

Ceramics take flight

Audrey Whitty discusses her selection of experimental designer-makers for the biennial symposium in Bornholm



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European Ceramic Context 2010 forms part of a biennial symposium for European contemporary glass and ceramics held on the Danish island of Bornholm. Begun in 2006 on the subject of ceramic art, and followed two years later by glass art, Bornholm will again play host to comprehensive exhibitions, workshops, master classes and lectures on the theme of ceramics. All twenty-seven EU states along with Iceland, Norway and Switzerland are each represented by a maximum of four artists across two exhibition categories; established artists and emerging artists under thirty-five years of age. A designated national commissioner was appointed from each country whose responsibility it was to put forward up to four artists' names for each category, the final selection of two artists per exhibition being then chosen by an expert Danish panel. The overall European Ceramic Context winner in both the established artists' exhibition and that of emerging talent each receive €10,000 at the opening and prize-giving ceremony on 11 September to be launched by Denmark's Crown Princess Mary.

The two artists to represent Ireland in the established artists' category are Jack Doherty and Frances Lambe.

Jack Doherty first began producing ceramics in Ireland during the 1970s after graduation from the Ulster College of Art and Design, Belfast and a period of work at the Kilkenny Design Workshops. His current artistic output consists of exquisitely formed porcelain and stoneware objects. They possess a subtlety in the way in which they are thrown and in their applied colour. The functionality of his pots is of paramount importance whatever their use, and as lead potter at the Leach Pottery in St Ives his influence on a generation of potters is assured. His porcelain work in particular defies the conventional view of a material considered thin and translucent, into something of robust yet delicate beauty (Fig 2).

Frances Lambe's work is highly inspired by themes such as botany, marine life and astronomy. A graduate of NCAD, Dublin she works in stoneware, porcelain or terracotta. Her most recent work embodies a tension between the interior and exterior of the ceramic form, in which holes punctuate the surface, creating a membrane-like appearance to her

sculptural output. The apparent accuracy and attention to detail in the number and locations of these punctuations of the surface are remarkable to the onlooker in their simplicity, but which on closer inspection belies a complicated and highly intellectual premise; that of the tension between the inner and outer components of the properties of ceramic itself. The sphere, oval and undulating shapes are characteristic of Lambe's sculptural form (Fig 3).

The two artists representing Ireland in the emerging artists' category are Karen Morgan and David Withers.

Karen Morgan makes contemporary ceramic works from the collaborative studio and gallery 'Earthworks', based in Thomastown, Co Kilkenny. All of her work is hand-thrown in porcelain and altered while still in its wet state resulting in the distinctive folding that has become a trademark of her work to date (Fig 1). Her intention in making ceramic objects is to create works that are functional in nature, but that still retain a sense of being a sculptural object. Her glazes in shades of light greens and aqua blues are applied to the inside of each piece in a meticulous manner. These glazes combine a marked gloss interior with a matte-textured exterior, resulting in a coherent whole to the form. She is one of several young Irish ceramic artists (like Sara Flynn, Robert Lee, Mandy Parslow) that are attracted to the vessel as a starting point in their artistic practice.

David Withers is a ceramics sculptor who recently graduated in Fine and Applied Art from the University of Ulster, Belfast. Withers focuses mostly on the animal form and tries to capture a sense of movement in

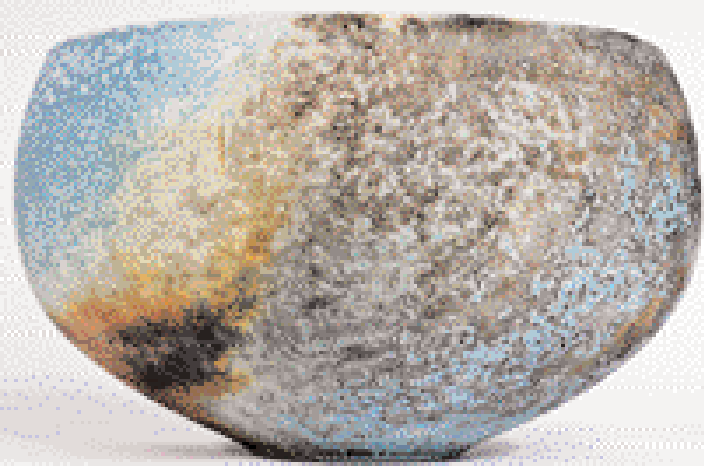
his work. He injects this life and energy into the work by creating sculptures of animals in some of their more dramatic and stressed positions. Withers' fragile-looking work is informed by research on animal skeletons, which is evident in his making style (Fig 4). Leaving areas unfinished and holes on the works' surface is a deliberate attempt to encourage the viewer to interact with his work, whereby the onlooker views the entire form of these creatures intellectually. His

making process involves a hand-built stoneware body, sometimes using a manganese wash that is subsequently covered with a porcelain slip glaze.

All four artists chosen to represent Ireland at this European-wide biennale are accomplished masters in the manipulation of and aesthetic possibilities of ceramic art. Interestingly, the inclusion of two vessel-based exponents (Doherty and Morgan), alongside two sculptors of the medium (Lambe and Withers), gives a coherent grouping to this Irish contribution. Furthermore, Doherty and Lambe are represented in the contemporary collection of the National Museum and the emerging talents of Morgan and Withers in the 'Under 35 Years of Age' category implies that their artistic practices have already reached an internationally high standard with a promise of more to follow. ■

The established artists and emerging artists exhibitions at Bornholm Art Museum (Bornholms Kunstmuseum) and Bornholm Ceramics and Glass School (Gronbechs Gard) 11 September – 7 November 2010.

Audrey Whitty is the Irish Commissioner for European Ceramic Context 2010.



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1 KAREN MORGAN
FOLDING JUGS
porcelain 17x15cm

2 JACK DOHERTY
BLUE AND GREY
BOWL soda glazed
porcelain 20x32cm
Photo © Rebecca
Peters

3 FRANCES LAMBE
SEA BEAN III
33x23x17cm
Photo ©Gerry Morgan

4 DAVID WITHERS
SPRINTING WHIPPET
hand-built ceramic
sculpture 45x20x50cm

