DEIRDRE McLoughlin
SHAPING THE VOID
For Kay McLoughlin and Henk Brouwer
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Empty form III, 2002
I remember my first encounter with a piece of work by Deirdre McLoughlin, being struck by its charged intensity; my response hasn’t changed in the years since - her work continues to have a physical presence that is disproportionately greater than its scale. This is perhaps partly to do with the perfection of her forms and surfaces, a perfectionism that seems almost obsessive in its seeking and which finds close kin in Japanese tradition, where the connection between beauty and skill is understood more subtly than in the West - it is no surprise that she was drawn there, to the avant-garde Sodeisha group of ceramic sculptors.

The intensity of her work seems imbued through the making process, an extraordinary and gravity-defying activity that displays precise mastery of her chosen medium. The process is slow, both because of the demands of the material and hand-building technique, but also because McLoughlin is exacting, perhaps more so than any artist I have worked with to date. She spends time with each element of the work – as much as is necessary - and the end result is work of extraordinary power and purity. It is a great pleasure to be able to bring this work to Ireland; I would like to thank those who have helped to make this possible – Pat Murphy and Frank Buckley for the generosity of their contributions to this publication, Mike Robinson for his support, and of course Deirdre McLoughlin herself, for entrusting us with the outcome of three years of work.

Ann Mulrooney
National Craft Gallery
December 2011
DEIRDRE MCLAUGHLIN - MAKER OF SHAPES

Fired clay has been used by artisans and artists since Neolithic times to make functional pottery and art objects. Red laterite mixed with water was once used by cave-dwelling hunter-gatherers to celebrate and record their hunt successes through painting animal scenes on the walls of their abodes. Throwing and coiling clay to make ceramics is more widespread and more popular than ever in modern times. Clay was the sole medium chosen by Irish artist Deirdre McLoughlin to start making her unique, world-class ceramic sculptures in the 70’s, and she has remained faithful to that medium (though she sometimes also casts work in bronze).

Mcloughlin’s passionate engagement with clay began in Amsterdam in 1972 in the studio of the Welsh ceramic sculptor Rosemary Andrews. In the manipulation of the material, she found strange surprising shapes and slowly realized that this was what she had instinctively been looking for - “the adventure of finding and discovering form”, as she once wrote. She had always been an avid reader, questioning her Catholic education and discovering “other minds and lives” in literature. She felt a compulsion to express and thought that might be as a writer. Alas, on completion of her studies at Trinity she wrote, “I could write (now) alright but the words fell out like dead things”. With clarity of vision and single-minded determination she left for Amsterdam even before the actual graduation ceremony, there finding Andrews and what was to be her path. She spent two years in Andrews’s studio developing abstract sculptural forms that could be classified as biomorphic and sometimes zoomorphic.

Afterwards she returned to Dublin and continued to work on her sculptures in the clay studio of Anthony O’Brien and Jim Galligan. She pursued this lonely path for eight years, supporting herself with street trading at fairs and festivals and some film acting. She read the works of Jung, Gurdjieff, Reich, Blavatsky, but the book that most helped her see her way forward was Herrigel’s ‘Zen in the Art of Archery’ which would eventually convince her to live in Japan for a number of years. In the meantime she had a fortuitous encounter with eminent Dutch born ceramic artist Sonja Landweer, who immediately realized that McLoughlin was a gifted and original artist and encouraged her to persevere. It must have been 1981/ 82 that she sent out her “Nightsailing” series to EVA in Limerick and to the now defunct Lincoln Gallery. The series was a triumph of achievement, though
it’s artistic significance seems to have escaped critical attention at that time. The highlight was a medium-large soft pink skinned ovoid form with a raised fin-like ridge and partial brown underside on a black plinth. It was a masterpiece of abstract modern art, original and beautiful, manifesting just the slightest nod to the great master of minimal sculpture, Constantin Brancusi. One other memorable work from this period was a smaller flame-like upright creation with mottled brown glazing that resembled the speckled breast of a song thrush.

In 1982 McLoughlin travelled to Japan, lured there by the Sodeisha group who had been inspired by the clay sculptures of Isamu Noguchi to push clay as a sculptural medium. She set up a studio and found great freedom and stimulation in working amongst these artists. She was above all drawn to the “sublime geometry” in the sculptures of Yasuo Hayashi whose work was later to influence her own. She had a solo show to great success in Gallery Beni where the Sodiesha artists were often to be found in that time.

Before deciding to return to Ireland she visited the Xi’an excavations in the Shaanxi province of China in 1985. The serrated masses of terracotta warriors impressed her deeply and were an inspiration to her later in exhibiting her celebrated series of ‘I am – too’ small vessel sculptures arranged together in rows and groups. These were to win her the prestigious Westerwald Prize for European Ceramics in Germany in 2004. This wonderful series of saucepan-like shapes in different earth colours with tails instead of handles was the nearest McLoughlin has ever come to making functional-seeming vessel shapes.

In 1985 she returned to the big ramshackle house in Mountjoy Square in which she had lived before Japan and set up a new studio. Her work began to receive favourable critical notice at home and abroad and she exhibited in Dublin, Belfast and Paris. Affairs of the heart intervened in 1988 which brought her back to Amsterdam, soon afterwards marrying her Dutch partner Henk Brouwer. She still resides there, working in a solitary city-centre studio and producing outstanding work which has gained a world wide reputation from Europe to New York, Oahu, Indiana, Korea and Turkey in recent years.
Luckily for Irish students she returns regularly to the art colleges in Sligo, Galway, Dublin and Belfast to tutor and inspire the next generation. She is a frequent exhibitor in the Royal Hibernian Academy and the Peppercanister Gallery in Dublin.

McLoughlin’s art featured prominently in Betty Blandino’s scholarly book ‘The Figure in Fired Clay’ 2001, together with the more representational work of Donegal artist Christy Keeney. Her red stoneware sculpture titled ‘Old Ecstasy’ is illustrated and the author pointed out that although it was abstract in form, it had somehow a subtle allusion to a head resting on a pillow and was created by the artist in the time her father was dying. ‘Old Ecstasy’ was selected for the ‘SIAR 50’ exhibition in IMMA.

Deirdre McLoughlin is one of the most outstanding sculptors to emerge from Ireland in the 20th century. It was fitting that the Irish Post Office should celebrate her by featuring one of her works on a postage stamp last year. It is equally fitting and appropriate that the National Craft Gallery should now honour her great achievement with this exhibition.

Dr. Patrick J. Murphy
27th November 2011
Sculpture offers double pleasure, visual and tactile, seeing and feeling. The advantage of owning a piece is that one may touch, handle, fondle it without incurring the wrath of a gallery invigilator, enjoying the hard, the soft, the rough, the smooth. This is especially true of Deirdre McLoughlin's wonderful ceramics. They allude to the human form, even if they appear abstract, the breast, the buttock, the thigh, the waist and the smooth silkiness of skin, the taut hardness of muscle. They are sensuous, certainly! They are erotic too, a pleasure to behold, sheer delight to touch, to handle, to cradle.
Big Nose, 2011
Little Bear, 2011
Light Horn, 2011
Sceltimini, 2010
Black Life, 2007
I am – too, gray and black, 2011
Everything I know is in my work.  
I don’t always understand what I know.  

DEIRDRE MCLoughlin
DEIRDRE McLOUGHLIN

Dublin born

Acted in film for Joe Comerford and Cathal Black.

Mentor: Sonja Landweer. Studied free dance with Kalichi and more recently Or Bagim.

1982-1985 Kyoto. Attracted there by Sodeisha Group. Set up studio and took classes with Sawamura Sensei,
a master in Kiyomizu porcelain, first solo show Gallery Beni.


1988- Amsterdam, studio on Prinseneiland.

Solo Exhibitions

2008 Peppercanister Gallery, Dublin

2005 Frank Steyaert Gallery, Ghent

2004 DUET10, Deirdre McLoughlin - Wicher Meursing, SBK, Amsterdam

2003 Peppercanister Gallery, Dublin

1999 Peppercanister Gallery, Dublin

1996 Galerie Maas, Rotterdam

1997 Sonja Landweer - Deirdre McLoughlin, Galerie Amphora, Oosterbeek

1993 Deirdre McLoughlin Recent Works, Ulster Museum Belfast, Limerick City Gallery of Art

1994 Green on Red Gallery, Dublin

1992 Galerie Maas, Rotterdam

1990 Galerie Ram, Arnhem

1984 Gallery Beni, Kyoto
Selected Group

2011  VUE, Royal Hibernian Academy with Peppercanister Gallery Dublin
Kunst is Kunst Amsterdam (also 2010) cat.
15a Galerie en Beeldentuin, Lochem, NL also 2010 2009 2008 2007
Art & Antiques Fair 's-Hertogenbosch, with Brujsiens Modern Art
TRANSform, Farmleigh Gallery, Dublin, toured cat.

Select, Peppercanister Gallery, Dublin
Affordable Art Fair Amsterdam, with Kunst is Kunst cat.

2009  Keramik Europas Westerwaldpreis, Germany also 2004
eenvoud Museum Nagele, Kunst & Architectuur cat.
Cultural Influence: from Traditional Expression to Modern Context, Indiana State University, USA cat.

2008  VII Ceramic Congress & Exhibition, Afyon Kocatepe University, Turkey cat.
Wall & Plinth, Peppercanister Gallery, Dublin cat.

2007  4th World Ceramic Biennale, Korea cat.
Irish Contemporary Ceramics, National Museum of Ireland cat.

2006  European Ceramic Context, Bornholm, Denmark cat.
East–West Ceramics Collaboration IV, University of Hawaii at Manoa cat.
Ten years in the Making, Art from State Buildings, Farmleigh Gallery Dublin cat.

Irish Ceramics of the 21st Century, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin cat.
Ruth Duckworth Homage, Garth Clark Gallery, New York cat.


Irish Contemporary Ceramics 2000, Ulster Museum Belfast, toured cat.
DRIE BEELDHOUWER Anneke de Witte – Marianne van der Kooij – Deirdre McLoughlin, Fort Rammekens, Stedelijk Museum Vlissingen cat.


1991  CONFIGURA 1, Kunst in Europa, Erfurt, Germany cat.
ESPACE '91, RHA Gallagher Gallery, Dublin cat.
DEIRDRE McLOUGHLIN

1990  *Contemporary Artists from Ireland, Austin/Desmond Fine Art, London*  
1987  *Four Ceramic Artists, Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast*  
1986  *Sweeney Astray, Kenmare, OB’ART, Paris*  
1984  *Independent Artists, Municipal Museum Kyoto*  
1982  *EVA, Limerick*  

**Public Collections**

Icheon World Ceramic Center, Korea  
National Museum of Ireland, Dublin  
Ulster Museum, Belfast  
Keramikmuseum Westerwald, Höhr-Grenzhausen, DE  
Museum het Princessehof, Leeuwarden, NL  
Frank Steyaert Museum, Gent, BE  
Arts Council of Ireland, Dublin  
Limerick City Gallery of Art  
St. Patrick’s Seminary, Carlow  
Allied Irish Bank  
Farmleigh House, Dublin  
Office of Public Works, Ireland  
National Self-Portrait Collection of Ireland, University of Limerick
Awards

1991  National Self Portrait Collection
2004  Keramik Europas Westerwaldpreis 2004, First Prize
2007  4th World Ceramic Biennale 2007 Korea, Certificate of Honour
2011  An Post stamp.

Represented by the Peppercanister Gallery Dublin.

Selected Bibliography

Deirdre McLoughlin, DE: Neue Keramik, New Ceramics, 5/2010
Van der Meulen, Yna, Ooggetuigen van de leven, NL: Klei Jan/Feb 2008
Augustijn, Piet, Deirdre McLoughlin, NL: Keramiek Juni 2007
During, Nesrin Deirdre McLoughlin, USA: Ceramics Monthly, March 2006
Steyaert, Frank, Amlash Modern Design van 3000 Jaar Geleden, NL: Klei Nov. 2005
McLoughlin, Deirdre McLoughlin, DE: Neue Keramik, Sept/Okt 2004
Blandino, Betty, the figure in fired clay, UK London: A & C Black, 2001
Robinson, Michael & McLoughlin, Swimming in the Pool, UK: Ceramic Review 151, 1996
Pim, Henry, Recent Works, Review, UK: CRAFTS March/April 1994
Brett, David Recent Works, Review, Ire: Circa, no. 67, 1994
McCrum, Sean, Ceramics as Sculpture, Ire: The GPA Irish Arts Review Yearbook 1988
The National Craft Gallery
Established by the Crafts Council of Ireland in December 2000, the National Craft Gallery exhibits a programme of groundbreaking national and international contemporary craft. Activities include profiling the work of Irish makers in Ireland and abroad, developing relationships with Irish and international galleries and collectors, and inspiring appreciation, creativity and innovation through the gallery exhibition and education programmes. The Crafts Council of Ireland is the champion of the craft industry in Ireland, representing all craft disciplines. It strives to foster the commercial strength and unique identity of the craft sector, and to stimulate quality, design and competitiveness. It is funded by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation through Enterprise Ireland.
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OVERVIEW
Deirdre McLoughlin is arguably the most outstanding ceramic sculptor to emerge from Ireland in the 20th century. Born and educated in Dublin, McLoughlin studied with Rosemary Andrews before moving to Japan to work amongst the Sodeisha artist group in Kyoto, and eventually establishing her studio in Amsterdam.

Her work has been exhibited in museums and galleries worldwide, and she received the prestigious Westerwald Prize in 2004 and a Certificate of Honour at the 2007 World Ceramic Biennale in Korea. Shaping the Void is Deirdre McLoughlin’s first solo exhibition in a public gallery space in Ireland since 1993.