indigenous culture.”²²¹

Prison Artwork

During his incarceration, Mo chara spent a great deal of time studying Fitzpatrick’s text. In the summer of 1982 he came off the no-work protest and entered into the ranks of conforming prisoners.²²² He was now allowed to associate freely with the other prisoners on his cellblock and could keep a limited number of personal items in his cell. More importantly, he could participate in the education classes that were run by Republican prisoners and he could take advantage of the prison-run recreational activities. Mo chara also attended the prison art classes that were taught by a professional art teacher who came into the prison once a week. In these classes Mo chara learned basic drawing and painting techniques. His time in the art workshop also meant that he had access to better art materials such as water-based paint, cardboard and heavy-stock paper.

The art classes inspired Mo chara to begin drawing on a regular basis. The first work he created depicted the hallway outside his cell. The work, *H- block 3, Wing C* is a pencil drawing and measures fifteen inches high by twelve inches wide (fig. 44). It

²²¹ Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, 243.

²²² By the fall of 1982 the Republican command structure in Long Kesh began to phase out the no-work protest. McKeown, 99 noted that by November 1, 1982, “all republican prisoners with the exception of five ended the no-work protest which had lasted since September 1976.”

depicts the hallway just outside the artist's cell in Long Kesh's cellblock three in wing C. The hallway recedes deeply into the background of the drawing. At the left and right foreground there are two barred doors through which the contents of the cells can be seen. Mo chara depicted three male figures standing in the middle of the hallway. The men stand in various poses. He employed a slanted viewpoint in which the floor seems to rise up as it recedes toward the back of the composition. In this work Mo chara attempted to refine his drawing skills. The work is essentially an experiment in perspective depth and positioning of figures in space. In comparison to a photograph of an identical hallway in Long Kesh's H-block eight (fig. 45) one can see that Mo chara attempted to create an accurate rendering of the hall.²²³

Mo chara was interested in drawing the hallway outside his cell because he wanted "to record a bit of history."²²⁴ He recognized Long Kesh's significance within the larger Republican community and he wished to preserve a visual record of its interior for posterity. Mo chara was keenly aware of the prison's historical significance. Oistín Mac Bride, a Republican photographer who photographed Long Kesh in 1999 described the importance and emotional impact of Long Kesh for Irish Republicans. He stated:

'The Kesh' as it will forever be known to two generations of nationalists, is a place full of memories and ghosts. These memories are mostly bitter and painful and the ghosts are iconized Irish rebels. It is well nigh impossible to go through

²²³ The British government, citing security concerns, has prohibited photography of Long Kesh. In 1999, the photographer Oistín Mac Bride was granted unprecedented access to photograph the prison. The photograph illustrated in figure 45 was taken by Mac Bride in 1999.

²²⁴ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

the gates and not feel an incredible sense of history and sadness.²²⁵

During the summer of 1982 Mo chara attended the Republican-led Irish history and language classes that were taught by fellow Long Kesh prisoners who were knowledgeable on the subject. Mo chara was a meticulous note-taker.²²⁶ These notes detail the history of Ireland from the Paleolithic period to the coming of the Anglo-Normans in the late twelfth century. These lessons further strengthened his cultural nationalism and they made him aware of the subversive power of education. He believed that education and recognition of his Irish heritage could be used as a symbolic weapon against British cultural imperialism.

In 1983 Mo chara began to think about the power of resistance art in relation to the Irish Republican struggle for independence. He was aware of Belfast's Republican murals from photographs that appeared on the pages of the weekly Republican newspaper, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. Miniaturized copies of this newspaper were smuggled into Long Kesh on a regularly basis.²²⁷ After seeing the murals for the first time, Mo chara recalled, "I was in bed at night and would have ideas for murals all over

²²⁵ Óistin Mac Bride, *Family, Friends and Neighbors: An Irish Photobiography* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2001), 136.

²²⁶ Mo chara's class notes are located in his personal archive in his home in West Belfast. This archive contains a wealth of materials related to his life and work. Mo chara has granted me full access to this archive and has given me permission to publish any of its contents.

²²⁷ The Northern Ireland Political Collection of the Linen Hall Library in Belfast contains a complete archive of *An Phoblacht/Republican News* including the miniature versions, which were sent to Long Kesh.

my mind. I thought it was brilliant. It was exactly what I was thinking about in prison.”

²²⁸ The first mural Mo chara saw depicted a Blanket Man and included the works of the well-known “H-Block Song.” This song proclaimed solidarity with Long Kesh’s Republican prisoners. The work was painted in 1981 and was located on the Whiterock Road close to where Mo chara spent his childhood. The mural featured two Republican prisoners standing before the barbed wire of Long Kesh (fig. 46). Written on the wall next to the prisoners are the lyrics from “The H-Block Song” by Francie Brolly. ²²⁹ The words read:

I’ll wear no convict’s uniform
Nor meekly serve my time
That Britain might make Ireland’s fight
Eight hundred years of crime

The mural made a great impression on Mo chara. He stated, “I thought, this is a brilliant idea. That is the way to do it.” ²³⁰ Many of the murals painted during the early 1980s also contained Celtic imagery. Rolston has pointed out that at this time “the roots of the current struggle, for mural artists...lie far back in history. Therefore there is a notable predominance of Celtic designs and lettering in murals of this period.” ²³¹ These

²²⁸ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

²²⁹ For the full lyrics of “The H-Block Song,” see Brian Campbell, Laurence McKeown and Felim O’Hagan, ed., *Nor Meekly Serve My Time: The H Block Struggle 1976-1981* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1998), xi.

²³⁰ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

²³¹ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 96.

murals were reproduced in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* and appealed to Mo chara's and his nationalist sensibility.

In 1984 Mo chara began to think about painting murals after his release from prison. In a 1996 interview with the *Irish Times* he recalled, "I decided when I got out that I would do cultural and political murals."²³² In the meantime, Mo chara occupied the rest of his time in prison copying Jim Fitzpatrick's illustrations from *The Book of Conquests*. At first he traced the original work using wax paper as a tracing medium but then he began to employ a grid system in which he squared Fitzpatrick's design and transferred it block by block to a piece of cardboard. Mo chara used several coats of watercolor paint that he obtained from the prison's art workshop. To recreate the fine detail of Fitzpatrick's intricate designs he asked his brother to send him a set of very fine paintbrushes.

The first watercolor Mo chara created after Fitzpatrick's work depicted King Nuada, the ruler of the Tuatha Dé Danann (fig. 47). According to ancient Irish mythology, King Nuada was the most powerful king in the history of ancient Ireland. Nuada was known as a warrior king who fought to regain possession of Ireland after it had been taken over by invaders. In Fitzpatrick's *The Book of Conquests*, King Nuada calls upon the warriors of the Tuatha Dé Danann to fight for Ireland to insure their future prosperity. According to Fitzpatrick, Nuada inspired the ancient Irish warriors before battle by stating, "better to be warrior and freemen in the green land of Éireann than to be slaves without rank or right in strange countries...with this victory this island will [again]

²³² Victoria White, "Murals Without the Masks," *The Irish Times*, September 3, 1996, 10.

belong to us and be the home of our children.”²³³

Over the course of one month Mo chara copied Fitzpatrick’s illustration (fig. 48) meticulously. He recalled that while in his cell:

I had plenty of time to look at it and study it. I looked at the color, where the black outlining was, what the color close to the black outlining might be, what the mountain was like, and the colors on the grass, the armor. And oh, I just sat and took it in and looked at every wee dot and every wee stroke that Jim Fitzpatrick had done.²³⁴

Although Mo chara copied Fitzpatrick’s image with painstaking detail he did make several obvious alterations to the original. These modifications enhanced the impact of Fitzpatrick’s work. When Mo chara showed his rendition of King Nuada to other prisoners he was told that he had improved the original work.²³⁵ In Mo chara’s image he altered the original color scheme in order to infuse the work with a greater sense of light. This light emerges from the background of the work. In Fitzpatrick’s illustration the sky is painted in shades of purple and pink and the clouds are outlined darkly in black. In his copy Mo chara painted the sky blue. He toned down the black outlines around the clouds and replaced them with lighter strokes of gray. Overall, these changes make the original work look less complicated. By eliminating some of the excessive detail in the sky, Mo chara pushed the main equestrian figure of King Nuada toward the picture plane thereby infusing him with greater importance. By defining the

²³³ Fitzpatrick, *The Book of Conquests*, unpaginated.

²³⁴ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

²³⁵ Ibid.

spatial divisions within the background imagery, Mo chara created a less complex and more organized image.

Mo chara modified the original illustration further by eliminating the undulating lines that radiate from King Nuada's head. Mo chara changed this to a target-like pattern with concentric bands of color. This 'target' draws the eye immediately toward King Nuada and it stresses his importance within the composition. Lastly, Mo chara modified the original work by eliminating the elaborate interlace design which borders the main image. He created a simple border consisting of rectangular bands of color.

After its completion Mo chara sent the work to his young daughter, Gerda as a present for her fourth birthday. Along the bottom of the work he wrote the words, "To Gearoidin from daddy," using the Irish version of her name. This artwork, like all parcels leaving Long Kesh, was customarily subject to search and censorship. The prison authorities had strict guidelines that prohibited prisoners from sending anything out of the prison that was considered to be of a political nature. For example, one restriction prohibited prisoners from referring to the prison, as "Long Kesh" or "H-blocks." Letters or artwork containing these words were censored. In an act of defiance against the prison authorities, Mo chara hid a message within the work. Along the far end of the cliff on the left side of the drawing in tiny letters he painted the words, "Gerard Kelly, H Block, Long Kesh." The prison authorities never detected the words and the work was sent out without being censored. This was a great victory for Mo chara who recalled sixteen years later, "it was small things like that that gave me power in prison."²³⁶

²³⁶ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 1, 1999.

In a 1991 interview with Bill Rolston, Mo chara further explained that painting Celtic imagery was a way for him to circumvent prison rules. He stated:

Prison was supposed to be a breaker's yard for Republicans. You were stripped of your dignity, your clothes, anything that showed your identity. You were allowed to paint hankies of the Pope, the Virgin Mary, Mickey Mouse and things like that. They censored everything. Rather than do the Mickey Mouse things, I decided to paint Celtic mythology.²³⁷

Mo chara's drawing of King Nuada was a powerful signifier of his personal and political convictions. He related the story of King Nuada to his own fight for Irish freedom. King Nuada's battle cry, as recounted by Fitzpatrick, gave Mo chara a renewed sense of strength and determination. He recalled that:

These stories made me stronger. I was in jail and I was locked up, so anything that would have made me feel strong especially in my identity was so important, because they were trying to take my identity away from me. Reading about King Nuada gave me a new sense of pride.²³⁸

Mo chara related his prison experience to King Nuada's steadfast determination and endurance. According to legend, King Nuada lost his right arm in the battle for Ireland. The Tuatha Dé Danann's believed that their king could not rule with a physical defect and King Nuada was forced to relinquish his throne. Nuada was later fitted with a silver arm that functioned miraculously as though it were his own flesh. With a renewed

²³⁷ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 15.

²³⁸ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

sense of strength he was reinstated as king and he went on to be victorious in the battle for Ireland. Mo chara made an analogy between King Nuada's miraculous story of resurgence and his own struggle for Irish freedom.

Irish Republicans have often used images of rebirth such as this to symbolize their continuing fight for independence. For example, the image of the phoenix has been linked historically to Irish Republicanism. The phoenix is a common motif of Republican flags and posters. Bill Rolston has described the historical connection of this symbol to Irish nationalist organizations. He noted:

Another traditional symbol [of Irish Nationalism] was the phoenix, the mythical bird that was reborn from its own ashes. Used originally in Ireland by the Fenians²³⁹ in the late nineteenth century, it signified for them the continuation of the Republican struggle in their generation despite the failure of the revolutionaries of the previous generation, the Young Irelanders. It eventually came to have similar significance for subsequent generations, each taking up the struggle despite the defeats of those who went before them.²⁴⁰

As Mo chara delved into the stories of Ireland's ancient mythological history, he also learned more about Ireland's more contemporary historical events while attending the prisoner-led history classes. One of the books used in these classes was P. Michael O'Sullivan's 1972 text, *Patriot Graves. Resistance in Ireland*. This book chronicled the actions of the Provisional IRA between 1969 and 1972 during the initial stages of the

²³⁹ The Fenians was a Irish nationalist organization founded in 1858. They fought for independence from Great Britain but were unsuccessful. Their predecessors, the Young Irelanders, staged an unsuccessful rebellion in 1848. For further information on the Fenian Movement and the Young Irelanders, see Walsh, 10-22.

²⁴⁰ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 71.

Troubles. O’Sullivan included supplemental text with Republican poems and political speeches of such well-known Irish figures as Wolf Tone and Patrick Pearse. The text established a link between the Republican movements of the past with the on-going struggle for Irish independence. It was of great interest to Mo chara, particularly because it featured many photographs of activist Republican who lived in Ballymurphy. One photograph in O’Sullivan’s text depicted Mo chara’s uncle, William Carson (1917 – 1991) who was a prominent Belfast Republican during the 1970s and 1980s.²⁴¹

O’Sullivan’s text presented the Republican prisoners with an unbiased and positive assessment of the role of the PIRA. Consequently, it was an effective form of propaganda that was used by the Republican instructors in Long Kesh to bolster their fellow prisoners.

While attending the Republican-led classes, Mo Chara also studied the history of the 1916 Easter Rising. He recalls reading the poems and writings of Patrick Pearse. Pearse was a prolific writer. As one of the leading members of the Celtic Revival, Pearse connected the promotion of Irish art and culture to the Irish quest for independence. The author Tim Pat Coogan pointed out that since Pearse’s death in 1916 his writings have been a primary influence on Irish Republican ideology. Coogan noted “Pearse’s writings derive their strength from the manner in which they express the ideal of Irish separatism.”²⁴² Pearse’s statement: “Ireland Free is Ireland Gaelic and Ireland Gaelic is

²⁴¹ O’Sullivan, 105. William Carson is the man wearing glasses, pictured at the left.

²⁴² Coogan, *The IRA, A History*, 171.

Ireland Free”²⁴³ solidified Mo chara’s strong atavistic ideology.

At this time Mo chara embarked on a project to create portraits of the seven signatories of the Irish Proclamation of Independence, which was signed on the first day of the 1916 Easter Rising. Mo chara produced each of the seven portraits on a large sheet of yellow cardboard. All seven drawings are now lost. In 1988 he reproduced these portraits in a mural located in West Belfast (fig. 81). The mural also included the text from Pearse’s well known poem, *Mise Éire* (1912). The mural reiterates Pearse’s belief that, “Patriotism is in large part a memory of heroic dead men and a striving to accomplish some task left unfinished by them.”²⁴⁴ Pearse’s words were empowering and Mo chara explained that:

While I was in jail, I was always thinking about Ireland and these men [the leaders of the Easter Rising] were our heroes. You see we had been told by the British that we were inferior and so many people in my community believed that we were the stupid drunken Irish, but then I read about our history, and I thought to myself, why are you telling me that I have no culture? This was my culture and these men fought to the death for Ireland.²⁴⁵

Mo chara discusses here what the psychiatrist Garrett O’Connor defines as “malignant shame.” In an article entitled, “Recognizing and Healing Malignant Shame,” O’Connor outlined the longstanding effects of British colonization on the Catholic population of Ireland. According to O’Connor, over five centuries of British repression

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

had a long-lasting affect on the Irish Catholics. He stated:

The oppressive relationship between colonizer and colonised [sic] in Ireland has produced self-misconceptions of cultural inferiority in significant segments of the Irish Catholic population...[and] whether they know it or not, Irish Catholics all over the world have inherited a history that evokes images of shame, oppression, deprivation, and bigotry.²⁴⁶

Mo chara, like the Celtic Revivalists before him, understood that in order to counter British Imperialist notions of superiority he would have to stress his Irish cultural heritage. The introduction to his pre-Christian Irish roots, through the work of Jim Fitzpatrick and his Irish history lessons convinced him that he was part of a significant culture and he continued to copy Fitzpatrick's illustrations.

Mo chara spent over a month producing a watercolor copy (fig. 49) of a Fitzpatrick's illustration of King Nuada and the Celtic goddess, Morrigan (fig. 41). The scene depicts the king and the goddess lying on a bed of Celtic textiles. Mo chara spent a great deal of time copying the Celtic patterns which fill the composition, but he noted that it was the subject matter that most interested him at this time. As he described it, "you could just imagine what a man would be thinking about after being locked up for so long and not seeing a woman."²⁴⁷ The work's erotic imagery had a clear effect on Mo chara and as he later stated, "this kind of thing also helped me get through prison."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Garrett O'Connor, "Recognizing and Healing Malignant Shame," in *Distant Relations*, ed. Trisha Ziff. (New York: Smart Art Press, 1996), 132.

²⁴⁷ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Reproducing *The Book of Kells*

Mo chara continued to explore his indigenous roots during his imprisonment. He spent much of his spare time copying the Celtic-inspired artwork in *The Book of Kells*, which is widely considered to be one of the greatest masterpieces of the medieval period.²⁴⁹ The complicated motifs and decorative patterns in this Irish manuscript would later feature prominently in Mo chara's large-scale public artwork (fig. 50).

The Book of Kells was created by Irish monks during the late eighth century in a monastery in Iona, Scotland. During the ninth century, it was moved to a monastery in the town of Kells, in County Meath, Ireland.²⁵⁰ The manuscript illustrates and recounts stories from the Gospels of the New Testament. The art historian Carrol Farr, who has published an in-depth study on *The Book of Kells* noted that several artists were responsible for the illustrations within the manuscript.²⁵¹ She further pointed out that the work was created to glorify Christ and his message and it was often displayed on the altar during the Christian mass. The illustrative style of the manuscript (fig. 35) with its complex animal and abstract interlace designs was influenced by ancient Irish metalwork from the Celtic period.

Belinda Loftus has noted that by the mid-twentieth century "improved colour-printing and the expanded paperback market made possible...lavish facsimile reprints

²⁴⁹ Carol Farr, *The Book of Kells: Its Function and Audience*. (London: British Museum, 1997).

²⁵⁰ For further information on *The Book of Kells*, see Farr.

²⁵¹ Farr, 17.

from the Book of Kells.”²⁵² Many Irish Republican prisoners in Long Kesh had paperback copies of *The Book of Kells*. Mo chara recalled that he received a copy of the manuscript from a priest, who often visited the prison.

While in prison Mo chara created a wood carrying case for his Irish-language bible. On the front and back cover Mo chara painted copies of illustrations from *The Book of Kells* (fig. 51 and 52). Mo chara’s Irish-language bible was an important symbol of his culture and he therefore dedicated a great deal of time creating a fitting case for it. The case measures approximately fourteen inches high, twelve inches wide, and three inches deep and was fashioned with the finest mahogany wood Mo chara could find in the Long Kesh art workshop. On the front panel Mo chara depicted “The Arrest of Christ” and on the back, the “The Four Evangelists.” The spine of the case is decorated with gold paint. At the top of the spine the artist has painted the words *An Bíobla Naofa*, Irish for The Holy Bible.

The illustration on the front cover was copied from the “Arrest of Christ” page (fig. 53). Mo chara made slight modifications to the original. The original image depicts Christ at the center of the page. He is flanked by two guards who are considerably smaller in stature. The eighth-century artist painted highly stylized figures in an Irish ornamental style. The exaggerated features and the bold black lines that accentuate the sharply contoured folds on each of the figures’ tunics add to the work’s sophisticated decorative style. One of the most engaging aspects of the original composition is the decorative arch, which frames the three figures. The frame is ornamented elaborately

²⁵² Loftus, *Mirrors: Orange and Green*, 93.

with intricate animal and geometric patterns.

In his rendering of the work (fig. 51) Mo chara made some slight variations such as using a more vibrant color scheme. He also eliminated the fine detail of the original. This is particularly apparent in his rendering of the interlace patterns located within the arch. In this section of the work Mo chara simplified the patterns by creating broader geometric interlacing. Aside from this, the overall similarity to the original is quite outstanding. Mo chara recalled, “I looked at the Celtic designs and I’d try to get into the minds of the people who had done this. And to wonder why and how had they done [sic] this? It was so small, so accurate and so amazing. And it made me feel so proud that this was part of my history.”²⁵³

On the back cover of his bible case (fig. 52), Mo chara attempted to reproduce the original “The Four Evangelists” page from *The Book of Kells* as accurately as possible (fig. 54). A comparison to the original shows that Mo chara created a precise copy. This is most apparent in the symbols of the four evangelists whose fine details are copied exactly. Again, it is in the decorative frame and through the use of a brighter color palette that Mo chara strays from the original. Although not conforming exactly to the intricate design of the frame, the decorative interlace patterns Mo chara used conveyed his growing artistic ability. Mo chara noted that he was interested in using bright colors because Long Kesh, “was gray, everywhere you looked was all gray. So when I produced art it was the bright colors that I tried to get, the magentas, the oranges. And these would

²⁵³ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

be the colors I would use when I got out.”²⁵⁴ Oistín Mac Bride also described Long Kesh in a similar manner. He made particular note of the grayness of the site and explained that the prison contained, “miles of gray concrete and endless, endless acreage of twenty foot high wire fences. Everywhere are gates and guards, watchtowers, lights and cameras. And strangely it seems a dull, dampening silence. As if shouting, laughter or noise would disturb the regime’s sense of severity.”²⁵⁵

The bible case was one of Mo chara’s most valued possessions during his time in prison. Today it still holds a great deal of significance for him and it continues to serve as a carrying case to his Irish bible. This bible is an important remnant of his time in prison and it has great symbolic meaning for the artist. The Irish Bible was the only Irish text that prisoners in Long Kesh were allowed to possess. The prison authorities viewed the use of the Irish language as a subversive activity. McKeown has pointed out that the Irish language was important for Republican prisoners in Long Kesh because it enabled them to communicate secretly.²⁵⁶ He notes that by the time Mo chara was imprisoned in Long Kesh, “the Irish language was as commonly heard as English and many [Republican prisoners]...became fluent speakers.”²⁵⁷ The sociologist Camille O’Reilly noted that the Irish language was a powerful signifier of Irish identity. In Northern Ireland “it has become more than just a symbol of identity ... it becomes the symbolic personification of

²⁵⁴ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

²⁵⁵ Mac Bride, 136.

²⁵⁶ McKeown, 67.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

the Irish people.”²⁵⁸ Therefore, this bible, written in his native tongue was an concrete affirmation of Mo chara’s Irish identity.

WWII Social Realist Imagery

Mo chara’s study of ancient Celtic design inspired him both artistically and politically. At this time he also found inspiration in the social realist artwork that he saw within books in the prison’s library. One text in particular, which featured Russian and Nazi social realist imagery from the 1930s had a profound affect on Mo chara. Through this book, the title of which he could not recall, Mo chara learned the political effectiveness of social realist imagery. He pointed out that although he did not agree with Nazi or Soviet politics, “The message they were putting across was very effective...they were getting the message out in their artwork and I thought to myself, yes this is what we should be doing in the murals...we can adapt these to our struggle.”²⁵⁹

He also found inspiration in the American war posters of the 1940s. He recalled that when he was a young boy he saw WWII recruitment posters and made particular reference to a poster that featured the image of a dead American sailor. The sailor had a Japanese Samuri sword plunged into his back. The text on the poster read, “Remember Pearl Harbor.” This powerful work remained in his memory for many years and he recalled that it was one of the most effective images he had ever seen. Mo chara was

²⁵⁸ Camille O’Reilly, “The Irish Language as Symbol: Visual Representations of Irish in Northern Ireland,” in *Symbols in Northern Ireland*, ed. Anthony D. Buckley (Belfast: the Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University of Belfast, 1998), 51.

²⁵⁹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

particularly impressed by the posters' ability to encourage Americans to fight in the name of freedom. He viewed this image and the Nazi and Soviet artwork in relation to his own fight for Irish freedom. He stated, "When I seen [sic] the murals I kept thinking about the US, Nazi, and Russian things I had seen and I thought we can do things like this and they can get the message out the way we need to."²⁶⁰

Bob Marley and Resistance Art

In the prison art workshop Mo chara created several small works on wood that were decorated with Celtic designs. Most of these objects were sent out to his family and friends. Long Kesh prison crafts were highly prized by the Republican community outside the prison. These objects symbolized the sacrifice the Republican prisoners had made and for many they became valued works of resistance art. The art historian Belinda Loftus has pointed out that Republican "prison crafts made as presents for friends or relatives become public assertions of defiance when displayed in windows facing onto the street, or pointers to the familial and national heritage."²⁶¹ Rolston further noted that the "cultural artifacts that flowed from the jails into the communities not only reminded people that the prisoners were still alive and should not be forgotten, but they were also great propaganda for the [Republican] movement."²⁶²

While Mo chara used many common Irish motifs in his prison work, he also

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Belinda Loftus, "Northern Ireland 1968-1988," 114.

²⁶² Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 74.

produced images that were not considered typical prison material. Although not Irish specifically, the imagery he created proclaimed his spirit of resistance. For example, the most significant work he created at this time was a mahogany plaque that featured a portrait of the reggae singer Bob Marley. The plaque was created as a wedding gift for Mo chara's younger brother Sammy (fig. 55). It was painted with several layers of water-based paint. The imagery was copied from the cover illustration of Marley's 1983 album, *Confrontation* (fig. 56). In the work Marley is depicted riding a rearing white stallion and is slaying a purple dragon. The imagery is informed by a medieval aesthetic. The fine details throughout the work, such as the minute decorations on Marley's armor, resemble the medieval illuminated manuscripts pages that appealed to Mo chara early in his life. In addition, the album cover contained a border with a design stylistically similar to Celtic interlace.

Mo chara also identified with the spirit of defiance found in Bob Marley's lyrics. These lyrics corroborated his rebellious nature and they strengthened his resolve. Marley's philosophical ideas of cultural empowerment were analogous to his own fight for Irish independence. He explained, "Marley was saying everything we [Republicans] were saying. He talked about the struggle for freedom and that was the same as ours. He was a great inspiration to me."²⁶³ Mo chara identified specifically with the lyrics of Marley's well-known work "Buffalo Soldier":

I'm just a buffalo soldier,
Stolen from Africa
Brought to America

²⁶³ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 17, 2003.

Fighting on arrival
 Fighting for survival
 If you know your history
 Then you will know where you're coming from
 Then you wouldn't have to ask me
 Who the hell do I think I am²⁶⁴

These lyrics conveyed the revolutionary spirit which Mo chara lived by. The last four lines in particular articulated Mo chara's belief in the subversive power of education.

The Great Escape of 1983

Mo chara's artistic activities in prison were cut short almost entirely in the fall of 1983. At this time thirty-eight Republican prisoners performed a daring and successful escape from Long Kesh.²⁶⁵ The escape, known to Republicans as, "The Great Escape of 1983," was a great moral boost to Mo chara. He recalled that although he never heard the sounds of the escape, he rejoiced at hearing the news of it on the radio. He explained:

The Kesh was a huge place, and we were in concrete cells, so you wouldn't hear much. But God, we heard Lock up! and we locked up and listened to the radio. Then we heard, there has been an escape from the Maze Prison [Long Kesh] and everyone began screaming, Up the IRA! Up the IRA! We were so happy! But then they stopped all our craftwork. At the time I had been doing a lot of art. I had had the Jim Fitzpatrick book [*The Book of Conquests*] and was copying it, but that had to end.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Lyrics by Bob Marley, *Confrontation* album, Bob Marley and the Wailers, 1983.

²⁶⁵ For further information on the escape of 1983 see Coogan, *The IRA, A History*, 403-407, and McKeown, 107-120 .

²⁶⁶ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

After the escape the prison authorities instituted harsh new rules. Laurence McKeown explained that “all the blocks were thoroughly searched and all handicrafts and handicraft facilities removed.”²⁶⁷ Mo chara’s cell was cleaned out and he was moved to another wing. The new rules placed limits on the quantity and type of personal items each prisoner could possess. The artwork Mo chara was working on at the time of the escape was confiscated and he lost all his art-making materials. He was now confined to his cell for most of the day.

In the spring of 1984 he created a sketch for a mural using a piece of wax paper he received in a food parcel (fig. 57). The mural was never completed, but its design and political commentary is similar to the wall paintings that he created after his release. Mo chara sketched the design in pencil and although it has faded, one can make out the image of three portraits. The portraits depict the then British and Irish Prime Ministers, Margaret Thatcher and Garrett Fitzgerald respectively, and the well-known Irish Republican Dominic McGlinchey. McGlinchey, also known as the ‘Mad Dog,’ was a former member of the IRA. During the early 1980s he left the organization and became the leader of the more violent Republican paramilitary group, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA). McGlinchey had a notorious reputation. He was responsible for killing a large and untold number of Northern Ireland’s security forces. For many years he was considered the ‘Most Wanted Man’ in Northern Ireland. Wanted posters seeking his arrest were a common sight throughout Northern Ireland in the 1970s and early

²⁶⁷ McKeown, 116.

1980s. After a shoot-out with the Irish police in 1984, McGlinchey was arrested and held in a prison in the Republic of Ireland. After his arrest, the British government requested his immediate extradition. Traditionally, the Irish government had turned down British requests for the extradition of Northern Irish citizens. McGlinchey “became the first Republican to be extradited to the Six Counties” of Northern Ireland.²⁶⁸ The McGlinchey case set an important precedent for Irish Republicans, who viewed the Irish government as working in collusion with Great Britain against their cause for a united Ireland.

In Mo chara’s sketch the two prime ministers appear considerably larger than McGlinchey and they hover over him in a menacing way. This simple composition emphasizes the power of the two governments over the Irish Republican community. Mo chara believed a mural that was simply and clearly stated would project the feelings of the Republican community, which saw the case as a matter of political maneuvering at its expense. Tim Pat Coogan pointed out that the Irish government granted McGlinchey’s extradition because it “wanted to impress both the Unionist[s] of Northern Ireland] and the British.”²⁶⁹ If completed, Mo chara’s mural would have expressed the Republican point of view in an effective way. The mural sketch clearly indicated that Mo chara was concerned with his future role as a Republican muralist. The style of the sketch is consistent with the murals he later produced after his release. These murals, created between 1987 and 1998, are discussed in chapters four and five. In this body of work, Mo

²⁶⁸ Coogan, *The Troubles*, 278.

²⁶⁹ Coogan, *The IRA, A History*, 411.

chara highlighted the social, political, and cultural concerns of the Republican community in which he lived.

CHAPTER 4
MURALS WITHOUT MASKS
1986-1990

Mo chara was released from Long Kesh in October 1985. On his drive out of the prison he was struck by how colorful the world appeared in comparison to the grayness of Long Kesh. Initially, Mo chara returned to the home of his wife Colette and their two young children in the Lower Falls, a neighborhood in West Belfast. After about six weeks it was apparent that their marriage had failed and Mo chara left the home. He moved in with his older sister Lucy, who lived in Springhill in Greater Ballymurphy (fig. 29). His sister's home was only a short distance from the Lower Falls and it gave him the opportunity to see his two young children on a regular basis.

At this time Mo chara acquired his Irish nickname. He recalled that, "prison does crazy things to your head and when I got out I couldn't remember anyone's name...so I just called everyone Mo chara, which is "my friend" in Irish. After that everyone started calling me Mo chara. I am sure they thought I was nuts, but the name stayed with me."²⁷⁰

In an article entitled, "The Irish Language As Symbol: Visual Representations of Irish in Northern Ireland," Camille O'Reilly pointed out that it was common for Republicans to take on an Irish first name. She noted that the use of an Irish name "is seen as a political act on behalf of the Irish language" and was a defiant way for one to

²⁷⁰ Mo chara, (a lecture discussing his work) at Rocky Sullivan's Tavern, New York City, October 29, 1998.

express his/her indigenous roots.²⁷¹ Mo chara's new Irish name emphasized his identity as a politicized ex-prisoner and Republican activist.

The residents of Springhill held Mo chara in high esteem and he was admired for the sacrifice he had made for the Irish Republican movement. This is a common occurrence in Republican communities throughout Northern Ireland where ex-prisoners often become leading members of their community. As an ex-prisoner Mo chara could speak the Irish language and converse confidently on matters relating to Irish politics, history, and culture. Mo chara recalled, "you see I don't want to say anything to honor myself...but what happened was when you just come out of jail you are sort of put on a bit of a pedestal. You see people look to you for leadership and that is what they did to me in Springhill."²⁷²

Graffiti Removal

Mo chara fit easily into a leadership role and he soon took on a position of authority within Springhill. In the spring of 1986, Mo chara organized a project to clean up the neighborhood. He specifically concentrated on graffiti and trash removal along Springhill Avenue, the community's main thoroughfare. In conjunction with this project, he created artwork that was visually appealing but non-political. He described the project in the following way:

When you used to come down Springhill [Avenue], Springhill was gray. It was a

²⁷¹ O'Reilly, 61.

²⁷² Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

ghetto...it was so drab, and there was a lot of graffiti everywhere. After I got out [of prison], I started doing work in Springhill, tidying up the neighborhood. I got the kids [of the neighborhood] out with brushes and shovels, and we cleaned the whole place...we got the fireman's hose out and cleaned the place from top to bottom. We painted the place up to head height with red and yellow paint just to brighten up the place and also get the kids involved. You see there was a lot of graffiti on the wall, so I said let's go to the paint warehouses and ask them for any old paint, tell them what you are doing and ask for it. And we got old tins of paint and we painted it. We painted the walls white and we just made abstract band designs. And the color was a sort of a red and a yellow band just to break it up and clean it up.²⁷³

Mo chara further recalled that the people who donated the paint specified that they did not want it to be used for political purposes. Mo chara noted, "We couldn't get too much paint. They weren't going to give us too much paint because they were terrified that the paint was going to be used for a political mural and we had to promise them we wouldn't paint one."²⁷⁴ This fear could have been well founded because by 1986, most Nationalist murals located in Belfast were sponsored by Sinn Féin, the political party representing the IRA (fig. 58), or they were painted by members of Na Fianna Éireann (the Republican youth movement). The latter created work that glorified the IRA, such as a mural painted in 1982 on Beechmount Avenue in West Belfast, which proclaimed solidarity between the IRA and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) (fig. 59).

By 1982, Sinn Féin was trying to hold on to the popular support it had gained during the hunger strike. Electoral campaigning became one of its most important activities and the party commissioned murals that promoted its political message. The Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams remarked that during this time, "we intensified our

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

publicity and propaganda efforts...we reviewed the standing of Sinn Féin and the mood of our support base...we learned the lessons of mass mobilization and popular actions, of electoralism and broad front work.”²⁷⁵ The Republican murals of the early to mid-1980s reflected this “intensified” political effort. Rolston has pointed out that the muralists who produced this work supported Sinn Féin and in some cases “became party cultural workers.”²⁷⁶ He further noted “the post-hunger strike murals increasingly became party murals.”²⁷⁷

Bearing this in mind, many non-political members of the community, who did not wish to be seen supporting the activities of Sinn Féin, were hesitant to donate materials that they felt might be used for the party’s political gain. It is also likely that the donors were reluctant because they were afraid of Loyalist retaliation against them. Mo chara therefore used the materials to paint purely abstract designs.

Mo chara painted over an old mural on Springhill Avenue that depicted a jungle scene. This “jungle” mural, complete with pre-historic hunters and ferocious animals, was painted in the summer of 1977 as part of a state-sponsored mural program to bring art to Belfast’s low-income neighborhoods (fig. 60). The work was painted by Brendan Ellis and Geraldine Jordan, two fine art students from Belfast’s College of Art and Design. Bill Rolston noted that the two young artists were hired by the Belfast City Council’s Community Services Department, which established a fund to sponsor a

²⁷⁵ Adams, *Before the Dawn*, 314.

²⁷⁶ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 91.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

community mural program in Belfast. The program was created to improve Belfast's physical environment and at the same time promote the City Council's effort to secure international economic funding.²⁷⁸ Rolston noted that the program evolved out of a 1976 government campaign named, "Operation Spruce-Up."²⁷⁹ This campaign was created to support the creation of art that would improve Belfast's physical appearance to impress foreign investors. The Belfast City Council eventually expanded the campaign by creating the community mural program to bring art to areas in need of physical improvement.

The Community Services Department required the artists who participated in the program to work in close consultation with the community while designing the mural.

Describing Ellis and Jordan's Springhill mural, Rolston noted that the artists painted:

... a mural 400 feet long and ten feet high in an astonishing two-and-a-half-week period. Although this stood as a record of almost demonic artistic genius, the content annoyed many locals. It depicted a jungle with animals and human figures painted with a ferocity that derived as much from the speed of painting as from Ellis's fascination with German expressionism. Local people regarded it as an insulting comment on them and their area.²⁸⁰

Rolston also pointed out that although they were required to do so by the Community Services Department, the artists did not consult with the community when

²⁷⁸ This mural program was confined to Belfast. Other cities throughout Northern Ireland, such as Derry and Newry, did not have sponsored mural programs at this time. For further information on the community mural program in Belfast see, Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 50-68 and Wilson, "The Painted Image," 19-20.

²⁷⁹ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 55.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

they designed the mural. He pointed out that the artists created a work in which “the local involvement was confined to a couple of teenagers helping the artists.”²⁸¹ Brendan Ellis explained the evolution of the design in the following way, “After several meetings and discussions with the teenagers, one of them came up with the idea that as they all lived in a ‘concrete jungle’ would it not be good to at least make it a proper jungle with all the color and imagination it could contain?”²⁸² Thus, the artists did not adequately consider the community’s opinion as a whole while they developed the concept for their mural.

Lucy R. Lippard has pointed out that artists who come from outside the community in which they work commonly make this mistake. She has also noted that a mural’s success depends on its ability to engage and empower the community where it stands. She stated, “Murals are primarily intended for the community that lives with them, so it is important that the muralists live in or have some strong bond to the community, are not just parachuted in to Do Good for the supposedly artless Other.”²⁸³ Rolston has shown that it was not the norm for the mural program artists to consult with the community. He also noted that the community only considered the murals successful when they depicted local people or local themes in a positive way.²⁸⁴ He stated:

²⁸¹ Ibid., 58.

²⁸² Ibid., 59.

²⁸³ Lucy Lippard, “Foreword to the 1998 Edition,” in eds. Eva Cockcroft, James Cockcroft, and John Pitman Weber, *Toward a People’s Art. The Contemporary Mural Movement*, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1977; reprint, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), xi.

²⁸⁴ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 59.

Although they had no opportunity to be involved in the artistic process...local people genuinely identified closely with murals that depicted local people, activities and scenes. This identity meant that they had a close relationship with the murals; such murals were ‘theirs’ in a way that even the most excellently executed fine art mural was not.²⁸⁵

The Springhill “jungle” mural did not appeal to the local residents. Mo chara recalled that Springhill’s residents felt offended by Ellis and Jordan’s mural and its presence was one of the contributing factors that led him to clean up the community. He stated, “The reason I began painting the area was to clean it up, because there used to be a mural...of a jungle scene and Father Wilson thought it was an insult to our community and so did I. It was as if they [the artists] thought we were jungle boys.”²⁸⁶

Mo chara felt insulted by the work’s implication that the residents of Springhill lived in an untamed environment. He also recalled here that the Springhill community leader, Father Des Wilson was equally offended by the work. In a 1983 article published in the Irish art magazine *Circa*, Father Wilson lambasted Ellis’ and Jordan’s mural. He described the mural’s unpopularity:

With brilliant flair and astounding absence of sensitivity the artists painted a series of wild animals, set in a jungle. Then they went away leaving the residents to contemplate their handiwork and to wonder if it really represented the artists’ view of them and their district. Local children soon made emendations to the design, as series of additions, subtraction and appendages to the animals, which caused the more elderly and sedate to look the other way. The mural may have been an outsider’s comment on the district; the emendations were the children’s

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 61.

²⁸⁶ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

comment on the artists.²⁸⁷

Father Wilson was a prominent member of the Springhill community and he was an important influence on Mo chara. Wilson was born in 1925 in Belfast. During the 1960s he worked as a Catholic priest in St. John's Parochial House on the Falls Road. He witnessed the plight of Belfast's Catholic residents and he grew weary of the Catholic Church's intransigent stance and inability to help the beleaguered members of the community. Father Wilson, along with Father Hugh Mullan, left the Parochial House in 1971 and moved to Springhill so that they could better serve the area's Catholic residents.²⁸⁸ Father Wilson worked tirelessly for the rights of the residents of Ballymurphy and Springhill. He encouraged the residents to empower themselves through education and social action. In 1975, Father Wilson resigned from the priesthood citing his on-going conflict with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.²⁸⁹

Springhill Tenants Association

Father Wilson's guidance and support inspired Mo chara to become a more active member of his community. Mo chara worked in close consultation with Father Wilson

²⁸⁷ Wilson, "The Painted Image," 19.

²⁸⁸ Father Mullan was tragically killed by the British Army only a few months later on August 9, 1971, see chapter 2.

²⁸⁹ For further information on Father Wilson, see de Baroid, 60-64; Daniel Fluet, ed. *Binlids: A Drama of West Belfast Resistance* (Belfast: Dubblejoint Productions, 1998), unpaginated; and Des Wilson, *The Way I see it. An Autobiography* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2005).

during his project to clean up Springhill. In 1986 he encouraged Mo chara to form a Springhill tenants organization. The purpose of this organization was to create a venue through which Springhill's residents could petition the government for better living conditions. In 1986 Mo chara became the chairman of the newly formed Springhill Tenants' Association. He recalled that although Father Wilson was not a member of the association he did play an important supportive role in the organization. Mo chara explained, "I was the chairman of the association, but Father Wilson was the advisor. He told us where to go, what to do. Any letter that needed to be done, paperwork he would get that all done for us. But, he wanted us to take control of it that was very important."

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As chairman of the Springhill Tenants' Association, Mo chara worked in close consultation with his community to improve its quality of life. The most pressing need for the community at the time was new housing. During the winter of 1986, Mo chara met with members of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the governmental housing agency responsible for the creation and maintenance of public housing in Northern Ireland. He pressed them to develop a new housing plan for Springhill that would be acceptable to the community. He explained:

First we had a meeting with the community and asked the community what they wanted and the first thing they wanted was new houses. You see about a year before this the Housing Executive had drawn up what they were going to do to redevelop the area...so, the first thing we wanted to do was to see the plans. So they already had the plans drawn up and we looked at the plans. Then...we had meetings with the community and we asked what they thought we should do...and we went to the Housing Executive and we asked for it. We worked very

²⁹⁰ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

well with the Housing Executive. And I have to say they worked very well with us...and we were very successful.²⁹¹

One of the most positive aspects to come from these meetings was the creation of a public playground for the children living in the area. The Springhill Tenants' Association lobbied the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to set aside land for recreational space and Mo chara proposed the creation of a large public playground. The Housing Executive approved a plan that incorporated this playground, which Mo chara later called *Tir na n'Og* [Land of the Young] *Park* (fig. 36 and 50).

Springhill Festival

In addition to focusing on housing issues, the Springhill Tenants' Association also organized an annual community festival. In his position as chairman of the Association, Mo chara was responsible for directing the production of much of the artwork associated with the festival, including set designs for the festival's main stage (fig. 61 and 62).

The first festival was held in the summer of 1988. This festival, or "Féile" as it is referred to in Irish, is a weeklong neighborhood celebration, which highlights the cultural identity of the community. It celebrates the community's uniqueness through music, art, poetry, and sporting events. The Springhill festival occurs in conjunction with the better known, *Féile an Phobail* [Community Festival] or West Belfast Community Festival, which is held annually during the second week of August. This festival was created to mark the anniversary of the introduction of Internment. In the past, this anniversary was

²⁹¹ Ibid.

commemorated by violent riots and street protests. The *Féile an Phobail* was initially organized at the urging of Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams. Adams encouraged members of the community to transform their protests into affirmative actions that would highlight the cultural identity of the community. Kenney describes the Republican festivals marking the anniversary of Interment as one of the most important occasions in the Republican calendar. She notes that Republicans transformed this anniversary into an event that was “peculiarly their own” and affirmed their sense of control over their community.²⁹²

Jack Santino has noted that, in Northern Ireland, events such as festivals are extremely significant because they are a form of artistic celebration, and he further notes that in Northern Ireland, “art and politics are one.”²⁹³ He pointed out that, “these events...are simultaneously rites of intensification of ethnic identity, the construction and maintenance of which always involve the construction of differential identity, the creating of an ‘other’ against which to define oneself.”²⁹⁴

The artwork Mo chara created in conjunction with the Springhill Festival conformed to his ideas regarding the function of a work of art. During his time in prison Mo chara developed a socialist ideology and he came to believe that art had an important role in bringing people together. The work produced for the community festival was executed collectively and it was art for the people. The socialist ideas implicit in this type

²⁹² Buckley and Kenney, 83.

²⁹³ Santino, 24.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

of work are analogous to the theories of the Mexican mural artist, David Alfaro Siqueiros, who at the beginning of his mural career in 1924 published a manifesto in which he noted, “our fundamental aesthetic object resides in socializing artistic expression and doing away, absolutely, with bourgeois individualism.”²⁹⁵

Mo chara felt that the art he created for the Springhill Festival was among his most important work, because it directly involved the community and was an expression of their collective strength. He stated:

Art comes in different forms and festivals are art too. The stage designs, the fences around Springhill for the festivals were a work of art. We had nothing. We turned this wasteland in the middle of a ghetto, in the middle of a war and we turned it into something beautiful. To put that together was a work of art. In between the harassment and the shootings, people came to the Springhill festival and that was another form of lifting people’s morale.²⁹⁶

Alan W. Barnett has noted that one of the most important characteristics of community-based public art is its ability to forge a sense of camaraderie among the residents of the community. He pointed out that with the development of community-based artwork, artists:

...learned to work with other residents to reaffirm their common identity. They developed not only a new medium of public communication and education, but also a technology of working together that became a model of social production.

²⁹⁵ David Alfaro Siqueiros, “Al Margen del Manifiesto del Sindicato de Pintores y Escultores” (In the Margin of the Manifesto of the Union of Painters and Sculptors), *El Machete*, no. 1 (March, 1924); trans. quoted in Philip Stein in *Siqueiros His Life and Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1994), 47.

²⁹⁶ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

These efforts began to reconstitute art as central to the existence of communities and to make it possible for ordinary people to begin shaping their world.²⁹⁷

Mo chara performed a variety of artistic duties organizing the Springhill Festival. He spent most of his time overseeing the painting of the stage designs for the festival's main concert stage. These designs were painted on large wood panels that were hinged together to frame the stage (fig. 61 and 62). Mo chara was responsible for choosing the designs; these included Nationalist images such as Celtic interlace, Irish mythological figures, and portraits of Republican dead. He recruited volunteers from the community to help him paint designs on large plywood panels. Mo chara marked out the designs in pencil and directed the volunteers to fill in the areas with household paint. Most of these volunteers were young local children between eight and sixteen years of age.²⁹⁸ For the most part, Mo chara has maintained this working method for all his large-scale public art projects, such as his murals.

At the end of the Springhill festival the designs were dismantled and either destroyed or recycled for future artwork. The 1994 stage design survived and is now part of the artist's personal archive located in his West Belfast home (fig. 63). This design originally formed the right side of the stage frame. It depicts an animal-interlace pattern that was copied from an illustration in Jim Fitzpatrick's *The Book of Conquests*²⁹⁹ Mo chara continued to copy Fitzpatrick's work after his release from prison and these images

²⁹⁷ Barnett, 386.

²⁹⁸ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002

²⁹⁹ Fitzpatrick, *The Book of Conquests*, unpaginated.

became an important part of Mo chara's visual repertoire.

Throughout his career Mo chara has continued to work as a set designer. Between 1993 and 2000, Mo chara created set designs for the Belfast-based theater group, Duplejoint Productions. Mo chara was one of three artists, including Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons, who painted the set designs for Doublejoint's best-known play, *Bin Lids*, a drama that was written and performed in Belfast in 1997 and traveled to New York City in 1998.

First Public Murals

At the time he began working with the Springhill Tenant's Association, Mo chara painted his first public murals. In May of 1987 he began one of the most prolific phases of his career. During this year, Mo chara painted an astonishing body of work that included seven large-scale public murals located within West Belfast. His experiences in prison and his personal maturation convinced him that Irish independence could be attained through a political process. He believed his contribution to this process involved the production of publicly provocative and informative artwork. He explained that, "I went to it as a Republican activist. I thought, this is our art, this is part of our struggle. Before I went into prison I was doing military work...but after prison I thought art was political work too. So in one shape or other the work I was doing after prison was one part of our struggle. A very important part I would say."³⁰⁰ And further that, "At the time I thought of the words of Bobby Sands who said, everyone Republican or otherwise has

³⁰⁰ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

their own part to play and I thought creating art, this is my part to play.”³⁰¹ Other contemporary Republican muralists have shared Mo chara’s belief that painting murals is vital to furthering the Republican cause. For example, the Belfast-based muralist Danny Devenny has noted that, “Bobby Sands said, everyone has a role to play. If a journalist reporting in Belfast or Derry is in front of a mural, then that is our form of publicity...what we have sought to do is to reflect the views of our community.”³⁰²

Mo chara was inspired by young Republican artists, like Con (figs. 26 and 27), who painted murals during the 1981 Irish hunger strike. The courage and fortitude of these young men influenced Mo chara’s decision to become a mural artist. He also credited his time in prison for bringing him to this realization. He explained:

Because of what the British were doing to my community, I got into the fight, and I don’t regret anything I ever done [sic]. The only thing I regret is that I got caught. And even then when I got caught that turned into a good thing anyway because I turned into being an artist in jail. I got the message when I was in prison out of what they, the hunger strike artists were doing. The courage of the kids to get up onto the wall and start doing that was incredible. I decided that this was what I was going to do when I got out. This was going to be my particular part to play for the movement.³⁰³

Mo chara’s first mural was painted in 1987 to draw attention to the Westminster

³⁰¹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 3, 2003.

³⁰² Dominic Casciani, “Painting Politics in Northern Ireland,” *BBC News Online*, May 31, 2000; available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk/northern_ireland/newsid_771000/771314.stm; accessed June, 2, 2001.

³⁰³ Mo chara (a lecture discussing his work) at Rocky Sullivan’s Tavern, New York City, October 29, 1998.

re-election campaign of the Sinn Féin leader, Gerry Adams (fig. 64).³⁰⁴ The work entitled, *Vote Adams* was painted over the course of two days. The main image was painted on a small portion of a residential wall on Springhill Drive, a street in West Belfast located a short distance from Mo chara's home. The imagery is confined to a rectangular frame that measured approximately twelve feet high by fifteen feet wide. It depicted a portrait bust of Gerry Adams before a background of the green, white, and orange colors of the Irish Tricolor flag. Adams was framed by the words "Vote Adams" painted in large block letters.

Mo chara's choice of subject matter for his first work was in keeping with the general tendency in Republican murals to promote the electoral campaigns of Republican candidates. Rolston has noted that, beginning in 1982:

Sinn Féin became increasingly involved in electoral politics, a sophisticated message had to be given to republicans who had previously been urged to boycott elections or to vote for republican candidates who refused to take their seats; now the message was that the ballot box was as powerful a weapon as the armalite. Murals played a key role in imparting this new message.³⁰⁵

The Sinn Féin elections murals that were painted prior to 1987 were often fairly simplistic (fig. 58), with the exception of one mural located in Belfast that featured an

³⁰⁴ Gerry Adams, representing the Sinn Féin party, was first elected a Member of Parliament for West Belfast in 1983. He was reelected on June 11, 1987. For further information on Gerry Adams' electoral campaigns, see Adams, *Before the Dawn* 317-319; Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 749, 771; Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1999), 116-117, 126 and Peter Taylor, *Behind the Mask: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (New York: TV Books, Inc., 1999), 329.

³⁰⁵ Rolston, "Changing the Political Landscape," 11.

elaborate design including an image of a young woman dressed in military attire and holding the Irish Tricolor flag (fig. 65). Mo chara's work was unique in that it was the first time a muralist had painted the portrait of a Sinn Féin candidate. Rolston pointed out that the Gerry Adams mural "was the first republican mural to depict an actual living person."³⁰⁶

Mo chara was motivated to paint this mural because he felt that Sinn Féin was at a political disadvantage and was hindered by its inability to campaign effectively. The party had a low campaign budget and had to rely on grassroots organizing in order to get its message out. Mo chara also noted that other political parties in Northern Ireland had an advantage over Sinn Féin:

The Unionist and the SDLP [Social Democratic and Labor Party] had lots of money to work with especially money they got from America. The British government had plenty of money and we hadn't. And they were demonizing us and talking down on Sinn Féin, so I decided that why should we not paint a mural for Gerry Adams for the election. I never ever seen [sic] murals painted for an election ever. So I said to the boys [his friends from the community], why don't we paint one of Gerry Adams?³⁰⁷

Sinn Féin's ability to campaign was also hampered by the British government's control and censorship of the media. In an essay focusing on censorship in Northern Ireland, "Closing Down the Airwaves: The Story of the Broadcasting Ban," the journalist Ed Moloney pointed out that as early as 1971 Sinn Féin was being denigrated in the

³⁰⁶ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 105.

³⁰⁷ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

media. Moloney noted:

There were other [censorship] controls. The BBC's Director General's permission was needed before not only paramilitary members were interviewed but also members of political parties like Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams. This rule did not apply to extreme loyalists, however. And when people like Adams were interviewed, television and radio reporters were required to treat them in a 'forthright' and 'hostile' fashion.³⁰⁸

Mo chara attempted to counter this censorship by depicting a positive image of the Sinn Féin leader in his *Vote Adams* mural. Mo chara believed that the primary purpose of this mural was to inform and educate the community about the political message of Sinn Féin. He explained:

The Gerry Adams mural was speaking to my community. I think all my murals talk to my community. That's the bottom line. I think it was important for me to involve my community and to inform them and to teach them about what was going on at the time Adams was pointing a way forward and telling our community that we had a better future and I wanted them to see this.³⁰⁹

In order for the work to be effective it was extremely important that the mural was located in a highly visible area. Mo chara chose a high profile location for the *Vote Adams* mural. Commenting on this initial phase in the planning of the mural he noted, "the first step in creating any mural is location, location, location. I would say that the first thing you must think of is to pick a wall that would be seen by a lot of people

³⁰⁸ Ed Moloney, "Closing Down the Airwaves: The Story of the Broadcasting Ban," in *The Media and Northern Ireland*, ed. Bill Rolston, (London: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd., 1991), 8-50, see page 12.

³⁰⁹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

everyday. For it to be effective you must capitalize on the site and this was very important with the Adams mural.”³¹⁰ Mo chara picked a wall on Springhill Drive near the community’s main Catholic church. This street was also a walking route that linked the estates of Greater Ballymurphy. He recalled, “I painted it down at the chapel...for the simple reason that a lot of people go down back and forth to the chapel and would see it. And it was an access from Ballymurphy, through Springhill into the Westrock, so you got a lot of people coming up and down that way.”³¹¹

After choosing this location Mo chara sought permission from the person living in the house where the mural was to be painted. Describing the permission process for the *Vote Adams* mural, Mo chara remarked:

The first thing that happened with getting permission to paint was I would approach the person living there. Generally, when I find a wall I would say, who lives there? Does anybody know who lives in there? Do they know me? Then I would ask. I would say, we are thinking of doing a mural. And most people say yes, one or two times some people said no, because they didn’t want to stand out with a mural on their wall, because at the time the Loyalists were doing a lot of killing. But with the vote Adams mural, it was a woman who knew me and she agreed with no problem.³¹²

Mo chara knew that the mural’s effectiveness depended on a strong aesthetic design. Therefore, he spent a great deal of time drawing the portrait. This proved to be a difficult task because he was unable to obtain sufficient materials. He explained, “I had

³¹⁰ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, New York, December 5, 2000.

³¹¹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

³¹² Ibid.

no paint so I had to ask for it. I sent kids up and down the houses to ask for paint. We were looking for green, orange, black and white. And we got all the colors except black. So I had to use black tar.”³¹³ The mural design called for the portrait to be painted in tones of black. The tar was hard to manipulate and Mo chara had a difficult time creating the image. In addition, he lacked confidence in his drawing skills. He copied Adam’s portrait by using a contemporary photograph as his model. He explained his apprehension toward the image in the following way:

I started to panic and get stressed and when I start to get stressed I get impatient. ...so I said to myself, I have to get this right, if I don’t get this right, I have to live in this community. So I worked at it and worked at it and one of my mates who is a very cynical person, he said to me, Mo chara that’s it and I said to myself if he says that’s it, it is it. And the people in the community liked it. I never heard anything bad about it. They thought it was a good image. But the tar, that was tough, and I never can do faces, so I don’t think it was that good.³¹⁴

The portrait of Gerry Adams was successful because it exemplified Mo chara’s ability to articulate facial features in fine detail. Residents who passed the mural often complimented Mo chara on the work. This approval meant a great deal to him and he credits it for giving him the confidence to continue working as a mural artist. It also added to the mural’s success, as Eva Cockroft has pointed out, “The possibility of developing a genuine people’s art is verified by the types of criticism emerging directly from the communities in which today’s murals are created.” She cited a statement by a

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

community muralist from Boston, named Dana Chandler who noted, “I discovered that my best critics and most important people were the people to whom it [the mural] was directed.”³¹⁵ Mo chara also recalled, “If it hadn’t been for that mural and the encouragement I got, I don’t think I would have ever painted any more murals. I would have let it all go.”³¹⁶ He further stated, “I knew that this was the way to go...I said to myself, you’re going on a different path now Mo chara. It was just a feeling. I just said to myself that I was entering a different phase in my life.”³¹⁷

After painting *Vote Adams* Mo chara established himself as a Republican mural artist. A few weeks after the mural’s completion, Mo chara created a second mural based on the same subject. This work entitled, *Vote Adams X* was painted on an existing billboard located at a busy intersection between the Whiterock and Springfield Roads in West Belfast (fig. 66). Mo chara’s image filled the entire surface of the billboard. It measured approximately ten feet high by eighteen feet wide. The portrait bust of Gerry Adams is accompanied by the words “Vote Adams X” and, like his first mural, the background forms an Irish Tricolor flag. In comparison to the earlier mural this portrait exhibits a greater sense of realism. It is an indication of Mo chara’s improved artistic ability.

The work’s location along a busy intersection was also very important. Rolston noted that one of the first Republican murals had been painted on this billboard in 1981

³¹⁵ Cockcroft, 259.

³¹⁶ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

³¹⁷ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

(fig. 67).³¹⁸ Mo chara remarked that this work, a Republican hunger strike mural, was still on the billboard when as he described it, he “high-jacked”³¹⁹ the site. He explained that:

This was a billboard that had an H-block mural on it and it had basically fell to pieces and I thought it would be a good location for the mural. It is at the top of the Whiterock Road where the Springfield Road meets it and thousands of cars go up there each day. And so it could be seen from a far distance, maybe two hundred yards down the road and so many people can see it. So it would attract attention. And Gerry Adams was elected so, maybe in some way I contributed to the election of Gerry Adams and at that time I felt really good about it.³²⁰

The billboard was a valuable site upon which Mo chara could retaliate against the media for its hostile attitude toward Sinn Féin. This defiant gesture is in keeping with Lippard’s notion of activist art in that it makes “heard and seen those voices hitherto invisible and powerless.”³²¹ It also can be considered a form of what the art historian Toby Clark refers to as “oppositional propaganda” in which art is used as a form of dissent against the power of the state.³²² The Republican muralist, Marty Lyons also believes that one of most import aspects of Republican murals is their ability to vocalize the concerns of the community. In relation to his work he noted, “it was just the thing to

³¹⁸ Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 26, plate 50.

³¹⁹ Mo chara (a lecture discussing his work) at Rocky Sullivan’s Tavern, New York City, October 29, 1998. Although earlier muralists had painted over this billboard, “high-jacking” such sites was not a common practice in Belfast.

³²⁰ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

³²¹ Lippard, “Activating Activist Art,” 15.

³²² Toby Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the 20th Century: The Political Image in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 11.

do, to go out and paint, [because] it was the only way to get our message across.”³²³

A target for sectarian violence

When Mo chara made the decision to continue painting murals he had to consider the dangerous implications that this choice entailed. The attention he drew toward himself made it easier for the security forces to single him out. He stated, “To actually get up and paint a mural was to risk getting my head...shot off. Believe me, I thought it would happen to me many times.”³²⁴ Kenney has shown that during the 1980s it was quite common for Catholics living in Belfast’s Republican neighborhoods to be harassed by the security forces. She noted that during this time many Nationalist communities were in a “state of siege.”³²⁵ She stated:

On an average day in the mid-1980s, one could see the security forces stop and question youths, who would then be spread-eagled against the side of an army Land Rover. You might walk up a front path to knock on the door of a friend. Suddenly a soldier would appear in full battle gear, poised at the corner of the house or crouched behind the hedge. Squads of four or five soldiers typically patrolled in single file along the pavements...carrying their semiautomatic rifles at the ready. They pointed their guns this way and that...the [British] army patrols were highly visible and aggressive.³²⁶

Santino has noted that the production of murals is one example of the

³²³ Darina Molloy, “The Writing on the Wall,” *Irish Voice*, October 14 – October 20, 1998, 23.

³²⁴ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, New York, April 30, 2001.

³²⁵ Buckley and Kenney, 82.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

“theatricality of life in Northern Ireland”³²⁷ and serves “an active social role in the ongoing conflict.”³²⁸ Thus, in Northern Ireland the painting of a political mural was a highly provocative act.

The art historian Fionna Barber has noted that even mainstream artists have responded to the dangerous implications involved in painting a mural in Belfast. In her article, “Against the Act of Union: Censorship and Visual Imagery in Northern Ireland,” Barber described a work by the artists Sean Og McAteer and Tony Patrickson. The piece, entitled *Un-named*, was performed on the Falls Road in a Nationalist district of Belfast in 1991. According to Tony Patrickson, the piece was a comment on the role of the “external abuse and oppression in programming communal identities within Northern Ireland.”³²⁹ In their performance the artists “stood spread-eagle, facing the wall in the manner of suspects being questioned and searched by army patrols. In turn, they threw paintbombs over and around one another, using the green, white, and orange colors of the flag of the Irish Republic.”³³⁰ This work sought to dramatize the conflict between the government forces and the local Nationalist population. Mo chara’s description of his daily experiences working as a muralist mirrored this performance. For example he stated:

³²⁷ Santino, 16.

³²⁸ Ibid., 14.

³²⁹ Tony Patrickson, “Tony Patrickson Media and Live Works: 1988 – present”; available from <http://www.aspart.info/>; accessed July 7, 2005.

³³⁰ Fionna Barber, “Against the Act of Union: Censorship and Visual Imagery in Northern Ireland,” *High Performance* (Spring 1992), 26.

I can tell you that because of the murals, I was stopped on the street many times [by the security forces]. I actually have diaries of being stopped in the street. In 1988, I was stopped in the street roughly about sixty times. And I wrote down when I was stopped, and how long I was stopped for, and what they said. Basically, more or less it was all against the murals. The way it happened was they would come in and get around you. Maybe eight of them would get around you. And they would just intimidate you. They would ask me, did you paint that thing, and I wouldn't answer. They might slap me around. And when someone slaps you, you want to hit them back, but you can't slap these people back...I remember they would usually say, I am just going to kill you, you Fenian bastard. They usually would come back later and throw paint bombs at whatever I did.³³¹

Ironically, this harassment gave Mo chara a greater sense of confidence and he continued to paint public work. He pointed out that the security forces “were just constantly harassing me...they are trying to break your morale and it totally and utterly failed. The thing with the murals is that they wanted to intimidate you to make you stop doing it. And the more they harassed me the more I wanted to do it.”³³²

Mo chara recalled that on several occasions, the British Army inspired him to continue with his work. It was their opposition that convinced him that what he was doing was politically effective. Other activist artists working in the public realm have also shared this sentiment. For example, in his study of New York City subway aerosol painters, the art historian Ivor L. Miller has pointed out that although aerosol artists engaged in an illegal activity and constantly feared that they would be arrested, they continued their work. Most of these artists felt that the illegal nature of their work was one of its most important characteristics. The aerosol artist, known as “Lee,” noted the

³³¹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 1, 1999.

³³² Ibid.

political importance of painting in the subway when he stated, “the painting is a reflection of ourselves, it is about us.”³³³ He further stated:

The authorities don’t want this to happen again, if the trains are painted now in any shape or form, they will take those trains out of service just because the influence that one car has is so powerful. They know that it is a political act, not just a vile act of vandalism, as they call it, it has political impact on the inner structure of the youth in New York.³³⁴

Bill Rolston has noted that the act of painting a mural in Northern Ireland was a dangerous and often life-threatening activity for Republican artists. In his text *Politics and Painting* Rolston cited the case of Michael McCartan, a Nationalist youth who was shot and killed by the RUC while painting political slogans on a wall in Belfast.³³⁵ Liz Curtis pointed out that when McCartan was shot he was “holding a paintbrush with his back to his assailant.”³³⁶ His “assailant,” the RUC officer Robert McKeown, was acquitted of the crime. The court found that McKeown was without fault because he believed McCartan was holding a gun.³³⁷ Yet, *The Irish Times*, which covered the event,

³³³ Ivor L. Miller, *Aerosol Kingdom. Subway Painters of New York City* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 7

³³⁴ Miller, 19.

³³⁵ Rolston *Politics and Painting*, 102-103.

³³⁶ Liz Curtis, *Ireland: The Propaganda War: The British Media and the ‘Battle for Hearts and Minds’* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 76.

³³⁷ For further information on the killing of Michael McCartan, see *The Irish Times*, June 20, 1981, 5; *National Geographic*, no. 4 (April 1980), 486-497.

stated that McCartan had been shot in the back at close range.”³³⁸ Michael McCartan’s killing was an apt representation of the extreme risk Mo chara faced as a mural artist and he often cites this story when he discusses the dangers that his work involves.

Mo chara’s public support for Irish Republicanism also identified him as a target for Loyalist violence, which by 1985 had been on the increase. Since he began painting murals, Mo chara has been informed by the RUC that his name had appeared on Loyalist hit lists more than once. The increase in Loyalist violence was due in large part to the passage of Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. This agreement, between the British and Irish governments, gave the Irish government a political role in the affairs of Northern Ireland. It created a ministerial body composed of British and Irish officials who were to meet regularly to discuss matters relating to Northern Ireland’s security, politics, and infrastructure. The agreement continued to affirm Northern Ireland’s political status as a province of Great Britain and it stipulated that any change in the region’s status could only come about with the consent of a majority of the population. Yet, Loyalists vehemently opposed the Agreement because of the active role it gave the Irish government in Northern Ireland’s internal affairs.

Loyalists felt that their culture was under threat and they stepped up their violent campaign against Irish Catholics. This increase in violence was reflected in Loyalist murals. Rolston has noted:

Part of the opposition to the Agreement was an increase in loyalist militarism. Although unionist politicians claimed the Agreement was the beginning of the

³³⁸ *The Irish Times*, June 20, 1981, 5.

final sell-out of Ulster, the loyalist paramilitary groups prepared to defend Ulster against sell-out. And as attack is said to be the surest form of defense, it was inevitable that lone, unarmed nationalists again would be prime targets. Initially, response to the Anglo-Irish Agreement on unionist walls consisted solely of graffiti...but in time the images became pictorial, bringing together loyalist symbolism...and militaristic imagery.³³⁹

He further noted that these murals contained images of, “men wearing balaclavas and firing weapons [and]...they are intentionally anti-nationalist and anti-Catholic. The sinister images are threatening, and are meant to be.”³⁴⁰

As outlined in chapter one of this study, murals depicting armed and masked gunmen were not particular to the Loyalist tradition. Republican muralists also have a tradition of painting gunmen. Mo chara avoided the use of such violent imagery in his murals. He felt that these provocative images were ineffective and should be avoided. Mo chara believed that Republican muralists had the ability to create more compelling works of resistance art. He wanted his murals to be both politically effective and aesthetically appealing. As he noted, his murals had to contain “beautiful art.”³⁴¹ Mo chara also wanted his work to be a positive signifier of his community’s ideals. He explained that he therefore, “took the hoods off. I think hoods and guns are intimidating. I don’t see anything intimidating in my murals...my murals are never, ever, destructive or sectarian.

³³⁹ Rolston *Politics and Painting*, 43-44.

³⁴⁰ Rolston, *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2003), ii.

³⁴¹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 17, 2003.

they have expressed what my community felt.”³⁴²

Removing the masks

The mural which most articulated his ideas at this time was entitled *Loughgall* (fig. 13). *Loughgall*, as noted in chapter one, became one of Mo chara’s most celebrated murals.³⁴³ The mural was painted as a memorial to eight IRA volunteers who were killed by the British Army in the town of Loughgall, County Armagh on May 8, 1987. These men were killed during a well-planned British Army ambush. Describing this ambush the journalist Tim Pat Coogan noted that “of the eight killed five were killed in combat and three were ordered to lie on the roadway after arrest and were then executed.” Coogan further noted that the killing at Loughgall “was the biggest single loss for the IRA since 1921.”³⁴⁴ Mo chara knew three of the Loughgall victims and their deaths affected him greatly.³⁴⁵

The incident at Loughgall was a major blow to the Republican community and Mo chara felt that it was important to honor the men with a memorial mural that was a positive affirmation of the cultural and political identity of the community. In their study

³⁴² White, 10.

³⁴³ Since its completion, this mural has been reproduced by a variety of Republican groups, including Sinn Féin, in various formats such as postcards, posters, and banners.

³⁴⁴ Coogan, *The Troubles*, 198, 290.

³⁴⁵ The three men were: Pdraig McKearney, Patrick Kelly, and Gerard O’Callaghan.

of New York memorial wall art of the 1980s and 1990s, Martha Cooper and Joseph Sciorra have pointed out that memorial murals not only transform “public grief into shared public sentiment” but they also are a “vehicle for community affiliation and potential empowerment.”³⁴⁶ Mo chara felt this his *Loughgall* mural could lift the morale of his community. He also wanted the work to send an affirmative message to the British government and its security forces on the ground. He explained:

I felt that I wanted to do something to honor these guys and to show the international world that we were not defeated. The British, obviously after the killing of the IRA volunteers, believed that the war was going well and they had struck a big blow against the IRA. So, okay they had struck a big blow...and it affected the entire Nationalist community and the struggle. So I said ‘instead of getting up and weeping and wailing let’s get up and show the rest of the world that we still support these people and we still support the IRA.’ But, in painting that mural people in the community began to bond, and there are people who weren’t involved in politics but just liked the artwork for what it was. They might not have agreed with what it was saying but they liked the artwork and that was very important to me.³⁴⁷

Mo chara clearly believed in the aesthetic importance of his work. The style of *Loughgall* indicates that although untrained as an artist, Mo chara was a competent draughtsman. Mo chara’s choice to paint the IRA men without masks is a further indication of his skill. Discussing the tendency to use masked images in Republican murals, Rolston stated:

It is tempting to attribute this obsession with masks to a return to traditional republican concerns and away from the newfound community politics

³⁴⁶ Cooper and Sciorra, 14.

³⁴⁷ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

of post-hunger-strike Sinn Féin. A more important explanation is probably the lack of ability of the artists. It is clear from most of the murals of the period other than Gerard Kelly's that the ability is lackluster. Painting volunteers with masks is easier than painting facial features.³⁴⁸

Although Mo chara considered the message to be of primary importance within his murals, he admits that in order for the work to fully engage the viewer it must have an interesting artistic design. Mo chara often react strongly to critics' claim that his work is not a form of artistic expression. He stated:

Art critics never see painting in the middle of a war as art but I believe that it is every artist's duty to express how he or she feels about what's happening to them and their community. And I think anybody who backs away from that are [sic] just moral cowards...I speak for my community. I am a voice for my community. I am voicing what my community is thinking and I do that in an artistic way. And for the people who look at our work and say it is not art, how do they not see it as art. Well then, you tell me the definition of art then. 'Propaganda', no, I don't paint propaganda, I tell my side of the story. And see for other artists or critics to say that it's not art it's propaganda. Well, I have the same emotions as they do when they are painting art. They just probably have had better equipment and training.³⁴⁹

In addition to questioning the narrow definition art critics have employed when viewing his work, Mo chara also affirmed the provocative nature of the *Loughgall* mural. He challenged the notion that a work of fine art cannot be either politically or socially provocative. He described his unease with the term 'propaganda' explaining in an interview with Bill Rolston:

³⁴⁸ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 107.

³⁴⁹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

I don't like the word propaganda, because 'propaganda' seems to be telling half-truths, but most people like art. They may not take much interest in it. But people would stand and look at a mural before they would read a paper. Also it gives the people of the immediate area a sense of pride.³⁵⁰

Mo chara spent a great deal of time refining his artistic design for *Loughgall*. The mural was painted on the gable-end wall of his sister Mary's home on Springhill Avenue. *Loughgall* measured approximately thirty feet high by twenty-five feet wide. It is the first Republican mural in which the imagery was expanded to cover the entire surface of the wall. This effect heightened the dramatic visual impact of the work. Mo chara recalled, "I thought, why should I not just go all the way up the wall? It made the mural stand out more but I also had to come up with all the paint to get it all done."³⁵¹ Mo chara took his time creating the design by squaring the wall and sketching the details out in a meticulous manner. The work took Mo chara two months to complete. His method was unique in that most Republican muralists prior to this time painted their work very quickly and in a more spontaneous manner.

Mo chara's painting process was hindered by the limited art materials available to him. He used donated paint and painted the imagery using a standard ladder and no scaffolding. The ladder proved to be too short for Mo chara to paint the upper portion of the wall. Thus, he was dangled from the roof of the house with his paintbrush in his hand. Mo chara recalled, "our materials were always second-class, so I did whatever I could to get it done. My two mates held me from over the wall from the roof and that's how it was

³⁵⁰ Rolston, *Drawing Support*, vii.

³⁵¹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

done.”³⁵²

Loughgall was the first work in which Mo chara put into practice the artistic lessons he learned in prison. The mural’s elaborate design and brightly painted background was inspired by Jim Fitzpatrick’s landscape illustrations that appear throughout *The Book of Conquests*. He also felt that the color scheme of the work was very important. He explained, “I wanted to use vibrant colors. Overall I think the sky and the colors just shout out at you. And this is what I wanted because Springhill was so drab and you know if you look at anything black and white, and that is what Springhill was and once you put color into it, the eyes are automatically attracted to the color.”³⁵³ Mo chara felt limited by his artistic ability and he recalled that in looking back at the work he “cringes” when he looks at the water. He noted, “I have no art training so I just didn’t know how to do water, so I just done [sic] it like that and I cringe when I see it now.”³⁵⁴

The overall design of the mural is focused around the image of six Irish Republican Army volunteers who represent a Republican funerary honor guard. They stand below a large ornate Irish cross with a variety of Irish Nationalist emblems. Mo chara noted, “I decided to put a Celtic cross with Celtic designs, in order to make the work look more Irish.”³⁵⁵ At the top and transverse of the cross Mo chara painted yellow and orange geometric interlace patterns modeled after designs he saw in *The Book of*

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

Kells. From the center to the lower portion of the cross is an Easter Lily, a lark entwined in barbed wire, and a rising sun. The Easter Lilly signifies the Easter Rebellion of 1916 and is meant to evoke the ongoing fight for Irish independence. The lark in barbed wire symbolizes the sacrifice of the Irish Republican prisoners of war and the rising sun is the logo of Na Fianna Eireann, the youth movement of the Irish Republican Army. The cross is surrounded by the four symbols of the provinces of Ireland.

Mo chara added these symbols in order to stress the Irishness of his work. He explained, “There is a lot of symbolism in the mural, all of it Irish. I included the four shields of the four provinces to tie in the ancient provinces of Ireland. I did it all in Irish and that was important.”³⁵⁶ Mo chara’s depiction of the four provincial shields was a Nationalist gesture that alluded to the establishment of a united Ireland. Northern Republican artists have traditionally used the provincial shields within their artwork since the early 1970s to express their belief in a united Ireland. The shields depicting the symbols of each province are frequently painted in Republican murals and provincial flags are often displayed during Nationalist parades (fig. 68). Buckley and Paisley have noted that Republicans often display these flags “together to express unity in diversity.”³⁵⁷

Mo chara painted a memorial plaque beneath the main figures. The plaque commemorated the Loughgall victims by listing their names and a dedication in their

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Anthony D. Buckley and Rhonda Paisley, *Symbols* (Belfast: Ulster Traditions Group of the Community Relations Council, 1994), 11.

honor. This was a common practice in Republican murals since the hunger strike period. Murals dedicated to the men who died on hunger strike often included their names. In addition, Republicans have painted murals dedicated to the memory of IRA members who have died in combat (fig. 69). These murals, which often include the Irish phrase, “In n’Díl Cuimne” (In Loving Memory) function as important forms of commemoration within the Republican community. Jarman believes that Republicans create memorial murals “to celebrate the triumph that will eventually be achieved through the willingness of people to risk their lives for the cause of Ireland.” He further notes that in Mo chara’s *Loughgall* mural, the Republicans being commemorated serve “less as examples of the willing sacrifice than as martyred victims.”³⁵⁸ Like the young muralists of the hunger strike period, Mo chara has attempted to transform the Loughgall victims into heroes for the Republican cause.

Although Republican artists frequently memorialize the dead by writing their names on the wall, Mo chara altered this tradition slightly when he wrote the names and the text in Irish. Mo chara believed that it was important to avoid the use of English in the mural. He explained:

I decided that while painting *Loughgall* all the writing should be done in Irish. For the simple reason to show the British army on the ground that they are on a different island...what I wanted to say to the British and what I wanted to say to my own community was that ‘We are different. We are not English people we are Irish, we are Celtic people, we have a different culture and a different identity than you.’ And that was the reason I did everything in Irish...I wanted the British to know that they were in a different country with a different language and culture.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁸ Jarman, *Materials Conflicts*, 240.

³⁵⁹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

The inclusion of the Irish language was a symbol of the cultural identity of his community and, as he notes, it defines the work in opposition to British culture. Camille O'Reilly has noted that the use of Irish in Northern Ireland's public spaces has become an "effective means" for Irish Republicans to "mark out the boundary of identity." She also pointed out that its use was a direct provocation against a government ban that restricted the public use of the Irish language.³⁶⁰ Thus, the inclusion of the language in the *Loughgall* mural made the mural a highly subversive work of art. O'Reilly argued that, within Nationalist communities, the use of Irish signifies the political, social, and cultural resistance of the population and it can also be used "as a threat"³⁶¹ against the dominant British power base. She has pointed out that interest in the Irish language in West Belfast, in particular, has increased since the early 1980s and schools teaching the Irish language "have mushroomed all over the North, the number of Irish classes for adults has also grown."³⁶² O'Reilly further stated, "In the context of Northern Ireland, the Irish language has become a powerful symbol and its use in public places has given rise to some strong reactions."³⁶³

Mo chara directed his mural at the British Army but he was also speaking to his own community. He believed the mural had an important didactic function. He noted:

³⁶⁰ O'Reilly, 46 noted that this ban was included "in an amendment to the Public Health and Local Government Act of 1949." The ban was overturned in 1995.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

I was trying to capture my own people too. I remember when I was painting and even old people, not just kids, would say ‘What does that mean?’ And I would explain it. So I was educating people then, even a wee slight thing like including Irish, something like that was education. I also wanted the British to understand that this...is not English; that this thing painted on the wall is of the culture that lives here. Maybe some of them got the message that they were on the wrong island here, that this is the island of Ireland. I did all the writing in Irish, cause I just had to hammer it home to them.³⁶⁴

In this sense the work was clearly effective. Shortly after the *Loughgall's* completion the security forces covered it with paint bombs and Mo chara had to repair it. The mural was vandalized significantly at least eight times. Each time the work was damaged Mo chara repainted it (fig. 70). The mural was destroyed in its entirety in 1993 when the Northern Ireland Housing Executive redeveloped the Springhill area. Yet, the image lived on, for example, Sinn Féin reproduced the mural in several formats including as a poster and postcard design. These images were sold in Sinn Féin headquarters located throughout Northern Ireland. Each reproduction added to the significance of the original work. Belinda Loftus has noted that through constant re-use Republican images are transformed into “visual codes, whose constant use and re-use simultaneously adds further layers of meaning to them, [and] ensures their real impact on social, political, economic and religious developments.”³⁶⁵

Loughgall was one of several murals that Mo chara painted throughout his career in which the sociopolitical context of the work changed as it was reproduced. For example, one of his later murals, *Free Ireland*, 1990 (fig. 20) in addition to becoming an

³⁶⁴ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

³⁶⁵ Belinda Loftus, “Northern Ireland 1968-1988,” 99.

important symbol of the community's cultural pride, functioned as a backdrop to important Republican speeches. It is also used as a central meeting point for Republican parades and rallies (fig. 71). This attests to the mural's acceptance and success within the community. Barnett has noted that a mural's "actual role is impossible to measure, but it is felt by local people. The power of murals to pick up people's spirit is demonstrated by the holding of public meetings and celebrations beneath them. The tone, the vitality of an area is observed again and again to change because of murals and the activism to which they contribute."³⁶⁶

Free Ireland, like *Loughgall* has also been reproduced in several formats by Republican groups including Sinn Féin, and more recently the Irish Travel Board, which copied the mural as a postcard. In this context the work became a symbol of the Northern Irish urban landscape and it was used to signify Belfast's physical characteristics and promote tourism. The Derry-based mural group known as the Bogside artists believe that the ability of Nationalist murals to promote tourism is one of the many important ways murals serve the community. William Kelly, a member of the group noted, "Whether you are prepared to admit it or not these works are very popular and internationally known. They draw in large numbers of tourists, thereby keeping the tourist industry happy" and they keep a large number of people who work in the tourist industry employed.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Barnett, 391-392.

³⁶⁷ William Kelly, 104.

Iconic Rebels

While painting *Loughgall* Mo chara completed two other large-scale murals: a memorial to Bobby Sands (fig. 72) and a double portrait of Bob Marley (fig. 76). During this time Mo chara met Caron McMullen (b. Belfast, 1967 d. Belfast, 1992), a Belfast native who Mo chara would later refer to as his personal source of inspiration. Caron was from an Irish Catholic family who lived in the Ballymurphy area, in a small housing estate known as Westrock (fig. 29). Her family did not have any connections to the Republican movement, but they supported the Nationalist cause.³⁶⁸ Caron's brother-in-law, Tony Mulligan, was a friend of Mo chara's, and at Caron's request Tony introduced her to Mo chara. Mo chara recalled that when they met in the spring of 1987 "there was an immediate connection."³⁶⁹ Caron was nine years younger than Mo chara and according to the muralist, "she had a tough interior to match her stunning exterior."³⁷⁰ After three months of dating, Caron moved into Mo chara's home on Springhill Avenue and the couple lived there together until her untimely death from bone cancer in 1992.

Caron helped Mo chara in every aspect of his personal and professional life. Although she had no artistic background, Mo chara valued her opinion and he felt that she was the only person in his life who truly understood his work and his artistic objectives.

While he worked on *Loughgall* Mo chara received his first official commission to

³⁶⁸ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

produce a mural for the Twinbrook housing estate in South Belfast. The mural was commissioned to honor the six-year anniversary of the death of Bobby Sands who lived in Twinbrook before his arrest. Mo chara reluctantly agreed to paint the mural, because at the time, in addition to painting *Loughgall*, he was also busy with work for the Springhill festival and Tenant's Association. These responsibilities were taking up a great deal of his time. He began the *Bobby Sands Memorial* but was unable to fully complete the work.

The memorial was painted on the exterior wall of a three-story apartment complex. It measured approximately thirty-five feet high by eighteen feet wide and extended to just below the third apartment balcony. The work contained a two-part design. The upper section of the wall was dominated by a large black and white phoenix, which rose from red and yellow flames. Above the phoenix's head was a white banner containing the Irish word, "Saorise" or freedom. The background was painted with flat planes of blue color and the entire work was framed with three bands of green, white, and orange, the colors of the Irish Tricolor. As noted above, the phoenix is a traditional Republican symbol that has been used since the nineteenth century. It symbolizes the ongoing fight against British imperialism. Mo chara linked this symbol with the contemporary struggle for Irish independence. He also used the image to signify Sands' resilient spirit. Mo chara noted that, "The phoenix rising from the hunger strike was showing that it was a rebirth of the Republican movement in a sense."³⁷¹

In the original design for the work the lower half of the mural consisted of a double portrait of two Irish hunger strikers. Due to his other painting commitments Mo

³⁷¹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

chara left this section of the work unfinished. He asked two young Twinbrook residents to complete the work for him. He noted that he quickly changed the original design and “marked out images of the four provinces” of Ireland to make it easier to complete. He pointed out that “later on a couple of guys drew in figures of the IRA” (fig. 73).³⁷²

The *Bobby Sands Memorial* was also difficult to complete because, while he was painting, Mo chara was continually harassed by the British Army. The British Army’s parachute regiment was patrolling the Twinbrook estate at regular intervals and they targeted Mo chara by throwing paint bombs at the mural. On one occasion the mural was destroyed almost completely. He explained:

When I had most of the work painted the Parachute Regiment was in the area at the time and they threw a red paint bomb. It just splattered the inside of the mural. So, I had to get back on the ladder and redrew and repainted the phoenix rising from the ashes. It was murder to do and it nearly did me in. I thought of giving up painting. It was such a hassle, but at least I know that my point was well taken by the British and my work was being effective.³⁷³

Mo chara also pointed out that this harassment caused him to alter his original design for the mural. He noted that the original sketch for the work also called for areas of shading to be placed around the wings of the phoenix. Yet, he stated:

This was very difficult because I was trying to get the wings to be the exact same and the exact same shape on either side, and the ladder made it more difficult. Everything was done by ladders then and this was about three stories high and I

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

was standing there and the British Army was harassing me. When you're on the ladder you can only shade from there to there [motions a small arm length distance], then you have to get down off the ladder and look at it, and it doesn't work. You end up with patches on the thing. So I just done [sic] the background in plain blue. I also knew that the British army would just destroy it so with plain blue it could be fixed.³⁷⁴

It is remarkable that under such trying circumstances Mo chara continued to paint the mural. He explained that in addition to the harassment, painting from a ladder presented many obstacles for him. Mo chara produced a number of large-scale murals while dangling precariously from a ladder (fig. 74) or as noted above, from a roof.

The Bobby Sands memorial remained on the wall for fourteen years until the spring of 2001 when the Twinbrook Tenant's Association commissioned Mo chara to replace the work with a new mural that would commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the 1981 hunger strike. The new work conforms to Mo chara's original design (fig. 75). The mural includes the phoenix rising from the ashes in the upper section of the wall and two Republican hunger strikers on the lower section.

Painting Messages of Defiance

During the summer of 1987, Mo chara painted two personal murals that expressed his defiant stance against British Imperialism. The works, *Bob Marley* (fig. 76) and *King Nuada* (fig. 77) clearly recall his prison artwork and were artistic expressions of his continued fight for Irish independence. Mo chara painted the Bob Marley mural on the side of his home. He referred to this work as being "my mural." He contrasted this work

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

to his other public murals, which were painted primarily for his community.

Bob Marley depicted two portraits of the reggae singer, which were copied from the two album covers. The lower portrait depicted Marley in a defiant gesture. He was standing over the word “Uprising” and holds his arms over his head with his fists clenched. As in his earlier *Bob Marley and the Wailers Confrontation*, Mo chara makes an analogy between Marley’s revolutionary philosophy and his own spirit of resistance. The mural declared publicly Mo chara’s admiration for Marley. Additionally, through the inclusion of the words, “Uprising” Mo chara suggested a message of rebellious opposition toward the British establishment in Northern Ireland.

Through murals like *Bob Marley* and *Loughgall*, Mo chara attempted to encourage his community to oppose British rule. In the same way, his mural *King Nuada*, although a predominately cultural work, expressed a clear message of resistance (fig. 77). *King Nuada* was the most ambitious mural of Mo chara’s career. This work was painted on Springhill Avenue on a wall adjacent to his *Loughgall* mural. When viewed together, these two works created an impressive sight. Mo chara recalled that, “You have to remember that Springhill was gray. It was a ghetto. And you came down the street and turned the corner and there were these two bright huge murals. And it really made people look, and that’s what I wanted. I wanted to get people’s attention in a big way. I think I did by putting them together like that.”³⁷⁵

King Nuada was painted on an unevenly shaped wall that also contained a small extension. The work measured approximately twenty feet high by thirty feet wide with

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

the extension wall that measured about ten feet high by twelve feet wide. The central image was copied from Jim Fitzpatrick's illustration *Nuada Journeys to the Otherworld* (fig. 78) that originally appeared in Fitzpatrick's 1983 text, *The Silver Arm*.³⁷⁶ The illustration depicted the ancient Irish ruler, King Nuada as a victorious warrior. Mo chara noted that he was inspired to reproduce the image on a grand scale. He stated:

I wanted to do something big. I had done [sic] a few of Fitzpatrick's paintings when I was in jail, and I wanted to see if I could do it [Fitzpatrick's work] big. I believe that the figure of King Nuada was so inspirational. The story is a Celtic story. Basically, what I wanted to say to the British after the event at Loughgall was that, 'We are back and we ain't going to lie down. And the best way to do it I thought was to produce Celtic art, which would baffle them, so I copied Fitzpatrick's image.'³⁷⁷

In contrast to his *Loughgall* mural Mo chara did not rely on standard Republican imagery in this work. He created a mural that reintroduced the story of an ancient Irish hero and offered his community a new understanding of its cultural heritage. At the time he felt that the *King Nuada* mural was the most important work he would ever produce. Thus, he painted the work slowly and meticulously planned the layout of the design. The mural took Mo chara three months to complete. During this time Mo chara copied the Fitzpatrick illustration for the central section of the wall using a grid method. He squared the original illustration and expanded its seven and half by twelve inch design to the scale of the wall. He then hand-painted the work one section at a time.

³⁷⁶ Fitzpatrick, *The Silver Arm*, 39.

³⁷⁷ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

As in his prison drawings after Fitzpatrick's work, Mo chara studied every line and detail of the original composition. He drew a preliminary image onto the wall using pencil and then painted over the design. Mo chara pointed out, "I started to square off the wall. I got the basic image itself and centered it and put the squares up and drew it all by hand. And it was tough work. Everything in it was Jim Fitzpatrick's, but it was my back breaking up there on the ladder."³⁷⁸

Although his paint selection was limited, Mo chara found that after he established a reputation as a mural artist, he received donations of household paint on a regular basis. He recalled the time he was painting *King Nuada*:

People in the community knew to tell me if they had paint. I did get a lot of paint. I would use any color I could. That is why the mural is so colorful. And, I also knocked on doors and asked people for paint. Most of the time I got it. The materials just came during the process of painting in a variety of ways. If someone had come up and given me purple paint then I would have been painting with purple. That's how it happened.³⁷⁹

The final image is infused with vibrant eye-catching colors. The mural consisted of mainly green, red, and blue tones. The composition was dominated by the central image of King Nuada who seemed to be levitating toward the sky. His left arm with clenched fist is held up in a gesture of strength. The large silver sword in his right hand further emphasizes his power. King Nuada is highlighted by several large circles framing his body. The largest and outer circle contains the Irish words, "Is e seo Nuadha Ari

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

tuatha de danann,” which translated from the Irish reads, “Here is Nuada, King of the Tuatha de Danann.” The background consists of an elaborate landscape of lush green hills and a green cloud-filled sky. Mo chara explained this unconventional color choice in the following way:

The reason the clouds are so green is because I had a lot of green paint. I was trying to get as close as possible [to the original] with the colors that I had. And the green clouds were because it was all the paint that I had and I was stressed and I wanted to get it finished. I didn’t want to go back around looking for white paint, so I just used the green.³⁸⁰

To the left and right of King Nuada are images of ancient Irish rock structures. On the left there is a large dolmen or Celtic grave marker, and on the right an ogham, or standing stone decorated with ancient Irish designs. These objects of Ireland’s cultural heritage asserted the work’s Irish identity. This was a very important aspect of the mural. Mo chara explained:

I thought that it was very important to push the culture as well as the political murals. So, I introduced the Celtic forms because I believed it was very important especially when you were seeing the constant harassment of the British Army and the RUC. I think that when you are in a situation like that, when you have been driven to a situation where you are involved in an armed struggle ... you start to think about your culture and your identity and who you are, which often you weren’t told or weren’t allowed to know. So painting *King Nuada*, I thought it would be new, that it would break a mold in the murals. It would be another direction in the sense that...I wanted, my local community to know that we had a Celtic culture. That we had kings and queens and a culture that was long older than the culture that was forced upon us.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

The above statement conforms to Rolston's idea that, "at their best, Republican murals educate, promote debate and encourage the best, most progressive elements in their community."³⁸² *King Nuada* changed the face of Republican murals. Mo chara expanded the ideas he began with *Loughgall*, and for the first time a Republican mural became an educational tool through which the artist could inform the community of its cultural history. Jim Fitzpatrick, who reacted very positively to Mo chara's recreation of his work, noted that the mural played a significant role in the history of the Troubles. In a recent interview he stated,

What he [Mo chara] did was very important. There is no doubt that he contributed to the artistic identity of West Belfast. I think what Kelly [Mo chara] did was very vital at a very vital time in our history. I am glad that my work helped him to do something that served an important purpose. The murals he created were so important because he brightened up the place and in addition he stamped identity, identity, identity on to the walls of West Belfast.³⁸³

Mo chara was motivated to paint the *King Nuada* mural in order to express his sense of cultural pride. His work in general was highly influential in this regard. Muralists working after him often cite the cultural significance of their work as being important. For example, the Derry muralist, William Kelly who began painting Nationalist murals in 1993 as part of the Bogside Artists group noted, "The murals serve a much deeper and, to our mind, more crucial purpose. They function as talking points for

³⁸² Rolston, "Changing the Political Landscape," 11.

³⁸³ Jim Fitzpatrick, interview by author, telephone interview between New York and Dublin, September 17, 2005.

the local population. They also raise self-esteem, encourage artistic endeavor in the young, [and] give pride to the old.”³⁸⁴

Ironically, *King Nuada* was appreciated by the British Army, which Mo chara had fought so hard against. He stated, “I used King Nuada’s image to show that our culture is still shining through. And I saw British soldiers getting their photograph taken with it. Even the enemy said to me one day, ‘It’s blooming marvelous.’ Obviously the Brits [sic] understood this type of thing is not English, but they enjoyed it anyway. And that was amazing to me and it made me feel great.”³⁸⁵ This incident attests to the success of the work. Cockcroft, Cockcroft, and Weber have pointed out that the true measure of a successful community mural is the extent through the mural “acts as a catalyst, and make[s] the community stronger, more visible; but in order to do that, [the mural] must be a vehicle for the redefinition, or reformulation, of common values. In many cases this calls for the revaluation of a history and heritage previously ignored or suppressed.”³⁸⁶

The artistic aspects of the work were highly appealing and it is likely that the British soldiers appreciated the work’s aesthetic qualities. Mo chara believed that this was one of the work’s most important features. He stated:

With *King Nuada*, the artwork would have been at the forefront because it was a Celtic mural. It was a less threatening type of mural, because you see once I was painting the IRA images, they [the British] were torturing me. And then when I painted *King Nuada* I could put beauty into it. And it was amazing that the

³⁸⁴ William Kelly, 105.

³⁸⁵ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

³⁸⁶ Cockcroft, Cockcroft, and Weber, 73.

enemy, the British, thought it was beautiful. The media used to come to film their reports in front of it and people used to come from all over, and tell me it was brilliant.³⁸⁷

Mo chara was successful in creating a new Republican art form that engaged his enemy in a positive, yet thought-provoking way. He recalled, “What I wanted to do was to show our children that we had an identity of our own. I was telling the British army that we had an identity. Now I was telling our children that we have stories and something to be proud of. Both had to know something very important was being shown here.”³⁸⁸ Mo chara therefore, considered the mural to be a successful work of art.

The mural took on a great deal of significance for the community. For example, local residents recalled that the work was protected by the community’s youth. One resident, Paddy Fagan noted that “a patrol of kids use to run up [to Mo chara’s house] and to tell when the RUC had damaged the mural. Sometimes some of them would say that they’d fix it for him. They loved it that much, they really loved it, everyone did.”³⁸⁹

Unlike the earlier ‘jungle’ mural by Ellis and Jordan, Mo chara’s *King Nuada* mural gave the community a sense of pride. This is one of the most important contributions of the work. Sinn Féin’s Director of Publicity, Danny Morrison noted that he often brought international visitors to Springhill Avenue to view both the *Loughgall* and *King Nuada* murals. Morrison noted, “We [Sinn Féin] felt it was important to show

³⁸⁷ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Paddy Fagan, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 2, 1998.

people what our community was made of...the murals that Gerard Kelly painted were great publicity because they expressed what was so unique about our people.³⁹⁰ Barnett has pointed out that one of the most important characteristics of community murals is their ability to strengthen the local residents' sense of solidarity. He further noted that murals are most successful when they empower local residents. He stated:

The ultimate test of community support is whether the murals are defaced, since most of them are outdoors. Seldom do you find graffiti scrawled on them, and sometimes neighborhood children, as if they were museum guards, warn visitors not to get too close...the most important achievement is that local people regard the paintings as *theirs*.

What is of profound importance about these murals is that they represent a fundamental change in the relation of culture to ordinary people. Instead of having 'fine art' denied them by a cultivated elite or imposed on them by well-meaning educators, instead of being swamped by the public relations of the establishment and the commercial art of advertisers, neighborhood people are developing a community-based culture that gives them the means to represent their existence as they know it, and, if they so decide, to act to change it. These murals are freeing ordinary people from ways of seeing that are not their own and helping them take control of their perceptions, which is necessary to their taking charge of their own lives.³⁹¹

As in his *Loughgall* mural, Mo chara used the Irish language to further emphasize the cultural importance of the work. He noted that, "People would say what do those words mean and 'Mo chara who is the Tuatha de Danann?' I would explain all about it, the story of King Nuada and the earliest days of Ireland. Or they might have to find out themselves and that was the point getting across. That was why I added the Irish. I

³⁹⁰ Danny Morrison, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, June 17, 2005.

³⁹¹ Barnett, 15.

wanted them to go out and find what it means. What the story meant. That was the point.”³⁹² O’Reilly pointed out that the public use of the Irish language “encourages a passive viewer to become a more active participant perhaps also helping to spark an interest in learning the language but at least helping to raise people’s awareness of Irish.”³⁹³

Opposing Censorship

In 1988 Mo chara created a type of outdoor art gallery by painting a third mural on Springhill Avenue adjacent to his *Loughgall* and *King Nuada* murals. This mural, *Oppose Censorship* (fig. 79) was the first of five murals in which Mo chara relied primarily on political cartoons as the source imagery for his work. These murals were all copied from the work of the *An Phoblacht/Republican News* cartoonist Brian Moore, also known as “Cormac.” Mo chara was not the first Republican artist to reproduce Cormac’s images. Danny Devenny, who spent the early part of his career working as a graphic designer for Sinn Féin, often replicated Cormac’s cartoons in Sinn Féin’s political posters.

Mo chara was commissioned by Sinn Féin to reproduce Cormac’s *Oppose Censorship* cartoon on a large-scale. In his mural, Mo chara enlarged Cormac’s cartoon to the thirty by twenty foot scale of the wall. The inventive image effectively expressed

³⁹² Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

³⁹³ O’Reilly, 57.

the Republican objection to British censorship. The work depicted four heads that are painted with the colors of the Irish Tricolor. A British Union Jack gags the first two heads and the last two heads show the gag being removed as a dove of peace emerges. The image suggested that, when uncensored, Irish Republicans would talk of peace.

Mo chara painted this mural in order to highlight the injustice of the 1988 British Broadcasting Ban. Moloney pointed out that because of this ban, “television and radio organizations were forbidden from carrying interviews or direct statements from proscribed paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland, from representatives of Sinn Féin, Republican Sinn Féin, or the UDA and from those who ‘support and invite support for those organizations.’”³⁹⁴

The British and Northern Irish governments had a long history of censoring Irish Nationalists long before the British Broadcasting Ban was enacted. The voice of the Republican community had been silenced through a variety of methods. As Moloney further pointed out, the 1922 Special Powers Act, “empowered the Unionist Minister of Home Affairs to ban newspapers, films, and books”³⁹⁵ that he deemed unsuitable. The majority of this censored material was Irish Nationalist. Mo chara believed his *Oppose Censorship* mural served an important function in combating the government control of the media. He noted that murals such as this could be used as weapons against this form of oppression. He recalled:

Censorship was on in our community by all the media and demonization [sic]

³⁹⁴ Moloney, 10.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

against us was also very prevalent and used against our community. So I thought that the only way that people could get the message was by looking at murals. What we wanted to do was to get our message out. If we could have gotten our message out in smoke signals we would have done that. The only way we could put it out and it be seen in public and seen internationally was to paint it on the walls and to do art...people need to get their attention caught [sic]. Sometimes I think the murals are just like advertising. It's a way of getting the message across. The most simple and easiest way to get our message across was through art because that was all we had then.³⁹⁶

Mo chara's statement speaks to the important role his murals served within the Republican community. He saw his work as a vital form of communication through which he could inform and educate the public. As in his earlier *Vote Adams* and *Vote Adams X*, Mo chara attempted to counter the government's discriminatory practices. Fiona Barber has noted "The stakes of the Broadcasting Ban are actually much higher, raising the implications of a so-called democracy's power to silence any views it considers oppositional."³⁹⁷ Through his confrontational murals Mo chara expressed an alternate point of view and encouraged the onlooker to question the power and actions of the government.

He also compares his work here to advertising. Republican murals, in general share many similarities with commercial advertisement in that they are often created to persuade the spectator to support the Republican cause. As Rolston has described, murals in Northern Ireland primarily function to "draw support" for the political agenda of the group represented in the work. Mo chara understood that a commercial advertisement

³⁹⁶ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

³⁹⁷ Barber, 26.

was only successful if, as he noted, it “could capture the attention of the person on the street in less than five seconds.”³⁹⁸ He therefore felt that his work could be most successful if it contained a simple, yet vibrant design. Danny Devenny has also drawn an analogy between his work and advertising. He noted “We try to make the image very simple so that people can connect to it.”³⁹⁹

Honoring the Gibraltar Victims

Throughout 1988 Mo chara worked at a hectic pace. During this year he produced six large-scale murals and continued to organize the Springhill Festival and Tenant’s Association. The murals he produced in 1988 were created in an uncharacteristically short amount of time. Over the course of three days Mo chara painted a memorial mural entitled *Gibraltar* (fig. 80). According to Bill Rolston who was present during the work’s creation, the mural was painted during “three days of incessant heavy rain.”⁴⁰⁰ *Gibraltar* was the most physically challenging work Mo chara created. While he painted the work, he came close to death during an encounter with the British Army. He recalled:

British soldiers were patrolling the area at the time I was painting the *Gibraltar* mural. One of them came up to me and in my face and says to me, ‘What’s your name?’ I said, “What the fuck do you think my name is?” Because I mean they know who I am. It is in their briefing reports before they come out on the street.

³⁹⁸ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

³⁹⁹ Elizabeth Hayt, “Troubles, Agitprop for Both Camps,” *The New York Times, Arts and Leisure*, October 18, 1998, 36.

⁴⁰⁰ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 105.

They see photographs of who is in the area. After that another British soldier grabbed me by the throat and started to trail me down the entry. And the other Brits were yelling, ‘Shoot him, shoot the fucker’ and the soldier cocked his rifle and put it to my head. I said to myself, Mo chara this is your last day and just at that moment women [from the community] came around and started screaming and I just said, thank god, thank god. And my mate...came over to sort of cool the situation down, but they were going to kill me that day.⁴⁰¹

Mo chara had every reason to believe that he could have been shot on sight that day. By 1988 the British security forces were accused of operating a “shoot-to-kill” policy in Northern Ireland. Much evidence has been available to support this claim.⁴⁰²

Mo chara’s Gibraltar mural was painted to honor three IRA members, Mairead Farrell, Sean Savage, and Daniel McCann who were killed by the British Special Air Services (SAS) unit of the British Army in Gibraltar on March 6, 1988 in a likely shoot-to-kill operation. Mo chara knew the three IRA volunteers and he felt profoundly saddened by their death.⁴⁰³ The British government alleged that the three were in Gibraltar to bomb a British military parade. Later investigations revealed that when they were killed they had no evidence of a bomb and were unarmed. Witnesses described seeing the three being shot five to six times each at close range as they lay face down on the ground. In September 1995 the European Court of Human Rights reviewed the event

⁴⁰¹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 1, 1999.

⁴⁰² In 1988 a special British government investigation, known as the Stalker Investigation, found that there had been evidence of a shoot-to-kill policy in place within the Northern Irish security forces. For further information, see Maxine Williams, *Murder on the Rock: How the British Government Got Away with Murder* (London: Larkin Publishing, 1989).

⁴⁰³ For further information on the Gibraltar killings, see Williams, and Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 778-781.

and found that the IRA members had been unlawfully killed. The British Army was found to be in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights.

In addition to being a memorial, the work was also used to decorate the processional route for the funerals of the three victims that was held on March 16, 1988. The funeral was attended by thousands of people and it was widely covered by the local and international media. Gibraltar was located on a prominent wall along the funeral procession route and it was featured on many television news segments.⁴⁰⁴ During the night before the funeral, the security forces paint-bombed the mural and almost completely destroyed it. Mo chara repaired the work as best he could and finished it only moments before the funeral procession passed by the wall.

The design for the mural was based on Yann Goulet's (1914-1999) sculpture *Ballyseedy Memorial*, 1959 (Ballyseedy, County Kerry, Ireland). The Goulet sculpture commemorated a famous Republican massacre that took place during the Irish Civil War in which nine Irish Republicans were tied to a bomb and blown up by members of the Irish Free Army. The allegorical figures in Mo chara's *Gibraltar* mural were modeled after Goulet's sculpture. The man dying on the ground at the left of the work represented Republican loss. The mother and child at the center of the work grieve this loss. The young man striding forward at the right is a symbol of the continuation of the Republican struggle.

⁴⁰⁴ While the mourners, including Mo chara, gathered at Belfast's Milltown cemetery for the funeral of the Gibraltar victims, a Loyalist gunman named Michael Stone opened fire and threw grenades into the crowd. Stone killed three mourners and injured over fifty others. For further information, see Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 778-779 and Taylor, 347.

Republican Icons

Between 1988 and 1989 Mo chara invented a new form of Republican imagery in which he transformed portraits of well-known Republicans into cultural icons. In three murals, *1916 Cúchulainn*, 1988 (fig. 81), *Joe Doherty*, 1988 (fig. 84) and *Bobby Sands*, 1989 (fig. 85). Mo chara endowed the figures of his work with mythic, even god-like status.

1916 Cúchulainn is a commemorative mural, which was painted to mark the seventy-second anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising. The work, located on the Monagh Road in Belfast, is similar to Mo chara's *Loughgall* and *King Nuada* murals particularly because of its use of vibrant color and its complex design. Like these two murals, *1916 Cúchulainn* contained a richly detailed landscape inspired by the work of Jim Fitzpatrick. The mural featured the portrait busts of the seven signatories of the Irish Proclamation of Independence. The signatories depicted from left to right and top to bottom are: Patrick Henry Pearse (1879-1916), Sean MacDiarmada (1884-1916), Thomas J. Clarke (1857-1916), Joseph Plunkett (1887-1916), Thomas MacDonagh (1878-1916), James Connolly (1870-1916), and Eamonn Ceannt (1881-1916).⁴⁰⁵ These men were all executed by the British government for their role in organizing the rising. The portraits surround a depiction of the Irish mythological warrior, Cúchulainn.

According to Irish mythology, Cúchulainn was an ancient Celtic warrior from Ulster, who almost single-handedly fought off invading forces from the southern Irish province of Connacht. Cúchulainn received a mortal wound in battle and tied himself to

⁴⁰⁵ Mo chara, interview with the author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

a stone in order to die standing up facing his enemies. The image in the mural is copied from Oliver Sheppard's statue *The Death of Cúchulainn*, 1911-1912 (General Post Office, Dublin) (fig. 82). Sheppard's statue was erected in the General Post Office, Dublin in 1934, which served as the headquarters of the 1916 Easter Rising.⁴⁰⁶

Republican artists have frequently reproduced Sheppard's statue in their work to symbolize their spirit of resistance. They saw Cúchulainn as a Celtic martyr who died defending Ireland from invading forces. Unfortunately, Republicans, including Mo chara, have failed to note that the Cúchulainn myth recounts a story of internecine warfare between two Irish provinces. One must also consider that the Celts were immigrants to Ireland who arrived in about 400 B.C. The Celtic settlers soon dominated the earlier inhabitants of the island and asserted their own political and cultural practices.⁴⁰⁷ Irish Nationalists however equate the Celtic culture with the indigenous inhabitants of Ireland. They embrace Celtic art, language, and mythology as the native source for their contemporary culture. Yet, as Benedict Anderson has pointed out "Nations, however, have no clearly identifiable births"⁴⁰⁸ and formation of a nation is often based on a collective sense of amnesia. Thus, Mo chara and muralists like him, who use Celtic imagery in their work as a symbol of their indigenous identity, are

⁴⁰⁶ Turpin, 139 noted that the Prime Minister of Ireland, Eamon De Valera, selected the Sheppard sculpture "to be the official memorial to the Rising of 1916." The work was "installed in the General Post Office [Dublin], former headquarters of the Rising by December 1934."

⁴⁰⁷ Power, 12.

⁴⁰⁸ Anderson, 205.

relying on inaccurate historical idioms. Hobsbawn has also noted, “getting its history wrong is part of being a nation.”⁴⁰⁹

Paradoxically, Loyalist artists have also used the depiction of Cúchulainn to forge their own national identity. A mural located in the Loyalist neighborhood of East Belfast along the Newtownards Road depicts Cúchulainn as a Loyalist hero. It contains the words, “Cuchulainn Ancient Defender of Ulster from Irish Attacks over 2000 Yrs. Ago” (fig. 83). On a wall to the left of the mural, (not visible in fig. 83) the muralist has painted the words, “We will maintain our faith and our nationality.” Jarman has pointed out that “while the Republican use of Cúchulainn is established, even traditional, and appears ‘logical’ or obvious, the Loyalist claim is no less authentic.”⁴¹⁰

The appropriation of this Ulster warrior by the two ethnic groups is one indication that the conflict in Northern Ireland has much to do with arguments over territorial rights. Loyalist and Republicans have both attempted to legitimize their cause by using symbols that claim their group’s natural right to the region.

Art historian John Turpin pointed out that “Irish cultural nationalism of the early twentieth century took inspiration from the myth of Cúchulainn,” and that renewed interest in the Cúchulainn was sparked during the time of the Celtic Revival.⁴¹¹ In *1916 Cúchulainn*, Mo chara included the words of Patrick Pearse, which are quoted from his poem *Mise Éire* (1912). The English translation of the text reads:

⁴⁰⁹ Hobsbawn, 12.

⁴¹⁰ Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, 245.

⁴¹¹ Turpin, 134.

I am Ireland
 I am older than the Witch of Beare
 Great is my Glory
 I who bore dauntless Cúchulainn
 Great my shame
 My own children who sold their mother
 I am Ireland I am lonelier than the Witch of Beare ⁴¹²

Turpin pointed out that Patrick Pearse, the leader of the 1916 Easter Rising, was the first to “make the link explicit between the Cúchulainn myth and modern political action.” ⁴¹³ Mo chara emphasized this connection when he included the portrait busts alongside the figure of Cúchulainn. Mo chara noted that when he painted this work he looked to a variety of sources related to Irish history. He explained that, “I first think of ideas, then I begin to search. I look in books; I look at magazines, and try to get an image that would make sense, that would go with what you are trying to say. For the 1916 mural [*1916 Cúchulainn*] I thought of including the Cúchulainn statue so it would stress what I was trying to say which had to do with the Republican spirit living on forever in these people.” ⁴¹⁴ Thus, in *1916 Cúchulainn* Mo chara sanctified these early-twentieth century Republican figures. In his murals *Joe Doherty* and *Bobby Sands* Mo chara transformed these Republican figures in the same way by making them into contemporary Republican icons.

⁴¹² Translation taken from the website, <http://www.public.asu.edu/~jacquies/Pearse-Ireland.html>.

⁴¹³ Turpin, 134.

⁴¹⁴ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, New York, December 5, 2000.

Joe Doherty (fig. 84) was painted on the New Lodge Road in a predominately Nationalist neighborhood in North Belfast. Terry “Cruncher” O’Neill, a Republican member of the New Lodge community commissioned Mo chara to paint the work. His only specification was that the muralist create a work that would highlight the case of the local resident Joe Doherty. In May of 1980 Doherty was arrested for the shooting death of a British Army officer in Belfast. He was held in Crumlin Road Jail but escaped from the prison on June 10, 1981. Doherty fled to the United States and was later arrested in New York City. He was held in The Manhattan Correctional Center for eight years while he fought a British extradition request to have him returned to Northern Ireland. Doherty won many court decisions because he claimed political prisoner status. The governments of Great Britain and the United States tied up his case in appeals for years and in 1992 he was deported to Northern Ireland where he served a six-year sentence in Long Kesh. Mo chara met Doherty in 1981 when he was in the Crumlin Road Jail awaiting his trial.

The *Joe Doherty* mural consists of a large three-quarter-portrait bust of Joseph Doherty, which covered the entire surface of the wall. It is a dramatic image where the figure takes on heroic proportions. Doherty was depicted in a relaxed manner and stares directly at the viewer with a broad confident smile. Mo chara framed Doherty’s portrait with a halo-like pattern consisting of yellow, red, and blue undulating patterns. On the wall to the right of the main image, Mo chara painted the words:

Would the U.S. Att. General
Edwin Meese have deported
George Washington?
Don’t Handover Joe Doherty

To British Warlords!⁴¹⁵

Mo chara believed the inclusion of this text would further raise public awareness of Doherty's case. Mo chara linked George Washington and Doherty because both men fought the British for the political independence of their country. This comparison was clearly meant to elevate Doherty's status.

Mo chara employed the same visual codes when he depicted the hunger striker Bobby Sands (fig. 85). Sands' portrait was painted on the exterior of the offices of the Sinn Féin Press Center on the Falls Road. Danny Morrison, then the editor of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, asked Mo chara to paint a mural to publicize the newspaper. Morrison gave Mo chara the freedom to come up with his own design; his only specification was that the work must include the newspaper's logo. Rolston has pointed out that because Republican muralists, as opposed to their Loyalist counterparts, are given the opportunity to freely choose their own designs, the artists:

...were not, therefore, mere cultural employees of paramilitary groups, but were given a license to speak for the movement. This liberalism was posited on the unstated conviction that they would not abuse their freedom; at the same time, the freedom was real, allowing the muralists at times to be ideologically in advance of large sections of the movement, mobilising support for political changes and developments. In addition, their spontaneity and freedom was frequently apparent as much in artistic as political terms.⁴¹⁶

Mo chara created a design that included the *An Phoblacht/Republican News* logo

⁴¹⁵ Edwin Meese served as the Attorney General of the United States under President Ronald Reagan from 1985 to 1988.

⁴¹⁶ Rolston, *Changing the Political Landscape*, 9.

on the upper left, but he also depicted a large portrait bust of Bobby Sands. Sand's image was modeled after a popular photograph that was taken in 1976 while he was held in Long Kesh (fig. 86). Sands is depicted in a positive way. He is smiling and, like *Joe Doherty*, he looks directly at the viewer. Mo chara included Sands' well known words, "Everyone Republican or otherwise has his/her own part to play." These words were originally published in 1981 in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* where Sands had been writing a weekly column since 1978. The mural also included the image of a lark, a Republican symbol that has come to be associated with Sands. In 1979, Sands wrote a short story entitled, *The Lark and the Freedom Fighter* where he compared the spirit of the lark to his own experience as a Republican prisoner. He stated, "The lark had spirit – the spirit of freedom and resistance. It longed to be free, and died before it would conform to the tyrant who tried to change it with torture and imprisonment. I feel I have something in common with that bird and her torture, imprisonment and final murder."⁴¹⁷

Loftus has pointed out that the lark has a long historical significance in Irish art. She noted that Sands' use of the lark related to a "long-standing practice in Irish songs of symbolising [sic] the country by a bird, sometimes caged, sometimes flying free."⁴¹⁸ In addition to being a storyteller and poet, Bobby Sands was also a singer and songwriter. He was well versed in the history of traditional Irish music and would likely have been aware of this symbolism. Mo chara presented a positive image of Sands and stressed his important status as a Republican hero.

⁴¹⁷ Sands, 84.

⁴¹⁸ Loftus, *Mirrors: William III and Mother Ireland*, 80.

Bobby Sands was painted in a very short period of time. The mural took only four and a half hours to complete. Sand's portrait was painted in broad strokes of black and white. Mo chara employed a technique that made the work easier to repair. He was aware that Sands' image would produce a response from the security forces. Sands was a symbol of Republican resistance and Mo chara's positive image of the man the British government referred to as a terrorist elicited a negative response from the forces that patrolled the streets of West Belfast. The simple painting technique Mo chara used insured that the work could be quickly repaired. Mo chara also recognized that his choice to depict Sands as a smiling young figure would further annoy the security forces. Rolston pointed out that the photograph from which Mo chara modeled Sands' portrait had irritated the British establishment in Northern Ireland who found that "with his long hair and friendly smile...[Sands] appeared a normal, personable character, not the monster that the Northern Ireland Office would have had people believed he was."⁴¹⁹

The mural was vandalized on numerous occasions. Mo chara believed that *Bobby Sands* was one of "the most attacked mural in the six counties" of Northern Ireland. He stated that "the British Army and the RUC were delighted to destroy it, and I repainted it so many times because they hated it so much."⁴²⁰ This negative reaction was balanced by the overwhelmingly positive support the work received from the community. The Republican community viewed the mural as a positive visual statement of its strength and resilience. Republican organizations, such as Sinn Féin and Saorise (Freedom) often held

⁴¹⁹ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 77.

⁴²⁰ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, New York, November 3, 2003.

rallies and delivered important political speeches in front of the mural. In addition, photographs of the mural were reproduced by Sinn Féin and sold in postcard and poster format. As Neil Jarman has pointed out, Bobby Sands “has become the clearest symbol of the determination of the Republican community to continue their struggle to the end.”⁴²¹ Mo chara clearly intended to highlight the iconic status Sands had taken on within the Republican community. He emphasized this by surrounding Sands’ head with a yellow halo-like design and enveloping him with a saintly glow. Like Con’s murals from the hunger-strike period (figs. 26 and 27), Mo chara’s murals presented Sands as a Christ-like figure.

The *Bobby Sands* mural was enshrined by the Republican community and Mo chara was called upon to maintain it on a regular basis. The work’s significance was highlighted in 2001 when it was repainted after the building upon which it stood was torn down. The ‘replacement mural,’ painted by the Republican muralists, Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons, was modeled after Mo chara’s original design and included Sands’ portrait, the lark, and Sands’ inspirational words (fig. 87). An article published in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* recounted the mural’s importance to the Republican community. The newspaper noted:

One of the Falls Road’s most famous landmarks was given back its pride of place yesterday – on the gable wall of Sinn Féin’s new offices. Fears that the mural of hunger striker Bobby Sands would be lost when the old advice center was torn down were dispelled with the unveiling of a new mural, painstakingly restored and replicated to its original image by artist Danny Devenny.⁴²²

⁴²¹ Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, 149.

⁴²² “Sands Mural Unveiled,” *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 4-6, 2000, 1.

International Solidarity

In 1988 Mo chara began to paint murals that depicted the links between Irish Republicanism and other international liberation movements. In three works, *Leonard Peltier*, 1988 (fig. 88), *Our Struggle/Your Struggle*, 1990 (fig. 89), and *Mandela*, 1988 (fig. 90), Mo chara broadened his artistic repertoire to include international themes of struggle. The first two works were painted to honor the Native American organization, the American Indian Movement (AIM).

The mural *Leonard Peltier* was painted on a wall near Mo chara's home on Springhill Avenue in West Belfast. The work was small by Mo chara's standards, and measured eleven feet high by ten feet wide. It was painted during a visit to Belfast of an AIM delegation, which came to the city to politicize the case of Leonard Peltier (b. 1944), one of its most prominent members. Peltier was serving a life sentence in the United States for his involvement in the death of an FBI agent.⁴²³ The AIM felt that Peltier had been wrongfully convicted and they considered him to be a political prisoner.⁴²⁴ Mo chara drew an analogy between Peltier's case and his own experience as

⁴²³ Leonard Peltier is currently serving a life sentence in Leavenworth Federal prison for his involvement in the death of two FBI agents on June 26, 1975. The circumstances of the case have been debated for the past thirty years. The United States government contends that Peltier began a shoot-out with the two FBI agents after they mistook him for a suspect they were seeking to arrest. Peltier believes the shoot-out resulted from FBI aggression. Peltier and his supporters contend that he is innocent and has been unjustly accused. For further information on both sides of the case, see www.freepeltier.org and www.noparolpeltier.com.

⁴²⁴ For further information on Leonard Peltier, see his autobiography, *My Life is My Sundance* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

a Republican ex-political prisoner. Kenney noted that when Clyde Bellacourt, the leader of the delegation, came to West Belfast, he established a link between Peltier and the IRA. Kenney stated:

[Bellacourt] referred to members of the AIM delegation as ‘warriors’ and expressed ‘solidarity with Sinn Féin and the warriors of the IRA who are here tonight.’ Comparisons were made between Republican prisoners in the Maze prison [Long Kesh] and the imprisoned leader Leonard Peltier. The AIM spokesman expressed sympathy for his hosts saying, ‘The Irish are a native people’ who possess ‘a high culture,’ who were conquered by alien invaders.⁴²⁵

During their visit to Belfast, Mo chara met members of the delegation, and he spoke with them about Peltier’s case and its similarity to his own experiences. Mo chara felt an intense personal connection to Peltier. He felt they shared a similar political and social heritage. His feelings were exemplified by the mural he created in 1990 to honor the AIM. This work, *Our Struggle/Your Struggle* (fig. 57), draws a clear connection to the similarities between the native Irish and Native American experience.

The *Leonard Peltier* mural was also an expression of this solidarity. The design for the work was copied directly from a Leonard Peltier patch that Mo chara received from the AIM delegation. The badge contained a Native American composite design of a stylized man and eagle. It contained the AIM acronym and the words, “Free Leonard Peltier, Framed by F.B.I.” At the lower left of the mural Mo chara signed the mural,

⁴²⁵ Mary Catherine Kenney, “The Phoenix and the Lark: Revolutionary Mythology and Iconographic Creativity in Belfast’s Republican Districts,” in *Symbols in Northern Ireland*, ed. Anthony D. Buckley (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen’s University of Belfast, 1998), 153 – 169; see quote page 161.

“Painted by Sinn Fein Youth.” This work was the first of several murals that Mo chara signed this way and, although Mo chara has used local children to help him paint his murals since 1987, this was the first time he credited them in his work.

Mo chara feels an important obligation to the youth of his community. He noted that one of the first steps involved in the creation of the any mural is “to have a look around to see where all the kids in the area are and then commandeer them to help me paint the work.”⁴²⁶ Mo chara often recruited young children in order “to get them off the street and get them involved in something important.”⁴²⁷ These children often helped perform a variety of duties from collecting materials for the mural to actually painting on the wall (fig. 91). By involving children in the creation of the work, Mo chara affirmed his belief that the work as a community-based art form that serves an important function.

Santino has noted that when young children engage in the production of public displays in Northern Ireland, it raises their self-esteem and establishes a greater sense of group identity. Mo chara recalled that this mural was painted with the aid of his community and without them he “just couldn’t get it all together. The kids of the community are always there to help and they get excited about taking part too. To me sometimes that is what it is all about, and who knows, maybe I will encourage a kid who will later become a muralist.”⁴²⁸ Cockcroft, Cockcroft, and Weber have described the importance of involving local children in the production of a community mural. They add

⁴²⁶ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 1, 1999.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

that a collective mural project involving children “provides a permanent testimony to achievement, which is...an important aesthetic experience with equally important educational byproducts.”⁴²⁹

While he painted *Leonard Peltier* Mo chara was harassed by the RUC. He described a disturbing incident in which he and his young assistants were fired upon by the RUC who were using plastic bullets against them. He remarked, “This was incredible. It was clear at that point that the security forces just wanted the murals to be destroyed. That’s how dangerous they thought they were.”⁴³⁰ This extreme form of harassment once again strengthened Mo chara’s resolve, but because of it he was forced to alter his painting process. When he worked on his next mural, he eliminated complicated designs and painted an image that could be quickly created and repaired.

In his *Mandela* mural (fig. 48), Mo chara created single blocks of color to produce a portrait of the then- imprisoned leader of the African National Congress (ANC). He pointed out:

Shading and things was [sic] becoming a problem; fancy skin tones and things like that too, because the British Army was destroying the murals. Every time they would see me in the street doing a mural they would just destroy it. So I started to go away from painting murals like *Loughgall* and *King Nuada* and when I painted the Nelson Mandela mural I used flat colors, so that when they did destroy them, then I could just go down have a look at it and get a few wee pots of paint and just fix it. I wanted the murals to look good, but I had to make some changes for practical reasons.⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ Cockcroft, Cockcroft, and Weber, 116.

⁴³⁰ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 1, 1999.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

Mandela was a solidarity mural, painted to honor Nelson Mandela's seventieth birthday on July 18, 1988. Sinn Féin commissioned Mo chara to paint this mural across the road from its West Belfast office. Danny Morrison, their director of publicity chose the subject matter for the work. Yet, Mo chara explained that he "wanted me to just paint the words, 'Mandela - Father of Freedom - the future belongs to you' and I said 'why don't we put his face in too?' I thought it would be much more effective with the face, so I drew it in."⁴³²

Mo chara's inclusion of Mandela's portrait is another example of his interest in creating iconic imagery. As in his earlier portrait murals, Mo chara emphasized Mandela's iconic stature by surrounding him with bright colors; in this case the colors represented a combination of the Irish and ANC flags.

Mandela was one of three murals by Mo chara to be awarded a prize in the mural competition that took place in conjunction with the first Feile an Phobail, or West Belfast Community Festival in August 1988. The competition, which was judged by the Irish artist Robert Ballagh, included all the Nationalist murals in West Belfast. Ballagh awarded all three prizes to Mo chara's work. First place prize was given to his *King Nuada* mural, second place to *Loughgall*, and third place to *Mandela*.

Political Cartoons

In late 1988 and throughout 1989, Mo chara again reproduced Cormac's political

⁴³² Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, New York, September 29, 2004.

cartoons in his murals. He felt that Cormac's work provided effective political messages and focused on vital issues concerning the Republican community. In a recent interview, Cormac (Brian Moore) discussed the importance of Mo chara's reproductions of his work. He noted that Mo chara's murals "did a good job getting the message out to a larger audience. It is always nice to see the political cartoons used in murals because the people on the street that don't read *An Phoblacht* get to see what I am trying to say and that usually was something that was important to the Republican struggle."⁴³³

Cormac further pointed out that Mo chara's work inspired him to take up mural painting. He stated, "Mo chara actually made me think about murals too and so I painted a few." During the mid- 1990s, Cormac collaborated with Danny Devenny and painted three murals throughout West Belfast. In 1995, he painted a provocative commemoration of the Great Irish Potato Famine, which indicted the British government for its role in the Famine's escalation (fig. 92). At this time, Mo chara was also painting a famine memorial. He and Cormac shared their common ideas of how to represent the subject of their work and the two works were very similar in their anti-British statements (fig. 93).⁴³⁴

Mo chara recognized the cartoon's aesthetic qualities and he wanted to inject art into the drab atmosphere of West Belfast. He pointed out that he recreated Cormac's work in order to bring attention to important issues but he also wanted to improve the West Belfast landscape. He explained:

⁴³³ Brian Moore, interview by author, tape recording, New York, June 15, 2005.

⁴³⁴ Mo chara's *Famine* mural is discussed in chapter five of this study.

What I was trying to do was to clean up the area and all the walls I painted on were heavily graffitied. The point was to try to clean up the area with beautiful art, but art with a political and cultural message in it. Cormac's cartoons were perfect because they were easy and they addressed important issues. But I never painted them the way they appeared in black and white. I put in bright colors just to brighten it up...and make it more effective.⁴³⁵

So I always looked the other way, 1988 (fig. 94) was painted on the Whiterock in West Belfast. This work was located near Mo chara's third mural after Cormac's work, *Fight Back*, 1989 on the Springfield Road (fig. 95). These two works brought attention to Sinn Féin's electoral campaign. Mo chara also painted a smaller mural after a Cormac cartoon entitled, *Union Jack Crumbling* (fig. 96). This work depicted the symbolic disintegration of the British state. Beside this mural Mo chara painted the work, *UDR/UDA Death Squads* (fig. 97). Although similar to Cormac's work in design, this mural was copied from a political cartoon by an unknown artist that appeared in the Republican prisoner magazine, *An Glór Gafa/The Captive Voice* in 1988. In this work Mo chara attempted to politicize the alleged collusion between Northern Ireland's security forces and Loyalist paramilitary organizations.

During the fall of 1989, Mo chara was invited to the United States to participate in the creation of the *Pathfinder* mural, a seventy-six foot high mural that originally decorated the side of the Pathfinder Press building at 410 West Street in New York

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

City.⁴³⁶ The work was conceived and organized by the American mural artist Mike Allewitz (b. 1951). It featured portraits of social activists, labor leaders, and freedom fighters from around the world. Mo chara was asked to paint portraits of two Irish Republican revolutionaries, James Connolly and Constance Markievicz.⁴³⁷ He accepted the commission and traveled to New York to complete the work, but upon his arrival he was arrested by United States Custom's officials who accused him of lying on his Visa application. In response to the question, "Have you ever been imprisoned for a criminal offense?" Mo chara responded, "No." He believed his imprisonment was the result of a political offense and he refused to change his answer. Mo chara was held in The Manhattan Correctional Center for fifteen days and was then deported back to Northern Ireland. Before leaving New York, Mo chara sent sketches of the Connolly and Markievicz portraits to Mike Allewitz who then painted them on the wall.

In 1989 Mo chara painted a very personal mural that affirmed his Irish Republican ideals and his experience as an ex-Republican prisoner. The work, *Beidh Bua Againn* [Victory will be ours] (fig. 98), was commissioned by Sinn Féin. The organization wanted Mo chara to create a mural that would encourage public support for Irish Republican prisoners of war. This was a fitting commission that Mo chara particularly embraced after his negative experience in New York. The mural was painted

⁴³⁶ Pathfinder Press is an international publisher of books and pamphlets focusing on socialist subject matter. According its website, www.pathfinderpress.com, this publishing house is interested in supporting "revolutionary fighters whose struggles against capitalism, racism, and all forms of exploitation and oppression point the way forward for humanity."

⁴³⁷ For further information on Constance Markievicz, see chapter five of this study.

on a highly visible wall on the Whiterock Road in West Belfast. It featured the first Irish words Mo chara encountered when he entered Long Kesh. These words, *Beidh Bua Againn* or “Victory will be Ours” were a source of personal inspiration during his incarceration. The words are written in large block letters across the top of the mural. The central element of this visually engaging mural is a large black and gray letter H, which was a symbol of Long Kesh and had been used in Mo chara’s first work of public art. The vivid background was composed of ray-like planes that activated the surface of the mural and pushed the H forward in a dynamic manner. Unfortunately, the mural was destroyed hours after its completion. The work was not vandalized but was damaged by torrential rain before the paint had dried properly. Mo chara also recalled that the mural was painted with interior paints which could not stand up to the harsh exterior conditions.

By 1991 after working as a political mural artist for only three years, Mo chara had completed an astounding twenty-two murals. In addition to covering a range of Nationalist contemporary issues in his work, Mo chara established a improved aesthetic style in Republican wall painting. He created vibrantly painted murals that covered the entire surface of the wall and were meticulously executed. As Rolston has pointed out, “unlike previous mural artists, Gerard wanted his work to remain intact” and he frequently repainted his murals.⁴³⁸ The murals he produced between 1987 and 1991 have become iconic images within the Republican movement. Sinn Féin and other Republican organizations continue to reproduce many of these murals in postcard and poster format.

In 1991, Mo chara began to work in collaboration with the Belfast-based

⁴³⁸ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 105.

Republican artists, Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons. During this new phase in his career he began to tackle a wide variety of political and cultural themes. This work is discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5

TIME FOR PEACE / TIME TO GO

1991-1998

The period between 1991 and 1998 was a time of great change for Mo chara. In addition to tackling new themes in his work, he also simplified his technique. He abandoned his free-hand style of painting and projected his mural sketches directly onto the surface of the wall. He also explored the art of sculpture and produced several large-scale wood carvings in a Celtic Revival style. During this time he also collaborated with several mural artists from Belfast and around the world. By 1991, Mo chara established himself as Northern Ireland's leading mural artist and he was producing work that was both aesthetically and technically advanced. In his 1992 text, *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland*, Bill Rolston referred to Mo chara as "the most prolific and most accomplished" Republican muralist in Northern Ireland.⁴³⁹

Over the course of the next seven years, Mo chara expanded his visual repertoire to include themes that reflected an interest beyond the Republican struggle for self-determination. These themes included support for women's rights, equal rights in employment, and the search for peace and the justice in Northern Ireland. Mo chara approached this last theme in response to the gradual development of peace talks which began in April of 1991. These talks initiated an era that led to the IRA ceasefire of 1994 and the beginning of All-Party Talks in 1996. The All-Party Talks, headed by the former United States Senator George J. Mitchell, culminated in the signing of the Belfast, or

⁴³⁹ Rolston, *Drawing Support*, vi.

Good Friday, Agreement on April 10, 1998. This Agreement attempted to put an end to the Troubles.

Honoring Women

The first collaborative mural Mo chara produced was painted with the Belfast artist Danny Devenny.⁴⁴⁰ Devenny (b. 1952), an ex-Republican prisoner, was known for his work as the art designer for *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. In 1969, Devenny worked as a graphic designer for a Belfast printing firm.⁴⁴¹ In 1973, Devenny, then a member of the IRA, was arrested for attempted robbery and was held in Long Kesh Internment Camp.⁴⁴² During his time in Long Kesh, Devenny gained a reputation as a Republican artist. He created “portraits of IRA heroes on the Long Kesh walls but also decorated prison-issue handkerchiefs with politically subversive cartoons.”⁴⁴³ After his release from Long Kesh in 1975, Devenny began working as a designer for Sinn Féin. He produced much of the party’s artwork including posters, election material, and Sinn Féin’s modern logo. During the 1981 hunger strike, Devenny and a team of assistants produced posters in support of the men on hunger strike in Long Kesh. Loftus noted that

⁴⁴⁰ Although Danny Devenny agreed to be interviewed for this study, he later refused to allow any of the material discussed in the interview to be used. In 2000, Mo chara and Devenny severed their relationship citing personal and professional differences.

⁴⁴¹ Yvonne Murphy, ed, *Troubled Images: Posters and Images of The Northern Ireland Conflict from the Linen Hall Library, Belfast* (Belfast: The Linen Hall Library, 2001), 21.

⁴⁴² Hayt, 36.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

these posters were created for Republican demonstrations and were “printed as each striker commenced his fast with perhaps two thousand rushed out in a night”⁴⁴⁴ (fig. 99).

Although Devenny did not begin painting murals until the 1990s, he actively supported Mo chara’s work by supplying him with materials such as tracing paper and acetates. In the spring of 1991, Devenny and Mo chara created their first collaborative mural. This work *Women Against Oppression* (fig. 100) was painted to honor International Women’s Day. The mural broke new ground in that it was one of the first wall paintings in Northern Ireland to focus specifically on women’s contribution to the Republican struggle for independence.

Prior to the 1990s, the majority of murals in Northern Ireland featured predominately male imagery. Belinda Loftus has pointed out that when women appeared in murals prior to the 1990s they were represented as allegorical figures such as “Mother Ireland.” Muralists rarely depicted real women in their work before this time.⁴⁴⁵ In *Women Against Oppression*, Mo chara and Devenny portrayed nine portraits of women from cultures around the world. The main portrait at the center of the mural represented an Irish Cumman na mBan fighter. The work highlighted the active role women played in the fight for Irish freedom and it conforms to the socialist ideology of the Republican movement, which espoused the equality of the sexes. For example, in a 1972 interview the former vice president of Sinn Féin, the late Maura Drumm described the important role women like herself played in the Republican movement. She stated, “I think the men

⁴⁴⁴ Murphy, ed., 73.

⁴⁴⁵ Loftus, *Mirrors: William III and Mother Ireland*, 77.

have more trouble sometimes holding us back. There are women...who have been actively involved in I.R.A. units and who have been accepted on an equal footing with men...in the Republican Movement, we've never had to take a back seat. We have always been treated as equal.”⁴⁴⁶ The realistic depiction of women presented in *Women Against Oppression* paved the way for other muralists, who later produced murals that honored Republican women.

A few weeks after completing *Women Against Oppression*, Sinn Féin commissioned Mo chara to produce a work to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising. The work *Cáisc 1916* (fig. 101) also acknowledged the important contribution of Republican women. This mural was the first Republican wall painting to reference an historical female figure. The lower portion of the work was copied from a 1991 print by the artist Robert Ballagh (fig. 18) and includes a portrait of the Irish Nationalist leader Constance Markievicz (1868-1927). Markievicz was one of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising. Constance Markievicz, the second figure from the right, is portrayed with the now well-known seven male signatories of the Irish Proclamation of Independence. The depiction of these familiar historic figures affirmed the Nationalist and feminist ideology that Mo chara wished to express in his own work. He was attracted to Ballagh's print because the work accurately depicted the socialist spirit of the rising.

Markievicz, also known as Countess Markievicz, was a leading member of James Connolly's Irish Citizen's Army, an army consisting of both men and women. She was

⁴⁴⁶ O'Sullivan, 124-125.

the only woman to be court-martialed and sentenced to execution for her role in the Rising. Her sentence was later reduced because she was a woman. In 1919, Markievicz became the leader of Cumann na mBan and she actively fought against the British during the Anglo-Irish war of 1919-1922.⁴⁴⁷

In addition to depicting distinctively feminist subject matter, *Cáisc 1916* represented a radical shift in technique for the artist. With this mural, Mo chara abandoned his free-hand style of painting and projected his mural sketch directly on to the wall. This new method reduced his production time and simplified his working process. Mo chara also employed a simple design for the work, which consisted of large fields of flat color and little shading. Mo chara's previous approach to mural painting began to take a toll on his body. He was developing back and leg pain due to the long hours he often spent on inadequate ladders. This new method alleviated some of that pain.

His new approach also allowed for easy upkeep and repair of the mural. He noted that at this time one of the most important aspects of his work was that it had the ability to be repaired quickly. He stated, "I had to come up with a simple design that I could easily repaint and refresh each year because Sinn Féin wanted it to be up for at least four years."⁴⁴⁸ The mural's longevity was crucial for Sinn Féin because the organization intended the work to serve an important function in connection with the community's annual Easter Parade. *Cáisc 1916's* prominent position along the parade route made the

⁴⁴⁷ For further information on Constance Markievicz, see Ann Haverty, *Constance Markievicz: An Independent Life* (London: Pandora Press, 1988).

⁴⁴⁸ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

work a perfect backdrop for political speeches. Mo chara noted that the mural was used as a meeting point for the residents of Ballymurphy who joined the parade route at this point in its procession through West Belfast.

Cáisc 1916 became a fitting representation of the community's Nationalist identity and Mo chara filled the work with an array of Republican symbols. These symbols appear at the top of the mural. They are represented in a collage-like design. At the left is the sunburst of Na Fianna Éireann, the youth movement of the IRA, and in the center is the rising phoenix. In addition to symbolizing Na Fianna Eireann, the sunburst is also a reference to Constance Markievicz who was the co-founder of that organization. It is also an affirmation of the artist's strong interest in connecting to the youth of the Republican community through his work.

The background consists of the starry plough design from the flag of James Connolly's Irish Citizen's Army. The sunburst and starry plough are most commonly seen depicted on flags, but here Mo chara flattens out the images along the surface of the wall. He specifically avoided depicting flags because, as he describes it, he wanted the work to look "Republican and not Loyalist."⁴⁴⁹ As discussed in chapter one, the most commonly depicted image in Loyalist murals is flags.

The political symbols Mo chara included in *Cáisc 1916* became a significant part of his visual repertoire at this point in his career. Beginning with his earliest murals such as his *Bobby Sands Memorial*, 1987 (fig. 37), Mo chara painted symbols referencing Irish Republican history. Images such as the phoenix, the sunburst, and the starry plough

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

symbolized pivotal historic events in the on-going fight for Irish independence.

Anthropologist Anthony Buckley noted that in Northern Ireland symbols often evoke a specific “historical narrative.” He explained, “In Ireland, many quite important symbols are associated with narrative and especially with myth and history.”⁴⁵⁰ He further noted, “it is not the symbol so much as the historical narrative which is relevant to the present realities. The symbol evokes the narrative, and it is the narrative which has significance for the present.”⁴⁵¹ In *Cáisc 1916*, as in much of his work, Mo chara symbolically resurrected the past in order to establish a link to the present.

Collaboration

After completing *Cáisc 1916*, Mo chara produced his second collaborative mural. This work was painted with the Belfast artists Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons. Lyons was born in Belfast in 1962. In the early 1980s, he joined the youth movement of the IRA and began painting murals in support of the men on hunger strike.⁴⁵² At that time he met Danny Devenny, who was then working as the designer for Sinn Féin. Devenny, Lyons, and Mo chara began working collaboratively in the summer of 1991 when they painted their first mural, *Joe McDonnell* (fig. 102). This work commemorated the tenth anniversary of the death of Joe McDonnell, one of the ten hunger strikers to die in 1981.

⁴⁵⁰ Anthony D. Buckley, “Daring Us to Laugh: Creativity and Power in Northern Irish Symbols,” in *Symbols in Northern Ireland*, ed. Anthony D. Buckley, (Belfast: The Queen’s University of Belfast, The Institute of Irish Studies, 1998), 8.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁵² Darina Molloy, “The Writing on the Wall,” *The Irish Voice*, October 14 – October 20, 1998, 23.

As in his previous mural *Bobby Sands* (fig. 85), McDonnell is depicted as a smiling young man. His large frame seems to be ascending over Long Kesh Prison, the site of his death. The artists surrounded the portrait in a saintly glow, using vibrant yellow and red colors. Mo chara pointed out that these background colors were inspired by the work of Jim Fitzpatrick. The inclusion of these colors accentuated McDonnell's iconic status.

Joe McDonnell is similar in design to two of Mo chara's previous works: *Joe Doherty* (fig. 84) and, as mentioned above, *Bobby Sands* (fig. 85). In these murals Christian references, such as halos and ascending spirits, visually reinforce the iconic stature each of these men attained in the Republican community. The religious symbolism seen in these murals is similar to the murals of the 1981 hunger strike period. In the earlier work the hunger strikers were used to reference Christ's sacrificial death. The use of Christian iconography in Republican art can be traced to the Celtic Revival. During this stylistic period, images of "Mother Ireland" were often presented in the guise of the Virgin Mary. In works such as Beatrice Moss Elvery's painting *Éire* (fig. 32), the struggle for Irish freedom becomes a Christian metaphor. In this work the Christian attributes of sacrifice and struggle are recast as Republican ideals.⁴⁵³

Soon after its completion, *Joe McDonnell* was damaged by the British Army. Neil Jarman recounted that the mural was "unveiled at a formal opening ceremony only to be damaged by a paint bomb three days later."⁴⁵⁴ Shortly thereafter, the three muralists

⁴⁵³ For further information on the use of Christian imagery in Irish Nationalist art, see Steward.

⁴⁵⁴ Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, 236.

repaired the work. As Mo chara recalled, “you just expected that they [the security forces] were going to destroy it, so you went back and fixed it. And it was good proof that the work was effective and they were getting the message that we wanted to put out.”⁴⁵⁵

New Techniques

In the fall of 1991, Mo chara was commissioned by the Derryard Park Tenant’s Association to paint a mural for the Derryard Park housing estate in Armagh City, in County Armagh, Northern Ireland. The mural was the first work Mo chara painted outside of Belfast. He was asked to create a mural that would highlight the community’s Irish Nationalist heritage. The Tenant’s Association provided Mo chara with a small amount of funding that would cover the cost of a limited number of materials, such as paints and brushes and his travel expenses to and from Armagh City. He was paid a small fee of two hundred and fifty pounds for the mural. This marked the first time the artist was paid for his work.⁴⁵⁶

The mural, *Cúchulainn Armagh* (fig. 103) features the Celtic hero Cúchulainn, the ancient Celtic warrior who defended Ulster from invaders. As in his previous work *1916 Cúchulainn* (fig. 81), Mo chara modeled the figure of Cúchulainn after Oliver Sheppard’s statue *The Death of Cúchulainn* (fig. 82). By the time Mo chara began this mural he had

⁴⁵⁵ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

⁴⁵⁶ Mo chara relies on government unemployment payments to pay for his daily living expenses. In addition, his low-income status qualifies him for public housing assistance.

made considerable alterations in his working process. In his studio Mo chara created cardboard templates that he used to transfer elements of the mural's design directly onto the wall.

The templates greatly reduced the amount of time it took to create the work. Mo chara recalled that the template was a practical solution. It helped to reduce the time that he had to be out in the "cold and damp and up on the back-breaking ladder."⁴⁵⁷ The first template Mo chara created was used to decorate the border in *Cúchulainn Armagh*. This template contained a Celtic animal interlace design of two stylized and interconnected cormorants. Mo chara's templates are beautiful detailed works of art in their own right. They take on both sculptural and painterly qualities and entail a great deal of work (fig. 104). Unfortunately, most of these templates have been lost or destroyed over time. Recently, Mo chara has begun to store the templates and re-use them in other murals.

In addition to the Celtic border, *Cúchulainn Armagh* also contains well-known Irish Nationalist motifs such as a Celtic harp, a dolmen, and the shields of the four provinces of Ireland. The four shields are superimposed over a map of Ireland, above which reads "Tir na h'Éireann" (The Land of Ireland). The inclusion of this map with the ancient Irish provinces once again expresses his support for a united Ireland. Above the head of the dying Cúchulainn, Mo chara included a line from Patrick Pearse's poem *Mise Éire*. These words, "Mise Eire More Mo Gloir" [I am Ireland Great is my Glory] created a link between Ireland's ancient past and the modern Republican fight for independence. *Cúchulainn Armagh* asserts the rich artistic as well as literary heritage of Ireland, and

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

implies that this heritage is explicitly linked to Irish Republicanism. The mural's imagery recalls the words of the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros who advised that revolutionary muralists should "say something of the past of your people and of your concept of what its future should be."⁴⁵⁸

Cúchulainn Armagh was again inspired by the work of Jim Fitzpatrick. The image of the Celtic harp at the upper right corner of the mural was copied from an illustration in Fitzpatrick's *The Book of Conquests*.⁴⁵⁹ The landscape also bears a striking resemblance to Fitzpatrick's work. At the lower right corner of the mural Mo chara signed his Irish given name "Gearoid O'Ceallaigh" and he also included Fitzpatrick's name just below his own. At this point in his career Mo chara began to credit Fitzpatrick when he used his imagery. In 1990, the two artists met for the first time. They discussed their common interests and Mo chara's use of Fitzpatrick's designs. Fitzpatrick was very interested in Mo chara's appropriation of his work and felt that the muralist had done an excellent job reproducing his designs. Fitzpatrick recalled:

I told Gerry [Mo chara] that I had no problem with him using my work as long as he did two things for me. One he shouldn't attach any political slogans to the work, and two he should include my name somewhere. As long as he did that I had no problem with him using my work, because I believe in the freedom of expression.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ David Alfaro Siqueiros, "Lectures to Artists," *New University Thought* (Winter 1962); quoted in Cockcroft, Cockcroft, and Weber, 251.

⁴⁵⁹ Fitzpatrick, *The Book of Conquests*, unpaginated.

⁴⁶⁰ Jim Fitzpatrick, interview by author, telephone interview between New York and Dublin, September 17, 2005.

Fitzpatrick considers himself to be an Irish Nationalist, but he vehemently opposes the use of violence. He believes the non-violent tactics of the Northern Irish Civil Rights association, “showed that we could achieve a lot without the use of guns.”⁴⁶¹ Fitzpatrick acknowledges that his work had a strong influence on many Irish Republicans and for this he is proud. He further stated that he considers Mo chara and many prominent Republicans, including Gerry Adams, to be his close friends, but he stated, “with friends, it’s never a good thing to talk politics.”⁴⁶² Mo chara recalled that Fitzpatrick has always been very kind and supportive of him. He stated, “he sends me material from time to time about what he is currently working on and I continue to be influenced by his images.

In *Cúchulainn Armagh* and in his earlier culturally themed murals in which Irish history serves as the main subject, such as *King Nuada* (fig. 77), *1916 Cúchulainn* (fig. 81), and *Cáisc 1916* (fig. 101), Mo chara created his most original work. Although the imagery is taken from various sources, Mo chara blended them together to create artistically striking works of art. These works are both politically effective and aesthetically powerful. As in the previous murals mentioned above, Mo chara once again developed a historical continuity between past Nationalist movements for independence and the current Republican struggle in Northern Ireland. Mo chara is most comfortable creating these culturally-themed murals. He stated:

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

There will always be important political and social issues to get up and paint a mural about...but it was my cultural murals that got the most attention and I am most proud of. I think this is because with the cultural ones I always had the time to design the work the way I wanted to. I had the time to really put in a lot of work and to get it just the way I wanted it. And these are murals that are really my own.⁴⁶³

Mo chara clearly contrasts his cultural murals with his politically themed work such as his Gerry Adams election murals (figs. 64 and 66) or his reproductions of Cormac's cartoons. He feels his culturally themed works are more personal. These personal murals clearly stand out as his most distinctive work, and, as his statement indicates, it is through this work that he feels most effective as a mural artist. The cultural murals allow Mo chara to emphasize the didactic nature of his work. *Cúchulainn Armagh* is a unique expression of Mo chara's individual style where the standard symbols of Ireland's cultural heritage are presented in an aesthetically inventive way and are used to evoke a sense of pride in Irish Republicanism.

The work is one of Mo chara's most exceptional murals because it successfully fulfilled his artistic objective to create a public work of art that was both visually engaging and socially provocative. His use of Nationalist emblems, particularly the shields representing the four ancient provinces of Ireland seen on the map at the right side of the wall, is a subtle way to express his support for the creation of a united Ireland. They conform to Hobsbawn's notion that "visual symbols such as flags, are still the most

⁴⁶³ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

widely used methods of envisaging what cannot be envisioned.”⁴⁶⁴ What is ironic about this visual symbolism is that Mo chara is trying to present a view of Ireland that was never a reality. The history of Ireland reveals that the island never had a homogeneous culture. It was composed of many small kingdoms that constantly battled each other for territorial control. The differences between the native groups dissipated with the arrival of the Anglo-Normans and it was only after centuries of colonization that Ireland became a more homogeneous unit.

Contemplation and Stagnation

By the time Mo chara completed *Cúchulainn Armagh*, he was at the height of his career. Reproductions of his murals were widely circulated both within Ireland and internationally. His work was featured prominently in both scholarly and popular publications and he constantly received commissions for future work. At this pivotal time in his career he experienced one of the most tragic events of his life. Five days before celebrating his thirty-fifth birthday on January 25, 1992, his beloved companion of six years, Caron McMullen, died of cancer. Caron’s passing deeply affected Mo chara both personally and professionally. As a result of her death his artistic output greatly decreased. In 1992, he painted only one mural. Describing this difficult time Mo chara recalled, “I had no will to work. Caron was my support and it was hard to do it without her.”⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁴ Hobsbawn, 50.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

During the time they were together, Mo chara relied on Caron's advice and artistic input. For example, Mo chara felt that she was one of the only people around him to tell him honestly if his painting was of good quality or not. He often altered his paintings based on her opinion of its quality. She was also a great source of strength for him personally and he relied on her to organize his financial and personal affairs. Caron's death was a major blow to his self-confidence. He believed that without her he lost much of his artistic ability. In 1999 he remarked, "I have not painted a good mural since Caron's death."⁴⁶⁶

This year was also marked by the unwelcome news that his best known mural, *King Nuada* was going to be destroyed during the redevelopment of Springhill when the house upon which was painted was designated for demolition. As Chairman of the Springhill Tenant's Association, Mo chara could have petitioned the Belfast Housing Executive to save the work but, as he recalls, "At the time, Caron had just died and I had no fight left in me. It was one of the hardest times of my life. I actually stood there and watched the mural be destroyed. It was my best work. I sat and watched it be destroyed piece by piece."⁴⁶⁷ Mo chara produced a photographic documentary of the mural's demolition (fig. 105). One can only imagine how difficult it must have been for Mo chara to watch the destruction of a work that had taken him over three months to complete.

This tragic time in his life was also marked by the twentieth anniversary of Great Britain's establishment of direct rule in Northern Ireland. The anniversary clearly

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

provided a context for Mo chara to produce work that depicted the anti-Imperialist and pro-Republican imagery for which he had become known. A sense of inertia brought about by the heartbreaking events of the year led him to consider abandoning his career as a mural artist. In August of 1992, Mo chara accepted a commission from the organizing committee of The West Belfast Community Festival. The committee asked him to create a mural in collaboration with the Mexican artist Rubén Ortiz Torres. The work, *You Can Kill The Revolutionary, But Not The Revolution* (fig. 65), was painted for the August West Belfast Festival. The committee invited Torres to Belfast to paint a work with Mo chara in order to promote their solidarity with other international anti-Imperialist struggles.

In keeping with this goal, Torres and Mo chara jointly designed a work that depicted Irish and Mexican revolutionary figures. Mo chara painted the two Irish figures toward the left side of the wall, an armed IRA fighter wearing an arm band identifying the IRA by its Irish name, and James Connolly, one of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising. Torres painted the Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, a leader of Mexico's 1910 socialist revolution and a cholo youth. The imagery effectively linked revolutionary movements of the past with current resistance movements. This link is further stressed by the text painted across the mural, which reads, "You can kill the revolutionary, but not the revolution," and by the symbols of the phoenix and the stylized eagle of the United Farm Workers movement. The socialist ideology expressed in the mural is accentuated by the figures of James Connolly and Emiliano Zapata. Each man championed the rights of the poor and fought to end foreign interests in his country. They are fitting

representations of anti-Imperialist sentiment. As in his two previous works, *1916 Cúchulainn* (fig. 81) and *Cáisc 1916* (fig. 101), Mo chara turned Connolly into a contemporary icon by depicting him in a heroic mode. Connolly lies at the very center of the work and is the largest figure in the mural. His presence alongside the contemporary IRA volunteer recalls the current fight against the British military presence in Northern Ireland. Mo chara created the Republican imagery in response to the twentieth anniversary of British Direct Rule in Northern Ireland. In addition to referencing the continuing struggle for Irish freedom, the mural also functioned as a personal commemoration for Mo chara marking the twentieth anniversary of his involvement in the Republican movement.

After completing *You Can Kill The Revolutionary, But Not The Revolution*, Mo chara began a period of personal introspection in which he turned away from large-scale mural painting and began producing wood carvings that he used to decorate his home. These were mostly small pieces of furniture, such as a coffee table or small bed-side tables that were often decorated with Celtic-inspired spiral and interlace designs. These carvings were produced away from the public eye in the privacy of his home. Mo chara noted that carving was a “form of therapy” for him. Through this activity he could “do some soul-searching and think about where I wanted to go from here in my life and with the murals.”⁴⁶⁸

The most distinctive carving Mo chara produced during this time was a large mahogany door (fig. 106). This door was decorated with Celtic designs inspired by

⁴⁶⁸ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

illustrations from *The Book of Kells*. Mo chara carved the door over the course of five years between 1993 and 1998. He created this extraordinary work of art with no prior carving experience. The door's complicated symmetrical designs were carved in deep relief through the use of only a small penknife. In 1998 Mo chara hung the door on the front of his house. Although the work was created as form of personal introspection its meaning was transformed when it was placed in this new location. It now functioned as a work of public art. Mo chara directed the work at the security forces who routinely patrolled the street outside his home. In this context, the work's Celtic imagery was used to proclaim boldly Mo chara's Irish Nationalist identity.

The Search for Peace

By the Fall of 1993 the Republican movement began to call publicly for initiatives to be drawn up that would put an end to the conflict in Northern Ireland. On September 25, 1993 the Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams issued a joint statement with John Hume the leader of the Social Democratic Labor Party, a Northern Irish political party that was supported mainly by mainstream Nationalists. Adams and Humes called on Great Britain to recognize Ireland's right to self-determination and they began to pressure the British government to formulate a solution that could end the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

At this time, Sinn Féin began a campaign to highlight the adversarial role Great Britain played in the conflict. In 1993 Mo chara painted a mural which addressed this issue. The mural, *AK 47* (fig. 107), was copied from a Nationalist poster. The work accused British intelligence of colluding with Loyalist paramilitaries to kill Catholic civilians. The mural specifically highlighted the case of Brian Nelson, a Loyalist paramilitary who worked as an operative for the British Intelligence agency MI5. In

1988, Nelson arranged an arms deal in South Africa with MI5's assistance that would supply guns to the Loyalist paramilitary organization, the Ulster Defence Association. Nelson was also responsible for arranging the assassination of several well-known Irish Republicans. Mo chara's mural simply and effectively brought attention to the Nelson case. The mural features three AK-47 rifles painted before a plain white background. The writing that surrounds the rifles states the basic facts of the Nelson case. Mo chara describes this type of simplified work as a "retelling of events."⁴⁶⁹ He noted, "A mural like this tells the truth. It is an issue that actually happened and it needed to be publicized. This is simply the situation that happened and I am re-telling it."⁴⁷⁰

This statement is in keeping with Mo chara's belief that his work in general serves an important didactic role. Other international political muralists also believe that they have an important obligation to highlight the inequities in their society. For example, the Bolivian muralist, Walter Solon Romero has commented, "I believe it is necessary to say things at the right moment, denounce injustices at the moment in which they are committed; doing otherwise is complicity."⁴⁷¹

AK 47 was painted on a prominent wall along Springhill Avenue. Mo chara could be assured that this mural would be seen by a large audience. Through this work he could inform a large segment of the Nationalist population about this contentious case. Mo chara noted "Springhill Avenue was a very important location in terms of getting my

⁴⁶⁹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 1, 1999.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ceaser, 45.

message out.”⁴⁷² The mural attempted to counter the British government’s denial that it had anything to do with the gun deal, yet subsequent inquiries proved the legitimacy of Nationalist claims. The Nelson case bolstered Republican assertions that the British security forces in Northern Ireland had contributed to the escalation of the conflict and that their presence within the province was clearly seen as a detriment to peace.

In 1994, Sinn Féin began a new campaign to call for the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland. The campaign coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the deployment of the troops into the region. Sinn Féin commissioned Mo chara to paint a mural that would highlight this campaign. The work he created, *Time for Peace / Time to Go* (fig. 108), was copied from an original Cormac cartoon. Describing his reasons for painting this image Mo chara noted:

After a while the walls get dull and you don’t want the murals to be so heavy all the time. You want to lighten them up a little and the Cormac cartoons were a good way to do that. Sometimes this is more effective. You see when you attack your enemy through comedy it is more effective than attacking them directly. It sort of brings them down to the problem at hand in an obvious way. The *Time for Peace / Time to Go* one [mural] highlighted an important issue at the time. It made it clear to the Brits that it was time to leave.⁴⁷³

Mo chara transformed Cormac’s black and white cartoon by painting it with vibrant colors. The mural depicts a British soldier who is being carried by a dove across the water from Ireland to England. The dove speaks the words, “Time for Peace” and the soldier responds, “Time to Go.” The message is stated simply and in a child-like manner

⁴⁷² Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

⁴⁷³ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, September 29, 2004.

in which the images are depicted are in keeping with Mo chara's intention to produce a light-hearted work. Yet, the mural clearly articulated to the British soldiers that they were no longer welcome.

The British Army's presence in Northern Ireland was principally called into question after the IRA announced its historic ceasefire on August 31, 1994. This momentous statement called for a "complete cessation of military operations" and it indicated the IRA's commitment to peace.⁴⁷⁴ At this time Sinn Féin was also calling for the disbandment of the RUC. Republicans have long viewed the RUC as a key player in the war against the Irish Nationalist community, and its predominately protestant members have often failed to protect Northern Ireland's Nationalist residents.

During the summer of 1994 Sinn Féin commissioned Mo chara to paint a mural that highlighted this issue. The mural, *No RUC* (fig. 109), depicts a RUC officer dressed in riot gear and armed with a plastic bullet rifle. The officer is enclosed in a circle which contains a diagonal red line signifying the word "No." In addition to recalling the commonly heard Nationalist slogan "Disband the RUC," the work also makes reference to the RUC's use of plastic bullets. These four-inch bullets have been used by the RUC as a weapon against the Nationalist community since they were first introduced by the British in 1973. Plastic bullets have been responsible for the deaths of seventeen people and countless severe injuries. All but one of those killed were Nationalist and nine of

⁴⁷⁴ Coogan, *The Troubles*, 378.

them were under the age of eighteen.⁴⁷⁵ Through this mural, Mo chara effectively presented the RUC as an anti-Nationalist organization. By depicting the plastic bullet rifle, Mo chara brought attention to the RUC's violent role in the conflict.

The work's effectiveness is also enhanced by its simple design. Mo chara spent a great deal of time drawing the figure of the RUC officer, but he filled the rest of the work with flat planes of black and enclosed it with a simple red border. This design guides the viewer's eye toward the central image. The black and red color scheme also adds an unsettling effect to the work and emphasizes the Nationalist community's negative attitude toward the RUC.

Mo chara's three murals *AK 47*, *Time for Peace / Time to Go*, and *No RUC*, were all painted in an effort to emphasize the antagonistic role that the British government and the RUC played in the Troubles. In addition, in each of these murals Mo chara employed a simple design that effectively stated his message. Yet Mo chara felt that his work at this time was not living up to his high standards.

Portable Murals

During this time Mo chara once again altered his artistic process by creating smaller "portable murals" that he painted on wood boards. This work could be painted in the privacy of his home away from the public eye. In 1993, he was asked by Sinn Féin to paint three election murals in support of Pat McGeown who was running for re-election

⁴⁷⁵ "The Trouble with Plastic Bullets," *BBC News*, August 2, 2001 [journal online]; available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/1460116.stm; [Internet]; accessed November 28, 2004.

as councilor for the Upper Springfield, or Greater Ballymurphy area (fig. 110).⁴⁷⁶ This was not the first time a Republican muralist created a “portable mural.” Rolston has pointed out that in the early 1980’s the Derry-based Republican muralist Joe Coyle’s “forte was to produce murals on eight-by four-foot boards”⁴⁷⁷ (fig. 111). Rolston also noted that Sinn Féin later commissioned Coyle to produce “single board murals”⁴⁷⁸ for election campaigning. Coyle noted the importance of these murals and stated, “They can be transported around, they can be used for stage backgrounds, they can be used for exhibition purposes and they can be put up just on a street corner if the need be for whatever purpose.”⁴⁷⁹

The three “portable murals” Mo chara painted featured a three-quarter portrait of McGeown who was surrounded by Celtic designs. As in his earlier mural portraits, Mo chara sets McGeown’s portrait against a bright, almost glowing background. This creates a luminous glow and was intended to grab the viewer’s attention. Mo chara realized the advantages of creating smaller portable images. This new work not only allowed him to expand his audience but also guaranteed that the work’s message could be more widely disseminated. Sinn Féin often used these portable murals to campaign across many locations. Unlike wall murals, portable murals were not site specific and they could be

⁴⁷⁶ Photographs of the two other election murals have not been found. The descriptions of the two election murals are based on Mo chara’s recollections of the original designs.

⁴⁷⁷ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 98.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

easily moved to a community in which a Republican muralist might not have the ability to produce a large wall painting. For example, they could be placed along the road in more rural areas outside Belfast. These murals could be used as a tool to persuade an undecided voter living in a community that might not have supported a pro-Sinn Féin artist who came into their community to paint a wall mural.

Throughout his career Mo chara produced several portable election murals on Sinn Féin's behalf. These 'murals' were often moved throughout Northern Ireland in an effort to attract more votes for the party. Unfortunately, most portable murals were destroyed soon after the election. Mo chara recalled, "after that the mural served its purpose and it wasn't needed anymore, so it was either just left to rot, or the wood was recycled for other means. I am pretty sure that at least one of the Pat McGeown ones [murals] ended up as part of the wall for my brother Sammy's shed."⁴⁸⁰

In 1994 Mo chara produced a portable mural in collaboration with Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons. This work, *8531 Unemployed* (fig. 112) was commissioned by the West Belfast Economic Forum,⁴⁸¹ a not-for-profit organization formed in 1992 to improve the economy of West Belfast. The forum asked the three muralists to create a work that would draw attention to the high annual unemployment figures for West Belfast. The three men designed an image that depicted the districts of West Belfast as faceless figures walking forward with their heads held down. The large number of

⁴⁸⁰ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, New York, April 30, 2001.

⁴⁸¹ The West Belfast Economic Forum is also known by its Irish name, Fóram Eacnamaíochta Iarthar Bhéal Feirste. This name appears on the portable mural.

unemployed looms over them and appears to be carved in stone. This design sends the unsettling message that, if action is not taken to rectify this situation, these numbers will remain unchanged. The work therefore was meant to raise the public's awareness of this issue. Mo chara noted that the artists hoped reaction to the work would not only highlight the rampant unemployment in West Belfast but would foster change for the better.

Reinvigorated Murals

By the spring of 1995, Mo chara emerged from his period of personal reflection. In May he worked on a mural which, as he recalled, would “breath some fresh air into my work.”⁴⁸² He noted, “I had been struggling to create good work after Caron died. I just couldn't do anything I thought was good. So, I thought to myself, stop living on your past glory and do something different. I told myself to get up and do another good one [mural].”⁴⁸³ The mural Mo chara created, *Release all POWs Now*, was one of two works he created that called for the release of Republican political prisoners of war (POWs) (figs. 113 and 114). Through these murals Mo chara lent his support to the campaign known as “Saoirse,” Irish for “Freedom.”

This campaign was established by the families of Republican POWs in 1993. It pressed the British and Irish governments to release all Republican POWs. Between 1994 and 1995 this issue became a prominent theme in many Republican murals. As an ex-Republican prisoner, Mo chara personally related to this issue. He felt a deep desire to

⁴⁸² Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

add his public support to this campaign. His *Release All POWs Now* was a way for him to express his solidarity with the prisoners and their families. Mo chara also used this work to once again publicly honor the women of the Republican movement.

Release all POWs Now depicts both male and female prisoners of war. As noted earlier, the equal depiction of the sexes was not often seen in Republican murals. Like his *Women Against Oppression* (fig. 100) and *Cáisc 1916* (fig. 101), Mo chara broke new ground with this work by realistically presenting the cross-section of the Republican community who fought for Irish independence. Through *Release All POWs Now*, Mo chara acknowledged the experiences of female POWs who were often forgotten by the Republican community at large. By including the word “All” in the title of the work Mo chara emphasized this point further.

Throughout his career Mo chara consistently strove to raise public awareness of the valuable part women played in the Republican movement. Describing this aspect of his *Release All POWs Now*, mural Mo chara commented:

Everyone hears about the Blanketmen and the H-block men. But I always think, what about the women prisoners? You don't hear about them. The women actually suffered [in the prisons] as much as the men and possibly suffered even more because of the conditions they are under. They were humiliated constantly in the prisons with strip searches and the like. I thought to myself, if I am a Republican and I call myself a socialist then I should be thinking about women too. And in this mural I wanted to represent the women and the hardship they went through in the prisons.⁴⁸⁴

At this time, Mo chara also recalled the experience of his own mother who had

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

served six months in Armagh Jail as a Republican POW. The significance of her sacrifice for the Republican cause weighed heavily on Mo chara's mind later in his life and he always felt grateful to her for the sacrifices she made. In addition to depicting female Republican POWs, Mo chara also went to great pains to represent accurately the exterior of the prison in which they were held. The right side of the mural is a precise reproduction of the exterior of Armagh Prison. Describing this section of his mural, Mo chara recalled that, "I wanted the image of the blocks on the mural to be roughly the same size as the blocks that were used in Armagh Prison so the mural would look incredibly real."⁴⁸⁵ Mo chara represented the wall in a meticulous manner. He measured and drew each block by hand precisely. He spent a great deal of time studying photographs of the prison, and he recalled it from the visits he made while his mother was imprisoned there.

Release all POWs Now was an artistic and technical challenge for Mo chara, and it proved to be one of his most ambitious works. Unlike his earlier murals, which on average were painted on walls approximately twenty-five feet wide, this work was painted on a wall forty-five feet wide. Mo chara therefore needed to create a continuous and cohesive design across a much larger surface than he was used to. After creating many preliminary sketches he settled on a design that contained three distinct sections. Each of these sections was visually linked through the use of a Celtic border. This brightly painted border also enlivened the monochrome scheme of the two side sections. The continuous red and yellow background was included in order to add cohesion to the work. The mural received a great deal of praise when it was unveiled during the summer

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

of 1995. It was featured in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* and was reproduced by Sinn Féin in postcard format.

The second mural *Mo chara* painted in 1995 that was concerned with the prisoner release issue was *Tom Williams* (fig. 114). Like *Release all POWs Now*, this work also prominently featured prison architecture. The mural was commissioned by the West Belfast-based Tom Williams Committee. This committee was created shortly after Williams' execution to pressure the British government for the release of the remains of Tom Williams (1923-1942). Williams was a revered Republican and a West Belfast native who was executed and buried in Crumlin Road Jail on September 2, 1942. Williams and six other men were sentenced to death in 1942 for the killing of an RUC officer. The harsh sentence, which essentially convicted six men for the killing of one officer, caused a great public outcry within Ireland and the United States. Street protests and demonstrations to demand that the men be reprieved were held throughout Ireland. The United States government petitioned Great Britain to reduce the harsh sentences. As a result of this public and political outcry five of the men were reprieved. Tom Williams, who took responsibility for the killing, was hanged in Crumlin Road Jail. His body was buried within the prison and shortly after his death in 1942, a campaign was formed to retrieve his remains. Williams' body was finally recovered in January of 2000 and was reburied in a grave in West Belfast.⁴⁸⁶

The 1994 IRA ceasefire and the Saorise campaign brought greater attention to the

⁴⁸⁶ The remains of Tom Williams were ceremonially reburied in a republican plot in Belfast's Milltown Cemetery on January 26, 2000. For more information on Tom Williams see Coogan, *The IRA, A History*, 135-136, and *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, January 27, 2000, 1.

ongoing work of the Tom Williams Committee. Mo chara's mural attempted to increase public awareness of this issue. The mural featured a three-quarter portrait of Tom Williams above Crumlin Road Jail. In contrast to the prison imagery in *Release All POWs Now*, the architecture is simplistically rendered. Yet, like Mo chara's previous iconic representations of Republican martyrs (fig. 81, 84, 85, and 102), Mo chara surrounded Williams with a heavenly white and yellow glow. As in his *Joe McDonnell* mural (fig. 102), Williams is shown ascending above the prison. Through this image, Mo chara visually proclaimed Williams' revered status within the Republican community. The figure's depiction as a Nationalist hero is further stressed by the inclusion of the Irish Tricolor flag at the right side of the work. By superimposing a lark in barbed wire over the flag, Mo chara visually connected Tom Williams to the contemporary prisoner release issue. As noted earlier, Mo chara has used this symbol to represent the plight of Republican POWs since his *Bobby Sands* mural of 1989 (fig. 85).

Tom Williams and *Release All POWs Now* reinvigorated Mo chara. By 1996 he increased his artistic output and returned to the Irish cultural and historical themes that engaged him earlier in his career. He stated:

The time I spent thinking after Caron's death made me realize it was my cultural work that made me most effective [as an artist]. I originally introduced the Celtic forms in the murals because I believed it was very important to show people on the street who we were and where we came from. It is our history and one we should be proud of and I started thinking about stressing that aspect of my work again.⁴⁸⁷

The Irish cultural nationalism of which Mo chara speaks became the central focus

⁴⁸⁷ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

of the work he produced in 1996. In murals such as *Druid Harpers* (fig. 115) and *King Nuada at the Battle of Moy Tura* (fig. 116), Mo chara depicted events from Irish mythology.

Druid Harpers, the first mural Mo chara painted in 1996, was commissioned by the organizing committee of The West Belfast Community Festival for their summer festival. The work was painted on Springhill Avenue, adjacent to Mo chara's home. *Druid Harpers* is the first cultural mural Mo chara painted since his 1991 mural *Cúchulainn Armagh* (fig. 103). Like the earlier mural, this work also depicted a story from the legend of Cúchulainn as chronicled in the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology. Cúchulainn, the great Ulster warrior, defended Ulster from the invading Connaught Army. According to the Ulster Cycle, the Druid Harpers appeared within the Connaught encampment and played on their magical harps. The Connaught Army believed that the Druids were Cúchulainn's spies and they attempted to capture them. According to the legend, the Druids transformed into wild deer and ran away.⁴⁸⁸ Mo chara depicted this transformation in his mural. At the center of the mural he represented a Druid in a state of metamorphosis. On the left two Druids have already taken the form of the wild deer and are shown leaping over a stream. The entire scene takes place on a lush landscape consisting of green hills and a bright pink sky. The work is a fanciful depiction of this mythological event. Mo chara was interested in visually recreating this story because he hoped the mural would generate an interest in the myths and legends of Ireland. He

⁴⁸⁸ For further information on the legend of Cúchulainn and the Druid Harpers, see Lady Gregory, *Cúchulainn of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster* (New York: Scribner, 1903).

noted, “Most people in the community would not have ever heard of the Druid Harpers of Cainbile. I wanted them to look at the work and say, who are they and what is this about?”⁴⁸⁹ Mo chara’s statement expressed his ongoing interest in educating and informing the public through the creation of challenging works of art.

The romantic depiction of Irish mythology in *Druid Harpers* appears again in Mo chara’s next mural *King Nuada at the Battle of Moy Tura* (fig. 116). This mural was commissioned by the Upper Springfield Development Trust, a collective partnership of West Belfast residents and business leaders working for the economic and social redevelopment of the area of Upper Springfield. The Trust asked Mo chara to create a mural focusing on the cultural history of the area. In *King Nuada at the Battle of Moy Tura*, Mo chara delved deep into the past and depicted a story from Ireland’s most ancient culture, the Tuatha Dé Danann. This ambitious work was painted on a wall that measured over forty feet long. Mo chara returned once again to his favorite subject, King Nuada. He created a nostalgic and idealistic image that was inspired by Jim Fitzpatrick’s work. In this mural Mo chara culled together various images from Fitzpatrick’s text *The Book of Conquests*. At the center of the work he depicted King Nuada holding his sword above his head. He is seen at the moment of victory when he wins back control of Ireland.

This section of the work recalls his *King Nuada* mural that was destroyed four years earlier. *King Nuada at the Battle of Moy Tura* called to mind the core Irish Republican themes of resistance and strength conveyed in his *King Nuada* mural. The

⁴⁸⁹ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 1, 1999.

new mural was also meant to be a provocative statement representing the cultural and political defiance of the Republican community. As in his earlier King Nuada mural, Mo chara linked the story of the Tuatha Dé Danann's fight to regain control of their native land with the contemporary Irish Republican cause.

The third culturally themed mural that Mo chara painted in 1996 was also meant to be provocative. Although the work was commissioned in 1995, Mo chara did not begin painting it until the summer of 1996. The mural, *Famine* (fig. 93), was commissioned by the organizing committee of The West Belfast Community Festival to commemorate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Great Irish Potato Famine. Mo chara spent a great deal of time designing this mural and he considered it to be one of his best works.

Famine features four reproductions of nineteenth-century engravings that originally appeared in the *Illustrated London News*. These engravings were created by one of the newspaper's artists, William Mahoney. Mahoney chronicled the shocking conditions of Ireland's famished poor during several trips to Ireland during the late 1840s.⁴⁹⁰ Mo chara's initial design for the mural featured six of these illustrations (fig. 117), but he changed this layout because he felt it made the work look too cluttered. Mo chara's second design was based on the compositional structure of his *Release All POWs Now* work. Like this earlier mural, *Famine* contains a symmetrical design where distinct sections are defined through the use of Celtic borders. The most prominent feature of the *Famine* mural is located at the top center of the wall. In this section, Mo chara reproduced an illustration of a starving mother and her dead child. This depiction

⁴⁹⁰ For further information on illustrations of the Great Irish Potato Famine, see Helen Litton, *The Irish Famine: An Illustrated History* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1994).

references both Christian and Nationalist icons and calls to mind the images of the Madonna and Child and the suffering Mother Ireland. The mother's wretched condition effectively symbolizes this disastrous episode in Ireland's history when over a million and a half people died.

The work is also meant to be highly provocative. This is most evident in the text that appears in the upper half of the work. The words blame the British government for the high number of famine deaths. *Mo chara* refers to the famine as "Britain's Genocide" and "Ireland's Holocaust." These confrontational remarks clearly accuse Great Britain of escalating the famine for its own gain. During the Famine years, the conservative British government inadequately responded to the situation and continued to export food out of Ireland. This policy sent a clear message to Ireland's indigenous poor that their lives meant little to the British government, and it helped fuel the growth of Irish nationalism.⁴⁹¹

In her text, *Ireland's Independence 1880-1923*, the historian Oonagh Walsh noted that during the famine years the British government created an "impassioned" population of Irish fighters who "saw the famine as a British evoked Holocaust."⁴⁹² Contemporary 'Irish fighters,' such as *Mo chara*, continue to view the famine in this light. The work therefore is a public indictment of the British government.

The *Famine* mural was created at a time when the Republican movement was changing very rapidly. By 1997, Sinn Féin was admitted into the All-Party Peace Talks

⁴⁹¹ For further information on this topic see Walsh.

⁴⁹² Walsh, 35.

that had begun the year before. These talks attempted to bring an end to the Troubles. At this time, Sinn Féin was analyzing past injustices that had been committed against the Irish Nationalist community, such as the Great Famine. Republicans attempted to come to terms with the past by highlighting events such as the Great Famine in order to find a way to move forward. Sinn Féin was also drawing attention to contemporary incidents of injustice and sectarianism that were continuing to take place throughout Northern Ireland. These included incidents of police brutality and discrimination against Irish Catholics in the workforce and the public sector.

Collaborative Work and Reflections on the Peace Process

One of the most contentious issues to plague the peace talks was the continuation of the sectarian and anti-Catholic Orange Order parades. The most controversial of these parades took place in the town of Portadown in County Armagh, Northern Ireland. This parade, held each July 12th, traditionally traveled down the Garvaghy Road through a heavily populated Irish Nationalist community. In the mid-1990s, the Nationalist residents along the Garvaghy Road formed a coalition to fight for the parade to be re-routed away from their community. In 1997, the government under the auspices of the Parade's Commission, banned the Orange Order from marching along the Garvaghy Road. The Order responded to this ban by promising to force its way down the road. Order members called for mass protests to be held on the outskirts of the Garvaghy Road. Eventually, the Orangemen and their supporters besieged the Garvaghy Road's residents and turned the protest into an occasion for extreme sectarian violence.

In response to this situation, Mo chara and the muralists Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons traveled to the Garvaghy Road and painted three murals in support of the residents. The murals: *Re-Route* (fig. 118), *Fáilte* (fig. 119), and *Peace with Justice* (fig. 120) were jointly designed by the three artists. They were each painted with the assistance of young members of the Garvaghy Road community. All three murals prominently featured the Irish national colors, green, white, and orange, and they contain a central image enclosed by a circular border.

Re-Route is a political work that clearly referenced the sectarian nature of the Orange Order, and called for the parade to be re-routed away from the Nationalist community. *Fáilte* is a cultural work whose subject matter is in keeping with the artists' aim to promote the Irish Nationalist culture of the area. The mural depicts three traditional Irish dancers, Celtic designs, and Irish text that translate to "Welcome to the Garvaghy Road." *Peace with Justice* depicts bound hands, which symbolically represented the siege of the Nationalist community. These hands are superimposed over a rising phoenix, the traditional Republican symbol of perseverance that has featured prominently in Mo chara's work. The message in the mural, "Peace with Justice," references the on-going peace talks. These talks attempted to establish a new government that would ensure the rights of all of Northern Ireland's citizens.

The successful completion of the All Party Peace Talks culminated in the signing of the Belfast, or Good Friday, Agreement on April 10, 1998. The Agreement committed the new all-inclusive government to work to end sectarianism in Northern Ireland. In keeping with this goal, the Orange Order parade through the Garvaghy Road was again

banned in July of 1998. In defiance of this ban the Order and its Loyalist supporters organized another massive rally in order to force their way down the road. At this time Mo chara, Devenny, and Lyons returned to the Garvaghy Road and painted their fourth work in support of the area's Nationalist residents. This mural, *The Agreement, Free From Sectarian Harassment?* (fig. 121), pointed out that since the passing of the historic Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland's Catholic residents had still fallen victim to sectarian violence. The mural included a large Orange Order marcher who wears the traditional black bowler hat and orange sash of the Order. He hovers over the figures of the three Irish dancers menacing them with a petrol bomb.

This mural tragically foreshadowed the sectarian killing of three young Catholic boys that took place only hours after the mural's completion. On the twelfth of July 1998, in a horrific act of sectarian violence, three young Catholic boys were burnt alive in their beds when a Loyalist firebomb was thrown through their window. The boys, brothers Jason, Mark, and Richard Quinn were all under the age of eleven. The police believed that they were murdered because their mother, a Catholic, was dating a Protestant. The murders were believed to be linked to the Orange Order protest near the Garvaghy Road. The mural therefore calls to mind the extreme violence that the situation clearly provoked.

With the signing of the historic Good Friday Agreement, a relative peace was brought to Northern Ireland. The Agreement put in place an all-inclusive government,

which guaranteed Republicans a share in political decision-making.⁴⁹³ Although it did not achieve a united Ireland, Republicans viewed the Agreement in a positive light. They thought of it as the first step toward unification. The majority of Northern Republicans supported the Agreement. Mo chara referred to it as the “best possible deal we could get that would eventually lead us to unification.”⁴⁹⁴ He further commented that although the Agreement did bring an end to the conflict, his work as a political artist was far from over. He noted that even after peace, “there will still be so much to paint about. I will still paint about the struggle for Irish freedom, because we are still working toward that. There will always be social and political issues to cover in the murals. And of course, there is the art. I will never stop painting cultural work, because it is what I like the most.”⁴⁹⁵ Mo chara still addresses these important issues. The works he has painted since 1998 continue to reflect his social, political, and cultural experiences as an Irish Republican.

⁴⁹³ For detailed information on the Good Friday Agreement, see George J. Mitchell, *Making Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999); *The Irish Times*, April 11, 1998, 1; and *The New York Times*, April 11, 1998, sec. A, 1-5.

⁴⁹⁴ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

⁴⁹⁵ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

CONCLUSION

After the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, Mo chara was allowed to travel freely to the United States, despite his status as an ex-Republican prisoner. He was granted a visa to visit New York City for two weeks in October 1998. While in New York, Mo chara painted two murals in a Catholic school in Brooklyn (figs. 122 and 123).⁴⁹⁶ In addition to painting in New York, Mo chara also publicly lectured on his work, and made important contacts that led to further commissions in the United States. In the summer of 2000, he returned to New York and was commissioned by the New York collector Kit Defever to create a long-term project in which he would reproduce his best known (and for the most part, destroyed) murals on canvas. The project, which began in 2001, is ongoing.

The commission presented Mo chara with a great challenge because he had no prior experience working on canvas. His artistic versatility allowed him to easily embrace the new medium. The first canvas Mo chara produced in conjunction with this project revealed the high degree of artistic competence he had attained at this point in his career. The work, *King Nuada* (fig. 124) is a reproduction of his 1987 mural of the same name (fig. 77). The canvas was painted in a photorealist style. Mo chara replicated the mural by using a photograph of the work as his model. He squared the photograph and transferred the image onto the canvas in a freehand manner using small brushes and acrylic paint. The process was time consuming and took several months to complete. To date, Mo chara has produced five canvases, all of which have been painted using a

⁴⁹⁶ The murals are located in the Windsor Terrace neighborhood of Brooklyn at the intersection of East Third Street and Fort Hamilton Parkway.

similar technique (fig. 125).⁴⁹⁷ In addition to creating a visual history of his destroyed murals through this project, Mo chara transformed the impermanent nature of his murals and preserved them for posterity. He is concerned with creating a visual document of his earlier murals in order to highlight their important role in the history of Irish political art (fig. 126).

Influence

When Mo chara painted his first murals in 1987, the Republican mural movement was almost obsolete. As Bill Rolston noted, by 1986 Republican murals were on a “massive decline” and without an established historical tradition the murals were in danger of disappearing completely. In addition to reinvigorating the art of Republican mural painting, Mo chara introduced new imagery that was both aesthetically and technically advanced. He carefully planned and meticulously painted his work, which unlike other Republican murals, he treated as permanent works of art.

Mo chara has affected the work of younger Irish mural artists such as Andrea Redmond (fig. 127) and Donald Daly (fig. 128) who have imitated his Celtic-inspired style. In addition, his Irish cultural murals, such as *King Nuada* and *Cúchulainn Armagh*, influenced other Republican artists to paint murals that focused on the cultural heritage of their communities. For example, in 1996, Nationalist artists such as Sean Colligan painted murals as part of the Belfast community support group the Ardoyne Focus Group based in Ardoyne, North Belfast (fig. 129). The murals bear striking similarities to Mo

⁴⁹⁷ The five canvases are: *King Nuada*, 2001; *Mandela*, 2002; *No RUC*, 2002; *Caisc 1916*, 2003; and *Loughgall*, 2004.

chara's culturally themed works and they stress the area's connections to its ancient Irish roots.

Mo chara's murals have also influenced mainstream artists such as Robert Ballagh, who first encountered Mo chara's work in 1988 when he judged the mural competition sponsored by the West Belfast Community Festival. As noted in chapter four of this study, Ballagh awarded all three prizes to Mo chara's work.

In 1988, Ballagh had become internationally recognized for his photo-realist paintings that often featured Irish subject matter (fig. 130). Yet, it is clear that after his experience viewing Mo chara's murals in West Belfast, Ballagh began to alter his work to include more overtly Republican subject matter. In 1989, Ballagh created work that clearly supported the Irish Republican cause (fig. 131). In work such as his *France 1789 The Struggle Continues...Ireland 1989*, 1989 Ballagh transformed Eugene Delacroix's (1798-1863) *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830 (Musée du Louvre, Paris) into an Irish Republican image by replacing the French flag with a Irish Tricolor flag and superimposing an Easter Lily on the satchel carried by the boy at the right of the work. The work shares many similarities to Republican wall painting and Mo chara's late 1980s murals in particular, which use traditional Republican emblems, such as the Easter lily and the Tricolor, to evoke support for Irish Nationalism. Ballagh recently began producing posters on behalf of Sinn Féin. One such poster was produced in 2001 and commemorated the Irish Republican hunger strike (fig. 132).

As this study has demonstrated, Mo chara is a highly prolific artist who created a body of work that clearly articulated his strongly felt Irish Republican ideology. He has

visually articulated the spirit of resistance that pervades the Republican community in which he lives and works. Over the course of the past twenty years, Mo chara has contributed a significant body of work to the history of Irish political art, and for that contribution his artistic achievement must be recognized.

APPENDIX 1

Catalog

Catalog No. 1

- Title:** *H*
- Date:** 1980
- Medium:** earthwork consisting of lime and dirt
- Size:** ca. 40 feet long x 20 feet wide
- Data on object:** -
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Divis Mountain, West Belfast.
- Physical Description:** An earthwork dug into the side of a mountain in the shape of the letter H. The shape of the letter was dug out of the ground and lime was filled into the outline to create the appearance of a white letter H.
- Sponsor:** West Belfast H-Block Committee
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** This is the first work of public art created by the artist. The idea for the work came to Mo chara during the fall of 1980 while he was attending a meeting of the West Belfast H-Block Committee This committee was created by supporters of the Long Kesh Irish hunger strike of 1980. The work was created to bring attention to the hunger strike. Mo chara suggested that the committee sponsor the creation of the work on the side of Divis Mountain in West Belfast. The H was created by digging out large areas of earth and filling it with white lime. In an interview with the author, Mo chara remembers:

It took about forty or fifty people to do this. So we got up there and we dug it out to about forty feet long and maybe about twenty feet to thirty feet and we poured the white lime in and a lot of us were walking through the white lime like it was nothing and we all got burns, I got burns on my

ankle. Someone brought petrol up with them and threw petrol up into the H and set it on fire and it was very effective. Everyone who saw it down here [in West Belfast] said it was class. And then people that were coming by on the M-1 [Belfast motorway] could see it people who were coming in on airplanes could see it. The big H on the mountain. They would probably say, what does that mean? I would say that that would be my first involvement in community-political art and it really made me feel great. It filled me with the idea that this was what I wanted to do.⁴⁹⁸

Political Background: The first hunger strike in Long Kesh began on October 27th, 1980 when seven Irish Republican prisoners began a fast in an attempt to gain political prisoner status. The hunger strike was called off on December 18, 1980 after fifty-three days when the prisoners believed that the British government met their demands. When these demands were not met, another hunger strike began on March 1, 1981.

⁴⁹⁸ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, July 25, 2002.

Catalog No. 2

(Fig. 44)

- Title:** *H3, Long Kesh, C Wing*
- Date:** 1983
- Medium:** Pencil on paper
- Size:** H. 15 x W. 12 inches
- Data on Object:** Signed, titled, and dated lower left, "Gerard Kelly, H3, Long Kesh, C Wing/83"
- Present Location:** Collection of the artist, Belfast.
- Provenance:** The artist.
- Physical Description:** Pencil drawing of a view of the hallway outside the artist's cell in H-Block 3, Wing C, Long Kesh [also known as the Maze Prison] Mazetown, Northern Ireland. There are two barred doors on either side of a long hallway, which recedes deeply into the background of the drawing. Three figures appear standing in various poses in the central background of the drawing. The figure on the right is drawn with his back facing the viewer. The figure on the left leans on a cell door and faces the viewer. The third figure stands toward the center background and is drawn as if walking toward the right of the hallway. There is a rectangular shaped light at the center of the ceiling and two buckets on the floor on the left.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** This drawing was created during the period of the artist's incarceration in Long Kesh. The artist was in Long Kesh from March 1982 through October 1985. Mo chara remarked in July of 2002 that he created the work because he was "trying to record a bit of history."⁴⁹⁹ Mo chara was also practicing his drawing skills, the technique of linear perspective and positioning figures in space.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

Political Background: According to Bardon, the Maze prison consisted of a “complex of eight single-storey [sic] brick units whose shape led them to be named H-Blocks.”⁵⁰⁰ Coogan, described the creation of the Maze prison in 1976. He noted that the British government’s decision to build the prison was based on the Gardiner Report, a government report that recommended that the way to deal with the problem of terrorist activity “was to build more conventional prisons in Northern Ireland along the normal cellular lines. It was a result of this report that the H-Blocks were constructed in the Long Kesh complex which as a result of the new policy was renamed the Maze Prison.”⁵⁰¹

⁵⁰⁰ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 742.

⁵⁰¹ Coogan, *The Troubles*, 222.

Catalog No. 3

(Fig. 47)

- Title:** *Ri Nuadha* [King Nuada]
- Date:** 1983
- Medium:** Water-based paint on white cardboard
- Size:** ca. H. 12 x W. 14 inches
- Data on Object:** Printed in black on top center: “King Nuada of the Tuatha Dé Danann”; on the bottom center: “To Gearadin from Daddy”.
- Present Location:** Collection of the artist, Belfast.
- Provenance:** Gerda Kelly, 1983-2000
The artist, 2000-present
- Physical Description:** An equestrian Celtic warrior riding a white horse seen in profile. The horse is standing at the edge of a cliff that overlooks a lush landscape, which consists of green hills and a wide river that is dotted with small gray islands. The river ends in a waterfall that falls just below the cliff. The background consists of a blue sky filled with clouds and several bands of color that seem to represent rainbows. The warrior, with long red flowing hair wears a silver helmet, purple tunic, and a billowing robe decorated with orange and red Celtic checkered patterns. There is a large sword decorated with orange and gold Celtic-interlace designs hanging over the left side of the horse. A target-like design consisting of concentric bands of red, blue, green, orange, and yellow frames the warrior’s head. The horse wears an elaborate saddle and bridle that is also decorated with Celtic patterns.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** The artist painted this small work in 1983 during his incarceration in Long Kesh. The work is a copy from an original illustration by Jim Fitzpatrick’s that appeared in Fitzpatrick’s 1978 text *The Book of Conquests*. The illustration represents King Nuada, the

mythological king of the ancient Irish tribe the Tuatha Dé Danann. Fitzpatrick's work awakened Mo chara's pride in his Irish cultural heritage. It reinforced his spirit of resistance against British cultural imperialism and became a visual testimony to his sense of national pride.

Political Background: King Nuada was the ruler of the Tuatha Dé Danann, an ancient mythological race thought to be among the earliest inhabitants of Ireland. According to Irish mythology, King Nuada was a great warrior who, after losing his arm in battle, was magically healed and given a silver arm. He was known for his victories against the tribe of the Fir Bolg, who were also among the original inhabitants of Ireland.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰² For further information on the Tuatha de Danann and King Nuada, see MacCulloch and Fitzpatrick, *The Book of Conquests*.

Catalog No. 4
(Fig. 49)

Title:	<i>King Nuada and Morrigan</i>
Date:	1984
Medium:	Water-based paint on white cardboard.
Size:	ca. H. 20 x W. 24 inches
Data on Object:	-
Present Location:	Collection of the artist, Belfast.
Provenance:	The artist.
Physical Description:	A copy of an original illustration of <i>King Nuada and Morrigan</i> , 1978 by Jim Fitzpatrick which depicts King Nuada embracing the nude Morrigan. Morrigan lies on a bed of quilts with Celtic patterns.
Sponsor:	-
Bibliography:	-
Catalog Entry:	The work was created in 1984 during the artist's incarceration in Long Kesh. The original illustration, <i>King Nuada and Morrigan</i> by Jim Fitzpatrick appeared in Fitzpatrick's 1978 text, <i>The Book of Conquests</i> . The artist was introduced to the work of Jim Fitzpatrick while in Long Kesh. According to Mo chara, he received <i>The Book of Conquests</i> in 1984 from John Nixon, a fellow prisoner on his wing.
Political Background:	According to Celtic mythology, Nuada was the king of the Tuatha Dé Danann, a mythical people who were believed to be among the original settlers of Ireland. Morrigan was thought to be the Tuatha Dé Danann's goddess of war and fertility. ⁵⁰³

⁵⁰³ For information on Celtic Mythology see MacCulloch.

Catalog No. 5
(Fig. 51 & 52)

- Title:** *An Bóbla Naofa* [Holy Bible]
- Date:** 1983
- Medium:** Water-based paint on mahogany with brass hinges
- Size:** ca. H. 14 x W. 12 x D. 3 inches
- Data on Object:** Written in black on center of cover, “The Arrest of Christ”; along the spine, “An Bíobla Naofa” [The Holy Bible].
- Present Location:** Collection of the artist, Belfast.
- Provenance:** The artist.
- Physical Description:** Illustrations copied from *The Book of Kells, Arrest of Christ* page, which depicts Christ’s arrest and the symbols of the four gospel writers.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** This work was created during the period of the artist’s incarceration in Long Kesh. The work is a carrying case for the artist’s Irish Holy Bible.
- Political Background:** Republican prisoners in Long Kesh were permitted to have a copy of the Holy Bible written in Irish.

Catalog No. 6
(Fig. 55)

- Title:** *Bob Marley & the Wailers Confrontation*
- Date:** 1983
- Medium:** Water-based paint on mahogany wood
- Size:** H. 18 x W. 16 inches
- Data on Object:** Painted in black at upper center of work: Bob Marley & the Wailers Confrontation. Hem a go tired fe see our face' can't get us out a the race." Painted in black at lower center of work, "To Sammy and Mary From Gearóid".
- Present Location:** Collection of the Artist, Belfast.
- Provenance:** Sammy and Mary Kelly, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1983-1985. The artist, 1985-present.
- Physical Description:** Copy of the 1983 album cover of Bob Marley and the Wailers Confrontation. The image depicts Bob Marley riding a white horse and slaying a purple dragon.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** This work was created during the period of the artist's incarceration in Long Kesh. It was sent to his brother Sammy Kelly as a wedding present. Mo chara identified with Marley's subversive lyrics and linked them to his own fight for Irish freedom. The album Confrontation by Bob Marley and the Wailers was released in September of 1983.
- Political Background:** -

Catalog No. 7

(Fig. 64)

- Title:** *Vote Adams*
- Date:** 1987
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 12 x W. 15 feet
- Data on Object:** Painted in black at center: “Vote Adams”
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Springhill Drive, Ballymurphy, West Belfast.

Physical Description: A portrait bust of Gerry Adams framed by the words “Vote Adams” before a background depicting the green, white, and orange colors of the Irish national flag.

Sponsor: -

Bibliography: -

Catalog Entry: *Vote Adams* is the artist’s first public mural. It was painted during the 1987 Westminster election campaign of Sinn Féin president, Gerry Adams. According to the artist, the mural was created in two days with paint donated by members of the Ballymurphy community. Mo chara came up with the idea of using a mural as a campaign promotion. He noted, “at that particular time everyone was speaking down on Sinn Féin. Everyone was demonizing us, the British government, the Irish government, and the Unionist Parties.”⁵⁰⁴ He further pointed out that other political parties:

had lots of money to work with especially money they got from America and the British government...so they had plenty of money and we [Sinn Féin] hadn’t. So I decided, why should we not paint a mural for Gerry Adams for the election? I never ever seen [sic] murals painted for an

⁵⁰⁴ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

election... So we went and painted it down at the [Ballymurphy] chapel and the reason for it was that a lot of people go down back and forth to the chapel and would see it. And it was an access from Ballymurphy, through Springhill into the Westrock, so you got a lot of people coming up and down that way. And it took me two days to paint it. We had no paint we had to ask for it. We sent kids up and down the houses to ask for paint. We were looking for green, orange, black and white. And we got all the colors except black.⁵⁰⁵

The central image of Gerry Adams was copied from a Sinn Féin election poster. Bill Rolston pointed out in 1991 that this mural was the first to break “with tradition by depicting a living person”⁵⁰⁶ on the wall.

Political Background: In 1983 Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin was elected a Member of the British Parliament representing West Belfast. He was reelected on June 11, 1987.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 106.

⁵⁰⁷ For further information on Gerry Adams’ electoral campaigns see Adams, 317-319; Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 749, 771; O’Brien, 116-117, 126; and Taylor, 329.

Catalog No. 8
(Fig. 66)

- Title:** *Vote Adams X*
- Date:** 1987
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on advertising billboard
- Size:** ca. H. 10 x W. 18 feet
- Data on Object:** Painted in blue at left : “Vote”; at right “Adams X”
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: intersection of Springfield and Whiterock Roads, West Belfast.
- Physical Description:** A portrait bust of Gerry Adams at the center of the Irish national flag surrounded by the words “Vote Adams X”.
- Sponsor:** None.
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 105; Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 52 plate 98; Coogan, *The IRA*, plate 53.
- Catalog Entry:** This work was painted during the 1987 Westminster election campaign of Gerry Adams. The artist painted the mural over an advertising billboard on a busy intersection between the Springfield and Whiterock Roads in West Belfast. The artist was responsible for the design and painted the central image of Gerry Adams. He was assisted by members of the community who painted the green and orange colors to the right and left of the central portrait. The artist recalled that he was called away from this mural to paint another work and he directed his assistants to finish the mural by writing the words, “Vote Adams X” at the center in the white section above Adams’ head. But according to Mo chara, the finished mural did not turn out the way he planned. In an interview on October 31, 1999 he stated, “you can’t really see it [the writing] in the green, I wanted to put it in white at the top but this is how it ended up and I just let it go at that.”⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁸ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

Political Background: See *Vote Adams* (Catalog No. 7) above.

Catalog No. 9
(Fig. 13)

- Title:** *Loughgall*
- Date:** 1987
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 25 feet
- Data on Object:** Painted in Irish in black paint:
 at top center: “Lochgal” [Loughgall]
 at left: “Munchain” [Munster]; “Laighean” [Leinster]
 at right: “Connachta” [Connaught]; “Ulaidh” [Ulster]
 at center: “I Noil Cuimhne [In Loving Memory]
 “Oglach Padraig O Ceallaig” [Volunteer Patrick Kelly]
 “Oglach Gearoid O Ceallachain” [Volunteer Gerard O’Callaghan]
 “Oglach Seamas O Donnaile” [Volunteer Seamus Donnelly]
 “Oglach Padraig MacCearniagh” [Volunteer Padraig Mckearney]
 “Oglach Deaglan Mac Airt” [Volunteer Declan Arthurs]
 “Oglach Antoin O Garmailo” [Volunteer Tony Gormley]
 “Oglach Sesamas Laighneach” [Volunteer Jim Lynagh]
 “Oglach Ooghan O Ceallaig” [Volunteer Eugene Kelly]
 “An ochtar oglach de oglaigh na h’Eireann a duimharu ai
 Lochgal ar an ochtu la Bealtaine 1987” [To the Eight volunteers
 of the Irish Republican Army killed at Loughgall on 8 May 1987]
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Springhill Avenue, Springhill, West Belfast.
- Physical Description:** A memorial mural consisting of a central image of six figures dressed in military garb standing in two rows of three on either side of a large Celtic cross. The cross contains several decorative symbols including: Celtic interlace designs, an Easter Lily, a lark surrounded by barbed wire, and a setting sun. To the left and right of the cross are the symbols of the four provinces of Ireland with their names, (Munster, Connaught, Leinster, and Ulster) written in black above each symbol. A memorial plaque is painted beneath the six figures and lists the names of the men killed. There is an elaborate background landscape consisting of a body of water at

the foreground, with green hills receding into the background and a vibrant orange and yellow sunset.

Sponsor: None.

Bibliography: David McKittrick, "Messages of War from Ulster's Wall Paintings," *The Independent* (Belfast), April 8, 1988, 1. *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 19, 1988, 9; Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, color plate opposite p. 80; Rolston, *Drawing Support 2: Murals of War and Peace* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications), 56, plate 106; Ziff, ed. *Distant Relations*, 153.

Catalog Entry: *Loughgall* is one of the artist's better known murals and it has been reproduced in various formats including on postcards, posters, and banners. The mural was painted in 1987 and took the artist two months to complete. It is a memorial to eight IRA volunteers who were killed by the Special Air Services unit of the British Army on May 8, 1987. The artist was a personal friend of three of the men killed: Pádraig McKearney, Patrick Kelly, and Gerard O'Callaghan. The work represents a major shift in the imagery of Republican murals in that it marks the first time a Republican artist depicted members of the IRA unarmed and unmasked. The brilliant coloring and the background design were influenced by the work of Jim Fitzpatrick. The mural contains several important Irish Republican symbols. The image of the four provinces of Ireland signifies a United Ireland. The Easter Lily at the center of the Celtic cross signifies the Easter Rebellion of 1916. The lark in barbed wire, also on the cross, symbolizes the Irish Republican prisoners of war in Long Kesh. The rising sun is a symbol of Na Fianna Éireann, the youth movement of the Irish Republican Army.

Mo chara specifically chose to include Irish writing in the mural in order to set his work apart and make it more distinctly Irish.⁵⁰⁹ Explaining this choice he noted:

I decided that while painting it all the writing should be done in Irish. For the simple reason to show the British Army on the ground that they are on a different island ... what I wanted to say to the British and what I wanted to say to my own community was that We are different. We are

⁵⁰⁹ For further information on the political significance of the use of the Irish language see O'Reilly, 43-61.

not English people we are Irish, we are Celtic people, we have a different culture and a different identity than you. And that was the reason I did everything in Irish...I wanted the British to know that they were in a different country with a different language and culture.⁵¹⁰

The local security forces, including the British Army and the RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary] vandalized this mural on numerous occasions. According to Mo chara, the mural was paint bombed by the RUC and the British Army at least eight times. Each time the mural was defaced the artist painstakingly repaired it. The mural was destroyed in 1993 when the neighborhood in which it stood was redeveloped.

Political Background: On May 8, 1987, the British Army's Special Air Services unit killed eight members of the IRA in an ambush at Loughgall, County Armagh, Northern Ireland. Describing this ambush the journalist Tim Pat Coogan noted that an active unit of eight IRA volunteers were killed by the British army "of the eight killed five were killed in combat and three were ordered to lie on the roadway after arrest and were then executed." He further noted that the killing at Loughgall "was the biggest single loss for the IRA since 1921."⁵¹¹

⁵¹⁰ Mo chara, interview with the author, tape recording, Belfast, October 31, 1999.

⁵¹¹ Coogan, *The Troubles*, 290. For further information on this event see Taylor, 317-322 and Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 773-774.

Catalog No. 10
(Fig. 72)

- Title:** *Bobby Sands Memorial*
- Date:** 1987
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 35 x W. 18 feet.
- Data on Object:** Painted in black paint at the center of the mural: “Saoirse” [Freedom].
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Juniper Park, Twinbrook, South Belfast.
- Physical Description:** A mural painted in two parts. The top three quarters of the work contains a gray and black phoenix rising from red and orange flames before a solid blue background. The word “SAOIRSE”, Irish for “Freedom” is written in black letters on a white banner between the wings of the raising phoenix. The lower quarter of the mural contains the four symbols of the provinces of Ireland. From left to right they are: Ulster, Munster, Leinster, and Connaught. Below the symbols at the lower part there are two generalized portraits of a male and female IRA volunteer. They each wear green army uniforms, stand in profile, and lean on a rifle that is pointing toward the ground. At the center of the mural is a rectangular plaque honoring the Irish Republican hunger striker, Bobby Sands.
- Sponsor:** Community of Twinbrook, South Belfast.
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 54, plate 103.
- Catalog Entry:** Mo chara was commissioned by members of the Twinbrook community in South Belfast to create a memorial dedicated to the late hunger striker Bobby Sands (1954-1981). The work commemorates the six-year anniversary of Sand’s death on hunger strike. Sands’ family lived in Twinbrook. The symbol of the phoenix rising from the flames has long been used by the Republican movement as a symbol of the resurgence of the IRA and its continuing fight against the British government.

Mo chara painted only the rising phoenix at the top three-quarters of the work. Local teenagers from the community completed the lower quarter of the mural when the artist left to paint another mural.

Political Background: On May 5, 1981 Bobby Sands became the first of ten hunger strikers to die in Long Kesh during the 1981 Irish Republican hunger strike. On April 9, 1981, the fortieth day of his fast, Sands was elected to Westminster as a Member of Parliament for the constituency of Fermanagh-South Tyrone.⁵¹²

⁵¹² For more information on the Irish hunger strike see Beresford. Bobby Sands' prison writings, including his diary while on hunger strike, were published in 1983 as Sands, *Bobby Sands Writings from Prison*.

Catalog No. 11
(Fig. 76)

- Title:** *Bob Marley*
- Date:** 1988
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 20 x W. 30 feet
- Data on Object:** Painted in red at lower part of work: "UPRISING"
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Springhill Avenue, West Belfast.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A double portrait of the reggae artist Bob Marley. At the right center of the mural Marley's head is depicted with his signature dreadlocks. Below this portrait is another portrait of Marley in three-quarter view and bare-chested. He is raising his arms up and his upper body seems to emerge from a mountain shaped from the words, "Uprising". A background of bright yellow paint in a circular design surrounds the imagery. Green, yellow, and red bands of color frame the entire wall.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** The mural was painted on the side of the artist's house on Springhill Avenue in West Belfast. The lower portion of the design was copied from the cover illustration of Marley's 1980 album *Uprising*. Mo chara was influenced by Bob Marley's philosophy and found links between Marley's ideas and his own struggle for Irish freedom and equality.
- Political Background:** -

Catalog No. 12
(Fig. 77)

- Title:** *King Nuada*
- Date:** 1987
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 30 feet
- Data on Object:** Painted in white in a red circle at the center of the mural: “Is e Seo Nuadha Ari Tuatha Dé Danann” [Here is Nuada, King of the Tuatha de Danann]
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original Location: Springhill Avenue, West Belfast. Originally located diagonally across from the artist’s *Loughgall* mural.

Physical Description: A very brightly painted mural consisting of tones of green, red, and blue. The mural is dominated by the central image of a warrior in Celtic garb with long flowing red hair. He is seen in profile holding up his left arm with clenched fist and his gaze is upward. In his right hand, he holds a large silver sword with flames of red and orange emanating from its tip. He wears a helmet with two horns; a long red cloak draped across his shoulders and billowing in the wind; a bodice made of metal links; silver wrist guards on each wrist; a large metal belt; and leather boots with brown fringes. His large muscular legs are bare.

The figure appears to be flying up toward the sky. Framing his body are several large circles with abstract patterns painted in multiple colors. A raven is painted in black and appears to be flying just over the warrior’s head in the middle of the smallest circle. The largest and outer circle is framed with the Irish words “Is e seo Nuadha Ari Tuatha Dé Danann” [Here is Nuada, King of the Tuatha Dé Danann] written in white paint with a red background. The warrior is painted within a landscape of lush green hills and a large body of blue water recedes into the background. The sky is painted as a blue background with large green clouds. To the left and right of the warrior are images of ancient Irish rock structures, consisting of a dolmen on the left and a standing stone on the right. The standing stone is decorated with Irish Celtic designs painted in yellow and red.

- Sponsor:** None.
- Bibliography:** McKittrick, 1; *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 19, 1988, 9; Gallagher and Hanratty, 106, fig 7; Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, color plate opposite p. 80; Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 57, plate 107; Jarman, "Violent Men, Violent Land," 42.
- Catalog Entry:** This mural was painted in the summer of 1987 and took the artist three months to complete. The mural is modeled after a painting by the artist Jim Fitzpatrick and is inspired by Fitzpatrick's images of King Nuada from his text *The Silver Arm*. Mo chara noted that when he created this mural he worked directly from Jim Fitzpatrick's image. When producing the mural he first created a small copy of Fitzpatrick's image on tracing paper. This copy was then squared off and converted to the scale of the wall. The image was first drawn on the wall in pencil and then painted. Mo chara pointed out that "I started to square off the wall. I got the basic image itself and centered it and put the squares up and drew it all by hand. And it was tough work. Everything in it was Jim Fitzpatrick's."⁵¹³
- With this work Mo chara showed that Republican murals could function as educational tools that could be used to teach Irish history and culture. His motivation to create the work was to express his community's unique identity and its cultural pride. He stated that he painted this image:
- to show that our culture is still shining through. And I saw British soldiers getting their photograph taken with it. Even the enemy said to me one day, It's blooming marvelous...obviously the Brits understood this type of thing is not English. This thing painted on the wall is of the culture that lives here. Maybe some of the Brits got the message that... maybe they were on the wrong island here. That this is the island of Ireland. I did all the writing in Irish, because I had to just hammer it home." He also noted that it was just as important to express this identity to his own culture, for example he stated, "what I wanted to do was to show the children that we had an identity of our own. I was telling the British Army that we had an identity.

⁵¹³ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, January 16, 2003.

Now I was telling our children that we have stories and something to be proud of.⁵¹⁴

Background: See *Ri Nuadha* [King Nuada] (Catalog No. 3) above.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

Catalog No. 13
(Fig. 79)

- Title:** *Oppose Censorship*
- Date:** 1989
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 20 feet
- Data on Object:** On the left side of the mural painted in black: “Oppose Censorship” and below painted in red “Vote Richard May”
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Springhill Avenue, West Belfast.
- Physical Description:** A simple design separated into four sections. Each section contains an identical human head seen in profile and painted simplistically. The heads are painted in orange, white and green, the colors of the Irish Tricolor flag. The mural is read from top to bottom and left to right. The first head at the top left has a bandana tied around its mouth. The bandana is painted in the colors of the British Union Jack flag. The second head on the top right shows a hand beginning to remove the bandana. The head at the lower left shows a hand holding the bandana away from its mouth. The last head at the lower right has a cartoon voice bubble coming from its mouth. The bubble contains a dove.
- Sponsor:** None.
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 52, plate 99.
- Catalog Entry:** The artist copied this image from a political cartoon by Cormac [Brian Moore] that appeared in 1989 in the Republican newspaper, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. The work criticizes the British government policy of censorship. Mo chara produced this mural in an effort to highlight the discrimination of the Broadcasting Ban, which essentially sought to silence the voice of Sinn Féin in the media.
- Political Background:** On October 19, 1988, the British Parliament passed The British Broadcasting Ban. This law prohibited television and radio

organizations from broadcasting interviews or statements from any paramilitary organization or their political representatives. The ban, therefore, prohibited Sinn Féin from having access to the media.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁵ For further information on the Broadcasting Ban, see Moloney, “Closing Down the Airwaves,” 8-50.

Catalog No. 14
(Fig. 80)

- Title:** *Gibraltar*
- Date:** March 14 – 16, 1988
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 35 x W. 25 feet
- Data on object:** Written on three long wood boards attached to the upper part of the mural in black paint with a white background: “I have always believed we had a legitimate right to ‘take up arms’ – from an interview given by I.R.A. volunteer Mairead Farrell executed with her gallant comrades Sean Savage and Dan McCann.”
- Present location:** No longer exists. Original location: Falls Road, West Belfast.
- Physical Description:** A mural consisting of four figures all seen in profile on a rocky terrain. The background is decorated with a yellow sunburst with red rays. A woman has her head held down and she is holding a small child. She seems to be gazing down toward the dead figure of an emaciated man who is slumped over on the left side of the mural. On the right side of the mural there is a young man who seems to be walking forward. Above the mural are three long panels that are attached to the wall. The panels contain the quotation cited above by Mairead Farrell.
- Sponsor:** Sinn Féin
- Bibliography:** White, 10; Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, color plate opposite 81 and 105; Sulka, 205, plate 11.
- Catalog Entry:** Mo chara painted this mural over the course of three days between March 13th and March 15th, 1988. A few hours after it was completed, the British Army covered the mural with paint bombs. Mo chara repainted the mural on March 16th. According to Mo chara he was severely harassed by the British Army while he was painting this mural. He recalled that at one point, during the three days of painting, he thought he was about to be killed by a British Army soldier. He stated:

British soldiers were patrolling the area at the time I was painting the *Gibraltar* mural. One of them came up to me and in my face and says [sic] to me, ‘What’s your name?’ I said, ‘What the fuck do you think my name is? Because I mean they know who I am. It is in their briefing reports before they come out on the street. They see photographs of who is in the area. After that another British soldier grabbed me by the throat and started to trail me down the entry. And the other Brits were yelling, ‘Shoot him, shoot the fucker’ and the soldier cocked his rifle and put it to my head. I said to myself, ‘Mo chara this is your last day and just at that moment women [from the community] came around and started screaming and I just said, thank god, thank god. And my mate...came over to sort of cool the situation down, but they were going to kill me that day.’⁵¹⁶

Sinn Féin commissioned Mo chara to paint this mural to honor the three Irish Republican Army volunteers who were killed in Gibraltar. The three volunteers, Mairead Farrell, Sean Savage, and Daniel McCann were killed in Gibraltar, on March 6, 1988. The mural was to be completed for the funeral procession for the three victims. The procession was to pass by the mural on March 16, 1988.

The image in the mural is based on the sculpture, *Ballyseedy Memorial*, 1959, by Yann Goulet (1914-1999) located in Ballyseedy, County Kerry. The Goulet sculpture commemorates one of the most famous massacres of the Irish Civil War in which nine Irish Republicans were tied to a log and blown up by members of the Irish Free State Army. Mo chara modeled his mural after Goulet’s image and felt that it had a powerful message to send to the Republican community. He noted that, “The mother and child are mourning about what happened but the young man [is] walking strongly forward to take up arms.”⁵¹⁷

The artist was a friend of two of the Gibraltar victims, Mairead Farrell and Dan McCann. He served time in Long Kesh

⁵¹⁶ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 1, 1999.

⁵¹⁷ Mo chara, (a lecture discussing his work), November 13, 2003, Manhattanville College, Purchase, New York.

with McCann and he attended a Republican function with Mairead Farrell two months prior to her death.⁵¹⁸

Political Background: On March 6, 1988 members of the British Special Air Services (SAS) were accused of carrying out a British shot-to-kill policy when they killed three members of the IRA, in Gibraltar. The British government alleged that victims were in Gibraltar plotting to bomb a British military parade. Later investigations revealed that, at the time of their arrest, the three were unarmed and had no bomb. Witnesses described seeing them being shot five to six times each at close range as they lay face down on the ground.

Thousands attended the funeral of the three victims, which was held in Belfast. Media from around the world covered the event. When the mourners (including Mo chara) gathered at Belfast's Milltown Cemetery, Michael Stone, a Loyalist gunman opened fire on the crowd killing three mourners and injuring several others.

In September of 1995, the European Court of Human Rights reviewed the Gibraltar killings and found that the British Army had unlawfully killed the three Republicans and was in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁸ For further information on this mural, see Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 105.

⁵¹⁹ For more information on the Gibraltar killings and funeral, see Williams, *Murder on the Rock* and Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 778-781.

Catalog No. 15
(Fig. 81)

- Title:** *1916 Cúchulainn*
- Date:** 1988
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 40 feet
- Data on Object:** At the left side of the mural, written in Irish in red paint on a white background, are the words of the poem *Mise Eire* by Patrick Henry Pearse: “Mise Éire sine mé / ná an chailleach bhéarra / mór mo ghlóir/ mé do rug/ chulainn cróga/ mór mo náir/ mo clann féin/ do dhiol a máthair/ mise Éire uaigní mé/ ná an chailleach bhéarra/ p. mac piarais / executed 1916
[I am Ireland/ I am older than the Witch of Beare/ Great is my Glory/ I who bore/ dauntless Cúchulainn/ Great my shame/ My own children/ who sold their mother / I am Ireland / I am lonelier/ than the Witch of Beare.]⁵²⁰
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Monagh Road, Belfast.
- Physical Description:** A mural that consists of seven male portrait busts painted in white and black. The busts are arranged around a large figure of a Celtic warrior. The warrior is tied to a large gray stone and is slumped over as if dying. There is a black raven perched on his right shoulder. At the far left there is a rectangular box containing the words of the 1912 poem, *Mise Éiré (I am Ireland)* by Patrick Henry Pearse. The background of the mural consists of a brightly painted landscape of green fields, blue and white hills and a vibrant sky colored with yellow and orange bands of color. Bands of orange, white, and green, the colors of the Irish Tricolor flag, frame the mural.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, color plate opposite 81; Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 58, plate 108; Buckley and Paisley, 16.

⁵²⁰ Translation taken from the official website of Arizona State University available from: <http://www.public.asu.edu/~jacquies/Pearse-Ireland.html>; Internet; accessed December 15, 2004.

Catalog Entry: The mural was painted during the spring of 1988 to commemorate the seventy-second anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916. The portrait busts in the mural depict the seven signatories of the Irish Proclamation of Independence. The signatories are: (from left to right and top to bottom) Patrick Henry Pearse (1879-1916), Sean MacDiarmada (1884-1916), Thomas J. Clarke (1857-1916), Joseph Plunkett (1887-1916), Thomas MacDonagh (1878-1916), James Connolly (1870-1916), and Eamonn Ceannt (1881-1916). The British government executed all seven men shortly after their failed attempt to gain independence.

The dying Celtic warrior at the right side of the mural is Cúchulainn, an ancient Irish warrior from Ulster who successfully fought off invading forces from the southern Irish province of Connaught. According to legend, Cúchulainn received a mortal wound in battle and tied himself to a stone so he could die facing his enemy. The muralist modeled the image of Cúchulainn after the statue, *The Death of Cúchulainn*, 1911-1912 by Oliver Sheppard (1865-1941), located in The General Post Office, Dublin. Although created before the Easter Rising of 1916, the Sheppard statue has come to represent the Rising, which like the Cúchulainn myth symbolizes the Irish spirit of resistance. The image is a powerful icon evoking Irish Nationalism.⁵²¹

The background colors and landscape were inspired by the work of Jim Fitzpatrick.

Political Background: The Irish Proclamation of Independence was signed on April 24, 1916, the first day of the 1916 Easter Rising. The Easter Rising occurred between April 24th and April 29th, 1916 when two Irish Nationalist armies, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army violently took over strategic buildings throughout Dublin. The rebel leaders used the General Post Office as their headquarters and announced the Proclamation of Independence on its steps. The British Army put down the rising after six days of fighting. Soon thereafter, fifteen of the rebel leaders including all seven

⁵²¹ For further information on the link between the Cúchulainn myth and Irish Nationalism, see Turpin, catalog no. 37. Turpin notes that it was in a pamphlet titled, *The Murder Machine*, which was published in 1912 that Patrick Pearse first made the connection between the Cúchulainn myth and Irish Nationalism.

signatories of the Proclamation were executed.⁵²² Irish Republicans in Northern Ireland continue to commemorate the Easter Rising each year and they view their struggle for independence as a continuation of what was begun in the Easter Rising of 1916.

⁵²² For further information on the 1916 Easter Rising see Walsh; Jackson; and Caulfield.

Catalog No. 16
(Fig. 84)

- Title:** *Joe Doherty*
- Date:** 1988
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 25 feet
- Data on object:** Painted in black paint along lower portion of the mural on left: "Vol. Joe Doherty." Painted in white paint on the wall on right: "Would the U.S. Att. General Edwin Meese have deported George Washington? Don't Handover Joe Doherty to British Warlords! New Lodge Republican Youth."
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: New Lodge Road, North Belfast.
- Physical Description:** A two-part mural that consists of a larger vertical image on a wall at the left and a smaller horizontal image on a wall at the right. The left wall contains a three-quarter portrait of the Irish Republican, Joe Doherty. The portrait covers the entire height of the wall. Doherty wears a black short-sleeved shirt and has his arms crossed in front of him. He has a broad smile and looks directly at the viewer. A yellow background frames his head. Framing the yellow color is a background of red and blue. At the bottom of the image are the words, "Vol. [Volunteer] Joe Doherty" painted in black. The entire mural is framed with bands of orange, green and white, the colors of the Irish Tricolor flag. The wall on the right consists of the statement listed above.
- Sponsor:** New Lodge community.
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 106; Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 55, plate 105; *Irish Voice*, November 11th – November 17th, 1998: 1.
- Catalog Entry:** The Republican community of New Lodge asked Mo chara to paint this mural in honor of the local resident and fellow Irish Republican, Joe Doherty. Mo chara painted the mural with the aid of the local *Republican* youth. He designed the portrait of Doherty after a photograph that was given to him by Doherty's family.

In 1981, Mo chara served time in Crumlin Road Jail with Joe Doherty. He also served time in The Manhattan Correctional Center in 1989 while Joe Doherty was there fighting extradition charges. Mo chara included the wording on the right side of the mural, because he felt an analogy could be drawn between George Washington's fight for independence from Great Britain and that of the IRA. Mo chara directed the statement on the right side of wall to the American public. He was aware that Doherty's case had attained much attention in the United States and he believed the media would film the mural.

Political Background: Joseph P. Doherty was arrested in Belfast in May, 1980 for IRA membership and the shooting death of a British Army officer. He was held in Crumlin Road Jail until June 10, 1981, when he escaped and fled to the United States. He was arrested in New York City on June 18, 1983 on an extradition warrant from Great Britain. Doherty was held in The Manhattan Correctional Center for eight years while fighting the British extradition request. He won many court decisions, but was never released because the governments of Great Britain and the United States tied up his case in appeals. In 1992, Doherty was deported to Northern Ireland and served six years in Long Kesh.

During his time in The Manhattan Correctional Center, Doherty gained much media attention and a great deal of support from the Irish American community in New York. In November 1986, a street in Lower Manhattan was renamed in his honor. In November of 1998, as part of the prisoner release program of the Good Friday Agreement, Doherty was released from Long Kesh.

⁵²³

⁵²³ For further information on Joe Doherty, see *The Irish Voice*, May 27th – June 2nd, 1998, 8-9.

Catalog No. 17

(Fig. 88)

- Title:** *Leonard Peltier*
- Date:** 1988
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 11 x W. 10 feet
- Data on object:** Painted in black in large block letters: across the upper section of mural, "Free Leonard Peltier"; vertically along left side of the mural "AIM"; across lower section of the mural, "Framed by F.B.I."; and in small letters at lower left corner "painted by Sinn Féin Youth."
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Springhill Avenue, West Belfast.
- Physical Description:** A profile image of a red-faced man. The man wears yellow-face paint in the form of a spiral line on his cheek. The left side of the man's head consists of a hybrid image of the man's hair joined with the profile face of an eagle. Just below this, on the left side of the mural, is an image of a circle divided into four sections. Each section is painted with a separate color, red at the upper left, yellow at the upper right, black at the lower right, and white at the lower left. The background of the mural is painted white and the entire work is framed by three bands of color, black, yellow, and red.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** Buckley, 161.
- Catalog Entry:** The mural was painted to honor Leonard Peltier, a Native American member of the American Indian Movement (AIM). A Lakota delegation from AIM visited Belfast in 1988 to highlight Peltier's case. During their visit, Mo chara met Bob Kelly, a member of the delegation. Kelly gave Mo chara a badge that

honored Peltier. The mural is a copy of the image depicted on the badge.⁵²⁴

While Mo chara was painting the mural, the RUC shot plastic bullets at him and a riot later ensued.

Political Background: Leonard Peltier (b. North Dakota, 1944) is a Native American activist who is currently serving a life sentence in Leavenworth Federal prison for his involvement in the death of two FBI agents on June 26, 1975. Prior to his imprisonment he was a prominent member of the American Indian Movement (AIM). Through his work for the AIM, he petitioned the U.S. government to improve the living conditions of Native Americans.

⁵²⁴ For further information on the American Indian Movement's visit to Belfast see Kenney, 160-161.

Catalog No. 18
(Fig. 90)

- Title:** *Mandela*
- Date:** 1988
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 18 feet
- Data on Object:** Painted in white paint at lower section of mural from left to right in capital letters: “MANDELA FATHER OF FREEDOM / THE FUTURE BELONGS TO YOU/ HAPPY BIRTHDAY COMRADE/ SINN FÉIN YOUTH.”
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Falls Road, West Belfast.
- Physical Description:** A mural consisting of a portrait bust of Nelson Mandela painted in black and white. The background of the mural is split vertically in half. The right half contains three bands of color: green, white, and orange, the colors of the Irish Tricolor flag. The left half contains black, green, and yellow, the colors of the African National Congress flag. The message listed above is painted in white on a black background at the lower portion of the mural.
- Sponsor:** Sinn Féin.
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, color plate opposite p. 81; Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 58, plate 109; Sulka, 209, plate 15.
- Catalog Entry:** The mural was commissioned by Sinn Féin to commemorate the seventieth birthday of Nelson Mandela, the leader of the South African political party, The African National Congress that took place on July 18, 1988. Members of the local Republican Youth organization assisted the muralist in creating the work.
- This mural marks a change in artistic style for Mo chara. It was the first work in which he avoided excessive shading and the use of elaborate designs. According to Mo chara, the application of large bands of color created a work that was easier to repair. Mo chara noted that, “shading and things was [sic] becoming a problem. Fancy skin tones and things like that too. But the Brits were destroying the murals...every time they [British Army] would see you in the street doing a mural they would just destroy

it. So I started to go away from painting murals like *Loughgall* and *King Nuada* and I went into murals like *Mandela*...that used flat colors so that when they did destroy them then we could just go down have a look at it, get a few wee pots of paint and just fix it.”⁵²⁵

The Sinn Féin politician Gerry Kelly (no relation to Mo chara) informed Mo chara that while visiting President Mandela’s office, he saw a photograph of this mural hanging on the African leader’s wall.

Political Background: Nelson Mandela (b. South Africa 1918), President of South Africa and leader of the African National Congress was imprisoned between 1962 and 1990 for his role in trying to end the system of apartheid. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Sinn Féin had a close association with the African National Congress. Both parties have spoken of the parallels between the two organizations and their similar goals to create societies free from prejudice and sectarianism.

⁵²⁵ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 1, 1999.

Catalog No. 19
(Fig. 94)

- Title:** *So I always looked the other way*
- Date:** 1988
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 20 feet
- Data on object:** Not entirely legible from current photographs.
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Whiterock Road, West Belfast
- Physical Description:** A newspaper cartoon designed in three horizontal lines of text. The top line contains the title of the cartoon painted in large black print: "So I always looked the other way." The two horizontal lines just below this title depict eight scenes accompanied by text.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Politics and Painting*, 106; Sulka, 208, plate 13.
- Catalog Entry:** A copy of a political cartoon created by the cartoon artist Cormac [Brian Moore]. The cartoon originally appeared in 1998 in the Republican newspaper, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. Mo chara added color to the original black and white cartoon in order to make the mural more effective. The cartoon highlights the need for members of the community to become politically involved in Sinn Féin and not "look the other way." Mo chara created the mural to counter the negative attitude toward Sinn Féin that the British government was fostering in the local media.
- Political Background:** -

Catalog No. 20
(Fig. 95)

- Title:** *Fight Back*
- Date:** 1989
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 20 feet
- Data on object:** Painted in black and yellow in large block letters at upper left of mural: "Fight Back"; just below this framed in a white rectangular frame painted in white, "Vote Sinn Fein"; at the right of the mural "Ballot Box," written in black.
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original Location: Springfield Road, West Belfast.
- Physical Description:** A cartoon-like mural featuring a central figure of a stocky man dressed in army fatigues. He is wearing a red beret, next to his head appears a ballot box that seems to have fallen from above and hit him over the head. To the right of the figure written in black, yellow, and white block letters are the words, "Fight Back, Vote Sinn Féin."
- Sponsor:** None.
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 53, plate 100.
- Catalog Entry:** The artist copied this image from a political cartoon by Cormac [Brian Moore] that appeared in the Republican newspaper, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. The mural was created to encourage the community to vote for Sinn Féin in the 1989 parliamentary election. The man in fatigues and red beret is a British paratrooper whom Republicans often see as the symbol of British injustice.
- Political Background:** -

Catalog No. 21
(Fig. 96)

- Title:** *Union Jack Crumbling*
- Date:** 1989
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 9 x W. 12 feet
- Data on object:** -
- Present location:** No longer exists. Original location: Springhill Avenue, West Belfast.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A small mural presented in three horizontal bands. Each band is divided into squares of imagery that are meant to be read from left to right. The top band consists of three images of the Union Jack flag of Great Britain. As one reads the band from left to right the Union Jack seems to disintegrate. The imagery continues in the middle band, which shows the flag disintegrating until it completely disappears. The lower band is filled with images of white stars across a blue background. The far right section of the lower band depicts the image of the Starry Plough flag, the flag of the Irish Citizen's Army, one of two Irish armies that fought the British during the Easter Rising of 1916.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** The mural was copied from an original cartoon by Cormac [Brain Moore] that appeared in the Republican newspaper, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* The imagery depicts the symbolic destruction of the British presence in Northern Ireland and the emergence of the Irish socialist state, which is represented by the Starry Plough flag of the Irish Citizen's Army. This army was formed in 1913 by the Irish Socialist James Connolly.

Political Background: James Connolly (1868-1916) founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896 and the Irish Citizen Army in 1913. He was executed by the British on May 12, 1916 for his role in the Irish Easter Rising of 1916, and has been revered as an Irish Republican martyr since his death.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁶ For further information on James Connolly see, Greaves.

Catalog No. 22
(Fig. 97)

- Title:** *UDR/ UDA Death Squads*
- Date:** 1989
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 10 x W. 8 feet
- Data on object:** Painted in white block letters across the top of the mural: "Britains Death Squads" at center of mural: "U.D.A U.D.R U.V.F R.U.C"; at bottom of mural: "British Army."
- Present location:** No longer exists. Original location: Springhill Avenue, West Belfast.
- Physical description:** A mural with a camouflaged head as the central image. The head is depicted before a British Union Jack which functions as the background of the work. The head is skeletal and is camouflaged on the left side with glasses, a hat and a face scarf. The words listed above frame the face.
- Sponsor:** None.
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** The image is copied from an original political cartoon which appeared in the Republican prisoner magazine *An Glór Gafa/The Captive Voice*. The words were added by Mo chara. By adding these words, Mo chara wished to suggest a link between the Northern Irish security forces and Loyalist paramilitaries. The acronyms in the work stand for: Ulster Defense Association (UDA), a loyalist paramilitary group formed in 1971; Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR), a legal armed Protestant militia formed in 1969; Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), one of the oldest loyalist paramilitary groups in Ireland formed in 1912. Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), the predominately Protestant police force of Northern Ireland, formed in 1922 (in January 2002 the RUC was renamed the Police Service of Northern Ireland). Mo chara wanted to highlight his belief that the IRA was engaged in a defensive war and was reacting to the violence of the organizations listed on the

mural. He believed that these organizations were working in collusion against the nationalist residents of Northern Ireland.

Political Background: -

Catalog No. 23
(Fig. 85)

- Title:** *Bobby Sands*
- Date:** 1989
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 20 feet
- Data on object:** Painted in white block letters on upper left: "Ireland's Biggest Selling Political Weekly/ An Phoblacht / Republican News"; in black block letters on center left of mural: "Everyone Republican or Otherwise Has His/Her Own Part to Play"; on lower left of mural: "The Spirit of Freedom"
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original Location: Falls Road, West Belfast
- Physical Description:** A mural consisting of a large three-quarter portrait bust of Bobby Sands. Sands' portrait fills the right side of the mural. He wears a red sweater with a white shirt collar and has shoulder-length hair. He is looking toward the left and smiling. At the upper left of the mural is a rectangular box painted with a red background with white lettering. The box is an advertisement for the newspaper, *An Phoblacht / Republican News*. Below the advertisement at the center left of the mural is the quotation by Bobby Sands listed above. Beneath the quotation is a picture of a flying lark wrapped in a yellow banner, which reads, "The Spirit of Freedom"
- Sponsor:** *An Phoblacht/Republican News*
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 55, plate no. 104.
- Catalog Entry:** During the spring of 1989, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* commissioned Mo chara to create a mural and gave him the freedom to chose the subject matter of the work. He decided to create a memorial image dedicated to the Irish Republican hunger strike leader, Bobby Sands. Sands' portrait was copied from a highly popular photograph of him that was taken in 1976 while he was an internee in Long Kesh Internment Camp. Sands' face is painted in broad strokes of black and white, so that the work could be easily repaired. The mural took Mo chara four and a half hours to create. Mo chara believed that this work was "the most attacked

mural in the six counties” of Northern Ireland. He noted that “the British Army and the RUC were delighted to destroy it, and we repainted it so many times.”⁵²⁷

In 1978 Sands began writing a weekly article for *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. His articles often consisted of poems and personal stories about his experiences in Long Kesh. Sands’ writings were later published in Bobby Sands, *Writings from Prison*, 1983. The image of the lark refers to Sands’ 1981 short story, *The Lark and the Freedom Fighter* in which Sands compared the lark to his own experience as a prisoner. He stated, “The lark had spirit – the spirit of freedom and resistance. It longed to be free, and died before it would conform to the tyrant who tried to change it with torture and imprisonment. I feel I have something in common with that bird and her torture, imprisonment and final murder.”⁵²⁸

Political Background: See *Bobby Sands Memorial*, (Catalog no. 10) above.

⁵²⁷ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, New York, November 3, 2003.

⁵²⁸ Sands, *Writings from Prison*, 84.

Catalog No. 24
(Fig. 98)

- Title:** *Beidh an Bua Againn* [Victory Will be Ours]
- Date:** 1989
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 20 feet
- Data on object:** Written in red and yellow block letters in Irish: across the top of the mural, “Beidh an Bua Againn” [Victory will be ours], across the bottom of the mural, “We will be free.” Written in block white letters at center of mural, “Freedom, Justice, Peace.”
- Present location:** No longer exists. Original location: Whiterock Road, West Belfast.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A mural consisting of a large black and gray letter H as the central image. The H is painted in a three dimensional manner and seems to hover in the center of the composition. The background is painted in four triangular quadrants of yellow, red, and black. These color patterns seem to visually push the H forward. Across the H is a ribbon design, which contains the words, “Freedom,” “Justice,” and “Peace.” Three white doves are painted next to the ribbon with wings outstretched to appear as though they are in flight. There are four hands painted in yellow, black, and red, these hands are held upward toward the H. The H is framed by two phrases seen in horizontal bands across the top and bottom of the mural. At the top of the mural in a straight horizontal line is the Irish phrase “Beidh an Bua Againn.” This phrase is written in large block letters in alternating colors of red and yellow. Across the bottom of the mural in a horizontal band written in large block colors of red and yellow is the phrase “We will be free.”
- Sponsor:** Sinn Féin
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** Mo chara was commissioned by the Ballymurphy branch of Sinn Féin to create a mural that would highlight Republican issues. Mo

chara was asked to paint a mural on a prominent wall along the Whiterock Road in West Belfast. He designed a work that featured the H-shaped architectural design of the prison cellblocks in Long Kesh. Mo chara wanted the work to highlight the plight of Republican prisoners in Long Kesh. The work calls for freedom, justice, and peace to be shown toward the prisoners.

The Irish phrase “Beidh an Bua Againn,” which is translated as “victory will be ours” has important meaning for the muralist. He recalled that when he entered Long Kesh in 1983 a former occupant of the cell had spelled out the phrase with masking tape on the overhead light fixture. The phrase became a great inspiration to Mo chara and it helped him get through his incarceration.

Political Background: -

Catalog No. 25
(Fig. 20)

- Title:** *Free Ireland*
- Date:** 1990
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 20 feet
- Data on Object:** Painted in white block letters: at upper section of mural, “1916 Cáisc [Easter] 1990”; at center of mural “Free Ireland”; and in circle at center “Made in Britain”
- Present Location:** Beechmount Avenue, West Belfast.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A mural consisting of two parts. The entire mural has a light blue background. The upper part of the mural takes up about a quarter of the wall. At the very center of this section there is simple depiction of a large Neo-Classical building that is painted in white and black. The roof of the building is in flames and a large yellow and orange phoenix rises from the flames. Directly above the phoenix is the word “Cáisc,” Easter, in Irish. Framing the phoenix on either side and painted in large block script are the numbers “1916,” at the left and “1990” at the right. The remaining lower three-quarters of the wall consist of a simple design that is symmetrically arranged. At the very center there is a circle framed with a thick band of orange paint. The circle contains a white background upon which there is a green map of Ireland. Superimposed over the map is the image of a muscular arm which is shackled in chains. At the wrist painted in white block letters are the words “Made in Britain.” The hand is clenched and holds a large Easter Lily. The four shields of the provinces of Ireland appear at the four corners of the mural. In the upper left is the shield of Leinster that contains a yellow harp upon a green background; In the upper right is the shield of Ulster that contains a red cross with a red hand at its center on a yellow background. In the lower left is the shield of Munster that contains three gold crowns on a blue background; and in the lower right is the shield

of Connaght that contains a half of a black phoenix and half of an arm holding a sword upon a blue and white background.

Sponsor: Sinn Féin

Bibliography: Rolston, *Drawing Support 2*, 26, plate 50; Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, 191.

Catalog Entry: The mural was commissioned by Sinn Féin to commemorate the Easter Rising of 1916. The wall stands on a prominent intersection in West Belfast between the Falls Road and Beechmount Avenue. Each year on Easter Sunday, the National Graves Association, a West Belfast community group, organizes a march from this intersection along the Falls Road to Milltown cemetery. Milltown cemetery is the burial site of many well-known Irish Republicans and it contains a Republican memorial. The march is also an annual commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising. The mural was painted to decorate the parade route. It remains a prominent feature in West Belfast and is maintained regularly.

The imagery at the top of the mural relates to the 1916 Easter Rising. The Neo-Classical building represents the General Post Office (GPO) in Dublin, which was the headquarters of the Rising. The phoenix rising from the flames is a symbol of the indestructible spirit of Irish Republicanism. The four provisional shields of Ireland allude to a United Ireland. The shackled hand at the center of the work symbolizes the spirit of Irish Nationalism that has been restrained by Great Britain. The Easter Lily, connects the imagery to the 1916 Easter Rising.

Political Background: See *1916 Cúchulainn* (Catalog no. 15) above.

Catalog No. 26
(Fig. 89)

- Title:** *Our Struggle / Your Struggle*
- Date:** 1990
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 40 x W. 30 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in white block letters across center of the mural: "Our Struggle Your Struggle."
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Whiterock Road, West Belfast.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A rectangular-shaped mural framed by the colors black, white, red, and yellow. The lower section of the mural contains a man seen in three-quarter view and dressed in Native American traditional attire. In his left hand he holds a large peace pipe. He stands in front of a background of an American flag. Above the flag painted in white block letters on a black background are the words, "Our Struggle, Your Struggle." Above the flag is a triangle framed in yellow and filled in with red. Over the center of the triangle is a circle containing a Native American image of a buffalo skull with two feathers against a blue background. To the left of the triangle at the upper left of the mural is an image of a white lark in flight that is next to a piece of barbed wire. To the right of the triangle at the upper right of the mural is a black eagle in flight.
- Sponsor:** John Aldridge
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 59, plate 111.
- Catalog Entry:** The Native American writer and activist, John Aldridge sponsored this mural. Aldridge and Mo chara wished to highlight the historical connections between Native Americans and Irish Nationalists. Mo chara painted the work over the course of five days. The colors, black, white, red, and yellow on the frame of the mural are the four colors of man and are traditionally used by Native Americans to symbolize the harmony of mankind. The

image of the lark in barbed wire is a Republican symbol that is often used to symbolize the plight of Republican prisoners of war.

Political Background: -

Catalog No. 27
(Fig. 100)

- Title:** *Women Against Oppression*
- Artist:** Collaborative work with Danny Devenny.
- Date:** 1991
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 25 feet
- Data on Object:** Painted in blue block letter across the top of the mural: “Women Against Oppression.”
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Waterford Street, West Belfast.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A mural consisting of a central group of multinational women. The women are depicted in three-quarter generalized portraits arranged in two rows. Above the figures are the words “Women Against Oppression.” The artists increased the size of the letter O in the word women and added a cross at the bottom of the letter to form the international symbol of woman. There is a globe within the O. Along the bottom of the mural there are several silhouetted figures walking in a picket line. The background of the mural contains several bands of alternating colors that radiate out from the O. The bands of color on the right are black, red, white, and yellow; on the left they are green, orange, and white.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 53, plate 101; White, 10.
- Catalog Entry:** The mural was painted collaboratively with the Belfast mural artist, Danny Devenny. It was created to honor International Woman’s Day, which takes place each year on March 8th. The work highlights the images of women from around the world. The largest figure at the center of the composition represents a member of Cumann na mBan, the female wing of the Irish Republican Army. She is dressed in the organization’s signature uniform of

black beret and green blouse. The bands of color on the right symbolize the four colors of humanity and the bands on the left are the colors of the Irish Tricolor flag.

Political Background: -

Catalog No. 28
(Fig. 101)

- Title:** *Cáisc 1916*
- Date:** 1991
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 25 feet
- Data on Object:** Written at the top in white in a Celtic script, “Cáisc” [Easter]; in green across the middle, “Who fears to speak of Easter week”; in green along bottom, “éirí amach na casca 1916-1991” [Easter Rising 1916-1991]. In small letters painted in black at lower right corner: “Mo chara 91 ©”
- Present Location:** Whiterock Road, West Belfast
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A large mural consisting of a multi-part design painted in vibrant colors. The lower section of the work is copied from a print by the artist Robert Ballagh. The background of this section of the mural is painted in green and is dominated by the four large numbers “1916.” The numbers are painted in shades of red and yellow and appear to be in flames. There is a group of five people painted in the foreground in front of the numbers. The eight figures are arranged in a row across the bottom of the mural. The central figure is the largest and the figures arranged to his left and right appear to gradually decrease in size as they move farther away from him. At the lower right of the mural there is an image of a Neo-Classical building which is in flames. Along the bottom of the mural is a white band that contains the Irish words, “éirí amach na casca 1916-1991” [Easter Rising 1916-1991] written in black. The upper section of the mural consists of an arrangement of several Irish nationalist symbols. The background is painted in blue. There is a phoenix rising from red and yellow flames at the center. Just above its head are the Irish words “Cáisc” [Easter] written in white paint. To the left of the phoenix is a sunburst and to its right is an image of the starry plough design. A large yellow banner separates the upper and lower sections of the mural. It contains the words, “Who fears to speak of Easter week” written in green.

- Sponsor:** Sinn Féin
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support*, cover and 60, plate 112; Jarman, “Violent Men, Violent Land,” 43, fig. 2.
- Catalog Entry:** Sinn Féin commissioned Mo chara to paint this mural as a commemoration for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising. Mo chara painted the work in six days, using large areas of flat colors and little shading. The imagery is highly symbolic. At the top of the mural, Mo chara included Irish nationalist symbols, including the sunburst, the emblem of Na Fianna Éireann, the phoenix, and an image of the starry plough, the flag of the Irish Citizen’s Army. In painting the starry plough, Mo chara, avoided presenting an image of a flag. Instead, he flattened out the flag’s shape and filled the background of the mural with its design. This avoided any visual similarity to Loyalist murals where flags are often featured prominently.

The lower half of the work was copied from a 1991 print by the artist Robert Ballagh. The figures depicted are the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising. They are, from left to right: Joseph Mary Plunkett, Eamonn Ceannt, Thomas MacDonagh, Patrick Henry Pearse, James Connolly, Thomas Clarke, COUNSTANCE MARKIEVICZ (1868-1927), and Sean MacDiarmada. In addition to depicting the seven men who were executed for their part in organizing the rising, the image also depicts COUNSTANCE MARKIEVICZ (also known as Countess Markievicz) who was the only female member to be sentenced to death for her part in the rising. After public calls for her release, the charges against her were reduced and she was released from prison in 1917.

Political Background: See *1916 Cúchulainn* (Catalog no. 15) above.

COUNSTANCE MARKIEVICZ was the co-founder of Na Fianna Éireann. During the 1916 Easter Rising she fought for James Conolly’s Irish Citizen’s Army, acting as second-in-command at St. Stephens’ Green one of the battle sites of the rising. She was the only woman of the Rising to be found guilty of treason and sentenced to execution, but her sentence was commuted on the basis of her sex. In 1919, Markievicz was elected the first female member of the

House of Commons in Westminster. She was also the leader of Cumann na mBan during the Anglo-Irish war.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁹ For further information on Constance Markievicz, see Haverly.

Catalog No. 29
(Fig. 102)

- Title:** *Joe McDonnell*
- Artist:** Collaborative work with Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons
- Date:** 1991
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 20 feet
- Data on Object:** Painted in red block letters along the top of the mural: “10th Anniversary.” Painted in yellow block letters along the bottom of the mural: “Volunteer Joe McDonnell.”
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Rossnareen Avenue, West Belfast.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A mural featuring a three-quarter portrait of the Irish hunger striker Joe McDonnell. McDonnell faces toward the left and is smiling. He wears a white shirt and blue blazer and has shoulder length hair. Below him is an exterior view of Long Kesh. The background is painted in bands of yellow, orange, red, and blue and seems to indicate a sunset. Across the top of the mural are the words “10th Anniversary” and along the bottom, “Volunteer Joe McDonnell.”
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support*, 54, plate 102; Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, 236.
- Catalog Entry:** This mural was painted by Mo chara in collaboration with the Belfast mural artists, Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons. It is a commemorative mural for the tenth anniversary of the death of Joe McDonnell. McDonnell was one of ten men to die during the Irish Republican hunger strike of 1981.

Mo chara noted that the vibrant sky with setting sun was inspired by the work of Jim Fitzpatrick, whose imagery was a constant source of inspiration for him.

According to Neil Jarman, this work was “unveiled at a formal opening ceremony only to be damaged by a paint bomb three days later. Having been repainted at least once and then further damaged it was replaced” a year later.⁵³⁰

Political Background: Joe McDonnell was born on September 14, 1951 into a Republican family living in the Lower Falls area of West Belfast. He was arrested in 1976 in connection with an IRA bombing of a furniture factory and he was sentenced to fourteen years in prison. On May 9, 1981, McDonnell joined the Irish Republican hunger strike taking the place of Bobby Sands, his close friend who had died four days before. McDonnell died on July 8, 1981 after sixty-one days on hunger strike.⁵³¹

⁵³⁰ Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, 236.

⁵³¹ For further information on Joe McDonnell see Beresford, 204-235.

Catalog No. 30
(Fig. 103)

- Title:** *Cúchulainn Armagh*
- Date:** 1991
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 25 x W. 30 feet
- Data on Object:** Painted in white in a Celtic script at the top of the mural: “Mise Éire Mór mo Gloir [I am Ireland Great is my glory]. Painted in white at bottom left of the mural: “Cúchulainn Croja.” [Cuchulainn’s Death] Painted in white paint in a Celtic script at upper right side of mural: “Tír na nEireann”[Land of Ireland]. Painted in black paint in a Celtic script at the lower right, “Pairc Droim Airg”[Derryard Park], “© Gearoid O’Ceallaigh [Gerard Kelly], Jim Fitzpatrick”
- Present Location:** Derryard Park, Armagh, County Armagh.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A mural depicting a colorful landscape and featuring the Celtic warrior, Cúchulainn. Cúchulainn is tied to a large gray standing stone and is slumped forward as if dead. He holds a large shield in his left hand and a silver sword in his right. There is a black raven perched on his right shoulder. The warrior’s upper body is framed with a large halo-like design which consists of a yellow circle with a red, black, and orange decorative edge with white abstract protruding designs. A large Irish wolfhound, painted in profile, stands to the warrior’s left. At the upper right side of the mural there is a medallion containing a Celtic harp with a silver sword superimposed across it. The medallion is framed by large red and orange flames.
- The mural is oddly shaped. It consists of two areas: a large flat wall and a smaller extension that comes out from the right side of the wall. The decorative scheme flows seamlessly across the two areas. The entire image is bordered with a Celtic animal interlace pattern. The background consists of green hills and a bright blue sky. The middle foreground contains a blue and gray body of water that runs across the length of the two mural sections and visually joins them together. The foreground consists of a

yellow field that is dotted with brown rocks. On the left side of the extension there is a gray and black dolmen. On the front of the extension there is a map of Ireland showing its four ancient provinces.

Sponsor: Derryard Park Tenant's Association

Bibliography: Rolston, *Drawing Support 2*, 28, plate 53.

Catalog Entry: The Derryard Park Tenant's Association commissioned Mo chara to paint this mural. He was asked him to create a work that would reflect the community's nationalist identity. Mo chara traveled between Belfast and Derryard Park in Armagh for two months while working on the mural.

Cúchulainn Armagh is a cultural work consisting of traditional Irish symbols such as the four provinces of Ireland, a dolmen, a Celtic harp, the ancient warrior *Cúchulainn* and his Irish wolfhound. Elements within the mural were copied from the work of Jim Fitzpatrick, who the muralist credits at the lower right corner of the mural. The images taken from Fitzpatrick include: the background landscape, the dolmen, the Celtic harp, and the animal interlace border. The dead warrior represents the Celtic mythological warrior *Cúchulainn* (see *1916 Cúchulainn*, Catalog no. 15). The image was copied from Oliver Sheppard's statue, *The Death of Cúchulainn*, 1911-1912. The muralist signed the work at the bottom right with his Irish given name "Gearoid O'Ceallaigh" [Gerard Kelly].

Political Background: See *1916 Cúchulainn* (Catalog no. 15) above.

Catalog No. 31

(Fig. 8)

- Title:** *You Can Kill the Revolutionary But Not the Revolution*
- Artist:** Collaborative work with Rubén Ortiz Torres
- Date:** 1992
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 25 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in black across the top of the mural: “You can kill the revolution, but not the revolutionary.”
- Present Location:** Ballymurphy Road, West Belfast
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A mural containing portraits of four large figures seen in three-quarter view. From left to right there is an IRA volunteer dressed in camouflage, wearing a black beret, and a band around his shoulder reading, “Oglaigh na h’Eireann,” [Volunteers of Ireland (IRA)]. The fighter is holding a machine gun and seems to turn toward the left. Standing to his left and slightly above him is the figure of James Connolly, the leader of the Irish Citizen Army. Connolly faces toward the left and wears a black suit with a gray tie. To his left and slightly below him is the figure of Emiliano Zapata, one of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution. Zapata wears his traditional sombrero hat with rounds of ammunition crisscrossing his chest. To his left is an image of a cholo youth. The background of the work consists of three bands of color: green, white, and orange, the colors of the Irish Tricolor. In the upper portion of the mural the orange band is replaced by a red one signifying the Mexican colors. At the top central area of the mural there is a phoenix rising from flames; superimposed on this design is a black stylized eagle.
- Sponsor:** Féile an Phobail (West Belfast Community Festival Committee)
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support* 2, 31, plate 60; Ziff, 212; and Lyell Davies, “Republican Murals, Identity, and Communication in

Northern Ireland,” in *Public Culture*, Winter 2001, vol. 13, no. 1, 156.

Catalog Entry: Mo chara painted this mural in collaboration with the Mexican artist Rubén Ortiz Torres. The organizing committee of the West Belfast Community Festival invited Ortiz Torres to Belfast to paint this work with Mo chara. The two artists designed a multi-cultural work that features Mexican and Irish revolutionary figures. Mo chara painted the two Irish figures, an anonymous IRA volunteer and the socialist leader, James Connolly. Ortiz Torres painted the figures of Emiliano Zapata and the cholo youth. At the pinnacle of the mural the artists joined together the Republican phoenix and the eagle design, which is a symbol of the United Farm Workers movement.

Political Background: Part of the mission of Féile an Phobail is to promote the art of other indigenous cultures around the world. The organization regularly invites international artists to come to Belfast to participate in its annual community festival. For further information on the cultural, political, and sociological similarities between Mexico and Ireland, see Ziff.

Catalog No. 32
(Fig. 106)

- Title:** *Celtic Door*
- Date:** 1993-1998
- Medium:** Red gloss paint on mahogany
- Size:** ca. H 6 ½ x W. 2 ½ feet
- Data on Object:** -
- Present Location:** Springhill Avenue, West Belfast
- Provenance:** The artist.
- Physical Description:** A rectangular door made of mahogany wood. The door is carved with elaborate Celtic interlace designs. The designs are recessed in six areas throughout the front of the door. At the top of the door are two squares that are decorated with a Celtic geometric pattern; beneath these, at the center of the door, are two rectangles that are decorated with animal-interlace designs. At the bottom of the door are two long rectangles decorated with Celtic knot designs. The door was painted with red gloss paint.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** The artist carved the door over the course of five years between 1993 and 1998. Mo chara did not own professional carving tools and had to produce this work using only a small penknife. The highly complicated design was copied from the Celtic interlace patterns in the eighth century Irish manuscript, *The Book of Kells*. The work was completed in the artist's spare time, and is now used as the front door of his home.
- Political Background:** -

Catalog No. 33
(Fig. 107)

- Title:** *AK 47*
- Date:** 1993
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 11 x W. 9 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in black block letters across the top of the mural: “Sold in South Africa” at the center of the mural: “Bought by MI5” at the bottom of the mural: “Supplied to UFF/UDA Death Squads.”
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Springhill Avenue, West Belfast.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** Three AK 47 rifles are painting in detail in a vertical row before a white background. The phrases listed above are written between each of the rifles.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support 2*, 25, plate 48.
- Catalog Entry:** This simple but effective mural was painted near Mo chara’s home on Springhill Avenue in West Belfast. The work was painted to bring attention to the issue of alleged collusion between the British intelligence organization, MI5 and Loyalist paramilitary organizations, specifically the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) and the Ulster Defense Association (UDA). Mo chara copied the image from a poster that he saw during a Nationalist protest in Belfast. The poster was reproduced exactly.
- Political Background:** In 1993 Brian Nelson (1948-2003), a Loyalist paramilitary and member of the UDA, revealed that he had been working in collusion the British Intelligence agency MI5. Nelson recounted that in 1988 he received a large shipment of weapons from South Africa with the support and assistance of British intelligence. These allegations were later verified by a British government inquiry known as the Stephens Inquiry.

Catalog No. 34
(Fig. 108)

- Title:** *Time for Peace/Time to Go*
- Date:** 1994
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 20 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in black block letters at the top of the mural: "Time for Peace," at the middle of the mural: "Time to Go."
- Present Location:** Whiterock Road, West Belfast
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A cartoon-like image of a map of Ireland painted in yellow. A figure in green military fatigues is being carried through the air by a white dove from the lower left side of the mural. At the lower left there is a mound painted with the orange, green, and white colors of the Irish Tricolor flag, and on the lower right there is a mound painted in the design of the British Union Jack flag.
- Sponsor:** Sinn Féin
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support 2*, cover; Ziff, *Distant Relations*, 198.
- Catalog Entry:** This mural was commissioned by Sinn Féin to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the arrival of British troops in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin asked Mo chara to reproduce this original Cormac cartoon on a prominent wall in West Belfast. The military figure represents a British soldier who is symbolically being carried out of Ireland by a dove of peace. The dove says "Time for Peace" and the British soldier replies "Time to Go."
- Political Background:** British troops were sent to Northern Ireland on August 15, 1969 to reinforce the RUC. Although British troop levels were reduced after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, they still remain in Northern Ireland.

Catalog No. 35
(Fig. 109)

- Title:** *No RUC*
- Date:** 1995
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 20 feet
- Data on Object:** Signed in lower left side of the circle, "F.S. Mo chara 95"
- Present Location:** Whiterock Road, West Belfast
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** The main figure in this mural is depicted in a large central circle with a red border and a red diagonal band cutting through the circle. This design symbolizes the word "No" and the figure represents an RUC officer dressed in riot gear. He holds a plastic bullet rifle and aims it as if ready to fire. He is depicted with his back to the viewer but his head is in profile and facing toward the left. The remaining area of the mural is painted with flat planes of black paint and the entire perimeter of the work is framed with a red border.
- Sponsor:** Sinn Féin
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support 2*, 42, plate 79.
- Catalog Entry:** Sinn Féin commissioned Mo chara to produce a mural that would bring attention to its effort to disband the predominately Protestant Northern Irish police service, the RUC. After the 1994 IRA ceasefire, Sinn Féin began to press the British government for the creation of a non-sectarian and unbiased police force. Mo chara also used the mural to highlight the controversial issue of the use of plastic bullets. The simple design depicting an RUC officer holding a plastic bullet rifle allowed Mo chara to tackle the two issues in one image.

Mo chara signed and dated the work at the lower left. He included the initials F.S. which refer to his assistant Frank Stone.

Political Background: In accordance with the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, in January 2000 the RUC was reorganized and renamed the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, many of the important recommendations of the government committee to reform policing set up as part of the peace agreement were not implemented. Consequently, Sinn Féin did not support the new police service.

Catalog No. 36
(Fig. 112)

- Title:** *8,531 Unemployed*
- Artist:** Collaborative work with Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons
- Date:** 1994
- Medium:** House paint on wood board
- Size:** ca. H. 8 x W. 12 feet
- Data on Object:** At top center of the mural painted in green and black, “8531 Unemployed” at upper right in green and red, “West Belfast European week of action against unemployment”; at upper left in black, “Fóram Eacnamaíochta Iarthar Bhéal Feirste, [West Belfast Economic Forum]”; at lower right in white and red “UN declaration. Everyone has a right to work. To free choice of employment. To just + favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment”; across the figures in the lower foreground, “Upperspringfield, Andersontown, Glencolin, Glencarin, Whiterock, Ladybrook, Falls, Clonard, Shankill, Highfield, Beechmont, St. Anne’s, Falls Park, Glen Road.”
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Falls Road.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A painting on wood board depicting a row of faceless and armless figures. Each figure is painted in a different color and seems to be striding across the work from right to left. The first fourteen figures from the left contain the name of a West Belfast neighborhood written along their bodies. At the upper portion of the work the phrase “8531 Unemployed” appears in a block design as if carved from stone. The text listed above appears on the right of the work. The logo of the West Belfast Economic Forum is painted on the upper left.
- Sponsor:** West Belfast Economic Forum
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support 2*, 56, plate 105.

Catalog Entry: This work was commissioned by the West Belfast Economic Forum and was attached to a wall along the Falls Road in West Belfast. The West Belfast Economic Forum is an independent not-for-profit organization that seeks to highlight economic injustice within West Belfast by raising awareness on the issue of unemployment. The work was painted to mark the European week of action against unemployment and it displays the unsettling unemployment statistics of 1994, which identified 8,531 people unemployed in the small area of West Belfast. The forum's report that year pointed out that the majority of those out of work were disproportionately Catholic.

Political Background: According to the West Belfast Economic Forum's official website, the organization "works to evaluate the effectiveness of economic and social policies such as inward investment, training programs and economic regeneration initiatives in West Belfast."⁵³² As part of its stated mission to raise public awareness of economic injustices in West Belfast, the organization commissions public works of art such as the work described above.

⁵³² "West Belfast Economic Forum" [website] available from: <http://www.wbef.org> [Internet], accessed December 12, 2004.

Catalog No. 37
(Fig. 113)

- Title:** *Release All POWs Now*
- Date:** 1995
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 15 x W. 45 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in yellow block letters at the center of the mural: "Release all POWs Now Saoirse." Signed and dated at upper right corner of work, "G. Kelly 1995 © Spud"
- Present Location:** Kinallen Court, Lower Ormeau Road, Belfast
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A mural depicting a three-part design. At the center of the work is a black and white three-quarter portrait of an anonymous male prisoner of war. This prisoner with long hair and beard hovers over the exterior of Long Kesh. The phrase listed above frames the prisoner's head. The background of this section is decorated with a bright yellow and red sky. This central section is framed by two black concentric bands decorated with pink animal interlace designs. The left side of the mural contains a gray block wall with a barred window through which there appears a section of barbed wire; superimposed on the window are the international symbols of man and woman. Below the window are two clenched fists that seem to hover in space. The wrists are shackled but the chain is broken at the middle. This area of the mural is also bordered by the animal interlace pattern. The right side of the mural depicts a gray block wall with a barred window. A young woman with long hair appears behind the window and looks out through the bars directly at the viewer.
- Sponsor:** Ormeau Road Republican community
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** The Ormeau Road Republican community commissioned Mo chara to create a work highlighting the community's support for Republican prisoners of war. Mo chara created a mural that sought

to bring attention to the Saorise [Freedom] campaign, a campaign that was established after the 1994 IRA ceasefire to press for the release of all Republican prisoners of war. The muralist prominently featured the word Saorise [Freedom] along the bottom of the work. The subject matter is unique in that it brings attention to the plight of both male and female prisoners of war. Mo chara noted that he came up with the design in order to:

Represent the women in the struggle...what I wanted to do was represent both the men and the women. Everyone hears about the Blanket *Men*, and the H-Block *men*, but I always think, ‘what about the women prisoners. You don’t hear about them. The women actually suffered as much as men, and possibly suffered even more because of the conditions they are under. They were humiliated constantly in the prisons with strip searches and the like. I thought to myself, if I am a Republican and I call myself a socialist then I should be thinking about women too.⁵³³

This mural marked an important phase in Mo chara’s career. He began to challenge himself by working in a more technically advanced way. This new style can be seen in his accurate depictions of the architecture of the two prison walls represented in the work. The image on the left depicts the large rectangular blocks and arched brick windows of Long Kesh, the male prison that housed most of Northern Ireland’s Republican prisoners of war. The imagery at the right depicts the brick wall and rectangular windows of Armagh Prison, the female prison that housed Northern Ireland’s female Republican prisoners of war. Mo chara accurately depicted the two architectural designs in painstaking detail, drawing each block by hand with meticulous measurements.

The mural was painted with the assistance of Mo chara’s friend, Joseph Murphy, who also goes by the nickname “Spud.” Mo chara credited Murphy, dated, and copyrighted the work in the upper right corner.

Political Background: After the 1994 IRA ceasefire, the Republican leadership of Sinn Féin, along with the Saorise [Freedom] campaign, began to press the governments of Great Britain, Ireland, and the United States for

⁵³³ Mo chara, interview by author, tape recording, Belfast, November 1, 1999.

the release of all Republican prisoners of war. Between 1994 and 2000, the prisoner release issue became a prominent theme of many Republican murals in Northern Ireland. As part of the 1998 peace settlement known as The Good Friday Agreement, all Republican prisoners of war were released by the summer of 2000.

Catalog No. 38
(Fig. 114)

- Title:** *Tom Williams*
- Date:** 1995
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 20 feet
- Data on Object:** Painted in black block letters at upper left, "Volunteer Tom Williams. Executed 2.9.42 Age 19"; at upper right, "A lad who still lives within a prison wall"; at center of the mural in white block letters, "Crumlin Road Gaol"
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Kashmir Road, West Belfast.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A mural in two parts painted across two connecting walls. The larger wall at the left contains a portrait of Tom Williams whose three-quarter frame hovers over the exterior of Crumlin Road Jail. The roof of the prison is lined with barbed wire. There are two painted plaques at the upper section of the mural. These plaques contain the phrases listed above. Above the jail and surrounding the portrait is a background of flat yellow and white colors. The smaller wall to the right contains an image of a lark with outstretched wings perched on barbed wire. The background colors form the image of the Irish Tricolor flag. A broad band of green connects the two walls at the right side of the work.
- Sponsor:** Tom Williams committee, Kashmir Road
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support 2*, 22, plate 42.
- Catalog Entry:** The Tom Williams committee of the Kashmir Road in West Belfast commissioned Mo chara to produce a mural that would highlight its campaign to retrieve the remains of Tom Williams, (1923-1942) a revered Republican who was executed and buried in Crumlin Road Jail on September 2, 1942. The colors of the Irish Tricolor flag dominate the mural. Williams is surrounded by a yellow background which seems to illuminate him from behind, making him appear as if he is shrouded in light. As in his *Joe*

Doherty and *Bobby Sands* murals, Mo chara presents Williams as a saintly figure whose spirit seems to rise from the walls of Crumlin Road Jail. At the right of the main wall, Mo chara has painted a smaller side wall with the image of the Irish Tricolor. Superimposed on the Tricolor is a lark trapped in barbed wire. This image has symbolically come to represent the plight of the Irish Republican prisoner of war.⁵³⁴

Political Background: Tom Williams, a resident of West Belfast and a member of the IRA, was executed in Crumlin Road Jail in Belfast on September 2, 1942 for his role in the death of an RUC officer. Williams was one of six men who were sentenced to death for the murder. The harsh sentence caused a public outcry among the Nationalist community which was outraged that six Nationalists were sentenced to death for the killing of one police officer. After large-scale public protests, the Northern Irish government was forced to commute the sentences of five of the men. Williams was held responsible for the murder and ordered to be hanged. He was executed within Crumlin Road Jail and his body was buried there in an unmarked grave. A campaign to retrieve his remains began shortly after his death and lasted until January of 2000 when the body was finally recovered and released for reburial in a Republican marked plot in Belfast's Milltown Cemetery.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ For further information on the lark see *Bobby Sands* (Catalog no. 23) above.

⁵³⁵ For further information on Tom Williams see Coogan, *The IRA*, 135-136 and *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, January 27, 2000, 1.

Catalog No. 39
(Fig. 115)

- Title:** *Druid Harpers*
- Date:** 1996
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 10 x W. 14 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in a Celtic script along the top of the mural, “draoichlairseoiri an chinn bhaile” [The Druid Harpers of Cainbile]; along the bottom of the mural, “The Druid Harpers of Cainbile”
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Springhill Avenue, West Belfast.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A pastoral scene dominated by four figures within the foreground of the work. From left to right there are two deer leaping over a brook, to their left is a centaur who wears a green kilt and cape. Seated beneath him and to his left is a woman playing a harp, dressed in a long flowing yellow gown. The figures are set within a landscape consisting of green grass, waterfalls, and large megaliths in the distance. The imagery is bordered on each side by a Celtic-interlace design. The phrases listed above border the upper and lower sections of the work.
- Sponsor:** Féile an Phobail [West Belfast Community Festival]
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** Féile an Phobail commissioned Mo chara to paint a mural for its 1996 festival. The commission did not stipulate the subject matter of the work. Mo chara designed a cultural work which depicted a scene from the ancient Irish legend of the Ulster warrior, Cúchulainn. The Druid Harpers of Cainbile are featured in the ancient Irish mythological story of Cúchulainn. According to Irish mythology the Druid Harpers appeared within the army of Connaught, the army encampment of Cúchulainn’s enemy, Queen Maeve. According to the text, *Cúchulainn of Muirthemne* by Lady

Augusta Gregory⁵³⁶, which chronicles the Cúchulainn legend, the Connaught army believed the harpers were Cúchulainn's spies and began to chase them from the camp. According to legend, the harpers transformed into deer and swiftly ran away.

Political Background: -

⁵³⁶ Lady Augusta Gregory, *Cúchulainn of Muirthemne* (New York: Scribner, 1903).

Catalog No. 40

(Fig. 116)

- Title:** *King Nuada at the Battle of Moy Tura*
- Date:** 1996
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 8 x W. 40 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in block print along the top of the mural, “Nuadha Ri Tuatha Dé Danann Buaitteoir Chath Magh Tuireadh Conga Eire” the English translation is written along the bottom of the mural, “King Nuadha of the Tuatha Dé Danann. Victorious at the Battle of Moy Tura, Ireland.”
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Whiterock Road, West Belfast.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A long mural consisting of three sections. The main section at the center of the work depicts King Nuada standing in the center of a rocky landscape. He is dressed in Celtic battle attire and stands triumphantly with his large silver sword raised above his head. To his left and right there are two dragons whose heads are just visible over large clouds of smoke. The two smaller sections of the mural to the left and right of the central image contain animal-interlace designs.
- Sponsor:** Upper Springfield Development Trust
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** The Upper Springfield Development Trust commissioned the artist to create a mural that would help to improve the physical appearance of the community. Mo chara was asked to produce a work that would celebrate the community’s cultural identity. The imagery in the mural is based on illustrations taken from Jim Fitzpatrick’s *The Book of Conquests*. Mo chara’s mural incorporates various images which appear throughout Fitzpatrick’s text. The central image depicts a scene from the Battle of Moy Tura, an ancient mythological battle fought between the Tutha Dé Danann and the Fir Bolg for the possession of Ireland. King

Nuada, the leader of the Tuatha Dé Danann and his forces were victorious. Mo chara chose to represent the king at the moment of victory.

Political Background: -

Catalog No. 41
(Fig. 93)

- Title:** *Famine*
- Date:** 1996-1997
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 20 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in Celtic script at the pinnacle of the mural, “An Gorta Mór” [The Great Famine]. Written in block print at the left side of the mural, “Britain’s Genocide by Starvation” at the right side of the mural, “Ireland’s Holocaust 1845-1849” along the bottom of the mural, “Over 1,500,000 Deaths.” Signed and dated at lower right corner, “Gerard Kelly 1997.”
- Present Location:** Whiterock Road, West Belfast
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A landscape scene depicting three figural groups of emaciated figures who are searching for food. The figures are arranged in groups and stand within a barren rocky field. The background, depicted in bright colors, contains green hills and a blue sky. The central figural group is framed within a circle that is bordered with an orange and yellow Celtic-interlace design. Directly above this group is an identical circle that frames an emaciated young woman who is carrying an infant. The entire image is framed by a yellow Celtic-interlace design.
- Sponsor:** *Féile an Phobail* [West Belfast Community Festival]
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** In March of 1994, the West Belfast Festival Committee commissioned twelve artists, including Mo chara, to paint murals throughout West Belfast that had to be based on the theme of the Great Irish Potato Famine of 1845-1849.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁷ Brian Scott Lipton, ed., “*Binlids: A Drama of West Belfast Resistance*,” in *Encore*, October 8-23, 1998, unpaginated.

Mo chara began this mural in the summer of 1996 and worked on it intermittently until its completion in 1997. The four figural groups in the mural were copied from nineteenth-century engravings originally published between 1847 and 1849 in the *Illustrated London News*. The engravings visually detailed the devastating circumstances that the Irish poor endured during the famine years.

Political Background: -

Catalog No. 42
(Fig. 118)

- Title:** *Re-Route*
- Artist:** Collaborative work with Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons
- Date:** 1997
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 18 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in red along a spiral design at the center of the work “Re-Route” and along the bottom of the work, “Sectarian Marches.”
- Present Location:** No longer exists. Original location: Garvaghy Road, Portadown, County Armagh.
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A target-like design at the center of the wall contains a large red arched arrow with the words “Re-Route.” Across the target are five silhouettes of Orange Order marchers who are arranged in a row across the right side of the work. The imagery is presented on a flat green background.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** Mac Bride, 153.
- Catalog Entry:** The work is one of three murals that the artists painted collaboratively with Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons over the course of four days in July of 1997. The murals were all painted on the Garvaghy Road in the town of Portadown in County Armagh, Northern Ireland (see *Fáilte*, Catalog no. 43 and *Peace with Justice*, Catalog no. 44, below). The artists produced the work in support of the Nationalist community of the Garvaghy Road which was besieged by the Protestant Orange Order during its annually July 12th parade. This parade triumphantly celebrates the 1690 Protestant victory of King William III over the Catholic King James II. The parade is a sectarian display of Protestant culture and it often ends in violence and rioting. The Nationalist residents of the Garvaghy Road strongly object to the parade’s presence and

are annually besieged by “Orange” mobs, which violently antagonize them. The mural calls for the re-routing of the Orange Order parade away from the Garvagh Road.

The work was designed by the three muralists and painted with the assistance of members of the Garvagh Road community.

Political Background: In 1997, The Garvagh Road Residents Coalition, a local activist organization attempted to open a dialog with the Orange Order in order to find a peaceful solution to the parade issue. The Order refused to meet with its representatives and insisted that the parade should go ahead despite the resident’s objections. The Coalition therefore decided that it would attempt to counteract the parade by having an “open-air festival” the same day. This festival celebrated the Irish nationalist identity of the area.⁵³⁸ The three murals were painted as part of this open-air festival.

⁵³⁸ *The Irish Times*, June 14, 1997, 1.

Catalog No. 43
(Fig. 119)

- Title:** *Fáilte*
- Artist:** Collaborative work with Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons
- Date:** 1997
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 18 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in Celtic script at top of mural, “Fáilte”[Welcome]; along bottom of the mural, “go dti Bóthar Garbh Achaidh” [to the Garvaghy Road].
- Present Location:** Hurson Park, Portadown, County Armagh
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** A depiction of three young girls wearing Irish dancing costumes dancing in the middle of a road. The image is set within a circular frame that is decorated with Celtic knot designs. The phrases listed above frame the circle. The rest of the wall is painted in flat planes of green color.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** Rolston, *Drawing Support* 3, 6, plate 11.
- Catalog Entry:** The work was painted as a statement of cultural resistance stressing the unique Irish identity of the area. The central imagery of the three Irish dancers was taken from a print by the Irish artist Robert Ballagh.
- Political Background:** See *Re-Route* (Catalog no. 42) above.

Catalog No. 44
(Fig. 120)

- Title:** *Peace with Justice*
- Artist:** Collaborative work with Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons
- Date:** 1997
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 18 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in block letters at top of mural, "Peace" along bottom of the mural, "With Justice."
- Present Location:** Garvaghy Road, Portadown, County Armagh
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** The main image located within a large circular frame depicts two large hands that are bound together with a three-layered rope. The layers of the rope are painted orange, white, and green, the colors of the Irish Tricolor flag. Behind the hands upon a flaming yellow and orange background is a depiction of a phoenix with outstretched wings. The circular frame is decorated with Celtic knot designs and the rest of the wall is painted with flat planes of green color.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** -
- Catalog Entry:** The mural depicts the phoenix the traditional symbol of Republican resistance and perseverance. The hands reference the siege of the Nationalist community and the work calls for a peace and a just means to end the conflict.
- Political Background:** See *Re-Route* (Catalog no. 42) above.

Catalog No. 45
(Fig. 121)

- Title:** *The Agreement Free From Sectarian Harassment?*
- Artist:** Collaborative work with Danny Devenny and Marty Lyons
- Date:** 1998
- Medium:** Mural, house paint on wall
- Size:** ca. H. 30 x W. 18 feet
- Data on Object:** Written in block letters at the top of the mural, "LOL 1690" along lower portion of the mural, "The Agreement, Free from Sectarian Harassment?"
- Present Location:** Garvaghy Road, Portadown, County Armagh
- Provenance:** -
- Physical Description:** The mural is dominated by the cartoon-like image of a large angry Orange Order marcher who wears the traditional Orange Order sash with the initials LOL, or Loyal Orange Lodge, and a bowler hat. He holds a large petrol bomb in his left hand and hovers menacingly over the silhouettes of three young Irish dancers. Behind the figures, also in silhouette is an exterior view of Drumcree church in Portadown. A large group of figures marching behind a banner is depicted in the left background. The lower portion of the mural contains the phrase listed above. The background contains a large yellow setting sun amid a yellow and red sky. This design and the lower portion of the mural were copied from the cover of the Good Friday Agreement's information booklet that was sent to every household in Northern Ireland. The original cover design contained the words: "The Agreement, The Right to Freedom from Sectarian Harassment." The muralists changed this phrase slightly to suit their needs and added a question mark to make the work's message more effective.
- Sponsor:** -
- Bibliography:** Mac Bride, 163; Rolston, *Drawing Support* 3, 6, plate 12.

Catalog Entry: In the summer of 1998 two months after the passing of the Good Friday Agreement, the three muralists returned to the Garvaghy Road to paint their fourth mural in support of the nationalist residents of the community. This mural was painted over their previous work, *Fáilte*, 1997 (Catalog no. 43).

The image seemed to foreshadow the sectarian killings of three young Catholic boys who were killed by Loyalist extremists in a petrol bomb attack on their home hours after the mural was completed.

Political Background: In 1998 the Parade Commission of Northern Ireland banned the Orange Order from parading down the Garvaghy Road. In defiance of the ban, the Orange Order organized a massive rally to force its way down the road. On July 6, 1998, *The New York Times* reported that the British government was forced to use “hundreds of combat-ready army troops and Northern Ireland policemen...to prevent several thousand Protestants from marching.”⁵³⁹ The army erected a large barricade on the boundary of Drumcree church in order to stop the marchers from moving down the Garvaghy Road.

Over the course of the next several weeks, Loyalists from across Northern Ireland assembled at Drumcree to protest the ban. The protest spurred an increase in Loyalist violence throughout Northern Ireland.

On July 12th in a horrific act of Loyalist violence, three young Catholic boys were burnt alive in their beds when a Loyalist firebombed their home. The boys, brothers Jason, Mark, and Richard Quinn were all under the age of eleven. The police believed that the boys were murdered because their mother, a Catholic, was dating a Protestant. The event was also believed to be linked to the standoff at Drumcree. The mural seems to foreshadow this event.

⁵³⁹ *The New York Times*, July 6, 1998, sec. A, p. 4.

APPENDIX 2
Northern Irish Timeline⁵⁴⁰

1169-1170	At the invitation of Dermot Mac Murrough, the deposed Irish King of Leinster, Anglo-Norman forces headed by the Earl of Pembroke, known as Strongbow, landed in County Wexford on the southeastern tip of Ireland. Mac Murrough sought assistance from the Anglo-Normans in an effort to regain the lands of his kingdom.
1171-1172	Upon the death of Dermot Mac Murrough, Strongbow assumed the kingship of Leinster. King Henry II of England arrived in Dublin and began to divide the lands of Ireland among his knights.
1177	John de Courcy, a knight under Henry II, invaded and conquered a large area of land in northern Irish province of Ulster.
1198	King Rory O'Connor, king of the Irish province of Connacht died. He was the last native High King of Ireland.
1210	King John landed in Ireland with a huge fighting force to put down an insurrection among his subjects, specifically the Norman rulers William de Braose and Hugh de Lacy.
1260	Brian O'Neill, known as the "the King of the Gael in Erin," mounted a major offensive against the Normans in Ulster and was later killed by British forces at the Battle of Down.
1264	One of the earliest recorded Irish Parliaments met at Castledermot in County Kildare.
1315	Edward Bruce, brother of King Richard Bruce of Scotland, invaded Ireland at the request of Gaelic chiefs who wanted him to become their king.
1318	Edward Bruce is defeated and killed at the Battle of Faughart in Leinster.
1361	Native Irish are prohibited from holding civic office in Ireland.
1366	Statutes of Kilkenny enacted by the Kilkenny Parliament in Ireland. These statutes prohibited English colonists from speaking the Irish language or intermarrying with the native Irish.

⁵⁴⁰ Sources consulted: Bardon, *A History of Ulster*; Darby, "Conflict in Northern Ireland: A Background Essay"; Martin Melaugh and Fionnuala McKenna, "A Chronology of the Conflict – 1968 to the Present," [website] available from CAIN Web Service (Conflict Archive on the Internet), University of Ulster <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron.htm> Internet, accessed June through November, 2005; "Northern Ireland Timeline" [website] available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/timelines/ni> Internet, accessed July 20, 2005; Patrick Power, *The Timechart History of Ireland*. London: Worth Press Limited, 2001; "A Timeline of Irish History" [website] available from <http://www.rootsweb.com/~fianna/history/index.html> Internet, accessed July 20, 2005.

1394	King Richard II of England landed in Ireland with an army of over 34,000 men to put down Irish resistance.
1436	The term “Pale” was used for the first time to describe the English-dominated region of Counties Louth, Meath, Dublin, and Kildare.
1465	The English pass a decree that persons living within the region known as the Pale must bear an English name and conform to English customs in dress and manner.
1494	English parliament decreed that all legislation established by it would be applicable to Ireland.
1541	King Henry VIII of England declared himself king of Ireland in an attempt to gain control of the areas beyond the Pale.
1549-1603	Under Queen Elizabeth I of England, the plantation of Ireland by English loyal servants increased in earnest.
1594	Hugh O’Neill, the Earl of Tyrone, the powerful Gaelic chieftain of Ulster, attempted to force the English out of Ulster. This began the so-called Tyrone Rebellions.
1601	Hugh O’Neill and his allies are defeated by the English at the Battle of Kinsale
1603	Death of Queen Elizabeth and accession of King James I. Hugh O’Neill surrenders
1607	O’Neill, and his allies fled Ireland for Spain. This event becomes known as the Flight of the Earls. The lands of the departed earls were confiscated by the English crown and planted by English settlers.
1641	Catholic native rebellions occurred in Ulster and spread throughout Ireland. The leaders of the rebellion, including Sir Phelim O’Neill, called for the return of land to the native Irish Catholics. They also called for the expulsion of English settlers from Ulster. Thousands of Protestant settlers were murdered during these rebellions.
1649	Oliver Cromwell brutally put down revolt in Ireland and killed one third of the Irish population. During Cromwell’s reign, Catholics were forbidden from worshipping openly and priests are killed or sent to other British colonies. Cromwell began to ‘resettle’ Ireland by dividing up land in Ulster, Leinster, and Munster among his English soldiers. This prompted Cromwell’s well-known statement that Irish Catholics should go to “hell or Connaught.”
1652	Ireland is governed directly from Westminster in London. English resettling of the land by Cromwell’s soldiers continued.
1653 - 1658	Oliver Cromwell established a military dictatorship in his post as Lord Protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland.
1656	Over sixty thousand Irish Catholics are sent as slaves to the British colony of Barbados.
1658	Death of Oliver Cromwell.

1660	Restoration of the royal British crown with the accession of Charles II as King of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Charles II retains the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland.
1685	Charles II dies. His brother James II, a Catholic becomes heir to the throne.
1688	Birth of James II's son, a Catholic, fueled fears of a Catholic heir to the throne. In response the English parliament invited William of Orange, the Protestant husband of Mary, James II's daughter, to England to remove James II and take the throne of England. The so-called 'Glorious Revolution' (1688-1690) began.
1689	James II's army besieged a Protestant garrison in Derry. This is known as the Siege of Derry. After much internal dissent James II is forced to flee England for Ireland. He called on Irish Catholics to support him in his quest to retain the British throne.
1690	William of Orange and his army arrived in Ireland and defeated James II at the Battle of the Boyne.
1695	Penal Acts passed by the Irish parliament prohibited Irish Catholics from owning land, educating their children and owning a horse worth more than £5.
1704	The Test Act passed by the British parliament prohibited Irish Catholics and Irish Presbyterians from holding public office in Ireland.
1728	Irish Catholics are denied the right to vote.
1782	Irish Parliament is granted legislative independence from England.
1784	Sectarian battles in County Armagh in the north of Ireland, led to the formation of the Protestant fighters, the Peep o'Day Boys and the Catholic Defenders.
1791	The Society of United Irishmen, led by Theobald Wolfe Tone was formed in Belfast to bring about equal rights to all of Ireland's citizens.
1793	Catholic Relief Act granted most Catholics the right to vote. By this time most of the Penal laws had been repelled.
1795	The Protestant Orange Order founded as a defensive organization against Irish Catholics pledged to support the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland.
1798	The Society of United Irishmen planned a rebellion throughout Ireland. Wolfe Tone was captured and later committed suicide. Members of the Society of United Irishmen engaged in armed rebellion during the summer. The rebellion was unsuccessful but became inspirational to later generations of Irish nationalists.
1801	Act of Union passed by the British Parliament established the United Kingdom of Britain and Ireland. Irish representatives became members of the British Parliament.

1803	The Society of United Irishmen member Robert J. Emmet, organized an unsuccessful rebellion in Dublin. He was imprisoned and sentenced to death. The speech he gave before his death, known as the “Speech from the Dock,” became inspirational for successive generations of Irish nationalists.
1823	Daniel O’Connell, an Irish Catholic lawyer, formed the Catholic Association to press for Catholic emancipation.
1828	Daniel O’Connell elected to represent County Clare.
1829	Catholic Emancipation Act was passed by the British parliament. This act allowed Catholics to take seats in parliament. Daniel O’Connell became the first Catholic MP in Westminster.
1840	Young Ireland movement, an Irish nationalist organization, was formed to oppose British rule in Ireland.
1843	Daniel O’Connell held a large outdoor rally calling for the repeal of the Act of Union.
1845	Potato crop throughout most of Ireland was blighted.
c. 1845 – c. 1849	Ireland’s population is reduced by over two million as a result of starvation and emigration brought about by the Great Irish Potato Famine.
1848	Young Ireland staged an unsuccessful rebellion in Dublin.
1858	James Stephens formed the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), commonly referred to as the Fenians. The group advocated the formation of an Irish republic through the use of physical force.
1867	IRB stage an unsuccessful rebellion in Ireland.
1875	Charles Stewart Parnell, an Irish nationalist who supported Home Rule for Ireland, was elected MP for County Meath.
1879	Irish National Land League was formed in Dublin to demand better conditions for Irish tenant farmers.
1880	Parnell elected the chairman of the Irish Parliamentary Party and continued to press for Home Rule.
1881	Parliament passed the Land Act, which established a rent control system and gave greater rights to Irish tenant farmers.
1886	British Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone introduced the first Irish Home Rule Bill but it was defeated. British unionists in Belfast participated in riots to express their opposition to the proposed Home Rule Bill.
1893	Gladstone introduced the second Irish Home Rule Bill, which was passed by the House of Commons but was later rejected by the House of Lords and was ultimately defeated. Sectarian rioting throughout Belfast in response to the Home Rule Bill continued. Gaelic League was founded in Dublin to revive Gaelic language and culture.
1900	John Redmond was elected chairman of the Irish Parliamentary Party and called for Irish Home Rule.

1905	The Ulster Unionist Council formed. This organization united Unionists toward their common goal of blocking home rule. Sinn Féin 'we ourselves' was founded in Dublin by Arthur Griffith. This, Irish nationalist political party declared that Ireland was a free nation.
1908	Patrick Pearse, an Irish Republican, opened Scoil Éanna [St. Edna's], a private school that stressed Irish culture and language.
1909	Countess Markievicz and Bultner Hobson, two Irish nationalists, founded Fianna Éireann or the Republican youth movement.
1911	Countess Markievicz formed Cumann na mBan, the women's Irish Republican movement.
1912	Third Irish Home Rule bill was introduced in Westminster. Ulster Unionist rallied in Belfast in opposition to home rule. Over four hundred and fifty thousand Ulster men and women sign 'Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant' a document that opposed Irish home rule and asserted Ireland's position within the United Kingdom.
1913	Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a military organization was formed in Belfast by members of the Ulster Unionist Party under the leadership of Edward Carson. This organization was dedicated to resist Irish home rule through physical force. Irish Volunteers, a military organization, was formed in Dublin by Irish nationalists to counter the UVF and to support home rule. The Irish Citizen Army, a socialist military organization, was formed in Dublin by James Connolly. This organization was formed to safeguard worker's rights against excessive force by the police, but it also had Irish nationalist aspirations.
1914	Home Rule bill is passed but its implementation was delayed due to the outbreak of WWI. The bill contained provisions to exclude the six counties of Ulster from home rule. The UVF organized a major gunrunning operation in which thousands of guns and ammunition come into Ulster from Germany. The Irish Volunteers also received shipments of guns in a separate gunrunning operation. This shipment was considerably smaller than those received by the UVF.
April 24-29, 1916	Easter Rising, leaders of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army staged a rebellion by taking over civic and commercial buildings in Dublin. Patrick Pearse, one of the rebel leaders, read the Proclamation of Ireland, which declared Ireland to be a sovereign republic. The rising was put down after six days. Fifteen of the rebel leaders were tried and executed by the British Army.
July 1, 1916	Battle of the Somme, thousands of Ulstermen, fighting for the British Army, are killed in this deadly battle during WWI.
1918	In Ireland's general election Sinn Féin won an overwhelming victory by taking seventy-three seats in the House of Commons, Westminster.

1919	<p>The Sinn Féin MPs refused to take their seats at Westminster and formed the Dáil Éireann [Assembly of Ireland], an Irish independent parliament headed first by Cathal Brugha and later by Éamon de Valera.</p> <p>The Irish Republican Army (IRA) formed as the legitimate army of the Dáil Éireann.</p> <p>Countess Markievicz became the first woman to be elected to the British House of Commons, as a member of Sinn Féin, but she refused to take her seat.</p>
1919-1921	Anglo-Irish war
October 25, 1920	Terence McSwiney, the Sinn Féin Mayor of Cork city, died in Brixton Prison in England on the seventy-fourth day of his hunger strike.
December 1920	Government of Ireland Act was passed by Westminster. This act established the partitioning of Ireland into two Irish parliaments, the first in Belfast with jurisdiction over six northeastern counties in Ulster and the second in Dublin, which would control the remaining twenty-six counties in Ireland. Irish Unionists supported the act with some amendments, but the vast majority of Irish Nationalists rejected the act and continued to proclaim an Irish republic.
June 22, 1921	<p>British King George V inaugurated the Northern Ireland Parliament in Belfast. The Ulster Unionist, Sir James Craig became its first Prime Minister.</p> <p>The Dáil Éireann's Minister of Intelligence, Michael Collins, led the IRA in guerilla operations to destabilize the Northern Irish parliament.</p>
December 6, 1921	Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in London by representatives of the Dáil Éireann, and the British government. This Treaty established the British province of Northern Ireland consisting of six northeastern counties in the Irish province of Ulster; The Free State of Ireland is established among the remaining twenty-six counties.
1922	<p>Anglo-Irish treaty was approved by the Dáil Éireann.</p> <p>The Irish Civil War broke out between pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty forces. The Northern Irish Government passed the Special Powers Act that included provisions to retain prisoners without trial. The government also abolished proportional representation for local elections.</p> <p>Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), the Northern Irish Police force was formed.</p>
1922-1923	Irish Civil War
August 22, 1922	Michael Collins was assassinated during an ambush of his motorcade by anti-Treaty forces in County Cork.
May 24, 1923	The Irish Civil War ended when anti-Treaty forces called a cease-fire.
1929	The Northern Irish government abolished proportional representation for parliamentary elections.
1932	Éamon de Valera was elected to head the Irish government.

1933	James Craig, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, declared that in Northern Ireland there is “a Protestant parliament for a Protestant state.” ⁵⁴¹
1935	Sectarian riots in Belfast broke out when Loyalists attacked Catholics during the summer parade season.
1937	The Irish Constitution, drafted largely by the Irish Prime Minister Éamon de Valera, was passed. This document put an end to the Irish Free State and proclaimed Ireland to be an independent nation. Articles Two and Three of the constitution generated a great deal of controversy because they claimed Ireland’s territorial right to Northern Ireland.
1939	The IRA conducted a bombing campaign in England.
1947	The Northern Irish government passed The Education Act. This act offered free secondary education for all Northern Ireland’s citizens and it led to an increase in the number of Catholics attending universities.
1949	Ireland was formally declared a Republic. The British government recognized Ireland’s status as an independent republic.
1951	Free Presbyterian church founded by the Rev. Ian Paisley. Through his fiery rhetoric Paisley, a staunch Loyalist, increased anti-Catholic sentiment in Northern Ireland.
1954	The Northern Irish government passed The Flag and Emblems Act. This act prohibited the flying of the Irish tricolor flag and other Irish nationalist symbols.
1956-1962	The IRA conducted their “Border Campaign” in which guerrilla tactics were used against police barracks and essential services along the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The campaign was largely unsuccessful.
1964	An Irish tricolor flag was displayed in the Republican headquarters on Divis Street in West Belfast. Members of the RUC forcibly remove the flag and fierce sectarian rioting erupted around the city.
1965	The Campaign for Social Justice (CSJ) was founded in Northern Ireland. This organization was initially composed of thirteen Catholic professionals who sought to improve living conditions for Catholics and expose sectarian governmental policies. Its membership later grew increased.

⁵⁴¹ “Partition. A Protestant Parliament? Up to 1929” [website]; available from http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/timelines/ni/protestant_parl.shtml; Internet; accessed September 5, 2005.

1966	<p>Commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising were held in Dublin and Belfast.</p> <p>In Dublin, members of the IRA destroyed Nelson's Pillar in O'Connell Street.</p> <p>In Belfast, the government mobilized a huge security force to prevent violence by Irish Nationalists.</p> <p>Ian Paisley organized anti-Catholic protests in Belfast that erupted into riots and violence against Catholics. Several Catholic homes in the Shankill section of Belfast were looted.</p> <p>Paisley formed the Ulster Protestant Volunteers (UPV), a Loyalist paramilitary force.</p> <p>The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) stepped up its campaign to fight against Irish nationalists by increasing paramilitary activity against Irish Catholics.</p>
1967	<p>The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was founded. This non-sectarian and inclusive social action group pressed the government for the creation of equal and non-sectarian policies. These included: "universal adult suffrage in local government elections; the end to 'gerrymandered' electoral boundaries; the allocation of public housing to be on the basis of need; repeal of the Special Powers Act; the disbanding of the 'B-Specials'; the end to discrimination in employment; and a system to deal with complaints of discrimination."⁵⁴²</p> <p>The Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) was formed to demand improvements in housing.</p>
June 20, 1968	<p>The Caledon Protest was held to draw attention to discrimination in Housing Allocation in Northern Ireland. Nationalists, led by the MP, Austin Currie, squatted in a house in Caledon, County Tyrone when a young Protestant woman was given the house before a long list of Catholics families with children.</p>
October 5, 1968	<p>The DHAC, along with members of NICRA, held a civil rights march in Derry. The march was blocked by the RUC. Members of the RUC attacked the marchers. The incident was filmed by an Irish television crew and broadcast internationally. The event is widely thought to mark the start of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and it led to several days of rioting between Catholics and the RUC.</p>
October 1968	<p>The People's Democracy (PD) was formed. This civil rights group, founded by students of Queen's University in Belfast, organized protests to call for an end to police brutality and the repeal of the Special Powers Act.</p>
January 1-4, 1969	<p>Members of the People's Democracy organized a four day march from Belfast to Derry to highlight civil rights. On the fourth day of the march, members were ambushed and attacked by Loyalist paramilitaries.</p>

⁵⁴² Melaugh and McKenna, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch67.htm>, accessed October 21, 2005.

August 12 – 14 1969	The ‘Battle of the Bogside’, a riotous battle between the residents of the predominately nationalist area of Derry known as the Bogside and members of the RUC and Loyalist paramilitaries. The battle began when members of the Protestant organization the Apprentice Boys instigated the Catholic residents of the Bogside. Sectarian riots spread throughout Northern Ireland and were particularly acute in Belfast.
August 14, 1969	Loyalists petrol bomb Catholic homes in Belfast in an effort to drive Catholics from their neighborhoods. Hundreds of Catholics lost their homes and were displaced. Sectarian riots continued in Belfast and Derry.
August 15, 1969	British Army arrived in Northern Ireland.
December 1969	The Northern Irish government abolished The B-Specials.
December 28, 1969	Members of the IRA split from the organization and formed the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) [the remaining group became known as the Official IRA]. The PIRA, headed by Sean MacStiofain, stressed the basic military role of the republican army and mobilized to defend the minority Catholic population of Northern Ireland.
1970	Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR) was formed to replace the B-Specials. This armed militia of the state was put under the control of the British army. The Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP) was formed. This nationalist party asserted the rights of the Catholic minority, while recognizing the rule of majority consent in Northern Ireland.
March 30 – April 2, 1970	Sectarian rioting in West Belfast occurred along the Springfield Road, a road that separates Protestant and Catholic communities. The British army used CS gas against Catholics in the area of Ballymurphy. This is the first time the army used CS gas in “large quantities.” ⁵⁴³ Large numbers of young Catholics were arrested by the British Army and were taken in for questioning.
August 1970	The British Army approved the use of rubber bullets for riot control in Northern Ireland.
November 1970	The Northern Ireland Housing Executive was formed. This government organization was created to end the discriminatory practices involved in the allocation of housing by removing local council control of housing allocation.
1971	Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) was formed by Ian Paisley and Desmond Boal. This party was formed to preserve Protestant dominance in Northern Ireland and to defend the provincial status of the region.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch70.htm>, accessed Oct. 23, 2005.

August 9, 1971	Internment was reintroduced in Northern Ireland. Over the course of the next three days seventeen people were killed by the British Army during riots against the introduction of Internment.
August 31, 1971	An inquiry into allegations of brutality against internees was established.
November 1971	The report by the inquiry established to investigate allegations of brutality committed against internees, know as 'The Compton Report' is made public. The report acknowledged that there was ill treatment of internees.
January 1972	The Prime Minister of Northern Ireland banned all parades and marches in Northern Ireland for one year.
January 22, 1972	Members of the British Army used physical force to prevent protesters from marching in an anti-internment rally in Derry. Several marchers are severely beaten by the army.
January 30, 1972	The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association held a non-violent march against in Derry. The British army, who set up a barricade to prevent the march from moving into the city center, opened fire on the protesters and killed fourteen unarmed civilians. The event became known as 'Bloody Sunday.'
February 2, 1972	Funerals for eleven of the Bloody Sunday victims took place in Derry. Prayer vigils were held throughout Ireland to protest the actions of the British army. Approximately 30,000 people took part in a march in Dublin that culminated with the burning and destruction of the British Embassy there.
March 30, 1972	The British government passed the Northern Ireland Temporary Provisions Act. This law abolished the local parliament of Northern Ireland and instituted direct rule over Northern Ireland from Westminster.
June 1972	The British government establishes special category [political] status for paramilitary prisoners in Northern Ireland.
July 21, 1972	The IRA exploded twenty-two bombs in Belfast. Seven people were killed and hundreds were wounded. The day became known as 'Bloody Friday.'
July 31, 1972	The British army organized 'Operation Motorman', a large-scale action to route out the presence of IRA in no-go areas of Belfast and Derry. The British army used tanks and over 12, 000 troops to regain control of the streets within these cities. ⁵⁴⁴
February 1973	Loyalist held strikes throughout Northern Ireland after two Loyalist men are interned for allegedly killing a Catholic man.
March 1973	The British government proposed the creation of a devolved power-sharing Assembly for Northern Ireland. Elections for this assembly were arranged to be held in June 1973.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch72.htm>, accessed, October 24, 2005.

May 1973	Proportional Representation was reestablished for local elections in Northern Ireland.
June 1973	Northern Ireland Assembly elections were held.
November 1973	A power-sharing executive to govern Northern Ireland was established.
December 1973	Sunningdale Agreement. Talks held in Sunningdale, England between the British, Irish, and Northern Irish government to resolve obstacles in setting up the Northern Irish Executive. The talks result in agreement on the creation of a Council of Ireland, an assembly consisting of members from both the Irish government and the Northern Irish government, thus giving the Irish government a direct say in the governing of Northern Ireland.
May 14, 1974	Members of the Ulster Workers Council began a large-scale strike to contest the Sunningdale Agreement. The strike was organized by Ulster Unionists, who objected to the creation of the Council of Ireland. The strike lasted for two weeks and was largely successful for bringing the devolved government of Northern Ireland to an end.
May 17, 1974	The Loyalist paramilitary group, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) carried out a series of bombings in Dublin and Monaghan, killing thirty-three people. The death toll was the largest in a single day of the conflict.
May 28, 1974	Northern Ireland government is abolished and direct rule from Westminster is resumed.
December 1974	The Prevention of Terrorism Act was passed. The act allowed the security forces in Northern Ireland to detain suspects for up to seven days without charge.
December 22, 1974	The Irish Republican Army (IRA) announced a ceasefire and secret talks were held between members of the IRA and the British government.
January 17, 1975	The IRA called off its ceasefire after their secret talks with the British government broke down.
February 10, 1975	The IRA declared a new ceasefire after talks with the British government result in a twelve-point plan, which included the reduction of British army troops in Northern Ireland.
December 1975	The British government announced an end to Internment in Northern Ireland.
January 23, 1976	The IRA officially ended their ceasefire although several violent incidents were attributed to the organization before this date.
February 12, 1976	Frank Stagg, an IRA prisoner in England died after sixty-one days on hunger strike. Stagg began his hunger strike to protest the British government's refusal to move him to a prison in Northern Ireland.
March 1976	The British government announced an end to Special Category Status. Prisoners convicted of terrorist offences would henceforth be treated as criminals. The Maze Prison [also referred to as 'Long Kesh' or 'the H-Blocks']

	opened outside Belfast on the grounds of Long Kesh Internment camp.
August 1976	The Peace People movement was founded in Belfast. The movement consisted of Catholics and Protestants who came together to rally for peace in Northern Ireland.
September 2, 1976	European Court of Human Rights announced that the British government was guilty of torturing internees in Northern Ireland.
September 14, 1976	The 'Blanket Protest' began when Kieran Nugent, the first republican to be convicted after the removal of Special Category Status, refused to wear a prison uniform and wrapped himself in the prison issue blanket in his cell.
October 1977	The Peace People movement won the Nobel Peace Prize.
June 1978	Amnesty International issued a report alleging that detainees held in Castlereagh detention center outside Belfast had been mistreated.
June 19, 1978	British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher visited Northern Ireland.
July 1978	The Catholic Primate of Ireland, Tomás Ó Fiaich visited Republican prisoners in the Long Kesh [the Maze Prison] and issued a statement saying that the prisoners were living in inhuman conditions.
March 1979	The Bennett Committee, set up to investigate allegations of mistreatment of detainees, published a report that confirmed that mistreatment had occurred.
March 30, 1979	Airey Neave, the British Conservative Party spokesman on Northern Ireland, was killed by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA).
August 27, 1979	Lord Louis Mountbatten, a cousin of Queen Elizabeth was killed when the IRA exploded a bomb near his boat off the coast of County Sligo, Ireland (four innocent civilians were also killed in the attack). Later that day, the IRA killed eighteen British army soldiers at Warrenpoint in County Armagh, Northern Ireland.
August 29, 1979	Margaret Thatcher visited Belfast to discuss tougher security measures for Northern Ireland.
October 27, 1980	Seven Republican prisoners held in Long Kesh [the Maze Prison] began a hunger strike to demand political prisoner status.
December 1, 1980	Three Republican female prisoners held in Armagh Prison joined the republican hunger strike.
December 18, 1980	The Republican hunger strike is called off after the prisoners believed their demand for Special Category Status was met. This does not turn out to be the case.
March 1, 1981	On the fifth anniversary of the ending of Special Category, a republican hunger strike began in Long Kesh when the republican prisoner Bobby Sands refused food.
March 2, 1981	The Blanket Protest ended.
April 9, 1981	The Republican hunger striker, Bobby Sands was elected to the British parliament on the fortieth day of his hunger strike.

May 5, 1981	Bobby Sands died after sixty-six days on hunger strike.
May 7, 1981	Over 100,00 people attend Bobby Sands' funeral in Belfast.
May 12, 1981	The second hunger striker, Francis Hughes died.
May 21, 1981	The third and fourth hunger strikers, Ray McCressh and Patsy O'Hara died.
July 8, 1981	The fifth hunger striker, Joe McDonnell died.
July 13, 1981	The sixth hunger striker, Martin Hurson died.
August 1, 1981	The seventh hunger striker, Kevin Lynch died.
August 2, 1981	The eighth hunger striker, Kieran Doherty died.
August 8, 1981	The ninth hunger striker, Thomas McElwee died.
August 9, 1981	Rioting throughout Northern Ireland marked the tenth anniversary of internment.
August 20, 1981	The tenth and last hunger striker, Michael Devine died.
October 3, 1981	The Republican hunger strike ended.
October 6, 1981	The British government announced changes in prison policy in Northern Ireland. These changes met some of the demands made during the hunger strike, including the right of the prisoner to wear their own clothes, a degree of free association, an increase in the number of visits allowed, and return of fifty percent of lost remission.
October 31, 1981	Danny Morrison, the editor of the Irish Republican newspaper, <i>An Phoblacht/Republican News</i> made a speech at Sinn Féin's annual political meeting in which he called upon members of the party to join the political process. He suggested that, "with a ballot paper in one hand and the Armalite in the other, we take power in Ireland?" ⁵⁴⁵
November 23, 1981	The Rev. Ian Paisley organized the Loyalist Day of Action to call on the government to crack down on the IRA.
November 1982	After three unarmed IRA men were shot and killed by the RUC, Irish Republicans alleged that there a shoot-to-kill policy was being carried out by security forces in Northern Ireland.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch81.htm>, accessed, October 27, 2005.

June 9, 1983	Gerry Adams, then the Vice-President of Sinn Féin, was elected as a Member of Parliament representing the constituency of West Belfast.
September 25, 1983	Thirty-eight Irish Republican prisoners organized a successful escape from Long Kesh (The Maze).
January 24, 1984	The Londonderry District Council changed its name to the Derry District Council and stopped flying the British Union Jack flag on Council property.
March 14, 1984	Gerry Adams was shot and wounded by members of the Loyalist paramilitary group, the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF).
March 17, 1984	Dominic McGlinchey, the leader of the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), was arrested by the Irish police and was extradited to Northern Ireland. He became the first Republican to be extradited to Northern Ireland.
May 24, 1984	An investigation into allegations of a shoot-to-kill policy in Northern Ireland began.
October 12, 1984	The IRA claims responsibility for bomb attack on the Grand Hotel in Brighton, England where the British Conservative Party was holding its annual conference. The aim of the attack was to kill the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who narrowly escaped injury. Five people were killed as a result of the attack.
November 14, 1984	The British and Irish governments held a summit to discuss the future of Northern Ireland.
July 1985	Clashes broke out between members of the Orange Order and Nationalists in the city of Portadown, County Armagh when an Orange Order parade passed through a Nationalist community.
November 2, 1985	Local Loyalist oppositional organizations known as "Ulster Clubs" were formed by Loyalist in an effort to shore up support against the forth-coming Anglo-Irish Agreement.
November 15, 1985	Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed. This document gave the Irish government a consultative role in Northern Irish affairs. It also confirmed that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would depend on the consent of a majority of its citizens.
November 23, 1985	A large Unionist rally was held in Belfast to protest the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
December 1985	All of the fifteen Unionists MPs in the British House of Commons resigned in opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
April 1986	An increase in Loyalist violence in opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement resulted in the firebombing of over seventy-five Catholic homes throughout Northern Ireland.
November 1986	Ulster Resistance, a Loyalist organization was formed to fight the implementation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
November 2, 1986	Sinn Féin ended its policy on 'abstentionism' in Ireland. This policy prohibited its elected officials from taking their seats in the Irish parliament
December	The Flags and Emblems Act was repealed.

1986	
May 8, 1987	Members of the Special Air Service (SAS) of the British Army ambushed and killed eight IRA men in Loughgall, County Armagh.
November 8, 1987	A massive bomb planted by the IRA exploded in the center of the town of Enniskillen in County Fermanagh during the British Day of Remembrance services, killing eleven.
January 1988	SDLP leader, John Hume and Sinn Féin leader, Gerry Adams met in Belfast for talks.
March 6, 1988	Three members of the IRA, Dan McCann, Sean Savage, and Mairead Farrell are shot and killed by members of the SAS in Gibraltar.
March 16, 1988	Michael Stone, a Loyalist gunman opened fire during the funeral of those killed in Gibraltar and killed three mourners.
March 19, 1988	Two undercover British Army officers were killed by a mob at the funeral of Michael Stone's victims in West Belfast.
July 4, 1988	The Stalker Investigation found twenty RUC officers guilty of carrying out a shoot-to-kill policy.
October 19, 1988	The British government introduced a broadcasting ban in the media on individuals representing Sinn Féin, Republican Sinn Féin, and the Ulster Defense Association.
November 1988	The European Court of Human Rights found that Great Britain had been in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights by detaining suspects for more than four days.
February 12, 1989	Pat Finucane, a prominent Nationalist lawyer, was shot and killed by a Loyalist gunman.
March 1989	Gerry Adams delivered a speech in which he called for a "non-armed political movement to work for self-determination" in Ireland. ⁵⁴⁶
July 20, 1990	The IRA exploded a large bomb at the Stock Exchange in London causing severe damage.
July 30, 1990	Ian Gow, a Conservative MP of the British parliament was killed by an IRA bomb. Gow was a close associate of Margaret Thatcher and was a strong critic of the IRA.
November 1990	Peter Brooke, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, made a speech in London in which he stated "Great Britain had no selfish economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland and would accept the unification of Ireland by consent." ⁵⁴⁷
July 1990	Nelson Mandela visited Dublin and called for talks to begin between the

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch89.htm>, accessed, October 27, 2005.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch90.htm>, accessed, October 27, 2005.

	IRA and the British government.
February 7, 1991	The IRA launched a mortar attack on the grounds of 10 Downing Street in London while the British cabinet was in session. No one was injured.
March 1991	Four of the main Northern Irish political parties agreed to hold political talks on the future of Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin was not invited to join the talks.
June - July 1991	The political talks involving the future of Northern Ireland, later known as the Brooks/Mayhew talks, were held.
April 1992	In the British general election Gerry Adams lost his seat representing West Belfast. The Brooks/Mayhew talks recommenced in Northern Ireland.
November 1991	The Brooks/Mayhew talks come to an end as a result of Unionist withdrawal.
December 1992	Patrick Mayhew, then British Secretary for Northern Ireland said that Sinn Féin could enter talks on the future of Northern Ireland if the IRA gave up its violent campaign.
February 1993	Secret talks between members of the Republican movement and the British government were alleged to take place.
December 1993	Downing Street Declaration issued jointly by John Major, then British Prime Minister, and Albert Reynolds, then Irish Prime Minister in London. The leaders pledged: "to foster agreement and reconciliation, leading to a new political framework founded on consent and encompassing arrangements within Northern Ireland, for the whole island, and between these islands." ⁵⁴⁸
January 19, 1994	The Irish Broadcasting Ban against members of illegal paramilitary organizations and their representatives was repealed.
January 29, 1994	Gerry Adams was granted his first US Visa to enter the United States to attend a peace conference on Northern Ireland.
August 31, 1994	The IRA announced a complete cessation of military operations. This ceasefire led to mass celebrations in Republican communities throughout Northern Ireland.
September 16, 1994	The British Broadcasting Ban against members of illegal paramilitary organizations and their representatives was repealed.
October 13, 1994	Loyalist ceasefire announced.
December 1, 1994	President Bill Clinton announced the appointment of former Senator George J. Mitchell as special peace envoy to Northern Ireland.
January 15, 1995	The first official meeting between Sinn Féin and members of the British government took place in Belfast. The British officials raised the issue of

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch93.htm>, accessed October 29, 2005.

	the IRA decommissioning its weapons.
February 22, 1995	The British and Irish governments jointly published two documents proposing a framework for the future of Northern Ireland. The documents called for the formation of a local Assembly with a proportional form of representation. It also called for the formation of North/South institutions.
March 7, 1995	Patrick Mayhew, then the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, announced that decommissioning of IRA weapons must begin before Sinn Féin can enter peace negotiations.
March 17, 1995	Gerry Adams attended the United States St. Patrick's Day celebrations at the White House.
June 1995	Patrick Mayhew stated that Sinn Féin would not be admitted into political talks unless the IRA began to decommission its weapons.
July 9, 1995	The RUC prevented members of the Orange Order from parading down the predominately Nationalist Garvaghy Road in the city of Portadown. This led to a three-day standoff after which a compromise was reached that allowed the Orange Order members to walk quietly down the road.
July 12, 1995	Orange Order parades led to violent clashes throughout Belfast's Nationalists neighborhoods.
September 1995	The European Court of Human Rights ruled that the shooting of three unarmed IRA members in Gibraltar on March 6, 1988 by members of the British Army's SAS unit breached the Human Rights Convention. The court found that the killings were unnecessary and that the IRA members could have been arrested. The British government was ordered to pay the legal costs of the victim's families.
November 1995	The British and Irish governments issued a joint statement that called for a twin-track initiative that would create a parallel process between the issue of decommissioning and all-party peace talks. The governments proposed that an international commission be established to address the issue of decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. The commission was headed by former Senator, George J. Mitchell. President Bill Clinton visited Northern Ireland for the first time to encourage the establishment of all-party talks.
January 22, 1996	The Mitchell Report of the international body on arms decommissioning was published in Belfast. It included six principles (later know as the 'Mitchell Principles'). All parties allowed into the talks had to first sign on to these principles. The main conclusion of the report was that decommissioning should take place during all-party talks.
February 9, 1996	The IRA ceasefire comes to an end after the IRA exploded a large bomb at South Quay in the Docklands area of London. The bomb killed two people and caused millions in damage.
June 10, 1996	Stormont "All Party Talks" began. Sinn Féin was excluded from taking part in the talks until the IRA renewed its ceasefire.
June 15,	The IRA exploded a large bomb in Manchester, England causing

1996	destruction of a large part of the city and injuring over two hundred people.
July 8, 1996	The RUC prevented the Orange Order parade from marching down the Garvaghy Road in Portadown. The incident sparked Loyalist rioting and violence throughout Northern Ireland.
July 20, 1997	The IRA resumed its ceasefire after the British Labor Party won the general election in Britain and Tony Blair assured Sinn Féin that the party would be let into all-party talks if the ceasefire was restored.
August 1997	The British and Irish governments agreed to set up an Independent International Commission on Decommissioning to handle the issue of paramilitary decommissioning.
September 16, 1997	All-party talks resumed in Belfast. Sinn Féin participated in the talks for the first time.
March 17, 1998	The first official St. Patrick's Day parade was held in Belfast and received funding from the Belfast City Council.
April 10, 1998	The Belfast Agreement (commonly known as the "Good Friday Agreement") was signed. This document established a devolved government of Northern Ireland with an assembly of elected officials from all political parties in Northern Ireland.
May 22, 1998	The Belfast agreement was ratified after a referendum held in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland favored of the Agreement's passage.
July 1998	The Orange Order parade was again prevented from marching down the predominately Nationalist Garvaghy Road. The incident lead to several days of rioting between Loyalists and the RUC.
July 12, 1998	Three young Catholic brothers, Richard, Mark, and Jason Quinn were burned to death in their home in County Antrim when Loyalists attacked their house with a petrol bomb.
August 15, 1998	A breakaway group from the IRA, calling itself the Real IRA, planted a bomb in Omagh, County Tyrone, which killed twenty-nine people. The death toll represented the largest loss of life in a single incident within Northern Ireland since the Troubles began.
September 1998	President Bill Clinton visited Northern Ireland for the second time.
March 15, 1999	Rosemary Nelson, a lawyer who represented Irish Nationalists was killed when a bomb exploded beneath her car. Allegations of collusion between the Loyalists who planted the bomb and the security forces surfaces after her death.
2000	UDA [Ulster Defense Association] a Loyalist paramilitary group's ceasefire was declared invalid
February 11, 2000	The British government suspended the Northern Ireland Assembly and reestablished direct rule because of a lack of progress in Republican decommissioning of weapons.
May 30,	The Northern Ireland Assembly was restored.

2000	
July 28, 2000	The last paramilitary prisoners were released from prisons in Northern Ireland. The releases were in keeping with the Prison Release Program established under the terms of The Belfast Agreement.
December 2000	President Bill Clinton visited Northern Ireland for the third time.
June 2001	Sinn Féin became the largest Nationalist party in Northern Ireland after an overwhelming success in the Westminster general elections.
October 2001	The IRA agreed to begin putting its weapons beyond use.
October 23, 2001	The IRA began to decommission some of its weapons.
October 2002	The British government suspended the Northern Ireland Assembly over alleged spying activities by Sinn Féin. These accusations were never proven.
April 2003	The Stevens report into the killing of Pat Finucane revealed that there had been collusion between Finucane's Loyalist killers and members of the Northern Irish security forces.
November 2003	Results from Northern Ireland Assembly elections established the Democratic Unionist Party and their rivals, Sinn Féin as the two largest parties in Northern Ireland.
September 2004	Government talks aimed at restoring the Northern Ireland Assembly resulted in failure.
July 28, 2005	The IRA announced an end to its armed struggle and ordered all its members to dump their arms and "assist in the development of purely political and democratic programs through exclusively peaceful means." ⁵⁴⁹
September 26, 2005	IRA decommissioned all its weapons.

⁵⁴⁹ Brian Lavery, "I.R.A. Renounces Use of Violence; Vows to Disarm," *The New York Times*, July 29, 2005, A1.

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