

Irish Arts Review

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Strata

Dorothy Cross' new work feels explicitly relevant to the times we are living in, writes [Francis Halsall](#)

Throughout Dorothy Cross' storied and distinguished career, her work has featured materials, identities and concepts in creative tension with one another. Human, animal; male, female; artificial, natural; hard, soft; dead, alive: these are just some of the apparent dichotomies that her sculptures, images and films evoke. Sometimes these contrasts face one another in recognition or confrontation, while at other times clear distinctions between things begin to slide around or break down.

Cross' exhibition at the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin comprises a sculptural series of soft human feet modelled in hard, inhuman marble, alongside photographs layered in glass. It is another handsome iteration of her ongoing project of

unsettling binaries and traversing boundaries. She explains that the main focus of the show, a series called 'Tread', 'consists of 12 pieces of different-coloured marble from different seams'. As with previous works, such as *Damascus Rose* (2022), where Cross worked with red marble from Syria, the pieces have been hand-carved from coloured marble (Figs 1&2). With stone coming from a variety of geographical locations, these sculptures include feet made from Carrara Statuario alongside Chinese Green and Travertine Red. Cross offers, some of the feet emerge like fossils. It's about marks of time.' While this might suggest something static or ossified about the sculptures, the very nature of marble means that they almost glow as if animated by internal energy; the

Dorothy Cross **ARTISTS ON VIEW**

stone takes on the appearance of flesh. The naturally occurring veins in the marble seem to almost pulse in the same way as those that carry our own blood from our heart to our head – and feet.

Cross' feet are embedded in the pieces of different-coloured marble that bear them and imbue them with a particular sculptural weight. Yet, despite this heft, these feet are disembodied. They are without a specific gender or race and refer instead to a more general, universal humanity that, like the marble they are hewn from, doesn't correspond to particular national or social identities or borders.

The other series in the exhibition is 'Bloodlines', photographs layered with red-veined, hand-poured glass. These pieces are more obviously personal than the feet, as they have come from the artist's personal archive and feature recognisable people. They are images taken by Cross' father of himself and her mother. In one diptych, they both gaze through binoculars and a window (Fig 3). In other passages, motifs include the Fastnet Lighthouse and a lightship, a recurring subject for Cross, once used to mark the position of Daunt Rock, an underwater hazard in Cork Harbour. As with the sculptures, they speak from spaces where the human and non-human meet. They can feel similarly animated through some internal movement. Glass, after all, is not a solid, but a slow-moving liquid.

Superficially, 'Bloodlines' and 'Tread' are distinct in being, respectively, photographic images placed on the wall at eye height and sculptural objects placed on the floor. Nonetheless, the layers in the photographs mimic the strata, layers and veins of rock. They both have wave-like forms embedded in their structure and share the muted, earthy palette of minerality. The central motifs of heads and feet provide another connection, being at the top and bottom of recognisably human bodies. All the work provides traces and indices of human behaviour that have been captured, preserved, re-presented and monumentalised in material, tangible forms. They articulate, once again with poise and grace, a consistent motif in Cross' work: art triangulates the juxtaposition of the fragile and brief experiences of our lives with the concrete and enduring stuff of the world.

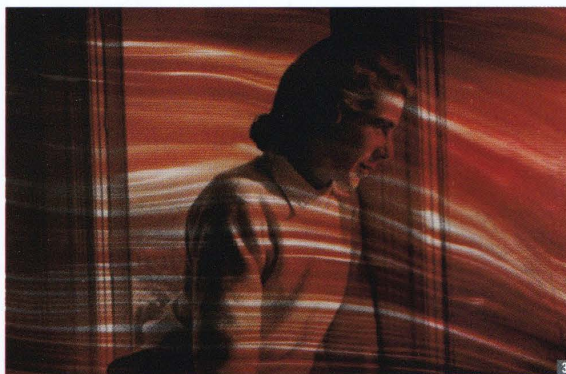
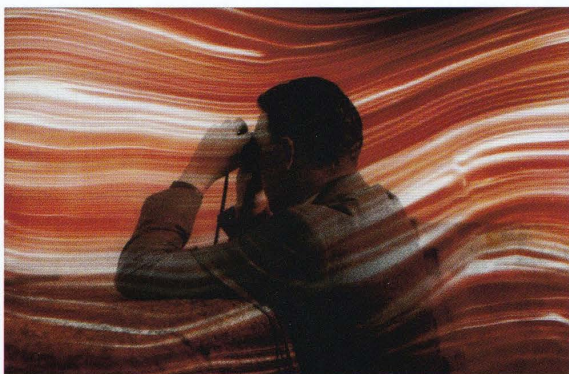


THE LAYERS IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS MIMIC THE STRATA, LAYERS AND VEINS OF ROCK

Despite the timeless, perhaps even Classical, feel of the pieces, there is something about them that feels explicitly relevant to the times we are living through. If things feel fast, fluid and febrile, Cross gives us some slow, fixed points to ground and anchor. Against the confusion and flux of the here and now, 'Veins of Other' evokes deep time. Are these new monuments to future generations and the new humans, animals and other conscious entities and intelligences (both natural and artificial) that are to come? Cross, as always, reminds us that human histories are nested within deeper processes of change in geological, meteorological, ecological and genealogical systems. ■

Dorothy Cross, 'Veins of Other', Kerlin Gallery, until 6 July.

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- 1 DOROTHY CROSS**
GENERATIONS
2022 hand-carved
Statuario marble
65 x 62.1 x 43.4cm
Photo Lee Welch
- 2 Green foot** 2023
hand-carved green
Ming marble
52 x 70 x 61cm
Photo Lee Welch
- 3 BINOCULARS & WINDOW**, diptych,
Bloodlines series
2023 photograph
with red glass
63 x 96cm
Photo Lee Welch