

Deirdre McLoughlin

ULSTER MUSEUM, BELFAST

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McLoughlin's recent work is immensely skillful in all respects, but the less we notice the skill, the more interesting and moving it is. Its presentation - as the result of a craft activity, or as sculpture - therefore makes some difference. The show will tour to Limerick City Gallery and to Green on Red Gallery in Dublin, and this will be interesting because objects do not exist independent of the viewing conditions which include language. Mike Robinson, who curated the show, locates the work firmly in 'the ideas and language of modern sculpture'. While I am sure he is right in this, it also raises wider problems which are not easily dispelled.

McLoughlin's work owes much to Japanese exemplars - the Sodeisha group who, as I understand it, were concerned to bring

traditional Japanese craft activities into contemporary use, and older sculptors such as Isamu Noguchi. I sense also some of the qualities of modern Japanese stone sculptors such as Jiro Sugawara. But they are also, clearly, within a tradition that includes Moore, Hepworth and St. Ives artists, not to mention Arp and Brancusi. Like Hepworth and Noguchi, McLoughlin's work is beautifully finished; rich cream or subtle grey glazes and the finest of considered textures. The driving force in all these cases is an appropriate perfection of form as created by mass, rather than the exploration of space or the exploitation of process. That is to say, from the point of view of the developing art of sculpture, McLoughlin's work has an old-fashioned look. Old fashioned at least, to a superficial eye; because there is also an individuality about it which is entirely up-to-date. The comparison is easily made with a large Hepworth carving from 1955, in a downstairs gallery. Hepworth is looking for a static and universal statement; but these pieces are often quirky, tense and sometimes dynamic in that they exploit leaning, off balance effects.