

Resource & engagement for second level students & teachers supporting
Content Area 3: Today's World

Thresholds to the Unseen

Fiona Kerbey, Christopher McMullan, Joanne Reid,
Katherine Sankey and Emily Waszak



We Speak Through Worlds, Emily Waszak, 2023

Curated by Brenda McParland

Saturday 7 September - Friday 1 November 2024



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Describing the exhibition, we have highlighted:

- **Theme & subject matter:** the 'story' behind the artwork, what the work is 'about'.
- **Process & media:** the techniques and materials used by the artist to create the artworks.
- **Composition & layout:** the arrangement of visual elements in an artwork, or placement within the gallery spaces.

A glossary of words highlighted in *bold italic font* to aid your understanding is on page 9.

Designed to assist you in an inquiry-based exploration of the artworks, this resource includes:

- Associated events you might like to attend.
- Information about the artists.
- Questions to consider & discuss relating to:
Artists Theory & Thinking
- motivations behind the work;
Processes & Media
- techniques & materials to create the work;
Art & the Environment
- a source of inspiration;
Art as Social Commentary or Commentator
- raising awareness through art.

Combine this resource with our associated learning & engagement events listed below:

Exhibition opening

Sat. 7 Sept. at 2:30pm

Join us in the gallery and hear the exhibiting artists reflect on their experiences of engagement with materials and form, and how this influences their individual artistic practices.

<https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/thresholds-to-the-unseen>

Gallery Tours for Junior & Senior Cycle using Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS).

<https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/school-gallery-tours-primary-and-secondary>

For Educators - An Introduction to our Gallery
Thu 19 Sep. at 4.00 p.m.

For teachers, lecturers, teaching artists, youth workers or community leaders, join us to hear more about Solstice Gallery, discover what it can offer your class or group, and how to use the gallery as a rich learning environment.

<https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/an-introduction-to-our-gallery-for-educators-and-artists>

Coral-ations

Tue 17 Sep & Tue 8 Oct

Especially designed for a small class or youth group aged between 9-17 years, Coral-ations is a two-day ceramic workshop with exhibiting artist Katherine Sankey exploring her hand-making art practice with clay that wrestles with absurdity and humour.

<https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/coral-ations>

In Conversation with Christopher McMullan (via Zoom) Fri 20 Sept. at 8pm.

[www.solsticeartscentre.ie/event/culture-night-in-conversation-with-artist-christopher-mcmullen-via-zoom](https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/culture-night-in-conversation-with-artist-christopher-mcmullen-via-zoom)

Material Narratives

Fri 4 Oct. at 9.30 a.m., 11.30 a.m.

Facilitated by visual artist Joanna Hopkins, students will create new and personal visual language through interpretation and hands-on experimentation with materials.

<https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/material-narratives>

About the exhibition – Thresholds to the Unseen



Left to right: Emily Waszak, Fiona Kerbey, Joanne Reid, Curator Brenda McParland & Katherine Sankey.

Thresholds to the Unseen is a group exhibition featuring sculptural works by five inspiring Irish based artists – Fiona Kerbey, Christopher McMullan, Joanne Reid, Katherine Sankey and Emily Waszak.

The exhibition includes new and recent sculpture, sculptural *assemblages*, and *installation* works. Curated by Brenda McParland, project curator at Solstice, the title of the exhibition is inspired by Emily Waszak's artwork *We Speak Through Worlds* which she describes as a Threshold to the Unseen (see page 5 for more details).

Themes & subject matter: Immersed in *materially driven practices*, the artists create works in an effort to make sense of the world, from *personal narratives* and encounters. The artists explore themes such as landscape and memory, still life, mourning, ritual, otherworldliness, cultural heritage, archives, environmental issues, rewilding, cultivation and *carbon sequestration*.

Composition & layout: Works by the five artists converge and interconnect throughout the gallery spaces. Bathed in natural light, minimal spotlighting highlights certain artworks on the walls. A mix of large and small-scale assemblages, the *curatorial* layout of artworks purposefully guides your eyes from the floor, to the wall. The aromas and sound connect all the works in this immersive group show.

Process & media: Materials used include those gathered from building sites and streets, industrial waste products, domestic units and agricultural implements. Textiles, found objects and natural matter from the landscape such as clay, seaweed, twigs, and branches, as well as distilled aromas, bee and food waste are also included.

Assembling these materials takes many forms. Casting, welding, moulding, sculpting, wiring, gluing, weaving, etching, film, extraction and distilling are some of the processes used by the artists.

Note the two film works in gallery 3 by Katherine Sankey. How do they connect to her sculptural artworks in the exhibition?

What sound do you hear resonating throughout the spaces?

To view all artworks in this exhibition see: www.solsticeartscentre.ie/event/thresholds-to-the-unseen

The Artists

The artists are emerging and mid-career in their artistic practice having all exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in Ireland, and some internationally.

Fiona Kerbey remakes and reimagines things from the everyday. Often using bone china casting slip and flax-paper porcelain she is inspired by the poetry of Emily Dickinson, and her recent work responds to her local environment, combining clay with natural materials, creating delicate objects of familiar forms. From Meath she completed an MA at NCAD having studied ceramics at Limerick School of Art & Design.

Christopher McMullan is a Dublin-based artist from Texas (USA), a graduate of Sculpture & Expanded Practice with Critical Cultures at NCAD (2023). Blending intricate materials and concepts into immersive experiences, his works often encourage physical interaction from the viewer. He uses extraction, distillation, and preservation of materials to questions our perception of materiality. His work has been included in Irish Arts Review and he was listed in the *Irish Times Magazine's* '50 People to Watch 2024'.
@christopherdanielmcmullen

Joanne Reid works with both discarded and new material, reflecting her interest in the life cycle of objects. Reid's sculptural practice is rooted in a fascination with material culture. Her work often begins as a direct response to chance encounters with the materials, objects and spaces that form our built environment; using steel, plywood, concrete, timber and plaster in her practice. She completed an MA in Art & Research Collaboration, Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, (2016).
@joannereid_

Katherine Sankey is an Australian Irish artist, born in Paris and based in Dublin. She employs sculpture, video, drawing and painting in her installations. Using natural and human-made media, Sankey's sculptural works can be sprawling and minutely detailed, exploring structure, supply, and degradation; asking questions about nature, the natural, the body and function that wrestle with the absurdity, humour and horror of our relationship with and perception of our planet and humankind's place within it.
[@katherinesankeystudio](https://www.katherinesankey.com/) <https://www.katherinesankey.com/>

Emily Waszak is a Donegal-based visual artist of Japanese-descent. With a background in industrial weaving, her practice is concerned with the materiality of ritual and ruin. Inspired by her Japanese culture and personal experiences living in Ireland she combines natural objects found locally in Donegal alongside the ceramic and textile objects created using traditional Japanese materials. Themes of grief and loss are also present in her work. @ emily.waszak.art

See Useful Links on page 10 to gather more information about the artists.

Questions to consider & discuss

Artists Theory & Thinking - Emily Waszak



We Speak Through Worlds (detail) 2023. Wood, Textile, Brass, Wild clay / h290 x w260 x d110cm.

Through the experience of profound grief in isolation following the sudden death of her husband during the first Covid-19 lockdown, Emily Waszak turned to ritual practice within her work, chanting and weaving as a coping mechanism; creating small works, she calls 'Grief Weaving'. With a background in industrial weaving, Waszak progressed to larger *installations*, combining found and handmade objects, offerings or connections to those who have passed through to other worlds. These sculptural *assemblages* are ritualised environments; 'thresholds' through which to view traces of the unseen.

Living in rural Donegal and inspired by her Japanese heritage and culture, Waszak combines natural objects found in the landscape with traditional Japanese materials such as ceramic and textiles. The installation 'We Speak Through Worlds' consists of a large woven 'threshold' made from textile waste. Hanging from a wooden frame, the front and back are exposed. At the base, a tea bowl made of wild, unfired clay rests on a mirrored brass plate etched by seaweed. Functioning as a *butsudā* (*Buddhist altar*) informed by Japanese culture, the woven threshold invites the viewer to pause and see beyond.

'Repetition is a key element of my work, the repetitive under/over rhythm of weaving, the making and remaking of object forms, to the daily practice of ritual acts.' – Emily Waszak

Consider the repetitive motions engaged in creating this work, and the tactile nature of the materials.

- Do you agree the ritual of making can be meditative, a form of therapeutic healing?
- In your opinion, what impact do the tactile materials have on this process?

Threshold meaning:

- 1) a strip of wood/stone on bottom of doorway.
- 2) the magnitude or intensity exceeded for a certain reaction to occur.
- 3) any place or point of entering or beginning.

Exploring the word *threshold*, reflect on multiple reasons why the artist uses it to describe her works.

- Note the scale and positioning of materials in the artwork in relationship to the viewer.
- Use words or drawings to describe your interaction and reaction to this artwork.

Questions to consider & discuss

Processes & Media - Christopher McMullan



Perfumer's Organ, 2023. Oak, pine, canvas, steel, aroma compounds from organic and synthetic materials.

Christopher McMullan's research based practice is multi-sensory. Using the process of distillation as an *archival* exercise, he explores aromas as a tool of communication, sensory alternatives to experience, in an image-saturated world. His interactive floor based sculpture 'Perfumer's Organ' references perfumery and music in a *vernacular* style. Consisting of 16 handmade bellows under parquet tiles, he invites visitors to walk upon each, compressing the bellows below. With a scent pad adhered to each bellow, this physical interaction diffuses aromas into the space; creating an airborne 'scent-scape'.

To familiarise himself with the Irish environment, the desire to capture scent began when McMullan moved to Ireland. 'Perfumer's Organ' contains sixteen blends and infusions from materials such as jasmine from Glasnevin, cedar from Sligo, fruit gums from a newsagents, and slurry from Meath.

Interact with this artwork, activating each scent slowly with your movements.

- Do you recognise the aromas?
- What experiences do they evoke?

List reasons for your answer.

In *Solstice* McMullan's artworks are about movement throughout the spaces. He constantly questions how to fill a space without structures; how do you define space without walls?

- Considering the senses, in your opinion discuss if and how he achieves this?

The structure and materials used have multiple references and connections within its title 'Perfumers Organ':

- The bellows of the musical instrument.
- The nose, used for breathing and smelling.
- The wooden parquet, the old French word for dance floor, is *vernacular*, familiar to the viewer as something you walk on.

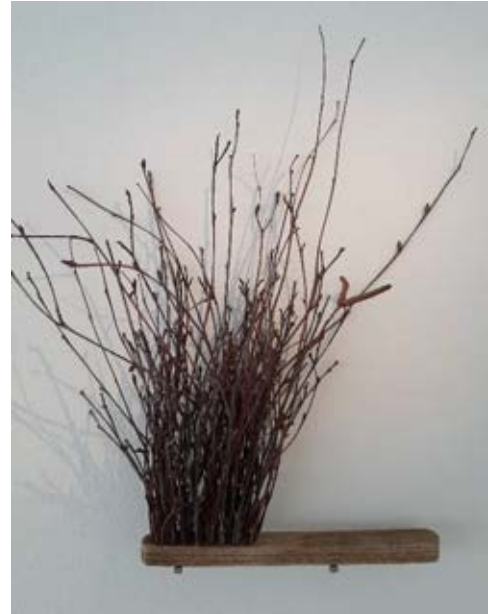
Contrasting the secrecy of a perfumer's process, McMullan openly shares his process of making. Explore his detailed working drawing for 'Perfumers Organ' on the café gallery wall titled '*Bellows Planning Revisited*'.

Questions to consider & discuss

Art & the Environment - Fiona Kerbey & Joanne Reid



Left image: Joanne Reid 'Studio Unit (plasterwork)', 2023. Plywood, wood filler, gesso, cotton dustsheet, cast plaster, latex gloves, black plastic builders bucket, timber. h87 x w40 x d45cm.



Right image: Fiona Kerbey '...and if it snowed, I would brush my teeth with snow', willow, salvaged brush handle. h26 x w30cm.

While all of the artists in this exhibition reuse and reimagine elements from the environment in their practices, here we have chosen works by Fiona Kerbey and Joanne Reid for you to compare and contrast.

Fiona Kerbey's sculptures combine natural materials with discarded domestic and agricultural implements. Responding to her local rural environment, '*...and if it snowed, I would brush my teeth with snow*', she uses willow twigs as if sprouting wildly from an old disused brush handle. Re-identifying it as a living object rather than functional, the notion of the past being all around us, not just behind us, and Kerbey's interest in *etymology*, *anthropology*, history and poetry informs this work.

Process driven, Joanne Reid's sculptures evolve from her engagement with everyday urban contexts. Inspired by art history and the Still Life genre in particular, her sculptural work '*Studio Unit (plasterwork)*' creates a contemporary 'still life' of materials directly from her artist's studio. Their formality in the gallery contrasts to the working chaos of a studio setting.

Both artists wish to elevate everyday objects, otherwise discarded or ignored.

- Do you agree they each achieve this and how?
- Discuss each artists' use of materials.
- Compare the titles of these two artworks, and what may have inspired them?

Joanne Reid references consumption, labour and construction in her sculptural work.

- How does she demonstrate this?

Observe the positioning of both artists' work in the gallery spaces.

- Using words such as organic, form, function, urban, domestic and rural, compare and contrast the two artworks.

The lemon is a reoccurring object in Reid's work.

Watch this short video with the artist to learn why this is.

<https://www.creativity.oide.ie/film/rha-joanne-reid>

Questions to consider & discuss

Art as Social Commentary or Commentator - Katherine Sankey



Hydrozomia installation (detail) h300 x w250 x d95cm

Katherine Sankey asks how humankind has come to believe that we are superior to other forms of life. Working with waste materials to produce unique creations, her deeply serious yet playful abstract sculptures combine natural forms with manufactured objects to engage conversation about what we gouge and suck out of the planet, 'the human extractive machine'.

Sankey's sculptures also gesture to the delicate balance of our ecosystems, our own personal systems, both constructed and natural e.g. our friendships, routine, DNA. Her practice refers to the often-precarious quality of these systems, represented in the manner in which the artworks are made, balanced and suspended. Rooted in the making process, Sankey embraces its unpredictability, using it to highlight vulnerability through her artworks construction.

Sankey explores structure, supply, and degradation, asking questions about nature, the body, and function.

- Looking at her abstract forms, how do you think she communicates these elements?

Consider the networks and processes that connect us to the living and non-living objects around us.

- Can you list some?

- How important are they to you, within your daily, personal and social life?

Sankey's structures wrestle with the absurdity, humour and horror of our relationship with and perception of our planet.

- In your opinion, does her use of materials and their construction convey this?

She describes finding materials, often in the aftermath of climate-related weather events that knock trees, and unearth roots.

- Discuss the importance of the source of these materials in relation to the messages Sankey is trying to convey within her practice.

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Glossary

Anthropology: the study of the origins, physical and cultural development, biological characteristics, and social customs and beliefs of humankind.

Archival, to store records usually of historical value or interest.

Assemblages is the collection or gathering of things or people.

A *Butsudan* (Buddhist altar), is a shrine commonly found in temples and homes in Japanese Buddhist cultures primarily used for paying respects to the Buddha, as well as to family members who have died.

Carbon sequestration is the process of capturing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide.

Curatorial, relates to the selection, organisation and display of artworks in a gallery or museum.

Etymology, the origin of a word. For example the etymology of 'brush' can be traced back to 'a bunch of branches or shoots' or 'bud, sprout or sapling' and an 'instrument for untangling hair or fur' – Fiona Kerbey.

Installation art is usually mixed media constructions, often designed for a specific place, for a temporary period.

Materially driven practices focuses on the properties and quality of chosen materials, and then the exploration of how to utilise or apply it into an artwork.

Personal narratives or a personal account of events; a story.

Vernacular, concerned with domestic and functional.

Useful links:

Using the links below, find out more about the artist's work. Look at their websites, follow on social media, and gain additional insight into their artistic career and practice:

<https://www.creativity.oide.ie/film/rha-joanne-reid>

<https://void.ie/in-conversation-with-chris-mcmullan/>

<https://www.draiocht.ie/gallery/artists/joanne-reid>

<https://www.katherinesankey.com/>

<https://www.firestation.ie/artists/emily-waszak/>

Visiting Solstice:

Solstice Gallery is open Tuesday-Saturday 11am-4pm.
Individual students and teachers can visit the gallery during opening times.



Class and group gallery tours must be booked in advance.

To book a tour, workshop or event please contact:

Deirdre Rogers, Visual Arts Facilitation & Public Engagement Coordinator at 046 909 2308 or by emailing deirdre.rogers@solsticeartscentre.ie

If you wish to be contacted directly about upcoming events and opportunities, please let us know and we can add you to our mailing list.

We encourage feedback to assist us in developing these resources and events to best meet your needs. Please get in touch with suggestions or any questions about our programme.

Best of luck to all students in their creative studies.

Deirdre Rogers

Visual Arts Facilitation & Public Engagement Coordinator

Student notes: