

## OBJECT

curated by Brian Kennedy for the National Craft Gallery,  
August 2009



## EYES AND HEART | Brian Kennedy *Curator*

Association and choice were the fundamental concerns in curating OBJECT. I have always been fascinated by how and where work is shown and the dialogues that form between objects in a space. What would I select from the Arts Council Collection? What would I choose from the craft field? Could an exhibition combining these two worlds make a stronger statement? Would the choices I make honour both traditions? Would my interests as an artist lead to a biased view? Would my collector's instinct cloud my editing?

Whilst musing on the above questions, my mind kept revisiting Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, UK. It is a place that I constantly refer to when thinking about living with art and craft. This remarkable house and collection was created in 1958 out of a cluster of cottages by Jim Ede (1895-1990) a former curator of the Tate London. At Kettle's Yard, Ede carefully positioned artworks alongside furniture, glass, ceramics and natural objects, with the aim of creating a harmonic whole. His vision was of a place that should not be -

*"an art gallery or museum, nor... simply a collection of works of art reflecting my taste or the taste of a given period. It is, rather, a continuing way of life from these last fifty years, in which stray objects, stones, glass, pictures, sculpture, in light and in space, have been used to make manifest the underlying stability."*

The placement of the work I make has always been of great importance. The joy of experiencing Kettle's Yard is seeing the careful placement of the art and the craft, the tensions created and the dialogues achieved. One leaves with an impression of the whole but also a clear remembrance of the individual.

In May 2009, I visited the *1620-1800 Baroque: Style in the Age of Magnificence* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. This exhibition dealt with the impact that the Baroque movement had globally in its day. We were shown works from across the entire range of creative expressions:- architecture, art, decorative arts, fashion, music and theatre. It was fascinating to see how it encompassed every aspect of creativity and how Masters in different fields and disciplines responded to one singular philosophy and idea.

The late 20th Century concept of placing contemporary work in splendid isolation is still practiced by galleries and museums today. Mixing of work from different disciplines is a rare occurrence; art, craft and design are shown in separate environments by gallerists and curators whilst the same gallerists and curators act as stalwart gatekeepers to their own camp.

Galleries are specialist zones and the fine art world has Frieze and Basel<sup>2</sup> while craft has SOFA and Collect<sup>3</sup>. While we, the viewers and patrons, tend to

live in less separatist places that we call home, and our collections exist in gracious harmony or riotous disharmony, depending on our intention. I have always wanted to see more exhibitions that deal with a broader view of the world, combining work from different backgrounds offering a view of the total creative output of a time and place.

As I began work on OBJECT I realised that my different personas: - artist, curator and collector constantly shifted the balance and composition of the exhibition, and I realized that this triple position strengthened the exhibition and fed the debate that I hoped to facilitate through the whole event.

This is an opportunity to put into the public realm some of the principles that I adhere to in my private collection. My own work as an artist is fundamentally abstract in its conception, and I have never been interested in telling stories or depicting the external world through the work that I make. Most of the art that I have bought is abstract, and deals with issues of colour, form, mark and material. The makers and designers I collect tend to have similar concerns. OBJECT focuses on abstraction, showing in many cases artists who were active when I was starting out as an artist and that helped inform and guide the development of my own work. It was a personal choice, lead by my likes and passions, a personal view of a national collection, a personal slice of Irish abstraction.

1 From the introduction to Kettle's Yard House  
[www.kettlesyard.co.uk](http://www.kettlesyard.co.uk)

2 [www.friezeartfair.com](http://www.friezeartfair.com) [www.artbasel.com](http://www.artbasel.com)

3 [www.sofaexpo.com](http://www.sofaexpo.com) [www.craftscouncil.org.uk/collect](http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/collect)

The great thing about public collections is that they make available their contents, so we can see into the past, be informed of our present and capture work for the future. The Arts Council Collection holds many pieces of work that otherwise may not have been so easily accessed by me for this exhibition. I could lay my hands on key pieces from the 1970's 80's and 90's. It would have been preferable to have shown these works alongside works from the same period by craft makers. Sadly this has not been possible, as to date no comparable craft collection exists in Ireland. This lack of a comprehensive collection of craft needs to be addressed. There is a risk that we may lose forever the ideas, concepts and most importantly, concrete creative output of a generation of makers.

Form, line, colour, light and shade, unbearable whiteness and fathomless black. All these sensations exist in all good art, but in pure abstraction we get to enjoy it without any distraction. In OBJECT, the starting point for abstract artists and the rules they engage in are also evident in the work of the makers, and while the end results and aspirations may differ it is this united interest that I celebrate. The exhibition moves through several moods and groupings. The monochrome of form is followed by a blast of pure colour, which leads to mark and symbol and ends with material and construction.

In Form, we are mostly unconcerned with the role of function but allowed to revel in the world of the physical, to contemplate surface and weight, light and shadow. Black, white, presence, absence. The white works of Roy Johnson, Angela O Kelly, Frances Lambe, Derek Wilson and Michael Moore seem

created to note the passing of time as the shadows of the day move slowly across their surfaces. Their lightness counterpointed by the mass of the surrounding black works. The weight of the works by Eilis O Connell and Vivienne Roche seem far greater than their modest scale and seem immovable in their determination to be objects of this world. Maud Cotter's *Strain*, created by great pressure, seems ready to be released save for the weight of the glass perched on top. The absence of light and the textured insistence in Michael Coleman's and Ciaran Lennon's drawing and painting are mirrored in the painterly surface of Cormac Boydell's *Black Vessels* and the textured and ebonised surface of Emmet Kane's sculpture.

In Colour, we have the lilac matt-ness of Sean Shanahan's *Swell* contrasted with the glossy charreuse of John French, a cool colourist in dialogue with an exuberant one. Mark Joyce beautifully captures on gesso the transparent delicacy of colour infused with light as if he has trapped a shadow cast by Lucinda Roberts's glass vessels. On the floor sit Sasha Sykes and Siobhan Hapaska's odes to summer; both encase a late summer harvest in acrylic and fibreglass, one sanitizing and urbanizing, the other with an undercurrent of threat and menace.

In Mark & Symbol, we deal with both the painterly and the graphic. The influence of eastern calligraphy is evident in the work of both John Graham and Peter Fulop, while the painterly surfaces and delicate hues of Marcus O Mahony's vessels are reflected in Richards Gorman's *Small Kitchen*. Nigel Rolfe's *Nine Symbols* becomes a possible index for the graphic concerns of Liz Nilsson, Brian Kennedy

and Neil Read, where repetitions of a secret code transverse the image plane.

In Material & Construction, the beautifully constructed stacking chair by Stephen O'Brien, an essay in the right angle, is placed alongside the work of Corban Walker and Michael Warren. All three architectural concerns and minimalist use of materials are exercises in order and restraint. Taking blackened wood as a starting point, Danny McCarthy creates the evocative wall construction *Shamans Horse XXX VII*, and Eric Connor the three-dimensional sketch that is *Wisteria*. The reductivist boxes of Laura Mays allow us to contemplate the marks and tones of the different woods from which they are constructed. These surfaces echo the quiet painterly skin on Fergus Fehily's *Scent* like a transient memory not fully remembered. The reflective outer layer of Fergus Martin's *Double* make the viewer and their surrounding space become part of the work, an act denied by the matt circles in Cara Murphy's *Meniscus*. Paul Mosse's construction *Catacomb*, a tangled world of paint and detritus, like a magnified detail of organic matter or the mapping of the negative space in a tangled hedgerow - a hedgerow that could have been the source of the material reordered and tamed in Joe Hogan's baskets.

In the end it was a choice of the eyes and the heart, about the pleasure of looking and feeling. My love of abstraction has always been the love of enjoying the object for the object's sake. Trust your eyes and feelings. Enjoy OBJECT.

## OBJECT | Helena Gorey

*Collections Manager, Arts Council of Ireland*

Swell, Link, Sunlight, Scent, Strain, Stand In - these are the titles of six artworks that curator Brian Kennedy has chosen from the Arts Council's collection for this exhibition called Object. The titles conjure up colourful images in the mind and perhaps give some indication of the artists' intentions in making these abstract and mostly monochrome objects. The absence of narrative gives the viewer space to indulge in the texture, the movement, the tensions and in the case of Double by Fergus Martin, to literally reflect. They will perhaps raise more questions than give answers and in a sense that is their function.

This exhibition includes 19 'objects' collected over a period of 34 years. The Arts Council began collecting in the late 1950's and this year 2009, the collection includes over 1000 artworks. It is now 50 years old and has become a public record of contemporary art produced in Ireland during that time. Purchases for the collection were made contemporaneously and often at the early stages of an artists career. The collection represents decisions made by various Arts Council committee members over these 50 years and in many cases these members were themselves practicing artists. In more recent times the Arts Council has adopted a curatorial approach to collecting and in 2005 and 2006 an independent visual art specialist advised the Council on what to purchase. The Council is currently developing and redefining its collection and acquisition policy.

A defining feature of the Arts Council's collection has been its connection to artists, and purchases have been a significant and practical way for the Arts Council to support the work of individual visual artists. The collection, which is loaned to various public institutions and galleries on a long and short term basis, includes painting, sculpture, print and photography and although the majority of work is object based, film and video installation are also included, in keeping with the practice of many contemporary artists.

When a work of art leaves the artist's studio it is vital that it is seen. It is only through the engagement with a viewer, other artwork, and for many its physical space, that it truly comes to life. This exhibition presents a unique opportunity for the collection to be presented alongside that of Crafts Council makers. The National Craft Gallery has established an excellent exhibition programme over the years and the Arts Council is delighted to be part of the Gallery's programme for the first time and hope that this collaboration will continue to develop in the years to come.

*For a full listing of the Arts Council's collection see Virtual Gallery at [www.artscouncil.ie](http://www.artscouncil.ie)*

## COLLECTIVE PASSION: *Collecting contemporary Craft Objects* | Des Doyle

Collector Programme Manager, Crafts Council of Ireland

*Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories. (Benjamin 1992)*<sup>1</sup>

To collect is to assemble, to amass, to place order upon objects that hold meaning. We are all collectors to some extent, preserving memories in material objects, collecting objects through which we can understand and order our world. The act of collecting therefore becomes a marriage of memory and material, an activity which grounds our identity and thinking in a real physical object.

For the butterfly collector, collecting many hundreds of specimens, some with only slight variation, the action places order on chaos and records the multiplicity of natural selection but also acts to preserve the history of a period in time.

Collections too give meaning to, and place order upon, our current culture – they exist as a repository for objects and link objects to memory. Collectively they become libraries, archives, celebrated collections where the most important pieces in a given field are lovingly assembled, often at great expense, and preserved.

In science the collections of germ cells, bacteria, spores – and the analysis of the behaviour of these organisms – serves to develop and improve our understanding of illness, of getting better, of prevention.

The archives of libraries record the thoughts of the great and good – or the plain unusual – to provide a snapshot of time, the thinking of the day; from

this we can observe how much we have evolved and how our current thinking has moved or changed from what is recorded.

Our museums are filled with thousands of objects, many of which may be of little monetary value but they collectively paint a cultural landscape within which we place the developments of all future things; they provide a benchmark against which we can compare and define our current and future efforts.

Our human desire to place order on the chaos of nature, or of disparate voices in written and visual culture results in the segmented, edited collections that we all amass. For example, the personal, private collections of books that offer a remembrance of times past, or the collections of a wine connoisseur that mark an appreciation of the process of making fine wine – and also of the pleasure of drinking and savouring the product of that process.

What then of craft, the handmade object? In this twenty first century what regard do we place on collecting the handmade object? How do we consider the savouring of the products of the hand?

In these changing economic times where the focus is on 'making do with less' what does this mean for collectors of fine craft objects? Does the new found economically-driven minimalism drive us to collect better objects, does it make us collect less objects? In collecting an object we change its status – we make it different, we add power to it and give it a new personality;

*'the object pure and simple, divested of its function, abstracted from any practical context, takes on a strictly subjective status. Now its destiny is to be collected. Whereupon it ceases to be a carpet, a table, a compass, or a knick-knack, and instead turns into an 'object' or a 'piece'. (Baudrillard 1994.)*<sup>2</sup>

The acquisition of an object therefore becomes an important step. The possibility of creating a collection of similar objects becomes a possibility – and if the engagement and interest is deep enough this often becomes the reality.

Anecdotally many Irish collectors, particularly of fine crafts, deny any public realisation of their passion. There is little recognition of their activity unless the pieces they have collected are listed in conversation or visit. In many cases collectors find it difficult to talk about their collections – their passions – as if they cannot articulate the meaning behind their wish to collect, as if the desire to have beautiful objects is not reason enough. A self-consciousness exists, perhaps connected to the apprehension that possession of a functionless object may mark them out as being different, as being excessive or 'showy'. The understanding of motivation in Irish collectors is markedly different than that of, say, North American Collectors, where the act of collecting craft objects is far more developed. There, collectors are proud to talk about their work, there is a greater recognition and understanding of the objects that they collect and also of the reasons why it is important to collect them. The feeling of 'deserving the object seems to be

much more strongly felt and there is less propensity to dismiss the activity of collecting.

This difference raises the question - how can we support the activity of collecting and encourage collectors - and future collectors - to engage their passions in Irish craft? We need to start by recognising, supporting and encouraging the collection of objects both by state and private collectors. From a cultural point of view we need to encourage the collection of objects of high quality as an important celebration of our visual and made culture and the creation of an archive for the future - particularly in the case of state collections. We need to create a place where the collector's role is recognised as being of primary importance both as a benefactor to craftspeople in terms of providing an outlet for their creative endeavours but also in terms of how the collection can create a personal understanding of collected objects and provide a picture of a particular discipline at a particular time.

Through this, we create powerful cultural acceptance of collecting, making it acceptable to possess an object because of its demonstration of superb technical ability, because of its aesthetic appearance and also because of its ability to mark an important passage in the career of a maker.

Makers at the highest level, current and future, need collectors to buy their work; to encourage them to make further work but also to start a process of understanding why their work has been chosen and the cultural importance of their creative expression. Makers therefore have a very important role to play

in creating this culture; not only do they have a responsibility to make work of outstanding quality but they also have a responsibility to question and find answers to why they are making this work, to articulate its placing in the international cultural landscape of the made object.

At the highest level is no longer good enough to create work that is just technically good - there has to be an articulation of its creation, the materials, techniques and thought processes that went into its making, and the larger contexts surrounding it. If makers can articulate the reasons for making an object then it becomes easier for collectors to be open to the possibility of acquiring the object. It is the role of industry bodies such as the Crafts Council of Ireland and also of State collectors such as the National Museum Of Ireland to assist in facilitating this discourse between craftmaker and client.

Understanding and further discussion will create a culture of increased acceptance of collecting as a valuable and important activity. The existence and continued success of international applied art shows such as Origin, SOFA & Collect serve to illustrate the importance and vibrancy of this segment of the market. Of course not all craftwork can reach the level of being represented at these shows which major collectors attend, but it is important to create and define the aspiration to produce work that will be represented at these shows; without the desire to create important craftwork, collecting will remain an enigmatic and underappreciated pursuit and that would be a cultural loss for us all.

1 Benjamin, W. 1992. *Unpacking my Library*, Illuminations (London: Fontana,) pp 61-69

2 Baudrillard, J. 1994. *The System of Collecting*. In: Elsner, J. and Cardinal, R. [eds] *The Cultures of Collecting*. Reaktion Books Ltd.

**FORM |**

CIARAN LENNON  
*Number 10 D6* 1986  
183 x 153 cm  
Oil on canvas





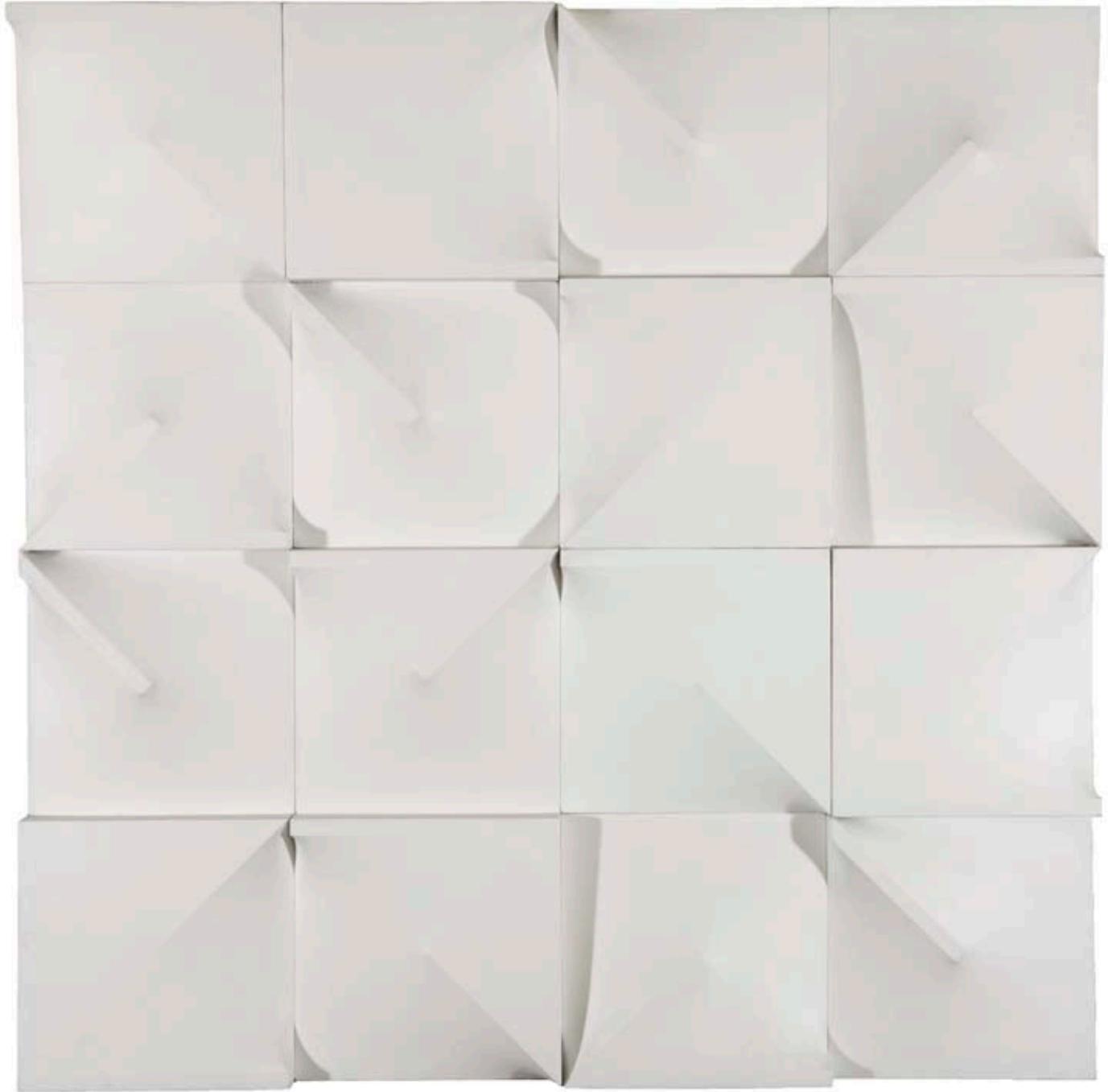


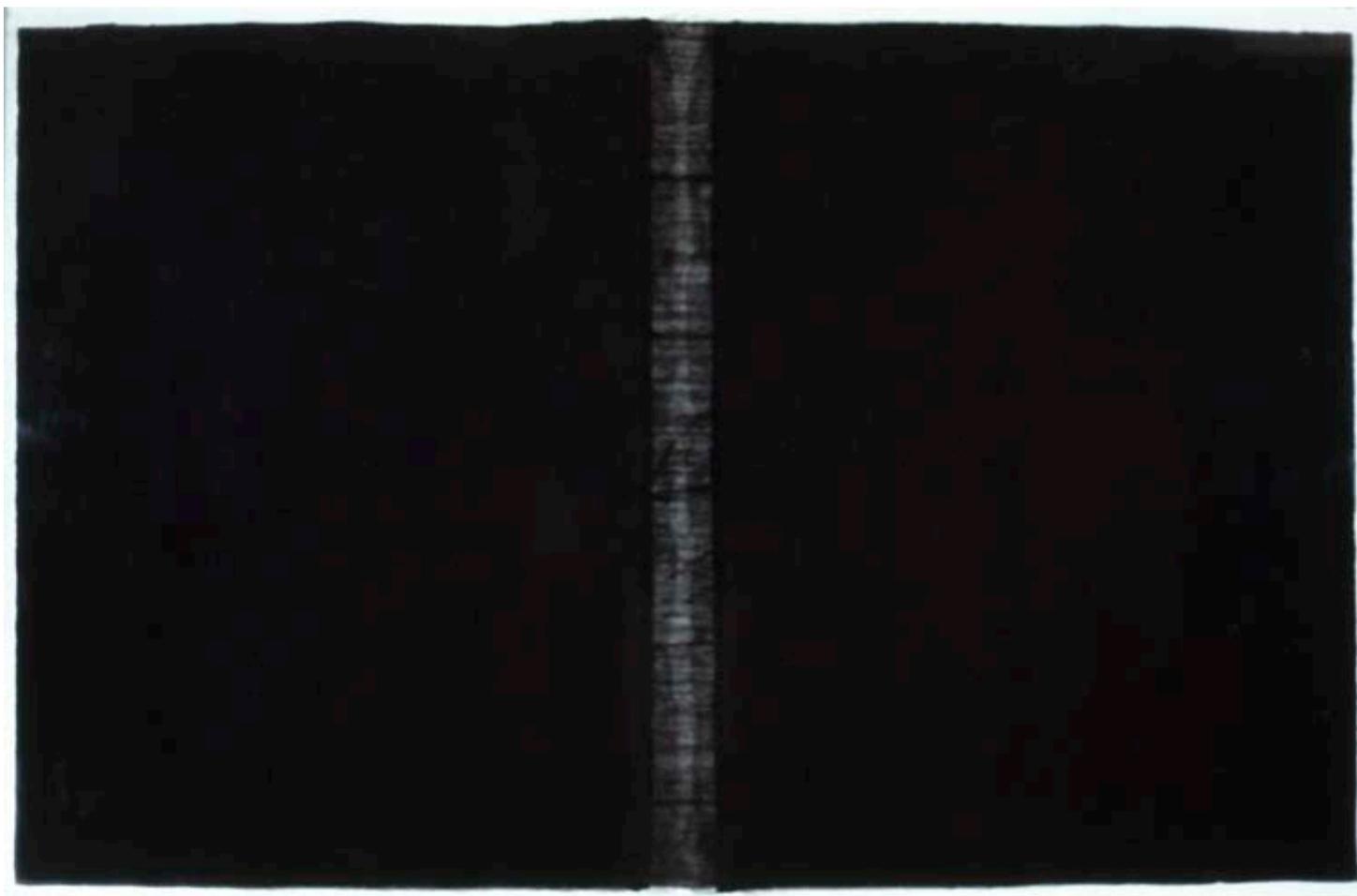
L TO R: FRANCES LAMB  
*Spiny Oval with Indent* 2009  
30 x 20 x 22 cm  
Ceramic, stoneware clay



MAUD COTTER  
*Strain*  
994 56 x 27 x 21 cm  
Copper, steel and glass

ROY JOHNSTON  
*Sixteen Rotating Forms II*  
1975 122 x 122 cm  
Stretched canvas





L TO R: MICHAEL COLEMAN  
*Link* 1977  
75 x 118 cm  
Paper and thread  
*Arts Council Collection, loaned to the  
National Collection of Contemporary  
Drawing as part of the permanent  
collection of Limerick City Gallery of Art*

EMMET KANE  
*Untitled* 2009  
81 dia. x 3.5 cm  
Irish Oak, textured and ebonised with  
peal essence acrylic ink





L TO R: ANGELA O KELLY  
*White Neckpiece* 2009  
70cm long, diameter of circle 4cm  
White Japanese handmade paper,  
white precious metal

CORMAC BOYDELL  
*Black Vessel* 2009  
h 45cm  
Ceramic with manganese and copper  
rich engobes and glazes.

MICHAEL MOORE  
*Last Column* 2008  
70x 28 x27cm  
T Material



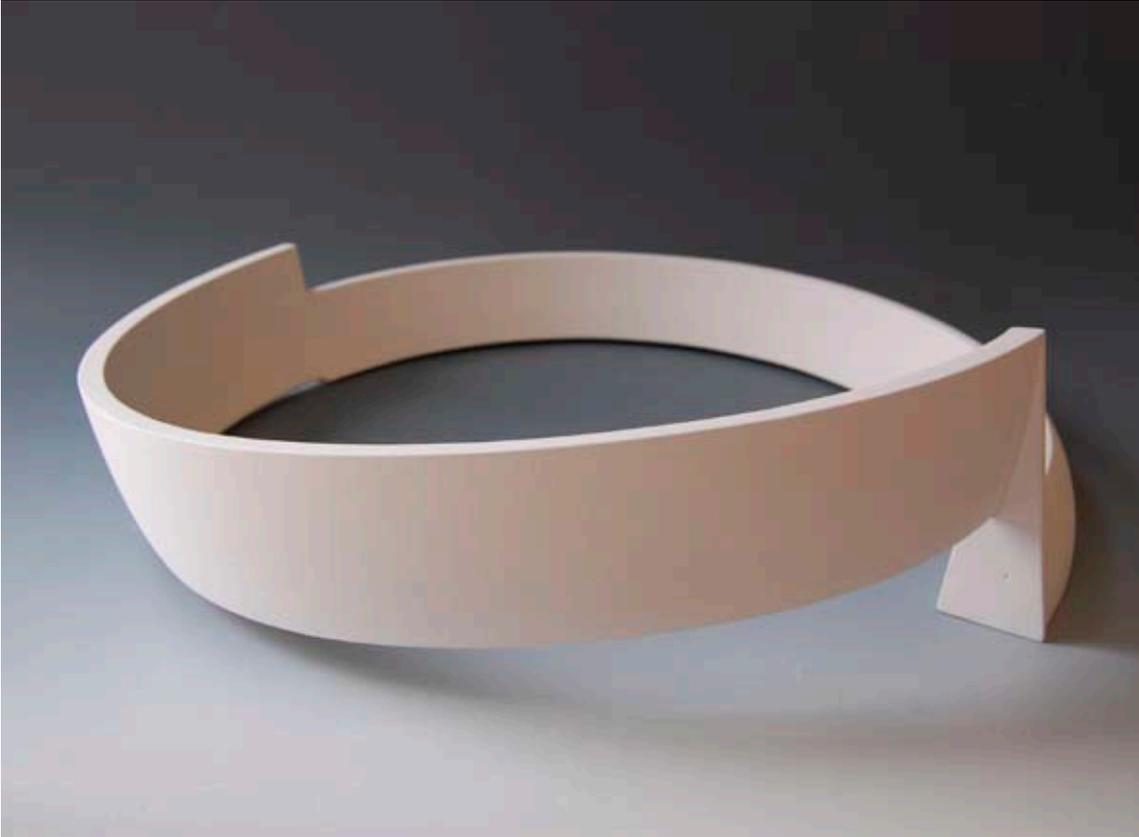


L TO R: EILIS O'CONNELL  
*Funnelling the Dish* 1988  
10.5 x 34.5 x 30cm  
Bronze



VIVIENNE ROCHE  
*Victim (Heads)* 1988  
5.5 x 6 x 27 cm  
Mild steel

DEREK WILSON  
*Continuity and Interruption Series* 2007  
Dia 50cm  
Thrown and altered stoneware with  
engobe  
*Private collection*



**COLOUR |**

JOHN FFRENCH  
*Bottle Form 2007*  
70 x 23 x 23cm  
Earthenware  
*Collection of Frances Keane*







L TO R: MARK JOYCE  
*Rosa 2* 2005  
25 x 21 cm  
Acrylic/ghesso

*Rosa 6* 2005  
25 x 21 cm  
Acrylic/ghesso



LUCINDA ROBERTSON  
*Red Rim Bowl 2007*  
30 dia x 8 cm  
Hot Glass  
*Collection of the Artist*





L TO R: SEAN SHANAHAN  
*Swell* 2005  
80 x 70 x 4 cm  
Oil on MDF



SIOBHÁN HAPASKA  
*Sunlight* 2004  
103 x 84 x 88 cm  
Fiberglass/2 pack acrylic paint,  
spent cartridges, wheat,  
edition of 3

SASHA SYKES  
*Straw Cube*  
Designed 2002 Made 2009  
40x40x50cms  
Acrylic & wheat straw

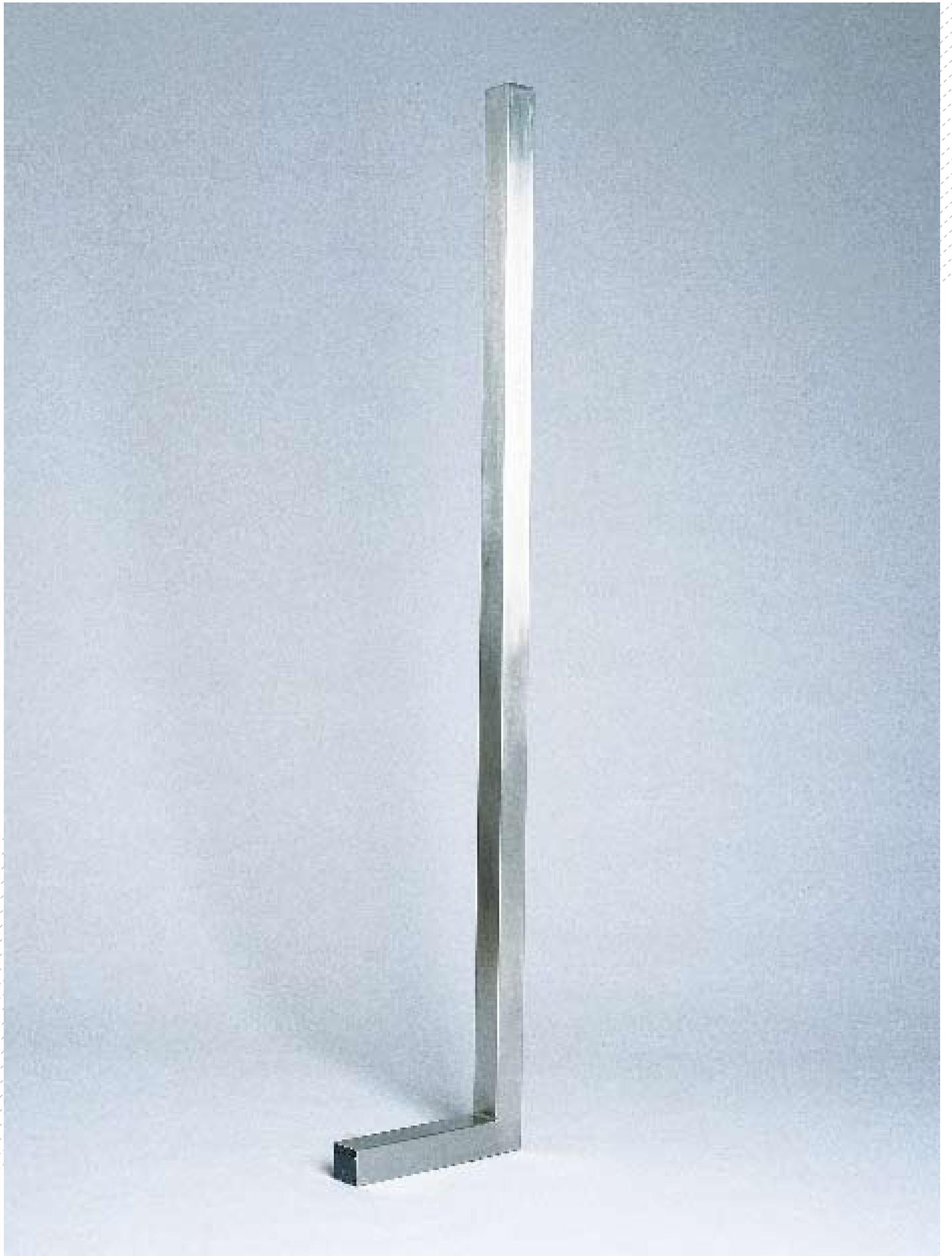


## MATERIAL CONSTRUCTION |



L TO R: JOE HOGAN  
*Bog Myrtle Bowl* 2009  
48 dia. x 23 cm  
Bog myrtle, willow

CORBANWALKER  
*Stand In* 1995  
149 x 5 x 30 cm  
Stainless steel  
and cast glass





L TO R: DANNY MCCARTHY  
*Shamans Horse XXX VII* 1995  
 122 x 122 x 5 cm  
 Wood / paint



MICHAEL WARREN  
*Pyramid 83 5/6* 1980  
 30 x 5 x 21  
 Bronze

ERIC CONNOR  
*Wisteria* 2007  
 75 x 56 x 42cm  
 Tulipwood and ash (ebonised)  
 Collection of Brian Kennedy &  
 Peter Ting







L TO R: STEPHEN O BRIAIN  
*Stacking Chair* 2000  
70cm x 55cm x 49cm  
American black walnut



FERGUS FEEHILY  
*Scent* 1996  
68 x 68 x 12.5 cm  
Oil on wood

LAURA MAYS  
*Boxes* 2002  
12 x 12cm each  
Walnut, douglas fir, and satinwood  
*Collection of Brian Kennedy & Peter Ting*





L TO R: FERGUS MARTIN  
*Double* (detail - large disk) 2003  
29 x 29 x 2 cm  
Stainless steel

CARA MURPHY  
*Meniscus* 2009  
26cm x 49cm x 6cm  
Silver

MARK/SYMBOL |

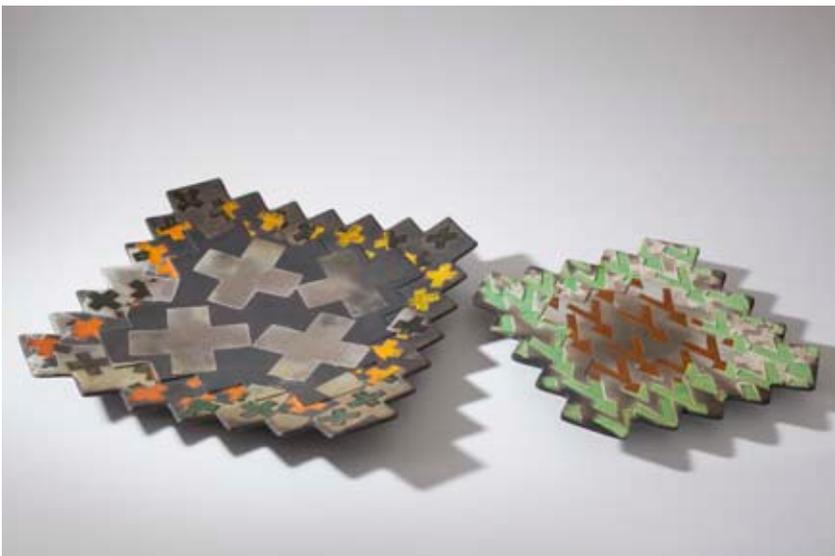


L TO R: PAUL MOSSE  
*Catacomb* 2004  
105 x 107 cm  
Mixed media

JOHN GRAHAM  
*Untitled III* 1998  
122 x 101 cm  
Carborundum

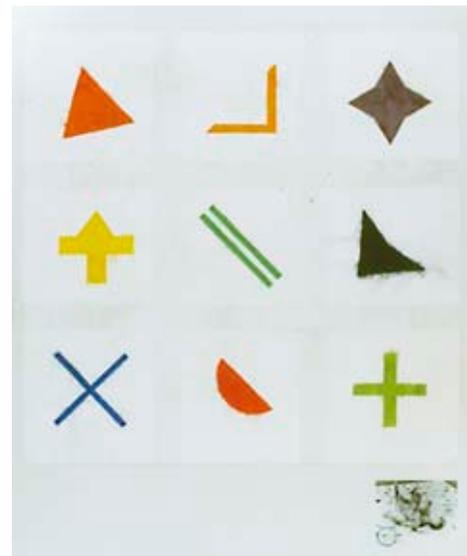




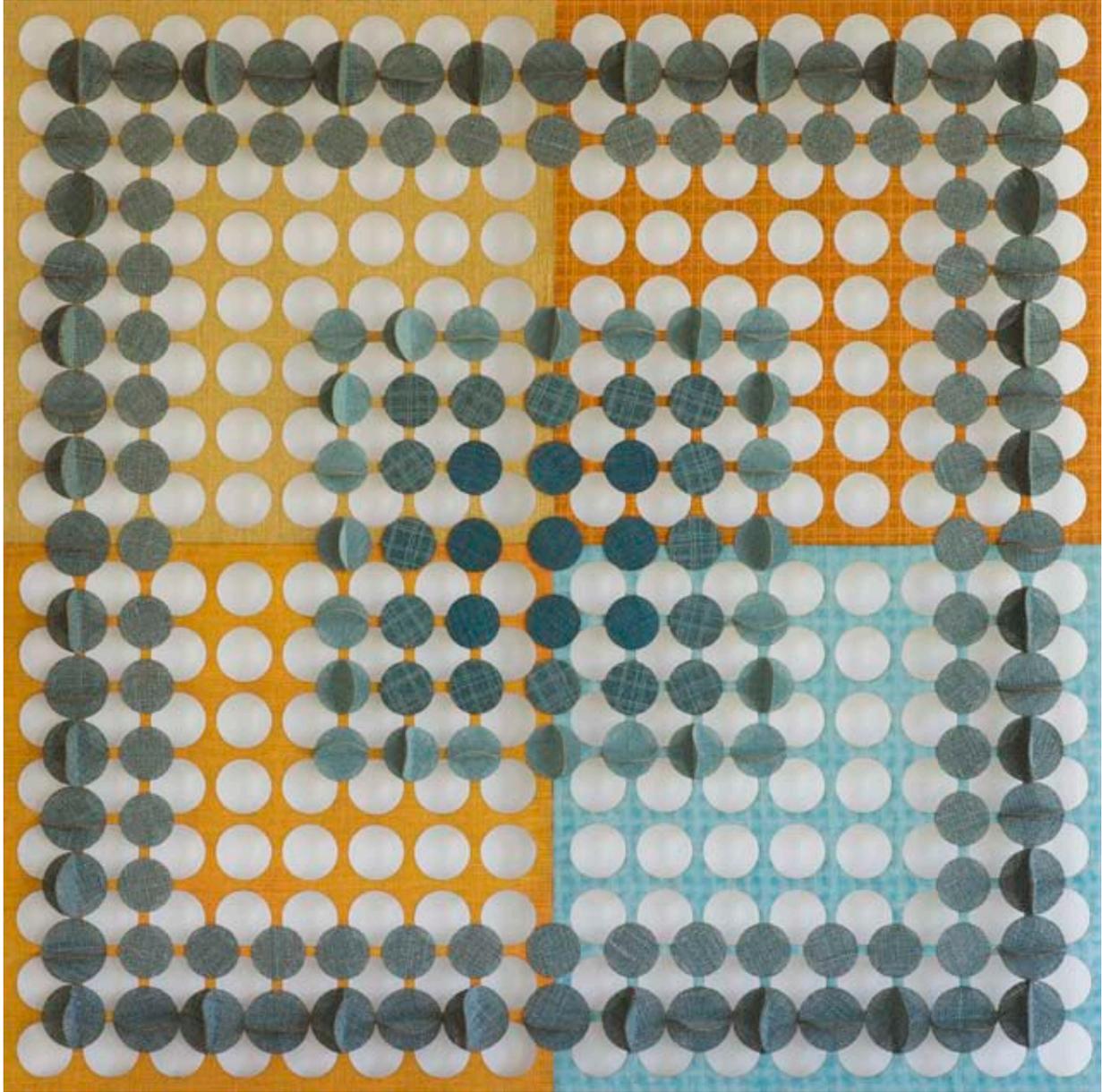


L TO R: NEIL READ  
*Geometric Series Wall piece* 1987  
 5 x 27 x 27  
 Raku fired T Material, embossed  
 and glazed, with copper.  
*Collection of the Artist*

NIGEL ROLFE  
*Nine Symbols* 1981  
 121 x 96 cm  
 Mixed media



LIZ NILSSON  
*Format 3* 2009  
 50 x 50 x 8 cm  
 Linen and cotton cloth,  
 pigment dyes.





L TO R: RICHARD GORMAN  
*Small Kitchen* 1987  
65 x 62.5 cm  
Oil on board Photo

BRIAN KENNEDY  
*Drawing towards marking the spot 5* 2009  
44 x 55 cm  
Inkjet print on paper





L TO R: MARCUS O MAHONEY  
*3 Bottle Forms* 2002  
25cm high  
Salt-glazed stoneware  
*Collection of Brian Kennedy & Peter Ting*

PETER FULOP  
*Vessel no 1* 2007  
25 x 29 x 13 cm  
Hand built and wood fired Shigaraki clay,  
pigments, porcelain slip, natural ash glaze  
*Vessel no 2* 2007  
28 x 28 x 14 cm  
Hand built and wood fired Shigaraki clay,  
pigments, porcelain slip, natural ash glaze



## OBJECT | Artists | *Contact Details*

### DEREK WILSON

173 Alexandra Park Ave. Belfast,  
BT15 3GB Co Antrim N Ireland

+44-(0)785-4045835 +44-(0)28-90742130  
derekwilson173@hotmail.co.uk  
www.derekwilsonceramics.com

### FRANCES LAMBE

Bridge Street Studios, Dundalk, Co Louth  
+ 353-(0)42-9351712+ 353-(0)87-6180080

fralambe@aol.com  
www.franceslambe.com

### MICHAEL MOORE

136 Tyrconnell Park, Inchicore, Dublin 8  
+ 353-(0)86 8456851

michaelmoore@ireland.com  
www.irishcontemporaryceramics.ie  
www.accessceramics.org  
www.ccoi.ie/portfolio/

### CORMAC BOYDELL

Allihes, Beara Co Cork  
+ 353-(0)27-73085 + 353-(0)87-2332335

crmccormacboydell.com  
www.cormacboydell.com

### ANGELA O KELLY

Coolmine, Saggart, Co Dublin  
+ 353-(0)1-4013899 +353-(0)87-6780784

angela\_o\_kelly@hotmail.com  
www.angelaokelly.com

### SASHA SYKES

The Black Dairy, Lisnavagh Farmyard,  
Rathvilly, Co Carow  
+ 353-(0)86-8711901

sasha@farm21.co.uk  
www.farm21.co.uk

### PETER FULOP

Sheskinacurry, Drumshanbo, Co Letrim  
+353(0)87-7792320 or 7792329

fulopmessages@hotmail.com  
http://peterfulop.squarespace.com/

### CARA MURPHY

Blessington House, 18 Ballynahinch St.  
Hillsborough Co Down BT26 6AW  
+44-(0)781-1958807 cara@caramurphy.com

www.caramurphy.com

### LAURA MAYS

Salruck, Renvyle, Co Galway  
+ 353-(0)95-43089

laura@yaffemays.com  
www.yaffemays.com

### STEPHEN O BRIAIN

Tomduff, Borris, Co Carlow, Ireland  
+ 353-(0)59-9771820 + 353-(0)87-2707674

info@obriainfurniture.com  
www.obriainfurniture.com

### ERIC CONNOR

Nirvana, Coliemore Rd. Dalkey, Co Dublin  
+ 353-(0)1-2859528+ 353-(0)87-1256787

ericdalkey@eircom.net

### JOE HOGAN

Loch na Foey, Finny, Clonbur, Co. Galway,  
+ 353-(0)94-9548241

joehogan3@eircom.net  
www.joehoganbaskets.com

LIZ NILSSON

54 Kenilworth Sq. Rathgar, Dublin 6  
+ 353-(0)86-8307294

nilssonliz@yahoo.ie  
www.liznilsson.com

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LUCINDA ROBERTSON

Farmoone House, Moone, Co Kildare  
+ 353-(0)59 86 23104+ 353-(0)86 1621341

info@cindersglass.com  
www.cindersglass.com

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EMMET KANE

Castledermot, Co Kildare  
+ 353-(0)59-9162967 + 353-(0)86-8146836

emmet@emmetkane.com  
www.emmetkane.com

---

JOHN FFRENCH

To be contacted through:  
Frances Keane, Keane on Ceramics,  
Kinsale Co Cork  
+ 353-(0)21- 4774553 + 353-(0)85-7074561

keaneonceramics@gmail.com

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NEIL READ

44 St Lawrence Road, Clontarf, Dublin 3  
+ 353-(0)87-6213823 readn@iol.ie

www.ncad.ie  
www.irishcontemporaryceramics.ie  
www.adam's.ie

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MARCUS O MAHONEY

Garrycloyne, Glencairn, Lismore Co Waterford  
+ 353-(0)58-56694 + 353-(0)86-2028756

moceramics@eircom.net  
www.marcusmahony.com

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BRIAN KENNEDY

Apt 420, 83 Crampton St. London SE17 3BT  
+44-(0)781-6151568

brian@briing.uk.com  
www.briing.uk.com

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ALL ARTISTS FROM THE ARTS COUNCIL  
COLLECTION TO BE CONTACTED THROUGH:

**Helena Gorey** Collection Manager,  
Arts Council of Ireland, 70 Merrion Sq. Dublin 2  
+353-(1)-6180200

helena.gorey@artscouncil.ie www.artscouncil.ie

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#### THE NATIONAL CRAFT GALLERY

Set up 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 designer-makers in Ireland and abroad, developing relationships with Irish and international galleries and collectors, and inspiring appreciation, creativity and innovation through the gallery education programme.

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 Enterprise, Trade & Employment through Enterprise Ireland.

National Craft Gallery, Castle Yard, Kilkenny, Ireland  
P: 00353 (0)56 7761804 E: [n cg@cco i. ie](mailto:n cg@cco i. ie) W: [www. cco i. ie](http://www. cco i. ie)

#### EXHIBITION TEAM

Object curator: Brian Kennedy

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