

Press Release

MODERN LANGUAGES

An Exhibition at the National Craft Gallery, Kilkenny

memories triggered by aran knits, woven blankets, turf creels and currachs.

21st October 2011 – January 2012

Opening Event: Friday October 21, 2011



Laura Mays *Rocking Stefan*, 2010
Two Amalgamated IKEA Chairs



Deirdre Nelson *Surplus* 2011
Wool

www.nationalcraftgallery.ie

Modern Languages offers the contemporary perspectives of five international artists and designers on the familiar traditions of Irish craft

Nao Matsunaga, Laura Mays, Deirdre Nelson, Ciara Phillips and Barbara Ridland have sought to re-interpret the sometimes familiar, sometimes forgotten skills of Ireland's craft tradition. In doing so they uncover fresh significance and meaning, offering new insights into the Irish vernacular.

Curator Katy West invited 5 artists with very different relationships with Ireland, to re-imagine Irish craft traditions in the 21st century. From the precision and planning that fashions a chair to the labour of industrial weaving or cottage industry knitting, these traditions still remain, but often only as nostalgic reminders of our past - they have been replaced by methods of mass production. This exhibition revisits those traditions and examines them in a contemporary light.

"I hope visitors to Modern Languages will discover things they already know about," said West. "but presented in a way that makes them rethink the familiar. Indigenous objects made for centuries in this country are sometimes undervalued. I hope visitors will leave with an excitement over the work, but also with memories triggered by aran knits, woven blankets, turf creels and currachs."

The re-interpretations of tradition in *Modern Languages* demonstrates the modern language of craft, how in today's global context, it transcends place, and employs materials and methods that explore ideas and concepts through making. The legacy of Ireland's craft will be explored through archival footage from the National Museum, Failte Ireland and Geal Linn, offering a counterpoint to the contemporary exhibits.

Nao Matsunaga
Irish Currachs

Matsunaga is interested in the skeletal construction of Irish Currachs and the manner in which they are stored, and carried from dry land to shore. Their resemblance to architectural structures has made Nao consider the importance of boats and shelters in island cultures. He has created a series of structures that reference both shelters and boats, paying homage to their myth and make-up.

Matsunaga was born in Osaka, Japan and studied at the University of Brighton (1999-2002) and the Royal College of Art (2005-07). Represented by Marsden Woo Gallery in London.

Laura Mays
The Sligo Chair & Ikea's Stefan Chair

Mays has contributed two series of chairs. By investigating the design behind the traditional Sligo chair and reinterpreting it, Laura has produced a modern, practical and thoroughly international perspective of furniture. She has gone on to apply this way of working to understand a more contemporary and readily available chair - IKEA's *Stefan*. The cheapest chair in IKEA, it retails at €16 and approximately 200,000 are sold per year worldwide.

Mays has a degree in Architecture from University College Dublin and a Higher Certificate in Furniture Design and Manufacture from GMIT Letterfrack. In 2010 she completed an MA in Industrial Design on the subject of 'Craft; Meaning and Value' at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. She has been a lecturer in Furniture Design and Manufacture at GMIT, Letterfrack since 2004 and is one half of YaffeMays furniture makers.

Deirdre Nelson
The Aran Pattern

Nelson is investigating the myths and provenance of the Aran pattern, the culture of cottage industry knitters and lace-makers. Carrickmacross Lace was introduced to Ireland around 1820 and became an important source of income for families during the famine. Nelson's hacked IKEA mattress cover contains euro-sized Irish linen pockets edged with hand-stitched lace, referencing the makers who stored lace under their mattresses to keep it safe.

Since graduating from Glasgow School of Art in 1992, Nelson has undertaken residencies in a variety of locations from Cove Park in Argyll, Scotland to Western Australia creating work with local communities for exhibition. In 2011 she has been resident at The Sirius Arts Centre in Cobh, Co. Cork, which will culminate in a solo exhibition later in the year.

Ciara Phillips
Donegal Weaving

Phillip's work uses the skills she learnt from her mother and aunts as a child growing up, traditional textile techniques such as sewing, print and patchwork. For *Modern Languages*, she has spent time with weavers at Studio Donegal, on the production of designs for woven blankets. Her time there inspired her to look, not just at the fabric and weave, but to consider the nostalgia imbued in fabrics whose methods of production have changed little over time. The resulting work is a collection of eleven unique blankets that are a reflection on the history and traditions of weaving in the area.

Further works by Ciara will explore the garments of Irish fashion designer, Nellie Mulcahy. She is interested in the use of traditional fabrics in fashion and will seek to explore this through the recreation of a cape by Mulcahy, as seen in Collins Barracks – Ireland's National Museum of Decorative Arts.

Born in Ottawa, Canada, and currently based in Glasgow, Phillips studied Fine Art at Queen's University, Kingston and at the Glasgow School of Art. Represented by Kendall Koppe Gallery, Glasgow.

Barbara Ridland **Traditional Baskets**

Ridland has been looking at the similarities that exist between the two distinct cultures of the west coast of Ireland and her native Shetland. She observes similarities and differences in man's involvement with the land and sea and the myths that have built up over time. Having lived on Shetland most of her life, Ridland is heavily influenced by its culture and stories, which have inspired her sculptures, based on traditional basketry methods and inspired by the animals and nature around her. Woven forms using recycled materials such as cardboard and paper have been developed for *Modern Languages*.

Ridland graduated from Drawing & Painting at Grays School of Art, Aberdeen in 1980. She became a lecturer for textiles at Shetland College in 1987. Now freelance, she designs for the international market including Japan, France, America and Italy.

Katy West **Curator**

Born in Ireland and based in Glasgow, Katy West graduated from the Royal College of Art in 2007. Interested in the intersection of craft and production, her practice spans designing for industry and curation. Past curatorial projects include *Our Objects*, contemporary ceramics in context for the Mackintosh Gallery, Glasgow and touring, including the British Ceramics Biennial 2009.

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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. 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 is being celebrated through a diverse range of dynamic events and programmes to showcase the very best of craft made on the island of Ireland.

www.craftinireland.com

3. Galway Arts Festival.

As part of the National Craft Gallery's mission to develop awareness of contemporary fine craft, Modern Languages premiered at Galway City Museum in July 2011. This exhibition was developed in association with the Galway Arts Festival to celebrate Year of Craft 2011.