



Deirdre McLoughlin - studio - 2018 Photo Kato Tan

By Derek Culley

DEIRDRE MCLOUGHLIN

As one of Ireland's most important sculptors, Deirdre McLoughlin has lived with clay for 40 years*. The following article is an introduction from Art & Museum Magazine of a truly unique and focused artist. Deirdre discusses her practice and pursuit of objects that gleam in half-light, as written about by Jun'ichiro Tanizaki, when making shapes.

Question: Art & Museum (AM)

"Deirdre McLoughlin is one of the finest sculptors to emerge from Ireland in the 20th century. The Irish Post Office celebrated her by featuring one of her works on a postage stamp in 2011. The National Craft Gallery now honours her great achievement with this exhibition." Dr. Patrick J. Murphy, 27th November 2011. Referring to you as a sculptor who works with

clay, Dr Patrick Murphy refers to your work as sculptures. Given that the exhibition "Shaping the Void"* is hosted by The National Craft Gallery of Ireland, does this body of works with clay identify/categorize your works within the contemporary Craft Movement and or contemporary sculpture?

Answer: Deirdre McLoughlin (DMcL)

Ann Mulrooney, who curated that show, was a graduate in sculpture from the Royal College London. For her, my works are sculpture. The DCCOI has a beautiful exhibition space, and I cannot deny the craft in my sculptures. I term my works sculpture, as it's a three-dimensional form of expression, and I call myself a visual artist. Categories are for curators, institutions, museums and specialized magazines. They



Anon - h 37 - 2017- Photo Rob Bohle



Nono II - h 32 cm - 2019 Photo Rob Bohle

imply boundaries that are vexing and unhelpful for the individual artist. I have learned to keep my head above water and float between categories. In recent years, I made the mistake of refusing an invitation to be part of an exhibition under the banner Contemporary Makers, which turned out to be a dynamic show that traveled to New York with artists I appreciate – without me. I've won the Ceramics of Europe Westerwald Prize twice for vessel forms that were deemed works of pure sculpture.

Question: A&M

"Deirdre learnt her skills, which required traveling to Kyoto, where the Sodeisha Group was based. This group, 'The Society of Running Mud', was founded by Yagi Kazuo in 1948 and was highly artistic, individualistic potters that tried to tear down the walls between fine art and craft art. They also strived for a ceramic aesthetic that was not restricted by conventions and sought individuality through freedom in expression." Mark Robinson - OEN 2016. Does this experience underpin your practice to this day?

Answer: DMcL

Yes - certainly. I set up studio in Kyoto in the beginning of the eighties and worked there for nearly four years. My own work took me in this direction, as there seemed to be an Oriental influence in the forms. In Amsterdam and Dublin, I was shaping clay into sculptures, and the reception (but for a few isolated stalwarts) was incomprehension and neglect, which was discouraging and made me anxious, and yet I knew the work itself was gaining strength. The need to find a fertile environment for growth, to deepen my commitment, gain courage and skills brought me to work amongst the Sodeisha artists. A businessman said to me once – if you want to get good at something, you go and work amongst those who are better than you, and you get better.

Question: A&M

Your CV/website is reflective both of your genius and recognition, plus your dogged commitment to your workings. You are a true global citizen. How much of your development is by intellectual design or by other forces?

Answer: DMcL

Since I can remember, I've always had the compulsion to express, but express what and how? I thought I might write, which is why I studied Humanities in Trinity College Dublin, to develop clarity of thought and vocabulary. I graduated, but writing failed me. In my early twenties, someone threw me a lump of clay, inviting me to make something, and I was hooked. We cannot know what forces rule us. In my forties, I found lace makers in my ancestry and lately discovered a weaver married a sculptor in St Patrick's chapel Belfast in 1884 – and they were my great-grandparents. I cannot ignore that my ancestors have had a hand in my life. "I live life, and I express it through clay. Everything I know is in my work. I don't always understand what I know." (Deirdre McLoughlin, China Art Ceramic, June 2015)*

Question: A&M

For me, the key to your work is your true humble approach to life/spirit/consciousness - subconscious and knowledge, which are tools in your bringing works to fruition. So, what stimulates you?

Answer: DMcL

I first discovered in movement classes with Kalichi in the old Grapevine Arts Centre (Dublin) that physical movement in its myriad guises helps push my vocabulary of form. I practice deep dance and ramble around the Dutch countryside with a group of dedicated walkers. I cycle to my studio, where I have a hula hoop, and I hop around to the New Sounds NY radio station. Like any other thinking human being, I keep abreast of movements in other fields and world events.

Question: A&M

Do you believe Aidan Dunne's observation is reflected in your works?

"While the forms she makes are elegant, and the coloured glazes she uses sumptuous – this is often achieved by polishing and repeated firing – there is also a distinctly humorous quality to the work, a playful sensuality." Aidan Dunne, *Touching the void*, *The Irish Times*, 18 January 2012*. A compliment further expressed by Mark Robinson OEN 2016* "Playful Expressive Forms – Dynamic Sculptures" is how Mark Robinson describes your work. Please discuss, and when do you feel when a work is complete?

Answer: DMcL

I'm happy to believe that others might find my works sensual or humorous or playful. Myself, I might also see awkwardness or unease or discord. But there are moments in the working process when I'm electrified with a line or movement in a form, and I'm deeply alive in those moments. "I know a work has come to an end when an inner logic

reveals itself. The work in an instance feels right. I sense something true." Deirdre McLoughlin, *New Ceramics*, May 2010

Question: A&M

STILL WALKING, Deirdre McLoughlin (As one of Ireland's most important sculptors, Deirdre McLoughlin has lived with clay for 40 years.)* "The Chinese edition of *Wallpaper* magazine, the bible of art, design and architecture, has just devoted a four-page feature to her work. An exhibition of her work opens in Galerie Le Don du Fel, Aurillac in France on June 30th. And another at the Galerie Franzis Engels in Amsterdam runs from October 10th.

Yet she is almost unknown here in Ireland. And if she was a man, I'd have heard all about her. "Roisin Murphy "Objects of Desire" *Irish Independent* on Sunday 2019*. Please discuss.

Answer: DMcL

Well, the exhibition in France has just closed, and I'll open in Amsterdam on the third of October. I'm probably known well enough in Ireland, and certainly in my field. There are no rock stars in my area of expression. Ceramic works are generally intimate and quiet in nature. But they can endure and are universal. A book by Betty Blandino, *The figure in fired clay*, opens with the *Venus of Willendorf* from about 30,000 BC to 25,000 BC and illustrates works through time and regions of the world, closing with three images of my sculptures.

Would I be better known as a man – not sure – but males certainly get more unquestioning support than females.

Articles on Website: www.deirdremcloughlin.com



Noo L 48 cm - 2014 - photo Rob Bohle