

# EARTH, WIND & FIRE

Made in Cork Contemporary

Anne Kiely/Mary Palmer  
Nuala O'Donovan  
Alex Pentek  
Eoin Turner  
Joseph Walsh

*'All art starts with a material...I want you to respect the material and use it in a way that makes sense – preserve its inherent characteristics'.*

**Josef Albers**

Crawford Art Gallery presents Earth, Wind & Fire: Made in Cork Contemporary, an exhibition showcasing the work of six Cork-based artists whose practice exemplifies excellence in craftsmanship:

**Anne Kiely and Mary Palmer, Nuala O'Donovan, Alex Pentek, Eoin Turner, and Joseph Walsh**

Earth, Wind & Fire: Made in Cork Contemporary highlights the distinctly individual voice of each one of these artists. The works on display share an organic existence, visible within the artists' chosen materials, their response to form and their appreciation of nature. The focus of this exhibition, therefore, is to illuminate the relationship between artistic excellence and technical skill.

In 2016, the exhibition Made in Cork: the Arts and Crafts Movement from the 1880s to the 1920s, curated by Vera Ryan, examined how the movement flourished during this period and how it influenced the wider social structure of Cork and beyond. Earth, Wind & Fire: Made in Cork Contemporary places on view the fascinating array of work currently being made by contemporary artists, drawing attention to the traditional skills they have adopted, and how they are responding to the emergence of new technologies within their practice.

Special thanks to the participating artists, our lender National Museum of Ireland, Victoria Evans and Crawford Art Gallery staff.

**Anne Boddaert, Curator**



Detail Nuala O'Donovan , Teasel Circular Motion,  
Janice O'Connell/F22 photography



## Anne Kiely / Mary Palmer

For a number of years, Anne Kiely and Mary Palmer have collaborated to produce art quilts, using fabric, stitch and printed imagery. Their densely nuanced compositions have the sensibility of very fine drawings. They create poetic contemporary statements through a combination of traditional quilting techniques and layers of less traditional elements. The pair use locally sourced linens which are washed, dyed and bleached. Anne trained and worked in fashion which led her to explore screen-printing bespoke fabrics. She creates designs for fabric and upholstery using screen-printed imagery, etchings and digitally manipulated photographs to produce designs that are often playful. Mary truly is a material specialist, describing her work variously as tactile craft or art quilts.

*"The geometry and graphic nature of traditional quilts has always intrigued me, and I found that it was a natural fit with my training in Automotive Design."*

Interview, "Dublin Horse Show: 10 craft artists & designers to know", RTE, 9 Aug 2017





*"It is quite technical  
and it's also about  
precision and being  
able to visualise."*

Interview with Colette Sheridan, "Celebrating 20 years of talent and creativity", Evening Echo, 6 July 2018





## Nuala O'Donovan

*Nuala O'Donovan has compared her making process to 3D printing: "I start with small elements. Then I build up the surface. If you think of the way shells grow or stalagmites and stalactites, it's just layer on layer".*

Interview with Colette Sheridan, "Nuala O'Donovan: Sculpture inspired by nature's irregularities", Irish Examiner, 14 February 2017

Nuala makes porcelain sculpture based on natural forms, each sculpture is made from thousands of individual pieces. She works directly from fractal patterns found in nature: pine cones, coral, teasel flowers.

"The evidence of a response to random events visible in patterns in nature, is testament to the ability of living organisms to recover, to respond, and to continue growing and changing. It is the imperfections in the patterns caused by a unique experience that are evidence of the life force in living organisms."

## Alex Pentek

With a multi-faceted sculptural practice, Alex Pentek's body of work covers a variety of materials from steel sculptures on roadways to suspended paper works. Alex's paper engineering is at once magical trick, Mobius form and mathematical construct. He has designed a star-shaped pattern, based on the Fibonacci sequence, which he folds into paper. In designing his paper-sculptures he uses drawing, 3D computer modelling, paper folding techniques or origami and model making. Alex is also a drummer in a jazz band and is drawn to Eastern ideas of memorised response; a non-western approach that values a quality of knowing or understanding created through rhythmic repetition.







## Eoin Turner

Sculptor and glass designer Eoin Turner has built upon his experience of life out at sea to produce bespoke artworks with glass, metal and wood. After graduating from the Crawford College of Art and Design, Eoin worked for a decade on an Irish fishing trawler and later refurbishing yachts.

Eoin discovered glass while Maud Cotter was running a Glass Department at the college. Today he runs his own glass studio together with Lorraine Mullins. He has described his work as 'backward painting'. While his glass work shows the molten process, his structures are vigorous, the glass is dense: colour and light invoke elemental natural forces and appeal directly to the senses.



## Joseph Walsh

Joseph Walsh learned the basics of joinery from his grandfather as a ten-year old boy. Today, Joseph's studio houses a team of makers, crafts people, apprentices, interns and visiting artists.

*"I started to explore the idea of bending (the layers of wood) free-form to create the desired shape, instead of building (up) solid wood (in layers) and carving (into them)."*

Introductory address delivered by Professor Philip O'Kane, Emeritus Professor of Civil Engineering, in University College Cork, Honorary Conferings Speeches Archive (Dr Joseph Walsh, Degree of Doctor of Arts), 5 June 2015

Joseph has developed his free-form design style into a distinctive language which is recognised at an international level. His sensuous handling of wood echoes natural forms. Through his sympathetic response to materials, his furniture becomes wildly imaginative and ambitious, bringing the singular to the everyday.

*"I believe we can enhance the quality of our lives by surrounding ourselves with objects that possess values beyond their function or aesthetic, that possess intelligence in their creation, that one can interact with and that will stimulate senses each and every time one engages with them."*



## Anne Kiely / Mary Palmer

### When or why did you first start to work with wood / fabric / clay / glass / paper?

**Anne:** Seeing my older cousins make their own clothes as a young child fascinated me. Some years later I studied Fashion and Design. While studying, I had great difficulty locating suitable fabric for my final year collection. This led me to investigate screen printing which allowed me to print bespoke fabrics for my collection. I have worked in numerous related areas over the years, where I have experimented with a variety of printing and etching techniques.

**Mary:** As a younger woman my interest was in Industrial Design, but I had an attraction to the tactile nature of fabrics. After a move to a rural community, I had an opportunity to explore new experiences. I had always been intrigued by the geometry and texture of patchwork and quilting and started making quilts. Focussing on traditional initially, a passion for art quilts evolved.

For both of us, this is an ongoing path of exploration.

### How would you describe the qualities, strengths and challenges of the material that you work with?

**Both:** Surface design has a wonderfully tactile nature on fabric, while print is immediately engaging, stitch can be nearly invisible from a distance but drawing the viewer in for a closer look, it all begs touch. However, textiles often have a life of their own, and can move, stretch, or distort in unexpected ways. Sometimes this creates magic, other times, frustration.

### Can you tell us a little about your making process? How do you develop from the idea stage to finished piece?

**Both:** In collaboration, the working process is much like a conversation, with each person thinking and working independently, and the design and object moves back and forth between.

**A:** I work to a theme; the imagery in my work is my interpretation of that theme.

The images I use can include sketches, photographs, surface textures and colour sampling. These elements are digitally manipulated producing many drafts. The layout is gradually refined until a final design evolves. Further changes to design often occur during the making process.

My work fuses traditional hand-printing techniques with modern digital technology.

**M:** I sometimes work to a theme, an idea can revolve around a conversation, a piece of music, current issues, or a myriad of other sources. I enjoy the relationship between shapes, proportion and colour, and the abstract representation of the same, with the texture that stitch creates on a surface adding another crucial element.

**Both:** We're both attracted to cloth and its tactile nature. The texture of a fabric is equally important as the visual appearance of a design. The fabrics we have used in our projects

have always had different textures and fibres, sometimes with previous uses. Colour is added and removed through both contemporary and traditional means such as discharge and indigo dyeing.

### When is a maker an artist?

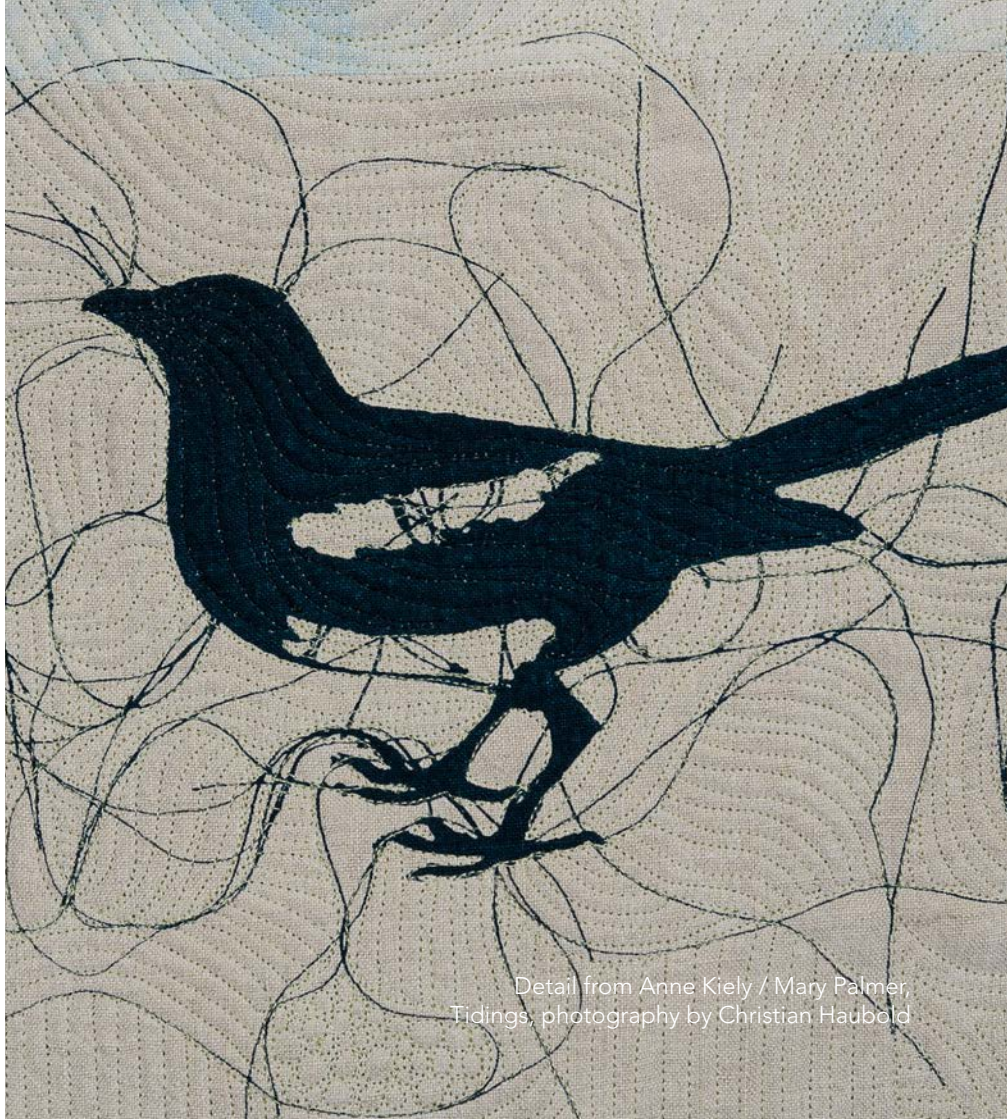
**Both:** This is a long running and contentious question. For many art and craft should be inseparable, as there is artistry in all finely made craft. For others, art should evoke an emotional or intellectual response and should have meaning.

As makers, we value handmade objects and like to focus on the human connection. Our work often references issues that are important to both of us. Perhaps the results of the combination of our creativity and technical skills can be regarded as art.

If the work connects to someone, does it really matter?

More information:

[www.marimudesigns.com](http://www.marimudesigns.com)



Detail from Anne Kiely / Mary Palmer,  
Tidings, photography by Christian Haubold

## Nuala O'Donovan

**When or why did you first start to work with wood / fabric / clay / glass / paper?**

I've worked with many materials at some stage. I could say that paper was my first working material – architectural drawing and model making. I added metal and glass when I studied design through materials at Middlesex University and most recently my main material has been porcelain clay. I started working more with clay to make plaster moulds for cast glass. I was interested in intricate layered structures such as cage cups from Roman times and realised that clay was a far more immediate material for making the forms that I was interested in. I was very lucky to be offered a post-graduate year of exploratory studies in the Ceramics Department at the Crawford College of Art and Design and went on to complete an MFA with clay as my main material.

**Can you tell us a little about your making process? How do you develop from the idea stage to finished piece?**

I make very detailed drawings of my source materials, usually plants, shells, coral fragments – any living organisms that have intricate structures and patterns. I will take the specimens apart to see how the structure works and explore these structures using drawing/collage/paper models. I am particularly interested in irregularities in the patterns as these are often the result of an event and a record of the life lived. I use the research into the patterns to start a new piece or series. Rather than replicating the source material I apply the rules of geometry from Eastern Buddhist and Classical Western art traditions to decide on the development and outcome of the form.

Each piece is an experiment; the principles of geometry from living forms are applied to the proportions of the piece in an attempt to replicate the dynamism and beauty of living forms.

The pieces will often become fluid, move and sometimes distort in the

high temperatures of the kiln firing, this is the magic of porcelain – each piece is a frozen moment

**Can you describe a maker or thinker, past or present, who has influenced you?**

D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, (1860-1948), published his classic book, 'On Growth and Form' in 1917. He was a Professor of Zoology but equally qualified in mathematics, philosophy and art history. His book has been described a 'tour de force combining the classical approaches of natural philosophy and geometry with modern biology and mathematics to understand the growth, form, and evolution of plants and animals'.


'On Growth and Form' has been a huge influence on my work, eloquently written and illustrated. Thompson's book weaves a tapestry from his vast knowledge, combining a history of art, philosophy, botany, zoology and mathematics. I constantly return to it for inspiration.

More information:  
[www.nualaodonovan.com](http://www.nualaodonovan.com)





Nuala O'Donovan, Radiolaria & Elisabeth Fern,  
Janice O'Connell/F22 photography



Alex Pentek, *Folded Space*,  
RHA gallery, Dublin 2018.  
Image credit -The Voyage Out

## Alex Pentek

### When or why did you first start to work with paper?

I experimented with a number of different techniques and materials in Art College and I took it upon myself to study origami as an example of intuitive knowledge of materials. It was originally my aim to transfer this material led approach into other mediums such as sheet metals.

But as computer software has developed over the past number of years, origami has been used to explore areas of scientific research as varied as micro medical devices, deployable emergency shelters, robotics and astro-solar folding panels used in space exploration. Origami is currently even used as a cosmological model to explain spiral galaxy formation.

At the forefront of this research, origami, with its multi-faceted surfaces connects with these ideas and implies a hidden interconnectedness. I am excited to continue to use origami as both means to express and to reflect

on these ideas on a practical and philosophical level.

### **How would you describe the qualities, strengths and challenges of the material that you work with?**

Because of its thinness where it can theoretically be folded perfectly flat, I find paper to almost exist on the boundary somewhere between being a 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional material, or a meta-material. The discipline of origami exploits this among many other properties of paper.

From a sculptural perspective where light falls and is broken over a 3-dimensional object or surface, paper can create a dramatic visual impact and also allows light to filter through its surfaces under certain conditions. Often viewed as a throw-away material in Western Culture, one of the challenges of working with paper is that people tend to see it as 'only paper' and that origami is nothing more than craft. I see paper and origami as a way of challenging these misconceptions as a valid

contemporary fine art medium.

As a delicate material, paper alludes to the temporary nature of all things and acts as a counterpoint to the material obsession of modern culture. But working with paper also presents a number of physical challenges as it absorbs moisture from our hands and creates complex surface tensions during the folding process. Not to mention the fact that in order to be folded it must be measured and creased to near mathematical perfection. Working in paper in this way pushes me to the very limit of my artistic ability more than any other material.

### **Can you tell us a little about your making process? How do you develop from the idea stage to finished piece?**

I have no fixed formula or program for creating new work but use a mixture of sketching in pencil, folded paper and also sometimes I use 3D computer modelling software to visualize an idea, but ultimately all of this is still drawing. With my gallery work I will research and develop folded surfaces

by trial and error, so that the creative process is informed by the materials as much as possible.

Direct hands-on experience in a growing range of materials gives me the freedom to work & think in this way. With any material, (including paper), it comes down understanding the limitations of the medium which I believe can only be found by experience.

But it is also my aim to push the limits of materials in some way so that they hopefully transcend from their original state to something more. My last paper installation, *Folded Space*, at the RHA gallery this year used a mixture of folds that created a technical challenge I intuitively hoped could be achieved. (<https://vimeo.com/274713030>) It is my aim to explore the limits of scale in this exhibition.

More information:  
[alexpentek.com](http://alexpentek.com)

## Eoin Turner

### How would you describe the qualities, strengths and challenges of the material that you work with?

Working primarily in glass presents some interesting logistical challenges, which occur during the handling and process stage. In terms of structural strength, glass stands one to one with other materials- steel, stone etc.

Testament to this is how currently glass is increasingly being used as a primary structural element in naval architecture. Large elevations of glass in yacht superstructures and even substantial underwater sections. So strength is not an issue.

Glass, though, can be utterly unforgiving. It is a hard material so scratches easily. If anybody hasn't had the dubious pleasure of polishing crystal from coming out from a mold to high polish, just think polishing rusty steel to a mirror polish with cotton wool!

Glass is an incredibly dense material, one metre cubed of crystal that I currently use weighs three tonnes. As the scale of the castings we are involved in is getting increasingly larger we are more and more reliant on heavy lifting equipment to move pieces around in the studio. One error or one slip can consign months of work to the bin.

All that said, I can't help but be seduced by that conflicting fragility on one hand and its incredibly strength on the other. Then transferring that physicality to the aesthetics of playing with densities and transparencies, of how it reflects or refracts light and how it makes that light move. And how glass then responds in its relationship, in its conversation with other materials. Working with its properties but also pushing the parameters of those properties and at times maybe subverting them to that end.

### When is a maker an artist?

That is a demarcation that is perhaps less clear now than it has been historically. When I came out of college in the 80s, I think it is fair to say

any hint of functionality within a piece of work relegated it from the realms of Fine Art.

Now we speak of sculptural lighting, furniture as sculpture, yachts as floating sculptures, architecture as enormous functioning sculptures (Zaha Hadid to name but one) cars (Jaguar E type is argued by some to be one of the most beautiful sculptural forms ever produced), the list goes on. Practitioners and disciplines overlap and cross over and back.

When does one become the other I think probably lies in intent: the intent to put one's own individual signature, stamp, DNA on or into a work to push the limits and boundaries, to push the limits and boundaries, in the pursuit of the emotive and individual. In the pursuit of the emotive and individual.

### Is there a typical working day in your studio?

For the most part there is. If I'm not out of the studio visiting a project or client. Then I start in the studio between 7 and 8 am. A normal day would usually run through to between 7 and 9 pm, depending on what



deadlines are looming or what is in production. The day breaks down between dealing with correspondence, manufacture and design on varying projects. These all have different demands as they would be at various stages of development.

I have worked and collaborated with my wife Lorraine Mullins for twenty years now. She runs the business side of the studio in its entirety and does a lot of client meetings which in turn frees me up to stay working in the studio. We often work on initial designs for projects together: this is where her background as a painter comes into play. Mostly the intention is to have all office work completed by mid-morning then it's working in the studio from there on.

More information:  
<http://www.eointurner.com>

Eoin Turner, detail from N by NE 1/4 E,  
photography by Lorraine Mullins



## Joseph Walsh

**When or why did you first start to work with wood / fabric / clay / glass / paper?**

I started very young, when I was maybe nine or ten. I started doing fret work, my maternal grandfather gave me a copying saw and I was using it to cut decorative characters in plywood and paint them. He then added to my toolbox a few other tools, a fretsaw and gouges and so I began to do light relief carving.

I quite quickly went on to making functional pieces from the age of about twelve onwards. Wood was accessible, I was very keen and I had all the time in the world so I spent long days making, failing and trying again. I think taking this time to work with a material, in a slow way, maybe with the wrong tools, is a good way to develop a foundation of knowledge of working a material. I was looking as local farmers were giving me tree so I also got to follow the whole process from tree to plank, dry the time and feel the difference from one growing circumstance to another.

**Can you tell us a little about your making process? How do you develop from the idea stage to finished piece?**

I really enjoy working organically, starting with a free-flowing sketch, then moving to model-making. It is a very fluid exchange and often I return to the sketching process. It is at this stage that I feel most creative and it allows for a real freedom of expression and a chance to generate ideas. Of course, at a certain point, there is the question of how to realise the piece, of how to scale up a model to full size and then engineer the inner technical works of a complicated piece. My team work through the details of the pieces with me. When necessary, I collaborate with a structural engineer. The rigour of this approach means I can achieve an exceptional level of resolve and quality while remaining true to the original stroke of the sketch.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges to being an artist living in Ireland now?**

I think the challenges can often be opportunities. For instance, one could

say we are very removed from the momentum of the art or design scenes in various world capitals. However, being removed is a great opportunity to create work in response to the issues that matter here: if successful in doing so, the outcome could be truly original, relevant and refreshing. I think Ireland is a great place to live and there is a great opportunity to be creative here.

I think the challenge here in Ireland is to develop an understanding that creativity, the arts, an artist, an architect can fundamentally enhance society. Today the world still benefits enormously from the contribution of societies in the past that placed a higher value on the arts. We are still enjoying the fruits of the labour of artists from another time, art from cultures that in many cases we cannot even comprehend now, so imagine if we could be living in a world where we could witness this equal commitment to the arts, to live, to see around us the creative response to the challenges of today.

Creativity is something each generation can give to its own generation and yet share with those to

follow. It is a boundless resource and simply nurtured by appreciation.

### **How does the location of your studio play a part in your work?**

I like the working environment I have, I like the sense of space and being able to enhance the space. These facilities made up of large buildings also enables me to explore larger-scale work. I also find being connected to the land and seasons inspiring, I find it a good surrounding for me. I'm sure that it influences the work.

I value living in a making culture and believe it to be an important component in a community. As consumers, we increasingly live through the objects we consume rather than surrounding ourselves with objects that best support how we live. In Ireland today, we need to look at our island, our past and our future, as we mark our place in time with the objects we create and surround ourselves with. Objects that enhance the way we live but are also an expression of who we are.

More information:  
<http://www.josephwalshstudio.com>



Detail of Joseph Walsh,  
Magnus Celestii

# EARTH, WIND & FIRE

## Made in Cork Contemporary

23 November 2018 - 17 February 2019

Crawford Art Gallery  
Emmet Place  
Cork  
T12 TNE6  
Ireland

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### Opening Times

Monday - Saturday: 10.00am - 5.00pm  
Thursdays: 10am - 8pm

### Sundays & Bank Holidays

Gallery: 11am - 4pm    Cafe: 11am - 4pm

For information on the associated Learn and Explore programmes visit:  
[www.crawfordartgallery.ie/education.html](http://www.crawfordartgallery.ie/education.html)

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