

Antosik-Parsons, Kate. Biographical Entry: Pauline Cummins. Paula Murphy, ed, *Art and Architecture of Ireland: Sculpture Volume III (1600-2000)*, Dublin and New Haven: Royal Irish Academy and Yale University Press, pp. 90-91.

CUMMINS, PAULINE (b.1949). Sculptor, painter, performance artist Pauline Cummins was born in Dublin and studied at NCA (later NCAD) where she specialised in painting and ceramics (1966-70). She subsequently completed an MA at the same college (2000-02), writing her thesis on the development of multimedia art in Ireland. She was the director of Craft Workshop (1974-75), an aid programme in Turkana, Kenya, where she taught craft design and marketing. She co-founded Ashford Pottery (1975), a ceramic studio in Co. Wicklow. Upon relocating to Toronto, Canada (1979), she focused exclusively on painting and explored female sexuality. She curated and exhibited in the group show *Pregnancy* (1981, Once upon a Time Gallery, Toronto). Returning to Dublin in 1981, Cummins participated in a number of group shows, including *9 months and after* (1982, The Grapevine Arts Centre, Dublin) and IELA (1982, Guinness Hop Store).

Her early work was a celebration of femininity, characterized by figures rendered in simple, free-flowing curvilinear lines with a delicate application of paint. An example of this was the whimsical mural *Celebration* (1984) which depicted two female figures joyously holding aloft a figure in labour referencing the pregnant mare in the prehistoric cave of Lascaux. Positioned on the external wall National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street, Dublin, it was removed after one week without consultation of the artist, owing to complaints. Her work shifted to incorporate photographic representations of the body, marking her move into audio-visual multimedia work. The slide installation *Inis t'Oirr/Aran Dance* (IELA, 1985) was an overtly feminist work that featured a nude male torso overlaid with knitting patterns. It questioned the essentialist nature of assumptions about women's creative productions and troubled the divide between fine art and craft.

Concerned with the problems encountered by women artists, Cummins was a founding member and the first chairwoman of the Women Artists Action Group (WAAG) (1987), a feminist collective and networking organization that supported the efforts of women artists working in Ireland. Through her involvement with WAAG, she later sat on the executive advisory committee of International Association of Women Artists (IAWA). During this time Cummins enacted *Unearthed* (1988-91), a video and performance work that fused cultural memory, oral history and ritual. Using Raku-fired ceramic masks with dark slits for narrowed eyes and a contorted mouth twisted in pain, Cummins activated the metaphor of bog bodies as a means of interrogating the connection between Irish identity and the turmoil in Northern Ireland.

Her oeuvre has been characterized by an underlying interest in personal and collective power, demonstrated through her feminist politics and participation in collaborative and community-based projects. She was an artist-in-residence on several projects with women inmates at Mount Joy Jail (1986 and 1990). *Changing States* (1991) was a large cocoon-like hanging sculpture created from wire armature and fabric for *In A State* (1991, Kilmanham Gaol, Dublin). The work reflected the transitional nature of the space, as well as a nuanced metaphor for the shifting perceptions of Irish identity in the later part of the twentieth century. *Sounding the Depths* (1992), a collaborative installation with Louise Walsh, explored the idea of feminine autonomy and subjectivity through imagery that fused clamshells, female torsos and mouths. *Becoming Beloved* (1996) depicted an unborn child in the womb and a baby swimming underwater in a pool, whose fluid movements were filmed using special scuba-

diving equipment, suggesting the delicate balance of life. More recently, Cummins collaborated with Sandra Johnston and Frances Mezzetti on *Appearances Project* (2000), a series of site-specific performances and installations. She has been a member of the Performance Collective since 2007, a group of performance artists in Ireland who create collaborative live works. Cummins has taught in the sculpture department at NCAD since 1995.

Her solo exhibitions include *Power Points* (2000), Tinahely Courthouse Centre, Co. Wicklow; *Becoming Beloved* (1996), Hermitage of Maria Magdaleina, Lanzarote; *Inis t'Oirr/Aran Dance and Unearthed* (1990), Ladengalerie, Munich.

Cummins has been the recipient of numerous bursaries and awards including Culture Ireland Award (2010); Research Grant, ACI (2005 and 2002); Bursary Award, Arts Council Of Ireland (1991, 1994, 2000); Sir Mark Turner Memorial Scholarship, Banff Centre, Alberta, Canada (1992); The George Campbell Painting Award (1986). Kate Antosik-Parsons

Selected Reading:

Catherine Nash, 'Reclaiming Vision: looking at landscape and the body' *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 3: 2 (1996), 149-170; Medb Ruane, 'Re/Dressing Cathleen: A Local Perspective,' in *Re/Dressing Cathleen; Contemporary Works from Irish Women Artists* Boston, 1996; Katy Deepwell, *Dialogues: Women Artists from Ireland*, New York and London, 2005.