



*Untitled Forms*

# SINÉAD GLYNN

## ROGER BENNETT

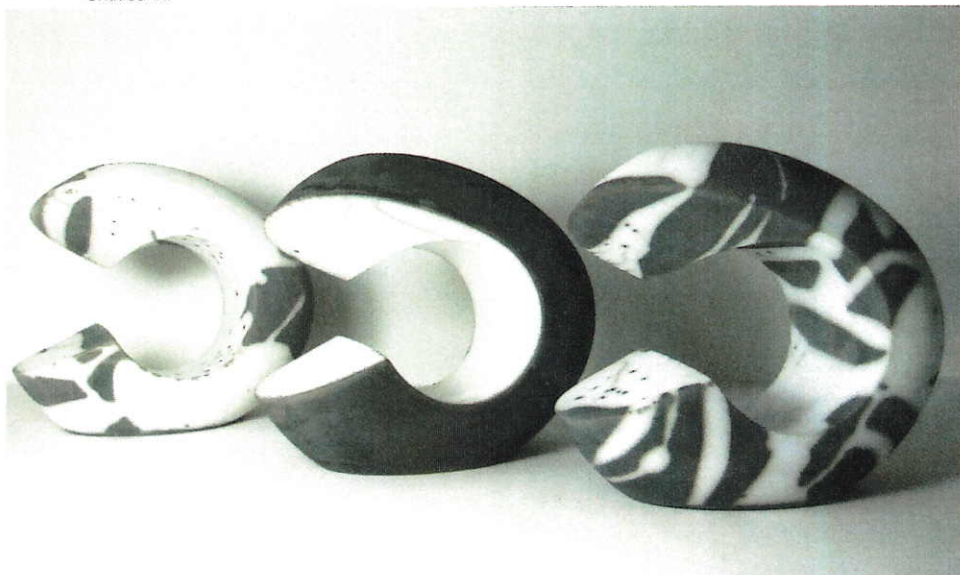
Sinéad Glynn's career in clay started quite late; before that, she did a lot of living, and those life experiences have inspired and fed her work. She has quickly established herself as an adventurous ceramic artist, with a confident and distinctive voice.

Glynn had an early introduction to clay in a workshop taken as a break from the stresses of the Intermediate Certificate. The following summer she got her hands dirty again on a two-week pottery course at the Grennan Mill Craft School in Thomastown. Returning after finishing school in 1991, for the one-year craft course; Glynn enjoyed the various crafts, especially weaving, but recalls 'I kept coming back to ceramics'.

For a couple of years she worked in computer companies, repairing motherboards: careful precise work, trouble-shooting and fine soldering. Then came the adventures! Travelling for ten years throughout – India, Thailand and Southeast Asia, Australia, South America. In between trips Glynn returned to Ireland to work and save, or to Leiden in the Netherlands for seasonal employment in flower and plant distribution. While backpacking she worked at what was available, as a waitress, a barista and in a whiskey distillery. Her eyes were opened to different cultures and ecosystems. Along the way she

saw a lot of interesting pottery – particularly strong memories are of stumbling across a ceramics village in India, and of being fascinated by how passengers on Indian trains threw their emptied chai-cups out of the window onto the tracks, the shards adding to the track bed aggregate.

*Untitled VII*



2003 was a fork in the road, an accident in Sydney, involving her then boyfriend, made her stop and take stock. She helped him to recover, then decided to return home and resume her education. To get into a third level college, she enrolled on the two-year course in Larkin Community College, studying print-making, woodturning, metalwork, enameling and ceramics, in which she gained an invaluable introduction to materials and techniques. From there to the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), where as a mature



student she was very focused and passionate. There were new discoveries and challenges, in particular the emphasis on conceptual thinking in the ceramics department; she learned that 'you need to have very good techniques in order to get your concept across'.

Glynn has three siblings, one of whom is an identical twin sister, Siobhán. At school their teachers could only tell them apart by the position of the freckles on their faces, so of course the girls tricked them with brown markers. This led Glynn to become fascinated

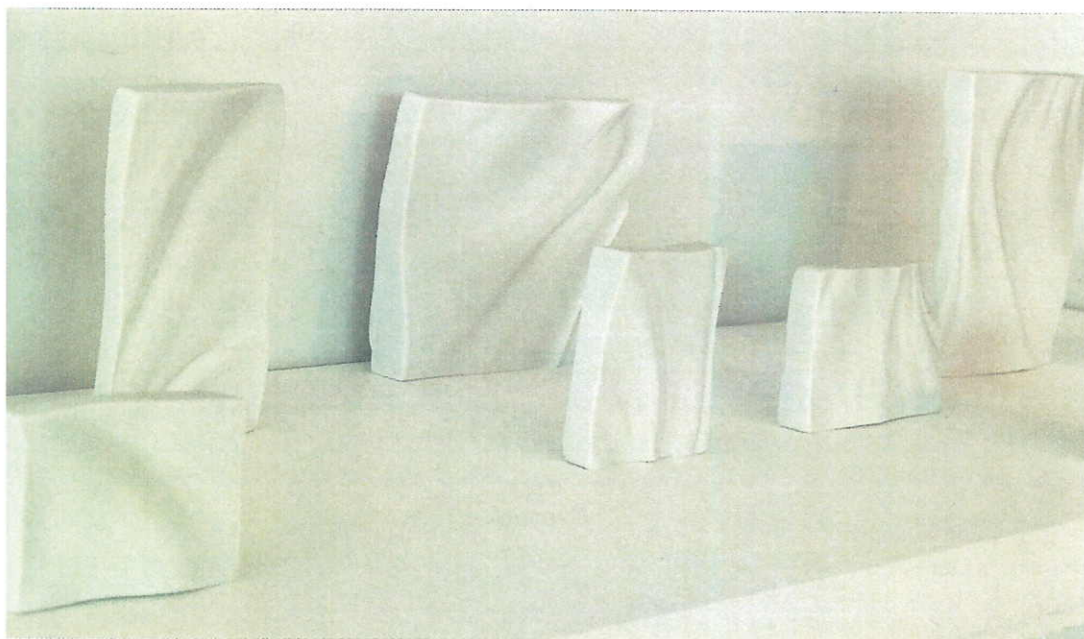
by the question of identity – 'I am a multiple' – and to develop what she calls her 'dictionary of multiples'. In her years of travelling, she noted the physical and cultural similarities between people within races and communities, which begged the question 'So, what makes us unique?'

In 3rd year at NCAD Glynn fell in love with two techniques which were to become central to her work, and through which she could express this preoccupation with identity. With slip-casting: its requirements of precision and problem-solving immediately appealed, as these were abilities which she had honed years before in the computer factory work. And secondly with the process of raku firing, which nudged her towards non-functional, sculptural work. Slipcasting allows her to make multiples, but each piece is unique because of how it has been affected by the firing process. As Glynn puts it, 'My work is about the co-existence of the unique with the similar'.

For her degree show, Glynn made a series of slip-cast naked raku pieces, *Untitled*. They were deliberately non-representational: Glynn wanted to allow people their own perceptions and interpretations. They might evoke stones, or magnets, or abstract anthropomorphic forms ... They formed a group, a family, in which each piece had been given its separate identity by the post-firing reduction, as the smoke randomly marked the surface exposed by the cracking and peeling of the glaze-over-slip layers. The limitless variety of the black on white patterning was visually very appealing. Glynn enjoys playing with expectations: people weren't always sure what medium they were made of; they were enticed too by the obvious tactile quality of their sexy curved surfaces, and when they picked them up, they were surprised by their lightness, not realising that the pieces were hollow.



*Holding*



*Traces of Movement*

After graduating in 2009 – Bachelor of Design (Hons) in Craft Design – Glynn set up her studio in Kildare in her parents' unused garage, with the help of a Design and Crafts Council of Ireland *Future Makers Studio Assistance Grant*. She continued to make pieces in the same style as in the degree show, but with new variations. In *Untitled VII*, for example, they are on their sides, like open mouths. For the *Holding* series, Glynn wanted to make smaller pieces. Usually her models were made in plaster, but for these she formed the models by hand from clay, creating a number of individual shapes. These gorgeously whimsical pieces were exhibited as a set of either five or nine.

Glynn used Bismin casting clay for her degree show, but has changed to a white earthenware casting slip. To this she adds 10-15% of grog to open the clay body and so reduce the risk of thermal shock: bisque fires in an electric kiln to 1040° and naked raku fires with gas to 950-1020°, depending on the glaze.

2011 was a momentous year. Glynn was one of the thirteen ceramic artists from Ireland selected for a month-long residency at the FuLe International Ceramic Art Museum at a ceramics factory in Fuping, China (see <http://irishceramicartchina.blogspot.ie>). Glynn was 'in ceramics heaven', but the pressures were huge: to make new work in a short time using unfamiliar materials and equipment in a strange environment, and to prove herself in a group of more experienced makers. She felt herself hit by 'a blast to the senses' – the vivid colours of clothes, food, trinkets, umbrellas; the attention to detail in clothes, where 'even the buttonholes are remarkable'. Groups of women dancing in public spaces enthralled her. Organised but casual, they looked from a distance as if they were in military formation, but up close their movements were gentle and graceful, like synchronised swimmers. The factory environment provided a prosaic set of stimuli; here she was surrounded by bricks from the production line, on the walkways and as stepping-stones over the puddles of rain.

In response to these experiences, Glynn made two complementary series of radically new works. *Traces of Movement* are small brick-like forms, freestanding,





*Dancing Forms*

partially darkened piece as it was, and used this reduction technique to give to the other pieces a lovely petrol-and-water finish.

In the closing exhibition, Glynn took great care with how the two groups were displayed. The flowing *Dancing Forms* were placed on a large plinth in a grid-like formation, with the partially darkened one in the role of leader; as viewers walked around them, they got a sense of the dancers' movements. As a contrast and backdrop to this colourful tableau, she lined up the monochrome white *Traces of Movement* on a shelf on the wall, where their static poise suggested a silhouetted skyline or a row of intent spectators.

Back home, there was much to digest. Dancers and colours were still thrumming in her memory. And a particular shape was calling to her, inspired by rice jars, which she had seen in museums and in the factory. She started looking at different colouring techniques, and discovered ferric firings, painting ferric chloride on bisque-fired pieces, then wrapping them in aluminium foil saggars with a variety of combustibles, so that in the firing a myriad of colours are produced. She conducted numerous experiments: with seaweed, poppy-seeds, banana-skins, sugar, to see what colours they would produce; with different firing temperatures; even with different grades of tinfoil.

Glynn's contribution to the follow-up exhibition at Farmleigh in 2012, *Bricks in the Rain*, was the result of this research, *Gatherings*. The title refers both

*Astralis I*



made of porcelain. They refer to her movements as she wire-cut the clay, and as she stepped over bricks in and around the factory. This was her first time to use porcelain, a local material, steeped in Chinese history. She found it very challenging at first, especially because the incessant rain made it difficult to control the drying, but she got on top of it with the help of invaluable advice from Frances Lambe, Sara Flynn and the other experienced porcelain users in the group. Glynn literally left local marks on the surfaces of some of the bricks, impressing them with the soles of her Chinese runners and with embossed tiles from the factory.

In *Dancing Forms*, Glynn responded to the sense of 'movement and restriction' conveyed by the women dancers. She used extruded lengths of red brick clay, then cut and reshaped them, by twisting and carving. A serendipitous discovery in a bisque firing produced an interesting result: one of the pieces was positioned too close to a gas flame, and the area hit by the flame was starved of oxygen, leading to partial reduction, giving it a dark metallic colour. Glynn liked the effect; she left that



*Standing*

to the groups of women assembling to dance together, and to the gathering of the combustible materials. It was a dramatic new departure for Glynn, as she moved from abstract sculpture to vessel, from spare black and white to glorious colour. But the multiple/individual theme, expressed through slipcasting, continued. The display was stunning: a number of tall (15") vessel forms arranged in formation, their sides swelling to gently rounded shoulders, the clean profiles framing random riots of colour – yellows, oranges, purples. The haphazard colours gave each vessel its own





#### Gatherings

personality; so too did the different lids which, were hand-built referencing details of fashion, patterns from shoes, etc. One of the vessels – *Standing* – was a more sober naked raku piece, and she exhibited it nearby on a separate plinth 'to represent myself looking at the dancers'.

Through trial and error she has learned how to influence the colouring by controlling the temperature: she brings it first to 260-280°, holding it there for 6-8 minutes to fix the colours, then fires to 700-900°. Depending on the combustibles used, higher temperatures produce purples, whites and reds, and lower temperatures tend to produce yellows and oranges. The experimenting with ferric firings for *Gatherings* reawakened her interest in astronomy, in how stars were formed, and this inspired further ferric pieces in *Nebulae*, a bigger, rounder vessel, and the hand-sized *Astralis* series in which the mouth has been replaced by a closed indentation. The *Astralis* form appeared again, but in naked raku, in *Thalassic* (of or relating to the sea) as part of her contribution to the exhibition *Shoals and Waves on the Wild Atlantic Way*, in Etain Hickey's gallery in Clonakilty in 2013.

Glynn's work has been recognised with several prestigious awards, including the *Ceramics Ireland Award for Best Innovative Ceramics* at the Hallward Gallery (2009), the Gold Prize in the *International Ceramics Magazine Editors Association (ICMEA) Emerging Makers Competition* (Fuping, China 2010), the *Etain Hickey Award* in the Irish Ceramics Awards (2013), and the *Ceramics Ireland Award* in the RDS National Crafts Competition (2013). She works on her own, but balances this with teaching on various adult education programmes.

#### Nebulae



What next? In her current research, Sinéad Glynn is working at marrying the two strands of her work: she is experimenting with underglaze colour in naked raku, aiming to create colours in that medium as intense as those achieved by ferric firing. And through firings the myriad effects of the flame are a fascinating challenge: she is working towards a themed exhibition 'In their element', in which her pieces will represent fire itself.

'In their element' Sinéad Glynn, Annika Berglund, Lesley Kelly and Freda Rupp, opens November 15th - December 13th Oliver Cornet Gallery, 3 Denmark Street, Dublin 1. (Beside Belvedere College)

For more, see [sg-ceramics.webs.com](http://sg-ceramics.webs.com)

Roger Bennett is a woodturner; he is also co-editor of the online crafts journal *Make Believe* ([makebelieve.ie](http://makebelieve.ie)). See [rogerbennettwoodturner.com](http://rogerbennettwoodturner.com)

Photography: Gerry Morgan - *Untitled Forms*, *Untitled I*. Andrew Standen-Raz - *Traces of Movement*, *Dancing Forms*. Rory Moore - *Gatherings*, *Astralis I*. Sinéad Glynn - *Holding*, *Standing* and *Nebulae*.