

## ABOUT: VESSELS OF MEMORY: RACHEL DICKSON & ALISON LOWRY



Objects and possessions play an often unacknowledged yet important role in the construction of an individual's identity and thus have a unique capacity for evoking memories. Some objects move in and out of individuals' lives without impact, others may play a significant emotional role, becoming embedded in frameworks of time and memory for that individual. In other words there is often more to an object than meets the eye - it has a story to tell. Sharing an interest in the exploration of memory, remembrance and the personal object or possession, ceramicist Rachel Dickson and glass artist Alison Lowry have exhibited together under the title 'Vessels of Memory' at CraftNI's gallery in Belfast.

Rachel Dickson's body of work examines concepts of memory and circumstance through the medium of porcelain, paperclay and paper. Depictions of seemingly everyday garments are juxtaposed with text, exploring personal narratives and



Above / Row of shoes, 'worn out', porcelain paper-clay

"Sharing an interest in the exploration of memory, remembrance and the personal object or possession, ceramicist Rachel Dickson and glass artist Alison Lowry have exhibited together under the title 'Vessels of Memory' at CraftNI's gallery in Belfast."



Above / Blue shoes, 'I was never...', porcelain paper-clay

ideas of relationships, rejection, loneliness and the forlorn.

Graduating from the Royal College of Art with a master's degree in Ceramics and Glass in 2002, Dickson received the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) postgraduate award in the same year and went on to be awarded the ACNI 'Support for the Individual Artist Programme' (SIAP) grant in 2008. Having previously studied at the University of Ulster in Belfast, gaining a first class honors degree in fine and applied art with specialism in ceramics, Dickson

became an associate lecturer in Foundation Studies there in 2004 and has since become Course Director of Foundation Studies.

Exploring the universal themes of memory, Dickson's work has been viewed in London, Somerset, Cork, Lisburn, numerous times in Belfast and as far afield as Atlanta. Additionally Dickson has received numerous commissions for her work, including her Cheese Sculpture (2009) and Butter Sculpture (2007) for Dale Farm Ltd in Belfast and a large scale piece for London Underground in 2002. ▶



Above / Single white shoe, 'just below the surface', porcelain paper-clay ▶



Above / Pair of white shoes, 'i was undone...', porcelain paper-clay

▶ On the surface Dickson's works are depictions of clothing and various garments. There is a recurrence of underwear - vests, corsets, briefs. These are the most private and intimate of women's garments, their delicacy enhanced by Dickson's fragile medium. Recent works include a series of paper and paperclay shoes, too fragile to wear, incorporating evocative text. "I forgot to remember...", "Lost to me forever" the mysterious words hint towards unknown emotion and experience only partially remembered. At the 'Vessels of Memory' exhibition ceramic plates with illustrations of earrings, bags, shoes - items a woman might have received as gifts from a

loved one - adorn the wall. Melancholic text litters the pretty plates, "You're still the same person but you're not". They are like private secrets displayed and memories revealed, "Intimate garments, marked and stained, secrets, memories exposed." (Artists statement)

Like Rachel Dickson, Alison Lowry uses garments and possessions to explore themes of memory, creating beautiful glass pieces tainted by melancholy and loss.

Graduating with a first class honors degree in Art and Design from the University of Ulster in 2009, Lowry previously undertook a City and

Guilds Diploma in Embroidery in 2004 and a Foundation course in Art and Design in 1994. Beginning her artistic education in Textiles, Lowry felt "restricted" by embroidery. Moving into glass in her final year at University, Lowry still enjoys the endless possibilities, contradictions and continual challenges of glass. More recently in 2010 she was awarded the Warm Glass prize and the opportunity to the course ▶



Above / 'Memories c.1843', cast glass, pate-de-verre, decals, 2010



Above / Paper shoe on shelf, 'you tell yourself you're happy', porcelain paper-clay

Below / 'Presence and Absence', cast glass, 2009



Left / 'The Holy Innocents/Innocence Lost', cast glass, decals, 2010



**Above** / 'Vessels (of Remembrance)', pate-de-verre, 2010

► 'Drawing with Light' taught by glass artist Deborah Horrell at Warm Glass, Bristol. Lowry's work has been exhibited in Norfolk, Prague, Dublin, Cork, Banbridge, and Letterkenny as well as Belfast and her work has been selected for this year's Royal Ulster Academy exhibition.

Since 2009 Lowry has won a number of prizes, including first place in the glass category at RDS in Dublin 2009, the Glass Society of Ireland's Award 2009 and ACNI SIAP 2010. Her work is included in the University of Ulster's permanent collection of art works and commissions have included twenty one cast glass awards for the Theatre Management Association in England,

as well as private commissions for momentos in mixed media and glass. The artist acknowledges the inspiration for her work as an embroidered christening robe in her



**Above** / Picture postcards from 'Vessels of Memory'

family for nearly a hundred years. An interest in Rites of Passage rituals and symbols, and the belief that 'fabric preserves the essence of its maker; it can act as a vessel memory and leaves a trace of the wearer' (Artist's statement) permeates throughout her work. Cast glass sculptures feature a

recurring christening robe, hauntingly preserved behind glass. Works such as 'Triptych of life' combine the robe with text, a technique Lowry has continued to employ since her embroidery work at the start of her degree. Biblical quotations are combined with the image of a christening robe, while a subtle use of light and dark, such as the creeping black in 'Fade to grey', hint at decay and death.

'Vessels of memory' forms a series of works by Lowry from which the joint exhibition with Rachel Dickson takes its name, consisting of bowls, jugs, vessels and framed memories. Again the Victorian christening robe is referenced, explicitly in the photographs and distressed frames of 'Memories c.1843' and more subtly in beautiful and intricate lace patterning of 'Lace Bowl' and 'Mourning and Half Mourning' creating using pate-de-verre or 'paste glass' technique. 'Mourning and Half Mourning' act as sombre yet beautiful reminders of death, due to the rounder urn shape, referencing a life ended but remembered and cherished by loved ones left behind. ●

**Emma McVeigh**  
Craft NI



'Vessels of Memory' continues at Craft NI, Cotton Court until 1 November 2010.

I am grateful to the artists for discussing their work with me. More information on Rachel Dickson can be found at [www.racheldickson.co.uk](http://www.racheldickson.co.uk) and on Alison Lowry at [www.alisonlowry.co.uk](http://www.alisonlowry.co.uk).



**Left and Above** / 'Fade (to Grey)', lost wax process, cast glass, 2010