# **OBJECTS IN FOCUS**

# New Research Seminar, National Museum of Ireland, Decorative Arts and History, Collins Barracks

Saturday 16th February 2013

The National Museum of Ireland – Decorative Arts and History is holding a day of talks to showcase new research on the theme of 'Visual and Material Culture'.

The purpose of the conference is to allow historians, scholars and practising artists to present their work for discussion before the general public and researchers working in the fields of visual and material culture today.

Admission €5.00 (includes refreshments).

If you would like to attend the Objects in Focus seminar please contact the Education and Outreach Bookings Office:

E: Bookings@museum.ie





# **OBJECTS IN FOCUS:**

5.00:

Close

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Session 1	
09.45 – 09.50:	Helen Beaumont, Education Department, NMI / Open
09.50 – 10.00:	Eimir O'Brien, Education Department, NMI / Introduction
10.00 – 10.20:	Fiona Ahern, Design History MA NCAD / Irene Gilbert: Identity, Agency, Image
10.20 - 10.40:	Elaine Hewitt, Design History MA NCAD/ Beetle wing Dress by Mrs Sims c. 1880
10.40 – 10.50:	Chair, Prof. Jessica Hemmings, NCAD / Panel Questions
10.50 – 11.20:	COFFEE
Session 2	
11.20 – 11.40:	Jessica Cunningham / From the Orient to Skinner Row: John Cuthbert, Dublin goldsmith,
	and the chinoiserie style in seventeenth-century Irish silver
11.40 – 12.00:	Breda Scott, PhD candidate Maynooth / Beautiful and ingenious: horsehair jewellery
	manufactured by the 'idle people' of Ireland c.1750 to c.1870
12.00 – 12.20:	Dr Helen McAllister, Head Fashion & Textiles Department, NCAD / The Shoe as a making skill
12.20 – 12.40:	Frances MacDonald, Independent Arts Advisor / KILKENNY WOODWORKERS 1905 – 1920
12.40 – 12.55:	Chair, Prof. Jessica Hemmings, NCAD / Panel Questions
12.55 – 2.00:	LUNCH
Session 3	
2.00 – 2.20:	Emma O'Toole, PhD Candidate, Visual Culture NCAD / The Material Culture of
	Infancy & Early Childhood in Ireland, c.1680-1830
2.20 – 2.40:	Dr Dominique Bouchard, Curator of Education and Outreach The Hunt Museum / Red-figure
	Bell Krater and the Hamilton Collection
2.40 – 3.00:	Dr Alison Fitzgerald, NUI Maynooth / "History's little black joke"? "Cromwell's cabinet"
3.00 – 3.20:	Alex Ward, Curator of Dress and Textiles, NMI / A dress for The White House
3.20 – 3.35:	Chair, Prof. Jessica Hemmings NCAD / Panel Questions
3.35 – 4.00:	COFFEE
Session 4	
4.00 – 4.20:	Dr Audrey Whitty, Ceramics, Glass & Asian collections, NMI / The Albert M. Bender
	(1866-1941) Collection of Far Eastern Art in the National Museum of Ireland and his
	Cultural Interests in Ireland and California
4.20 – 4.40:	Nigel Cheney, NCAD / 'Collect- ED'
4.40 – 4.55:	Chair, Prof. Jessica Hemmings NCAD / Panel Questions

# **CHAIR:**

### **PROFESSOR JESSICA HEMMINGS**

Head of the Faculty of Visual Culture, National College of Art and Design, Dublin (NCAD) Jessica Hemmings writes about textiles. She also writes about fiction that contains textiles, materials that remind us of textiles and other things, as long as they are interesting. Jessica writes articles and exhibition reviews for publications such as Crafts, Selvedge and the Surface Design Journal.

# **SPEAKERS:**

#### **FIONA AHERN**

is a student on the MA Design History and Material Culture at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. Ahern's talk examines Irene Gilbert's co-operation with the Department of Industry and Commerce and other fashion designers to bring international buyers to Ireland and increase export sales.

### **ELAINE HEWITT**

is a student on the MA Design History and Material Culture at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. Hewitt's research highlights the pivotal role that skilled Irish dressmakers played in the late-nineteenth century through an examination of the use of beetle wings to decorate garments. One such piece, made by Mrs Sims of Dawson Street Dublin, and now in the NMI collections, is the focus of this paper. Mary Sims was a court dressmaker by Royal appointment, who established herself from 1863 as the most prominent dressmaker in Dublin.

# JESSICA CUNNINGHAM

PhD Candidate and Hume Scholarship
Recipient in the History Department at the
National University of Ireland (NUI), Maynooth.
With reference to the permanent Irish Silver
exhibition at Collins Barracks his paper
highlights the growing sophistication
of the silver craft and trade in post-Restoration
Dublin, a subject that has hitherto received little
attention. Cunningham uses John Cuthbert
(fl. 1670-1705) as a case study of a Dublin
goldsmith's workshop in which silver
of this type was produced.

## **BREDA SCOTT**

PhD candidate in the History Department at the National University of Ireland (NUI), Maynooth. This paper considers a horsehair brooch c.1850, held in the collection of the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks. Using the brooch as a focal point Scott will consider the contexts in which horsehair jewellery was made, worn, retailed and valued in nineteenth-century Ireland.

### **DR HELEN MCALLISTER**

Head of Fashion and Textiles Department at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. McAllister's applied artist's practice and PhD research outcomes on embroidered shoe-derived forms are the connection to shoes in the museum. These are the starting point for this paper exploring the shoe as an artefact, a crafted object and as something to be archived and collected.

### **FRANCES MCDONALD**

Independent Arts Advisor and Studio Manager at Joseph Walsh Studio 2006 - 2010.

Looking at advertising material produced by the Kilkenny Woodworkers, including a Bookcase in the National Museum of Ireland Collection, McDonald's research proposes to investigate the approach taken to design and marketing by The Kilkenny Woodworkers in the context of the social and political environment of the time.

# **EMMA O'TOOLE**

PhD Candidate and a part-time lecturer in the Visual Culture Department at NCAD. Focusing on 18th and early 19th century infant material culture held in the National Museum's collection, this paper addresses the variety of objects, spaces and related ideologies which surrounded early childhood in Ireland during this period. Using everyday objects and clothing, together with family papers and ephemera, this research illustrates the changes that occurred in the organisation of domestic life on the arrival of children.

## **DR DOMINIQUE BOUCHARD**

Curator of Education and Outreach at the Hunt Museum. In this paper, Bouchard explores the journey of this krater through different collections shaped by different philosophies of collecting and taste. The story of this artistically modest object points to the larger history of the rediscovery of classical painted vases and the evolution of modern archaeological collections and approaches to understanding classical art.

### **DR ALISON FITZGERALD**

lectures in the Department of History at NUI Maynooth. This paper examines the Fleetwood Cabinet, said to have been the gift of Oliver Cromwell to his daughter Bridget when she married Charles Fleetwood in 1652. The paper presents new evidence on the production and consumption of this artefact and argues that the association with Cromwell has almost entirely obscured the other dimensions to its history. Who for example was involved in making or selling it? How were they used? And how robust is the provenance, which links the cabinet to Cromwell in the first place?

### **ALEX WARD**

Curator of Dress and Textiles, NMI.
This paper will look at an evening dress that was on display in the recent exhibition, Neillí Mulcahy, Irish Haute Couture of the 50s and 60s. The dress was designed and made by Mulcahy for her Aunt Phyllis, Mrs. Sean T.
O'Kelly, who wore it to a State Dinner in the White House on the evening of St. Patrick's Day 1959. The dress, made of antique Irish crochet, not only serves as a stepping stone into the story of the first official visit by an Irish Head of State to the United States, but it also highlights the lace industry for which Ireland was once famous.

## **DR AUDREY WHITTY**

Curator of Ceramics, Glass & Asian collections, NMI. One of the most remarkable donors to the National Museum of Ireland was the San Francisco-based philanthropist, Albert Bender (1866-1941) who presented 260 objects of Asian art to the institution throughout the 1930s. His correspondence with the then director of the National Museum of Ireland and Nazi, Adolf Mahr will be addressed. It is in these letters where the greatest insights into how he acquired his Asian collection are found. His friendships with such Irish writers as W.B. Yeats, Oliver St. John Gogarty, George Russell and Walter Starkie will also be referenced.

### **NIGEL CHENEY MA**

Lecturer in Embroidered Textiles, NCAD.
Winner of printed textiles category in the 2012
RDS National Crafts Competition.
This paper explores the role of artefacts,
material culture, and the study of collections
by design students. It discusses to what extent
museum collections can stimulate and excite
contemporary design students. Outcomes
highlighted in the paper may pose challenges
to the museum, suggesting possibilities for
providing a different experience for design
students.

