



Oliver Sears Gallery, foreground 'Junction' Vessel series, Sara Flynn

# DUBH / DIALOGUES IN BLACK

## FRANCES MCDONALD

'Himalaya' Cormac Boydell

In *dubh / dialogues in black*, recently seen at Oliver Sears Gallery in Dublin, curator Brian Kennedy employed black as both a physical and emotional starting point for a group of Irish and American studio makers and artists. This was a multi-disciplinary show which included furniture, glass, metal, textiles, jewellery and drawing however it must be said that those working in ceramics were responsible for some of the most vibrant and interesting responses to the brief.

In his introductory comments, included in the exhibition catalogue, Kennedy suggests that

‘by stripping back to one colour, dubh, we can focus on the common language shared by this group as well as individual approaches taken in approaching a single element’.

In both Cormac Boydell and Jury Smith’s work, their individual approach to process both directs and informs, however the resulting forms tell very different stories. Philadelphia based Jury Smith allows process to determine outcome. Her large sculptural works, in earthenware clay, are bisque fired, placed into a large pool of water and the resulting waterline of the floating object is then recorded onto the surface. The final forms command a great presence and are at the same time strong and silent.





Jury Smith

black has brought about a different outcome and created a wonderful result - a visually denser material and the experience of concentrating on form.

The 'Junction' vessel series, which Sara Flynn has shown in the exhibition, was developed as a direct response to work that has gone before. As in her previous work, the walls of the pieces are thrown and the bases slab built. In responding to this brief, a unique black glaze has been used. Strong and deep, it covers the form but has been taken back at the rim and, as a result, we are given these wonderful outlines with junctions where the viewer is invited to stop, pause and even change direction.

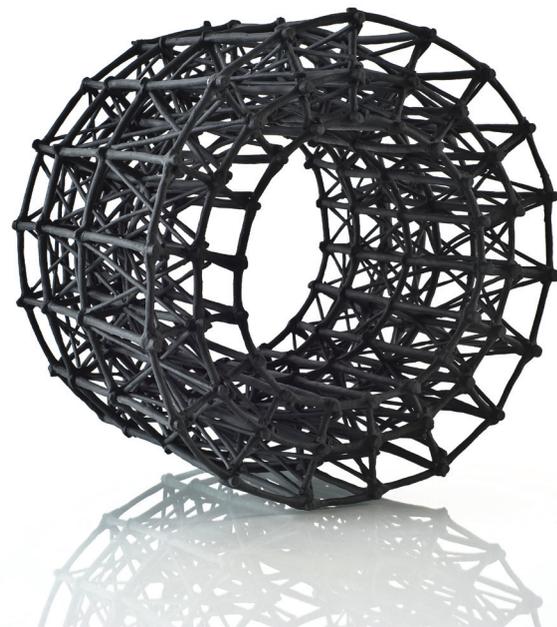
Delicate pin holing, often laid out in beautiful patterns have been a distinctive feature of Frances Lambe's more recent work and this can again be seen in some of the sculptural ceramic forms featured in *dubh / dialogues in black*. However the appropriately named 'Maelstrom' must stand out as one of the highlights of

'Maelstrom' Frances Lambe



On the other hand Cormac Boydell's relationship with process is much more immediate and focuses on the direct contact between hands and clay. In this case the process of making is emphasised while the connection with the material is evident in the texture of the finished piece. Boydell has a deep understanding of glazes; his work over the years has incorporated many bright and brilliant colours and this is again evident in some of the contrasting glazes used here. However in each exhibited piece, a different black emerges and with this a different response to light and contrasts of reflection and texture.

In contrast Nuala O'Donovan's high-fired unglazed porcelain work has primarily centered on material; it's lightness and translucency informing the character of the work. Certainly colour has, in the past, played its part in small sections of her forms - in suggesting change or separation or in creating a focal point, to bring the eye to a particular part of the form. For O'Donovan, this particular dialogue has certainly been rewarding. Using



'Light Tunnel' Nuala O'Donovan

the exhibition. Again the form is the prime focus but here the surface flows and we are drawn into a mystical black whirlpool. Lambe uses clay with no added glazes so there is a softness in this black and reminisces of sea and sand abound.

In responding to the brief presented by Brian Kennedy, all these makers spoke of a journey paved with challenges; both technical and creative, of moving out of their comfort zones and of new ways of seeing; material, form and colour. This is precisely what STUDIO practice wishes to achieve - the creation of an environment where Ireland's most creative minds are challenged to realise something truly great. In *dubh / dialogues in black* this challenge has certainly proved worthwhile.

*dubh / dialogues in black* was project managed by Frances McDonald who is currently pursuing a Masters in Design History and Material Culture at NCAD. [www.studiopractice.ie](http://www.studiopractice.ie)

Photography: Oliver Sears Gallery - Sharppix, Cormac Boydell - Trevor Hart, Jury Smith - artist, Nuala O'Donovan - Stefan Syrowatka, Frances Lambe - Gerry Morgan