

If we were to design neckpieces that conveyed something about us - as Irish - to the world, what would they say? And what would they look like?



(pictured - neckpieces by Rachel McKnight and Sam Hamilton)

A new exhibition at the National Craft Gallery may have some unexpected answers.

21st Century Icons **National Craft Gallery, Kilkenny**

10th June 2011 - 28th July 2011
Opening Event: Friday June 10, 2011

The function of jewellery has always been to convey status. This was particularly true of the torc, whose ostentatious size and weight could communicate the force and power of the wearer. But in contemporary usage, the torc has become an object of kitsch, often geared towards the tourist.

But if we were to design neckpieces now that conveyed something about us - as Irish - to the world, what would they say? And what would they look like? Would they be gold? Recycled? Injection moulded? Would they be images of

power and beauty? Shackles? Or blue collars?

21st Century Icons offers a unique opportunity for 21 of Ireland's most innovative and creative makers to suggest some answers.

Curated by Ann Mulrooney

Angela O'Kelly | Eily O'Connell | Eimear Conyard | Inga Reed | Julie Connellan | Justyna Truchanowska | Lesley Frew | Melissa Curry | Rachel McKnight | Rudolf Heltzel | Sabrina Meyns | Sonja Landweer | Tuula Harrington and Róisín de Buitléar (collaborative piece) | Una Burke | Marika Miklosi Manning | Christina Brosnan | Laura Macnamara | Sam Hamilton | Seliena Coyle | Erika Marks | Emma Bourke

The makers responses have included inspiration from a vast array of influences including the National Museum's Bronze Age gold collection (Inga Reed); sheep's wool from Co. Waterford (Eily O'Connell); the spiritual warrior women of Irish legend (Melissa Curry); Celtic lunulas (Christina Brosnan); the Tudor style ruff (Rachel McKnight); the 21st century neckpiece, the ipod headphones (Sam Hamilton); social networking (Laura McNamara) and tangles of Irish branches and tree roots (Emma Bourke).

This exhibition will open on Friday 10th June, on the occasion of the World Crafts Council delegation's visit to Kilkenny.

The Torc

To the frankness and high-spiritedness of [the Celts'] temperament must be added the traits of childish boastfulness and love of decoration. They wear ornaments of gold, torcs on their necks, and bracelets on their arms and wrists.
—Poseidonius

The exhibition began by asking makers to revisit the past, in the form of the torc, an instantly recognisable icon of Celtic identity. The bronze and golden neckwear of the Celts is understood to have had a ritual significance, often being buried with the dead as their currency for the next life, to have functioned as a signifier of Royalty, and to have denoted the wearer as a Celt.

The Makers

The makers include established figures such as Rudolf Heltzel and Sonja Landweer, who came to Ireland in the 1950's as part of the visionary Kilkenny Design Workshops, and who have both played significant roles in the development of Irish studio craft practice.

Contemporary leather maker Una Burke has created work for Lady Gaga, Rihanna and Daphne Guinness among others, shown collections at Milan Fashion Week, and worked with Burberry and Philip Treacy.

The gamut of talent stretches from confident sculptural innovators such as Angela O’Kelly and Rachel McKnight to the more ordered precision of Inga Reed and Eimear Conyard. It also spans those who make a living as contemporary designers and makers – Melissa Curry and Tuula Harrington (in collaboration with glass artist Róisín de Buitleár).

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NOTES FOR EDITORS:

1. The National Craft Gallery

The Crafts Council of Ireland’s flagship exhibition space is housed in the beautifully restored 18th Century stables of Kilkenny Castle. Exhibitions Manager and Curator Ann Mulrooney oversees a programme of groundbreaking national and international contemporary craft and develops exhibitions that tour museums and galleries worldwide.

www.nationalcraftgallery.ie

2. Year of Craft 2011

The Crafts Council of Ireland and Craft Northern Ireland have designated 2011 as Year of Craft. The year marks the 40th anniversary of the Crafts Council of Ireland. Year of Craft 2011 will be celebrated through a diverse range of dynamic events and programmes to showcase the very best of craft made on the island of Ireland. A highlight of the year will be the hosting of the Annual General Assembly of the World Crafts Council - Europe in June 2011. This 3-day event will attract representatives of national craft bodies from all over Europe adding an international dimension to Year of Craft 2011.

www.craftinireland.com