

A sculptor of top rank

DEIRDRE McLoughlin, whose outstanding exhibition can currently be seen at Green on Red, works in what has been, in Ireland, a problematic area: ceramic sculpture. The tendency has been, here, and indeed in the West in general, to draw a dividing line between the two. You are a sculptor or you are a ceramicist. An artist or a craftsperson.

It is not quite so in Japan, so it was logical that McLoughlin should find her way there, which she did, for three years, from 1982. "No-one knew what I was on about here, and that wears you down." She was born in Dublin in 1949, studied for an arts degree at Trinity and went on to work as a ceramicist in Amsterdam and back in Dublin.

From the early 1960s the Sodeisha group of ceramicists in Kyoto had been exploring the potential of ceramic as a sculptor's medium, but there was something else that drew McLoughlin to Japan. She had seen a photograph of a remarkable sculpture by American-Japanese artist Isami Noguchi, 'The Sun at Noon', a large, impossibly perfect marble ring: "It represented a level of sheer commitment that I aspired to, and I thought I could osmose some of this if I went to Japan." It was, she says now, "a deep learning experience." She learned discipline, attention to detail, the importance of finishing a piece as "beautifully as you possibly could." Back again in Dublin she was based in Mountjoy Square until 1988, when she moved to Amsterdam, where she now lives and works in a studio on the top floor of her house.

If you can imagine something along the lines of an organic geometry enacted in three dimensions you'll have some idea of the effect of her work. It has

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■ **Deirdre McLoughlin**
Green on Red Gallery

tremendous elegance and simplicity of form. The forms have, she says, always been very clear. If things get too complicated she reminds herself that she should be stripping them back to essentials. She studied dance in the 1970s — "That's really how I learned about form. You learn through your own body. In dance, I think that the best dancers have gone through deep training. They then take the training into new forms, rather than just saying, well, training is old-fashioned, I want to express my soul." She makes this point because: "People have told me that my work is 'well-crafted' and that therefore it cannot be art now at the end of the 20th century, and maybe that's so. But I still feel that in the society out of which you come most people are workers, they have skills. It doesn't matter if they don't understand what I make but I feel it is a more honourable thing if they can come and see that it is worked well."

Several of the pieces in her current show are part of a long series 'Resist Arrest'. "What they have in common is the idea of a gap. Each is one form, split and separated." Many pieces are so spare and restrained that they seem distantly related to the primary forms of minimalism, but minimalist scale and brutalism are altogether absent from the work. This exhibition has already been seen at the Ulster Museum. Not only is it beautiful piece for piece, but the installation as a whole in the Green on Red is quite outstanding and makes a visit to Fitzwilliam Square essential.

Aidan Dunne