

Kerlin Gallery

Anne's Lane, South Anne Street, Dublin 2, Ireland

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Dorothy Cross
The First Supper
1992



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The First Supper

1992

12 elements, each handblown glass and liquid silver

12 oak shelves

Dorothy Cross' 'The First Supper,' is comprised of 12 unique, hand-blown glass chalices each covered in a thin layer of liquid silver.

Throughout the 1990's Dorothy Cross' remarkable body of work sought to create a very particular and provocative beauty by repositioning the physical body and desire at the centre of Christian mythology and iconography. Cross' 1992 work 'The First Supper,' can be considered a key work that exemplifies the artist's approach at the time.

The work makes playful reference to the Last Supper, both its religious origin and its representation through art history but this is the First Supper and here the twelve objects prefigure the twelve apostles. Here the twelve participants are ambiguously gendered as their forms suggest both phallus and breast. Here, each object can be read as a chalice or a teat, as symbolic or bodily, as male or female.

The work was first shown in 1992 in a 12th Century convent in Madrid as part of the Edge Biennial and later reconfigured for the artist's 2000 show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb









The First Supper

1992

12 elements, each handblown glass and liquid silver



























27 x 10 x 10 cm



16.5 x 9 x 9 cm



20.5 x 11 x 11 cm



19 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm



24 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm



18 x 10 x 10 cm



23 x 9 x 9 cm



19 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm



26 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm



19.5 x 8.5 x 8.5 cm



30 x 10 x 10 cm



18.5 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm

The First Supper
1992
Ink on paper



The First Supper V
1992
red ink on paper
41 x 33 cm / 16.1 x 13 in



The First Supper V (b)
1992
red ink on paper
41 x 33 cm / 16.1 x 13 in



The First Supper VI
1992
red ink on paper
41 x 33 cm / 16.1 x 13 in



The First Supper VII
1992
red ink on paper
41 x 33 cm / 16.1 x 13 in



First Supper X

Cross '92

The First Supper X
1992
red ink on paper
41 x 33 cm / 16.1 x 13 in

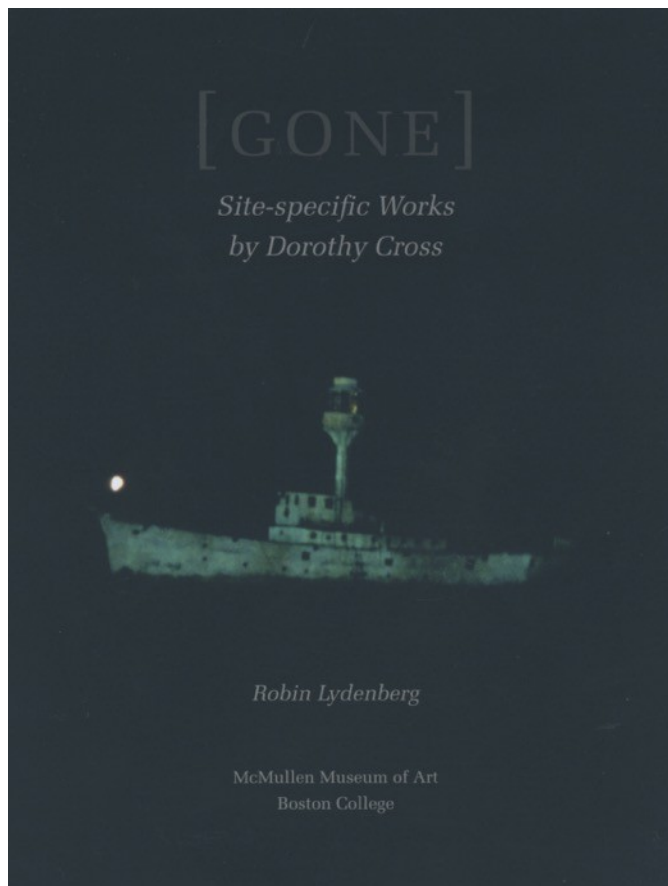
The Return of the Body
La Primera Cena [The First Supper] (1992)

A text by Robin Lydenberg

From:

[GONE]
Site-specific Works by Dorothy Cross

Published by McMullen Museum of Art,
Boston College, 2005





La Primera Cena, descent into the installation space

The Return of the Body: *La Primera Cena [The First Supper] (1992)*

In 1992, Cross participated in another group exhibition, the Edge Biennial, for which each artist selected two sites: one in Madrid and one in London. She sought out in each of these world capitals some hidden or abandoned territory where the culture's repressed but constitutive fantasies lay buried. Working creatively across two disparate spaces—a nun's residence in Madrid and an abandoned men's public urinal in London—Cross brings together the territories of church and state, private and public, spiritual and corporeal, female and male. As she bridges the geographical and ideological distance separating the two sites, the artist also discovers a breach deep within each one, where everything designated as “other” has made its secret habitation.

Cross's Madrid site is a functioning twelfth-century convent providing a group of nuns with a refuge from the secular modernity of this dynamic city. Viewers enter the enclosed space of the convent and approach an area beneath an inner stairway that Cross describes as a “trapped little well of space.” The work, entitled *La Primera Cena* or *The First Supper*, consists of a small rectangular table draped with a cow's skin, udders uppermost and central. Twelve blown-glass chalices covered with a thin layer of silver are arranged on the floor around the table, forming a circle that corresponds to the ornate pattern of the tile work. Some of the chalices are elongated and others rounded; each includes a small hole through which its contents might be sucked. A single chair is pulled up to the table beside the upturned udders, and the whole scene is illuminated from above and below.

Cross's intervention in the convent sets the stage for the return of the repressed pre-history of the church, and for the viewer's encounter with an archaic, pre-Christian, maternal fantasy. *La Primera Cena* achieves an uncanny convergence of pagan, secular, and sacred in this evocation of our common origins. Rather than contaminating the pristine territory of the convent, this piece brings within its walls a physicality, humor, and theatricality that animate the overlooked interior space of the stairwell with a scene of surprising beauty.



In the early 1990s, Cross produced several works in which she attempts to restore to Christian myth and iconography the powerful presence of the material body and desire. In one piece she drills a perfect hole through her family's illustrated Bible, making tangible the absence that can be created when passion is lost, the body denied or transcended. Although *Bible* makes visible the lack at the center of all systems of representation, where signs take the place of bodies, the effect of the artist's transformation is to intensify the material presence of the book as an object, thus bringing the body and embodiment back into play. In the subterranean alcove of the convent stairwell, Cross introduces the body, not in the artificial elegance of that "perfect void" she drilled through her family Bible, but in the cruder natural form of the cow's udder and teats.²³ *La Primera Cena* inaugurates the series of "udder" sculptures for which Cross has become widely known.²⁴

These "udder" works celebrate hybridity, transformation, and metamorphosis; the cow takes on new life and functions, and in one piece (*Amazon*, p. 12) even humorously reclaims a pre-patriarchal female power. In the context of *La Primera Cena*, however, the hide suggests slaughter more than reincarnation; the skin is ragged, showing rough holes where it was cut away from the legs. The effect is at once gruesome and absurd, a scene of pagan sacrifice incongruously hidden within the convent walls. In the flattened-out hide that survives as a remnant of the absent living body one can still read the story of that body's history: the teats appear shrivelled and dry, bearing the marks of years of use and abandonment.

Tanners normally cut a cow skin on the underside, discarding the udders as useless. For her "udder" works Cross had this procedure reversed; the hide was skinned upside down, the udders preserved intact, their value restored. The small table used in the Madrid installation was similarly rescued by the artist, salvaged from the trash on a nearby street. With both hide and table Cross introduces those cast off or abjected elements of the secular world into the protective confines of the convent retreat. Both skin and table remind us of the passage of time and the materiality of loss that may be forgotten, at times, in the pursuit of the spiritual and eternal or in the blind acceleration of modern life. Cross is attentive to the convent's lived history, and



part of the appeal of the site for her is the evidence of age and use, the cracks and stains that mark its finely crafted interior with a dignified and melancholy beauty. Thus the worn table and cowskin that seem at first so incongruous in the space of the convent are also at home there. In *La Primera Cena* history and the body are sanctified by the convent site in a peculiar below-stairs ritual. Cross's piece lends this internal space the atmosphere of a crypt where something cherished, but long lost, has quietly come to light.

The title of this installation makes playful reference to the religious as well as to the art historical tradition of the Last Supper, transforming this potentially melancholy crypt into a witty tableau. Although she is not alone in addressing the challenge of revisiting this powerful myth—one thinks of Andy Warhol's persistent return to the image—Cross's variation on the theme is unique. Representations of the Last Supper are readily recognized, even in Western secular culture, as establishing the foundation from which the Church's authority proceeds. While the earliest painted versions of the scene feature a circular or horseshoe-shaped table, modern viewers are more familiar with later versions depicting the guests at the Last Supper posed frontally at a long rectangular table, balancing the central figure of Christ. These formal characteristics reinforce a tradition based on hierarchy and symbolic ritual. The narrative and iconography of the Last Supper inaugurate the linear salvation narrative of the Church and the eucharistic ritual dominated by the symbolic body and blood of Christ.

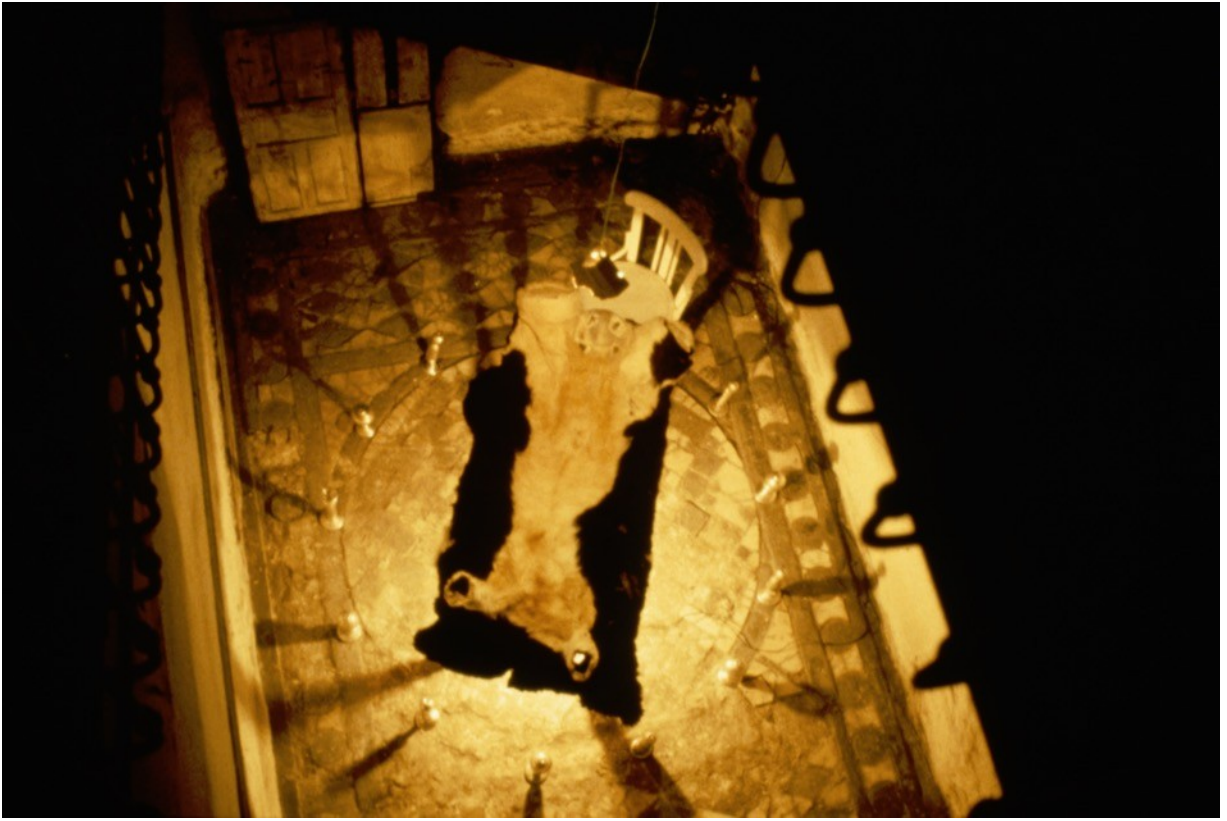
The convent residence is a female space set apart from, but still framed by, this tradition. Within that space *La Primera Cena* takes viewers back to the territory of the archaic maternal body and to a time before structures of hierarchy and difference were established, before the Church instituted a symbolic order guaranteed by a symbolic body. The circular arrangement of the chalices beneath the table evokes a pre-Christian mythical time of cycles and repetition that precedes the linear time of eschatology. The udder and teats recall our more intimate connection to nature and to what French feminist Luce Irigaray calls our ancient "maternal genealogy."²⁵ Cross's piece, however, is not a mere recasting of the Last Supper as a pagan instead of a Christian rite, with female instead of male protagonists. Rather, the elements of the work drama-



tize a more ambiguous transitional moment: the empty hide reminds us that the maternal body is always already lost. The scene of *La Primera Cena* is poised between the animal udder and the symbolic chalice. Not yet presiding over the table, but illuminated and rising up from below it, the twelve chalices prefigure the twelve apostles of the Last Supper. The rococo elegance of the goblets' silver-covered glass appears in sharp contrast to the rough materiality of the udder, yet the tiny hole in each chalice wittily imitates the teats' function, offering a new manner of "nursing." Thus these two opposing realms of nature and artifice, body and symbol, female and male, seem to join together in a common function of nurture and sacrifice.

In *La Primera Cena*, the new tradition about to rise up from beneath the primal animal body is still in its infancy. Although the church apostles are all male, Cross's transitional chalices are ambiguously gendered, their forms vaguely suggestive of phallus or breast. Responding to classic psychoanalytic theories about psychic development and the unconscious, Cross's piece prefigures the developmental imperative requiring each individual to give up the state of fluid and androgynous identities and to enter the fixed boundaries and differential categories of the symbolic order. This first meal, then, is designed to offer each diner a temporary return to that repressed pre-history in a Jungian smorgasbord of male and female sources of identification and desire. *La Primera Cena* creates a space within the convent where all boundaries are temporarily dissolved, our earliest bodily life acknowledged and even revered. The circle of chalices holds out the promise of the beauty and power of the symbolic realm, but also signifies its weakness—each goblet's precious metal patina conceals the fragility of glass.²⁶

Like *Caught in a State*, *La Primera Cena* displays a certain stylized theatricality. Illuminated and viewed from above, the body appears in its material as well as in its symbolic incarnations. Also illuminated from below, however, the scene casts its own light, disrupting the detached and encompassing gaze of the audience. The single modest chair positioned next to the table invites more direct and individual participation. It may be that fantasies of that lost intimate connection to nature, the body, or the maternal breast are accessible only through the mediations of the symbolic work of art.





Dorothy Cross
b. 1956, Cork, Ireland.

Working in sculpture, film and photography, Dorothy Cross examines the relationship between living beings and the natural world. Living in Connemara, a rural area on Ireland's west coast, the artist sees the body and nature as sites of constant change, creation and destruction, new and old. This flux emerges as strange and unexpected encounters. Many of Cross' works incorporate items found on the shore, including boats and animal skins, while others reflect on the environment. During the 1990s, the artist produced a series of works using cow udders, which drew on the animals' rich store of symbolic associations across cultures to investigate the construction of sexuality and subjectivity.

Recent solo exhibitions/projects include: *I dreamt I dwelt*, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, (2019); *Stalactite*, Libby Leshgold Galley, Vancouver (2018); *Glance*, New Art Centre, Roche Court, UK (2017–18); *Connemara*, Turner Contemporary, Margate (2013), touring to Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin (2014); *Eye of Shark*, Lismore Castle Arts, Co. Waterford (2014); Bloomberg Space, London (2009); Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, (2008); Irish Museum of Modern Art, (2005); Douglas Hyde Gallery, (2002, 1993 & 1988); Camden Arts Centre, (1993); ICA Philadelphia, (1991). Recent group exhibitions include: *Desire: A Revision From the 20th Century to the Digital Age*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, (September 2019 – January 2020); *Heartship*, Sounds From A Safe Harbour Festival, Cork, a collaborative performance with singer Lisa Hannigan (2019) and *Sea Garden*, Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, UK, (16 November 2019 – 26 January 2020). The artist has participated in the Venice, (1993), Istanbul, (1997) and Liverpool, (1998) biennials, and the groundbreaking 1994 exhibition: *Bad Girls*, ICA, London and CCA, Glasgow.

Cross' work is represented in the collections of The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; The Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin; The National Gallery of Ireland; Dublin; The Ulster Museum, National Museum, Belfast; Crawford Art Museum, Cork, Ireland; Art Pace Foundation, Texas; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle; The Arnolfini Trust, Bristol; TATE, London.

DOROTHY CROSS

b. Cork, Ireland, 1956

lives and works in Connemara, Ireland

EDUCATION

- 1980–82 San Francisco Art Institute, California (MFA)
1974–77 Leicester Polytechnic, England (BA)
1973–74 Crawford Municipal School of Art, Cork

CURRENT & FORTHCOMING EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 *ELLIPTICAL AFFINITIES: IRISH WOMEN ARTISTS AND THE POLITICS OF THE BODY, 1984 TO THE PRESENT*, Limerick City Gallery of Art, Ireland, (7 February – 22 March 2020), (group show)
other.worldly, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, Netherlands, (15 February 2020– 3 January 2021), (group show)
The Museum of Ancient History, The Classical Museum, UCD, Dublin, (27 March 2020 – 8 May 2020), (group show)
- 2019 *Desire: A Revision From The 20th Century To The Digital Age*, IMMA, Dublin, Ireland, (21st September 2019 - 21st March 2020) (group show)

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 *I dreamt I dwelt*, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
Dorothy Cross: *Croquet*, The Model, Sligo, Ireland
- 2018 *Stalactite*, The Libby Leshgold Gallery, Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Vancouver
- 2017 *Glance*, New Art Centre, Roche Court, Salisbury, UK
- 2015 *Eye of Shark*, Frith Street Gallery, London, UK
TROVE, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland (curator)
- 2014 *Connemara*, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, Ireland
Eye of Shark, Lismore Castle Arts, St. Carthage Hall, Co. Waterford, Ireland
View, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
- 2013 *Connemara*, Turner Contemporary, Margate, Kent, UK
Croquet, The Model, Sligo, Ireland
- 2009 *COMMA Series*, Bloomberg Space, London, UK
- 2008 *Stage*, Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery, UK
Landscape, Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
- 2007 *Sapiens*, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
- 2005 Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland
Gone, McMullen Museum of Art, Boston, MA, USA
- 2002 *Salve*, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
The Paradise, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
- 2001 *Come into the garden Maude*, Fourth Wall, projection for the National Theatre; commissioned work by the Public Art Development Trust, London, UK
- 1999 *Ghost Ship*, Nissan Art Award IMMA, Dublin, Ireland
- 1998 Model Arts Centre, Sligo, Ireland
- 1996 *Even*, Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; Oriel Mostyn Gallery, Llandudno, UK
- 1993 Parthenon, Camden Arts Centre, London, UK
Works from Power House, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
- 1991 *Power House*, ICA, Philadelphia, USA
- 1988 *Ebb*, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, Ireland

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 *Sea Garden*, Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, UK
Heartship, Sounds from a Safe Harbor festival collaborative performance with Lisa Hannigan, Cork, Ireland
21st Century Ireland in 21 Artworks, Dorothy Cross & Willie Doherty, Glebe house and Gallery, Donegal, Ireland
Shaping Ireland: Landscapes in Irish Art, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland
Coming Home: Art and the Great Hunger, An tSeaneaglais (Glassworks), Derry, NI
The Keeper. To have and to hold, The Model, Sligo, Ireland
Sights & Sounds, Art, Nature, and the Senses, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, USA
In the Labyrinth, Large Glass, London, UK
- 2018 Dorothy Cross, Aleana Egan, Siobhán Hapaska, Isabel Nola, Kathy Prendergast, Kerlin Gallery
Reclaimed, Linda Pace Foundation, San Antonio, Texas
Coming Home: Art & The Great Hunger, The Coach House, Dublin Castle;
Uilinn West Cork Arts Centre, Skibbereen; Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin;
An tSeaneaglais (Glassworks), Derry
- 2017 *The Time. The Place. Contemporary Art from the Collection*, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, WA, USA
Alchemy: Transformations in Gold, Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa, USA;
Akron Museum of Art, Ohio, USA
Legacies: JMW Turner and Contemporary Art Practice, New Art Gallery, Walsall, UK
- 2016 A Weed is a Plant Out of Place, Lismore Castle Arts, Lismore, Ireland
two birds / one stone, Farmleigh Gallery, Dublin
Riddle of the Burial Ground, Extra City Kunsthal, Antwerp
- 2016 Found, The Foundling Museum, London
Mystics and Rationalists, Modern Art Oxford
It's Me to the World, Modern Art Oxford
Head Above Water: Swimmers' Perspectives, Peninsula Arts Gallery, Plymouth
The Universe Cleft to the Core, De León, Bath
- 2015 What We Call Love, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland
Riddle of the Burial Ground, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, Ireland
The Untold Want, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, Ireland
New Art New Nature, Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland
The Art of a Nation, Mall Galleries, London, UK
- 2013 Crescendo, Australian Center for Contemporary Art, Victoria, Australia
Aquatopia: The Imaginary of the Ocean Deep, Nottingham Contemporary & Tate St. Ives, Cornwall, UK
3am: wonder, paranoia and the restless night, The Bluecoat, Liverpool, UK, travelling to Chapter, Cardiff, Wales; The Exchange, Penzance, Cornwall, UK (2014) and Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, UK (2014)
A Subtle Matter, Queen's University, Belfast, in collaboration with Catalyst Arts
Island: New Art from Ireland, Galleria Civica di Modena, Modena, Italy
Skin, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, Ireland
Changing States: Contemporary Irish Art and Francis Bacon's Studio, Bozar, Brussels, Belgium
- 2012 The Enchanted Isles: Re-imagining Galapagos, Centre for Contemporary Art, Lisbon, Portugal
Into the Light: The Arts Council –60 Years Supporting the Arts, Crawford Art Gallery, Cork, Ireland
The Enchanted Isles: Re-Imagining Galapagos, Bluecoat, Liverpool, UK, travelling to Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, UK and the Gulbenkian, Lisbon, Portugal
Time out of Mind, IMMA @ NCH, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland
Under the Sea, Millennium Gallery, Sheffield Museum, Sheffield, UK

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS CONTD

- 2011 *De L'Emergence du Phenix*, Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris, France
Eleventh Plateau, Archeological Society Museum, Athens, Greece
The Surreal in Irish Art, Highlanes Municipal Art Gallery, Drogheda, Ireland
Walking Blooming Flowers, Stadtgalerie, Kiel, Germany
- 2010 *Underwater*, Towner Gallery, Eastbourne and touring to SpaceX, Exeter; Ferens Art Gallery, Hull; Bluecoat Art Gallery, Liverpool; Tulie House, Carlisle, all UK
Superficies del deseo, Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC), Mexico City, Mexico
- 2009 *Underwater/Above Water* – from the aquarium to the video image, Kunsthalle Wilhemshaven, Germany
A Duck for Mr. Darwin, Baltic Arts Centre, UK
DLA Piper Series: This is Sculpture, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, UK
- 2008 *Exquisite Corpse*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland
Through the Lens: New Media Art from Ireland, Beijing Art Museum of the Imperial City, Beijing, China

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

The Arnolfini Trust, Bristol
Art Pace Foundation, San Antonio, Texas
Arts Council of Ireland, Dublin
Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast
Celebrity Cruises, Greece
Contemporary Irish Art Society, Dublin
Crawford At Gallery, Cork
Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, USA
Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin
Limerick City Art Gallery, Limerick
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
National Self-Portrait Collection, Limerick
The National Gallery Of Ireland
The Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin
The Norton Collection, California, USA
Tate Gallery, London
Ulster Museum, Belfast

AWARDS

2008	Gulbenkian Galapagos Award
2005	Arts Council Project Grant
2004	Gulbenkian Foundation Production Grant for Stabat Mater, in conjunction with Opera Theatre Company
2000	SCIART Research and Development Project Award, Wellcome Trust, UK Gulbenkian Foundation, Arts Council of Great Britain
1999	Nissan Public Art Project/Irish Museum of Modern Art Award, Ghost Ship, Scotsman's Bay, Dublin
1992	EVA Open Award, Limerick
1991	Arts Council Bursary O'Malley Award, Irish American Cultural Institute
1990	EVA Open Award, Limerick Martin Toonder Award, Ireland Pollock-Krasner Award, New York
1988	PSI Studio Scholarship, New York
1984–86	Arts Council Bursaries

COMMISSIONS

2017	Sounds from a Safe Harbour, Cork, installation and performance in collaboration with musician Lisa Hannigan
2005	FOXGLOVE digitalis purpurea, Artist web project, DIA
2001	Come into the garden Maude, 'Fourth Wall', projection for the National Theatre. Commissioned work by the Public Art Development Trust, London
1999	Ghost Ship, Scotsman's Bay, Dublin (Nissan Public Art Project)