



AUDREY WHITTY assesses the work of six Irish makers taking part in the European Ceramic Context exhibition in Bornholm, Denmark, this autumn

Form, **Function**, and

During September and October a major European ceramics event will be held on the Danish island of Bornholm. For this exhibition, entitled 'European Ceramic Context 2006', all twenty-five EU states along with Iceland, Norway and Switzerland nominated six artists to represent each nation across three exhibition categories: established artists; artists under thirty years of age; and industrial products. National commissioners were appointed in August last year for each country, which includes the present writer. In order to make the selection as fair and accurate as possible, three noted educators were asked to assist. They were Neil Read, Head of the Ceramics, Glass & Metals Department at the National College of Art & Design and Chair of Irish Contemporary Ceramics (ICC); Henry Pim, Lecturer in Ceramics at NCAD and Secretary of ICC; and Gus Mabelson, Head of the Pottery Skills course in the

Crafts Council. A shortlist was compiled of eleven ceramic artists for the established category and further selection was made through a vote. In terms of the 'young' category, letters were sent to most colleges in the Republic of Ireland (NCAD, Crawford College of Art & Design, Limerick College of Art & Design and GMIT), which run a ceramics undergraduate course, and selection was again made by process of a vote. In relation to the category of industrial products, the selectors were made aware of the lack of a recent Irish tradition in this area. By contrast this category has historically held a strong position in Northern European practice. In light of this, there were fewer individuals to choose from in this category, however the two selected illustrate prototypes easily applicable to mass-production. Selection across all three categories was based on Irish artists living in Ireland or abroad, and any artist living in or having been educated in

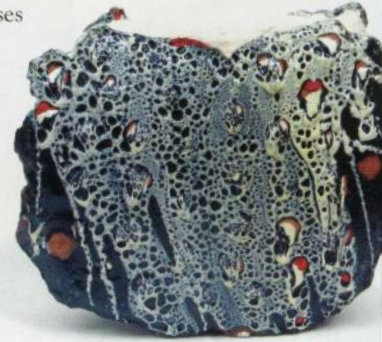
of expression in the sculptures of Rosemary Andrews in Amsterdam. Between 1974 and 1982 McLoughlin shared a studio in Dublin with Anthony O'Brien and Jim Galligan, when she discovered the work of Sonja Landweer which she found inspiring. In 1981 McLoughlin moved to Kyoto in Japan where the best in her field were based, in order to commit herself fully to her work.

The sculpture *Sun At Noon* by Isamu Noguchi and those of Yasuo Hayashi were significant formative influences for McLoughlin. Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988) transcended clay use for functional objects, seeking rather to create abstract sculpture, this being an important premise in McLoughlin's own work (Fig 3). McLoughlin encompasses both European and Asian ceramic references in her work, and it is perhaps in this respect that she is of distinct importance for the tradition of the subject in Ireland. Her work entitled *We Are Too* was acquired by the National Museum of Ireland from the 2005 RHA Annual Exhibition.

Cormac Boydell is a leading ceramic artist in Ireland, working almost exclusively with Irish clays and developing all glazes and colours from basic earth minerals (Fig 2).

Working from his studio in Allihies on the Beara Peninsula, he is represented in major public collections such as the National Museum of Ireland, the Ulster Museum and the National Self-Portrait Collection, Limerick. Apart from the overt influence of prehistoric tribal art in Boydell's work, other sources have been drawn from 1950s New York abstract art, the Spanish artist Antoni Tàpies - of the Tachiste movement (from the French word 'tache', meaning stain or blot) and the German conceptual artist Joseph Beuys. Perhaps the latter two artists can be seen as having encouraged Boydell to explore different media, including glass, minerals, drawing and printing, so as to broaden his studio work. Boydell's comment that 'What is important to me is a close relationship with materials, the enjoyment of art as a medium of communication, and a sense that art has a spiritual centre' provides a key to understanding the nature of his wonderfully varied output.

Isobel Egan and Robert Lee will be included in the category for artists under thirty years of age. Egan is a 2005 MA graduate in ceramics from NCAD. She received the Taylor Award from the RDS in 1999 and was recently short-listed for the 2006 Golden Fleece Award, which recognises excellence in both the fine

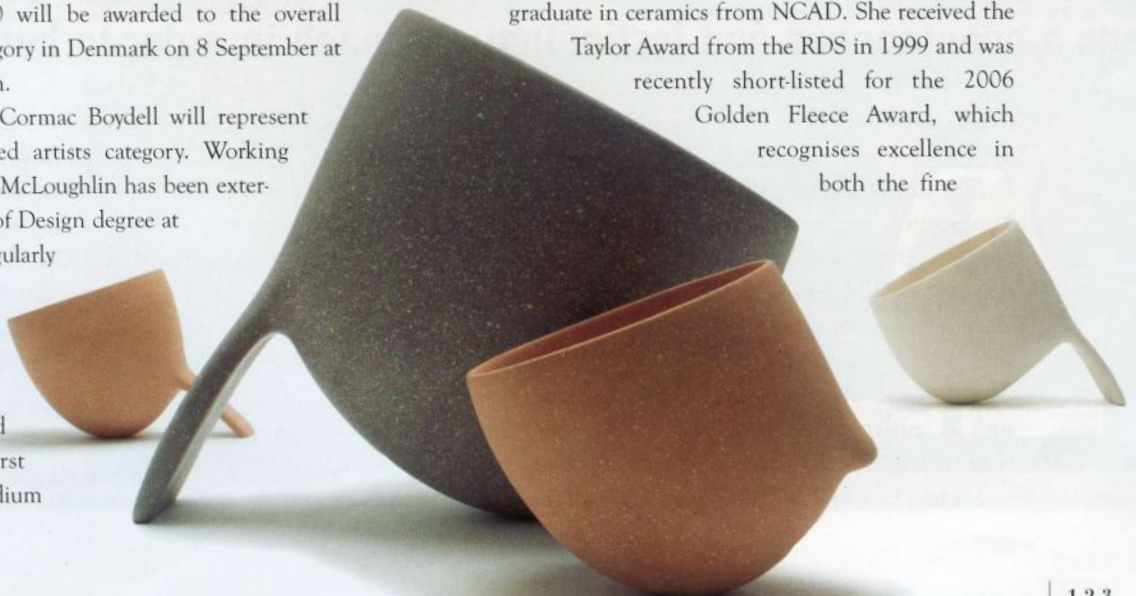


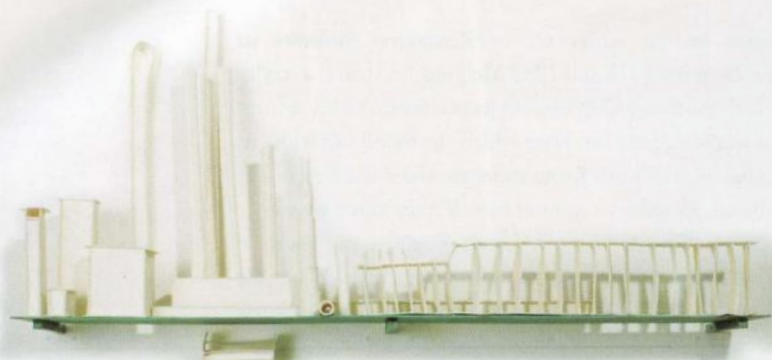
1 Ulrika Holmquist
2 Cormac Boydell
3 Deirdre McLoughlin

Decoration

Ireland. A prize of €10,000 will be awarded to the overall European winner of each category in Denmark on 8 September at the Art Museum of Bornholm.

Deirdre McLoughlin and Cormac Boydell will represent Ireland within the established artists category. Working from Amsterdam since 1988, McLoughlin has been external assessor for the Bachelor of Design degree at the NCAD (1994-97) and regularly visits other colleges here in Ireland. McLoughlin is a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin where she read Philosophy, History and English Literature. She first became aware of clay as a medium





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4 Isobel Egan

5 Robert Lee

6 Michael Lacy

and applied arts. Egan will be displaying a work entitled *Intimate Spaces* from her MA show. Using a combination of paper-thin porcelain structures and retrained copper shelving, Egan's thinking in this work focuses on fragility and memory (Fig 4).

Inspired by the writings of Phyllis Richardson on architecture, Peter Gray on psychology and Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, Egan brings a firm academic basis to her art, which is to be encouraged in Irish applied art postgraduates. For example, in terms of the concept of personal space, Egan has written: 'The box structures are like micro works of architecture. They represent environments for the nurturing of imagination. The walls in these pieces, although somewhat malleable, represent the essential boundaries that define personal integrity.'

Robert Lee is an MA graduate from the Crawford College of Art & Design whose thesis focused on medieval Japanese ceramics. Working in porcelain (Fig 5), Lee participated in the '40 Shades of Green' exhibition organised by the Crafts Council to



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Dun Laoghaire IADT. In recent years he has been selected to display his production of contemporary casual coffee ware and tabletop designs in cast semi-porcelain at several CCoI exhibitions. In 2004 he was the recipient of the Innovation Award at the RDS. The pieces Lacy is submitting for Bornholm are called 'Noodle/Rice Bowl Clusters', which consist of six identical hemispherical bowls (Fig 6).

Using a system of props and recesses, every bowl fits securely onto and into every other bowl to form a single, free-standing unit. The structural element of each bowl relates directly to the function of the piece, thus eliminating the need for decoration and demonstrating a coherent, sculptural quality. Each piece is finished in a high gloss transparent porcelain glaze.

Ulrika Holmquist (industrial products category) is currently undertaking an MA degree at NCAD where she also graduated with a Bachelor of Design in Craft Design Ceramics. In 1999 she participated in a coffee cup design competition, the resulting entry later being acquired by the National Museum. Although Holmquist was raised in Sweden she has chosen to work and study in Ireland. Her preferred technique is slip-casting. Surface decoration consists for the most part of strong bold coloured glazes, lus-



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mark Cork's nomination as European Capital of Culture 2005. Lee's work is represented in the collections of Farmleigh and the Department of Foreign Affairs, and later this year the National Museum will acquire work by him under the NMI/CCoI joint purchase scheme. Explaining the main criteria behind his production Lee says: 'the development of clay bodies, texture, colour and responsiveness take precedence over the conventional emphasis on techniques of forming that respect the clay's properties rather than coercing them into unsuitable shapes. The mark of the maker, such an important concept in 20th-century craft, needs a spontaneous and instinctual approach in order to become apparent.'

Michael Lacy (industrial products category) is a graduate of the

tres and patterns (Fig 1). Industrial architecture greatly influences her work, such as chimneys, silos, water towers and gas bells.

Happily the current state of Irish ceramics is healthy and all encompassing. Perhaps no better exemplifiers being the forthcoming international Féile Clai Festival and the current touring exhibition of Irish Contemporary Ceramics. Indeed when future researchers come to look upon this period in Irish ceramics the term renaissance may be written. ■

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'European Ceramic Context 2006' 8 September–22 October. www.ceramic2006.com All images ©The Artists