

The Light Fantastic: Contemporary Irish Stained Glass Art

This exhibition represents the work of twelve leading Irish glass artists in the field of stained, painted or etched glass – Donna Coogan, Debbie Dawson, Nora Duggan, Eva Kelly, Peadar Lamb, Mary Mackey, Sandra Miley, Patrick Muldowney, Killian Schurmann, George Walsh, Elke Westen and Peter Young. This is the Crafts Council of Ireland's first exhibition of secular free-standing, portable glass panels.

In the words of Dr. Nicola Gordon Bowe of the National College of Art & Design, Dublin the glass in this exhibition has been made 'by people living in Ireland whose professional lives are committed to working in various two dimensional forms of painted, enamelled, etched, kiln-formed, fused, plated, leaded and/or stained glass. As with any art, some of them have been trained as graphic designers and book illustrators, others as sculptors or painters...Some work traditionally, others embrace the possibilities offered by developing photographic and fibre-optic technologies. Some see their work as sculpture, others have taken on installation possibilities or full-scale architectural challenges. And some make narrative or symbolic panels, which may carry deep personal or emotional significance, offering an inner world of reflection and contemplation.'

A Brief History of Irish Stained Glass

The exhibition represents the culmination of over a century of studio stained glass in Ireland, which began with such renowned artists as Harry Clarke, Wilhelmina Geddes and Evie Hone. Gordon Bowe in the catalogue's introduction elegantly describes this period in Irish art history: 'Attention to the molten, textured and chromatically varied forms of glass as a receptacle for the passing of light was a key element in the approach adopted by Irish artists whom the painter Sarah Purser recruited to An Tur Gloine (The Tower of Glass). This was the pioneering workshop she set up in Dublin in 1903. They turned to Romanesque sculpture, early Christian illumination, enamelling and metalwork and helped to re-invent the figurative imagery of the Celtic Revival by applying painterly and crafted skills to richly coloured glass of the highest quality. Between c. 1912-1937, artists of the calibre of Michael Healy and Wilhelmina Geddes used a dazzling range of Norman slab and 'flashed' glass in full scale windows, both ecclesiastical and secular, as well as in small autonomous panels done as commissions and for exhibition. Their contemporary Harry Clarke, based at his family's decorating premises, did likewise to widespread critical acclaim, mounting microscopically detailed, double-plated panels illustrating scenes from his favourite writers in cabinets with diffusing sheets to spread the light behind them. In 1932, the semi-abstract Cubist painter, Evie Hone, turned to Geddes to learn the craft of stained glass, excelling in small-scale painted panels which were a spiritual extension of her canvases.' From the late 1970s and into the 1990s, the artists James Scanlon and Maud Cotter brought an exciting new dimension to the genre from their background in sculpture and mixed media at the Crawford School of Art & Design, Cork.

Curator Bios

Audrey Whitty

Audrey Whitty is Curator of Applied Arts (with specific responsibility for Ceramics, Glass & Asian collections) at the National Museum of Ireland – Decorative Arts & History in Dublin and an external advisor on the Crafts Council of Ireland's Exhibitions Advisory Panel. She has received two Merit Awards

for curating major exhibitions that included the subject of Irish contemporary glass art, and is the Irish Commissioner for both European Ceramic Context and European Glass Context in Bornholm, Denmark. Ms. Whitty has lectured at numerous high profile universities and institutions including the Sorbonne in Paris and SOFA, Chicago. She is also the author of numerous publications on Irish and European glass and ceramics.

Mary Boydell

Mary Boydell has been a noted advocate and authority on Irish glass for years. She was president of the Glass Society of Ireland from 1991 to 2004 and acted as the decorative arts representative for Sotheby's in Ireland for many years. Mrs. Boydell is the author of numerous publications on the subject of Irish glass.

International Arts & Artists is a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing cross-cultural understanding and exposure to the arts internationally through exhibitions, programs and services to artists, arts institutions, and the public. Founded in 1995, IA&A is using innovative approaches to respond to the needs of the international arts community.

The Light Fantastic was developed by the Crafts Council of Ireland and toured by International Arts & Artists, Washington, DC.

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June 4 through August 15, 2009

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Funding for this organization is provided in part by the Broward County Board of County Commissioners as recommended by the Broward Cultural Council.