

# JOHN McCRACKEN

6 August to 11 October, 2009.

Inverleith House, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

Open Tuesday to Sunday (daily until 6 September). Admission free.

## EXHIBITION GUIDE

Large Print version available upon request

### INTRODUCTION

On 1 January, 1966 the Californian artist John McCracken wrote:

"I think of color as being the structural material I use to build the forms I am interested in. The fact that in another sense I use plywood, fiberglass and lacquer as structural materials is of less importance. I have found that a certain range of mainly primary and secondary colours and a certain combination of color intensity and transparency and surface finish provide me with the expressive means I want, at least for the present."

Forty three years later, this statement still rings true as we welcome you to this exhibition of fourteen sculptures (dating from 1966 to 2006) – and seventeen pages of drawings from early sketchbooks kept between 1964 and 1968, which continue to define McCracken's art; as distinctive today as it was then.

Born in Berkeley, California in 1934, McCracken rose to prominence as an artist in the 1960s, and was included in the groundbreaking exhibition 'Primary Structures' held at the Jewish Museum, New York in 1966.\* The exhibition marked a turning point in 20th Century sculpture, featuring many artists who are now synonymous with the term 'Minimalism', including Carl Andre, Dan Flavin and Donald Judd. Unlike other artists working under this banner McCracken's work has always distinguished both through its emphasis on colour and the use of handmade, rather than industrial processes, (McCracken mixes pigments and lacquer by hand before pouring over wooden structures covered in fibreglass and repeatedly polishing by hand to achieve a smooth and highly reflective surface).

Reminiscent of the custom paint finishes on cars of the period in his native California, this saturated, reflective colour is allied to the use of simple forms – blocks, slabs, columns and planks. McCracken made his first sculpture in the form of a plank in 1966: gaining him international recognition, it has since been described as the perfect resolution between painting and sculpture. Of the significance of these different forms, which often have human proportions, McCracken has said "The plank is *out* of the world' (or on the edge of it), the column or block-form more *in* the world." In this way, McCracken calls attention to the space occupied by both viewer and object "the floor representing the physical world of standing objects, trees cars, buildings, human bodies ... and the wall representing the world of the imagination, illusionistic painting space, human mental space, and all that."

maybe but you don't know what to call it, or even how to describe it, these kinds of things are my interests and hopes when I make my work.

That is probably all I have to say. Thank you for coming to the show. Thank you Edinburgh for being such a great host to my show. I hope you all have a good time and so forth, bye.



John McCracken - August 2009

OK! Hello! Welcome to my show. Thanks for coming. And thanks to Paul Nesbitt and the Royal Botanic Garden for having my show here. It is a show I'm proud of and actually it is one I wish I could be at right now, looking at.

So, why do I make art? Is that a question? Why do I make the kind of art I do make? I make kind of noticeably minimal and I think maximal art. As beautiful as possible. I try to make beautiful things because I like to do it. I like that kind of thing. I mean for example, I don't like horror movies to much if they are too bad. If they're fun, then OK! But I like good things in the world. Positive things. Things that are uppers and so forth. To me art isn't good unless it is good. That is, unless it's an upper. And that could be tricky of course. Some things that are a little bit hard to take are uppers after all, and meant to be uppers and so forth.

Anyway, I'm trying to make beautiful things. Also, things that kind of come from... history? A few of my takes on history; I saw a statue in and Art History class quite a while ago. It was a statue of Korfa. One of the old Egyptian Faros. I thought whoa! There's something with being. That character is looking into infinity. I haven't been able to find an image of a thing that struck me like the image that day. But never the less, that's just kind of a source thing for my work. Some people think maybe the 2001 Space Odyssey thing has some relation to me. Some people thought I designed it. But I didn't! But, I had done work before then, at that time, that could have influenced it. I don't know. But that's the type of thing I like to make. Things that are almost like.... Sometimes I use this metaphor; "What if I were a UFO-naught?" And I want to just leave something here on this planet that those people called Earth? Just kind of be something I want to leave here. And I try to make works that have some of that nature to them of I try to anyway. I try to.

Let's see, what else? What else? Questions? You see I have to think one up. "Do you make all your own work by yourself?" Well, no I don't. I make the resin works, I have up to this point, by myself. But I have steel works. Polished stainless steel works going, and bronze. I just do resin and fibreglass and plywood and that sort of thing. The pieces, if you are wondering, in this show are polished polyester resin. This is a clear resin that you pigment with pigments. And what I do is pour a layer, a thickness about eight of an inch on each surface of a piece. Then I do a lot of sanding, and I mean a lot of sanding and polishing to bring the surface up to a polish and so forth.

Speaking of Polish... I like polished mirror surfaces, because they reflect the environment. And here at the garden by the way, here where you are, the reflections are going to be extraordinary. That is one reason I wish I were there, to see them myself right now. But anyway, what happens there physically and formally you have the environment included in the sculpture.

And why so I make sculptures so simple and of the shapes I make? Well, I like a simple shape that's all. The thing is though; I try not to make just architectural elements or something. But thins with energy or personality and attitude, stance. As if these pieces were visitors from another world. How about that [laughs]? But in a way that is what I try to do. So that they are almost figurative to my mind, many of my works, kind of all of them, whether they're horizontal like flying eagles or whether they're standing like giants of people and so forth.