

"Side by Side" - Contemporary Irish Craft within the Hunt Collection 2007

"Side by Side" is the 3rd exhibition of contemporary Irish craft at the Hunt Museum. This year for the first time the work is shown within the Hunt collection.

Some of the makers have responded directly to specific pieces from within the collection. Margaret Walsh a former docent at the museum both opens and closes the exhibition. In the prologue room her twin earthenware vessels draw inspiration from the Irish Belfast pearlware plates that can be seen beside them and her pair of plaques in the epilogue room draws together many influences from the collection. Eileen Singleton and Anne Harrington Rees are inspired by individual pieces from within the collection and make new contemporary works in response to them. Ceramicist Geraldine Grubb's work relates strongly to pieces like the Bell of Badoney within the museum. Sara Flynn feels that to be shown alongside work from the collection "would be a great opportunity to highlight age-old concerns that still apply to vessel makers today".

Jewellers Anne Mette O Conner, Marika o Sullivan and Debbie Paul respond to very different pieces from within the jewellery collection and show that the pieces within the museum form an historic lineage to the work of contemporary makers. Edward Cooks silver torc rings and bangles are direct descendants of the magnificent Iron Age pieces, while these same torc's are revisited in a very different way within the neckpieces of Berina Kelly.

Other works echo the materials or objects from within the museum. Beautiful pieces of glass, Michael Ray, Karl Harron and Suzannah Vaughan, metal Magdalen Rubalcava and Erika Marks and wood, Liam Flynn, are contemporary examples of the great craft pieces that make up this great collection and show that the skills and passion evident within the collection are alive and well in the contemporary field. As Magdalen Rubalcava said in her proposal "That is my first link - a sort of "then and now", my hands reaching into the past and joining with prehistoric hands".

Furniture by Joseph Walsh, Erich Fichtner and Ray Walsh are pieces that you could imagine the Hunts living with. The baskets of Joe Hogan show the passion for traditional crafts so admired by the Hunts lives on. A sense of luxury and a love of the decorative lives on within the work of Caroline Schofield, Beth Moran and Sharon Ferguson and a love of detail and the miniature is seen in the amazing silver and egg pieces of Kirsten Thomas.

This show set out to show the relevance of the collection to contemporary makers and to show that contemporary Irish craft is part of a long and treasured past. It also shows how relevant collections such as the Hunt are to us and how important they are to the world. I would like to feel that the contemporary craft show here is comprised of work that the Hunts would have considered acquiring for their collection if they were still alive.

Brian Kennedy Nov 2007

SOME ARTIST NOTES ON THE WORK IN SIDE BY SIDE

Prologue Room

Zebra and Deer (Glazed hand painted enamel and lustre earthenware ceramic vessels) by Margaret Walsh

A pair of decorated vessels one decorated with a zebra and a black and white pug dog on his back and one with a deer and a black and white kitten on his back. The animals are standing on stylised oak leaves and have a gold lustre 'Harp and Shamrock' on the top of the vessels. The work is inspired by the Irish Belfast pearlware plates c.1800-06 from the Hunt Collection.

Majolica case Medieval Room

The Bella Donna Plate (Earthenware) by Eileen Singleton

This plate is a tribute and homage to a loved one and an offering of love.

The plants featured are:

Lady's Mantle for protection

Lady's Bedstraw for amorous love

Forget-me-knot for a reminder of that love

The 12 dog's teeth for the 12 months of the year

And the whole design encircling the beloved and also radiating from the portrait.

1st. Floor Study Room

Oak Pattern Bowl (Sterling Silver) by Erika Marks

A scene reminiscent of willow-pattern, but an Irish one with an ironic edge. With the Sugarloaf Mountain, a stone wall, bulrushes and other natural elements, it also incorporates man-made features, such as a wind farm and a plane with a contrail, all vital elements that help to make up modern Ireland. Juxtaposing them in this formalised manner evokes for me the slightly surreal yet intimate feeling of the porcelain tea bowl in the Museum's collection.

Reading left to right -

Knocknaree cairn - Glencar waterfall and river - a salmon - rowan leaves and berries - bulrushes - Great Sugarloaf mountain - a golfer - a Scots Pine - the 18th flag - foxglove and clouds - a road through the hills - a wind farm - a wren on a stone wall - jet and contrail - oak leaves and acorns - a dolmen

2nd Floor Study Room

"Mether" (Hemp string and copper wire) by Anne Harrington Rees

I visited the Hunt in 2006 and was amazed at the diversity of the items held in the collection. I made some drawings during my visit, including one of a mether. It wasn't until I'd looked at the finished drawing that I realised it must have been from this form that the design was made for the McCarthy Cup. For whatever reason, whether or not its because I'm from Kilkenny and passionate about hurling, the mether made the biggest impression on me. The original mether is a four-sided wooden vessel with handles and is covered with holes from wood-boring insects, with scored lines criss-crossing the surface. In response to this I have created a fibre sculpture made using a technique which produces a very open texture - creating another form full of holes.

Epilogue Room

"Four Cats" (Glazed hand painted enamel and lustre earthenware ceramic plaque) by Margaret Walsh

A plaque depicting various animals from the Hunt Collection, the central figures are 4 animals from the cat family: an ivory leopard mask, a bronze leopard, a Japanese porcelain kitten and the cat on the crest of the serving dish commissioned by the Bourke family from Lisnagry Co. Limerick.