



## DEIRDRE MCLOUGHLIN

### BACKGROUND

I had completed my studies in Philosophy and History when someone threw me a lump of clay and said, "make something", and I did. So I have been doing so since. Later I was to discover that I have ancestors who were good with their hands – the females were lace makers and the men cut and engraved tombstones. I sometimes imagine them falling on their faces laughing that they were able to relieve themselves of two mediums in the one descendent. Certain techniques of working with clay can be as demanding as lace making and I finish my sculptures as if they were stone – grinding and polishing.

I began making 3D squiggles but soon moved to coiling, which is till my working method. I coil to discover, to make, to capture, to open a line, a form, a volume. In return the clay gives me the sense that I am intensely alive as no other activity has given me in depth or consistency – a fair deal and my good life adventure.

My main study happened in Kyoto (Sodeisha Group, Kiyomizu –yaki, Shigaraki-yaki) for some years then into China (Jindejezhin, Xian, Dunhuang) for some months. I am always open to learning but in truth my own work was and is my best teacher.

### WESTERWALDPREIS 2004

Before my stay on Oahu, Hawaii in 2006 I was working with the idea of gathering space into form – shaping space. From 1999

I had begun to move from the dynamic of building the form into empty space to the idea of gathering the space into the form. As I worked I concentrated on the shape inside the form and the sculpture as it appeared on the outside was the outcome of the inner form.

This way of seeing led me to make open and open-ended sculptures. These sculptures received good attention in the field of ceramics after two from the 'I am too' series won a Westerwaldpreis in Ceramics of Europe 2004.

Directly after the prize and with some works from the series on the cover of *Neue Keramik*, I received an invitation from the Garth Clark Gallery in New York to participate in an exhibition titled "Organic Abstraction: A Homage to Ruth Duckworth". The exhibition was designed to honour Duckworth in her 85th year. It included sculptures of Isamu Noguchi. A marble of his the 'Sun at Noon' was one of the driving forces that had sent me to Kyoto. I went to New York for the event. There was a major Duckworth retrospective at the Museum of Arts and Design at the same time. A good number of the sculptures on exhibition were made in the previous 25 years. She moved around the crowds quiet in herself and I was awestruck and to my regret was not able to approach her. Duckworth who has now passed on was a fabulous artist with a monstrous vocabulary of form and technique.

I also showed in the 4th World Ceramic Biennale in Korea from where I got a certificate, and a letter to say there had been more than six million visitors to the exhibitions. Six million visitors in two months is about the number the Tate Modern gets in a year. They also wrote that they would be honored if I donated my sculpture to their international collection of modern ceramics. I just cannot donate. I do not donate. This particular work had cost me more than a thousand Euros in studio rent in the time it took to make, transport costs were 500 Euros and on top of that photography costs.... When I was invited to show in New York I found to my surprise I had to pay for the work to be returned

### ILLUSTRATIONS -

opposite page - "Short Story" - L 10 cm - bronze 1/15

top - "White Life V" - H 25 cm - ceramic unica

right - "White Life VII" - H 31 cm - ceramic



## ILLUSTRATIONS -

opposite page - "I am too" - five from the series - ceramic

below l.to.r. - "Red Life I" - L 30 cm - ceramic unica  
- "Red Life III" - L 35 cm - ceramic unica

as well as having paid for the delivery. "New York will look good on your CV," a pal said - but - who reads CVs. I was deeply relieved after explaining the situation to the Icheon World Ceramic Center that they understood and sent me a cheque for the value of the sculpture. An artist can be driven stress mad by the economics of working as one. I have seen it happen.

Frank Steyaert invited me to show with Marieke Pauwels and Beatrijs Van Rheeden in his gallery M useum in Ghent which was a real coincidence as they got the last Westerwald sculpture prizes in 2009. I tell you these events not with the intention to boast but to show what can happen when you win a prize.

**OAHU, HAWAII 2006**

The best invite I had and the one that was to have a real influence on my subsequent work was from Suzanne Wolfe of the University of Hawaii at Manoa to participate in East - West Ceramics Collaboration IV 2006. Sixteen artists from around the world along with the students and staff of the ceramics department worked around the clock for five weeks in a tropical heat to produce a show.

My experience of the Hawaiian Islands brought a sea change

in my consciousness. I found an overwhelming sense of the life in nature, in the sea and deep in the earth. A boxfish passed my nose and a turtle beneath me while swimming. An army of gardeners worked day in and out to keep the vegetation at bay on the college campus and still seedpods burst and seeded. Blossoms blossoming - yet I have some images of places that looked like a wet day in Ireland and others of lunar landscapes created by crystallized lava. On Big Island the Volcano Kilauea is actively steaming and belching lava. Here is the beginning of life and in an instant life can come to an end. A place of monstrous energy - I was smashed by it. Facing this fierceness the culture of the islanders has a gentle and powerful softness, hula (dance), mele (song), 'oli (chant). Black ink tattoos in squares, parallel lines and triangles decorate many of the people - strict, disciplined, silent geometry. Some of the islanders are giants - their bodyweight seems as ballast in possible catastrophe.

**"LIFE" SERIES**

After Hawaii I began to lose my feel for voids and gathering empty space but it took nearly a year before I found myself making what I was to call 'Short Story'. I knew it came from the islands and I now see why. There is menace in the promise of abundance. 'Short Story' was compelling and I followed her and she led me to a new series of works which I called the 'Life' series, as that is what the sculptures seemed to be.

Although the genesis of the series was in Hawaii - the sculptures are not about the islands - though they would not have happened without that experience. Each sculpture in the series is about itself, how a line moves, how one volume pushes into another - or away, how the form balances or stands, the skin in light and darkness, the presence of the whole. Each work has its



own story, resonating other stories. The sculptures in the previous series where I had been shaping space, were symmetrical, as if empty space itself were symmetrical I thought after. They were meditative in their construction and intensely concentrated. The sculptures in the 'Life' series are constructed altogether differently. I begin with a simple ovoid shape then break it and build again from there. I continue building and breaking till I cannot build or break any further - so the sculpture is finished. The construction movement is frenetic and quiet by turn - fast and slow. The action lasts from days into weeks. I know a work has come to an end when an inner logic reveals itself. The work in an instance feels right. I sense something true. It does happen sometimes that I cannot go any further yet the work has no inner logic - then it is simply not right - not true and is over.

The "Life" series are fired to 1180 - 1200 centigrade. On some I have given pink/grey engobe skins - the others are polished with diamond polishing pads. I have inserted an opal, ruby or turquoise into five of the works. There are three bronzes in the series cast from the original ceramic sculptures. The bronzes are in edition and numbered - each of the ceramic sculptures are unique.

*Deirdre McLoughlin's work has a clear organic geometry and is variously termed biomorphic, abstract, abstract expressionist. Her ceramics most easily sit in the field of sculpture. RECENT WORK 1993 in the Ulster Museum, Belfast that travelled on to the Limerick City Gallery of Art and the Green on Red Gallery in Dublin established her position in the Irish art field. She was one of the artists exhibited in the Irish Millennium Exhibition Artists' Century, in the Royal Hibernian Academy that spanned 100 years. The winning of a Westerwaldpreis in 2004 brought her work international attention in the field of ceramics. She is a full time working artist and has had studios in Kyoto and Dublin; she now works on Prinseneiland in Amsterdam. In Ireland she is represented by the Peppercanister Fine Art Gallery, and in the Netherlands by 15a Gallery and Sculpture Park, Lochem.*

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