

## Deirdre McLoughlin (1949–)

A sculptor working in clay, Deirdre McLoughlin's training took the path of apprenticeship and immersion in the world of clay, sculpture and form. Born in Dublin, she studied philosophy, history and English at Trinity College from 1968 to 1972, before setting off for Amsterdam and the studio of Rosemary Andrews. On her return to Ireland, she worked in Dublin with Anthony O'Brien from 1974 to 1982, and had Sonja Landweer as a mentor.

As Deirdre McLoughlin's work is sculptural and often made of unglazed white or terracotta clay forms, it falls outside our comfortable categories. It was not surprising, therefore, that she would gravitate towards Japan where clay has long taken its place as a communicative medium. The work of the sculptor Isamu Noguchi, as well as the Sodeisha Group's exploration of clay as a contemporary sculptural medium, are cited as prompting her particular attraction to Japan, where she lived from 1982 to 1985. A further year in China was followed by her return to Ireland and a studio in Mountjoy Square, before she moved to Amsterdam in 1988, where she still lives and works.

McLoughlin's work is abstract and often of a size designed to be picked up in two hands. In scale, form and content, the work seems body-related or biomorphic. An individual piece may conjure up lips, arms, hips or legs, but each form also carries the presence and gesture of a whole body, sometimes interacting bodies. What she articulates is the experience of being in or with a body, that sense of weight, lightness, softness and firmness. Unlike Moore and Hepworth, whose work also considers the body and explores its visual relationships with organic form, Deirdre McLoughlin explores more specifically this experiential dimension.

This self-portrait conveys both the alertness of a head study and the presence and weight of an entire skirted figure. Unlike some of her work this is clearly a vessel form, with an interior darkness slipping in and out beneath the skirts. The ring cut into the clay creates separate parts in a single, simple piece, and reads, when seen as a head, as a nose or beak, with an air of awareness, direction and even anxiety. But when the piece comes into focus as a whole body, the ring denotes an arm raised effortlessly on this gliding dancing figure.

— HOK

*Self-Portrait*, 1991  
high-fired ceramic, 36 x 20 x 20 cm, signed: DML 91

