



Gráinne McHugh

While out at THE TJING TJING EXCHANGE we came across the hauntingly beautiful sculptures of Gráinne McHugh. The enchanting sculptures fascinated and unsettled at the same time, compelling us to find out more about their dynamic creator.

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**"It is the spectator,
and not life, that art
really mirrors".**

Oscar Wilde

1) How do you pronounce your name, phonetically?

My name's pronounced Graw + Nya. Grá means love in Irish.

2) How is it that you're living in South Africa, not Ireland where you're from?

The story is one that many know: we meet strangers (in this case in Ireland), fall in love, and suddenly one finds oneself living on another continent...

3) How long have you been living and working in Cape Town?

I have been here for 2 years.

4) What was it like growing up in Ireland?

I now realise that growing up in Ireland was special. Sure, it was conservative and patriarchal but it was also protected and very safe. Even today if a life is tragically lost – say in a car accident – it's front-page news for days on end.

The impression that my childhood gave me was that the world could be explored. I would hitch-hike wherever and whenever.

5) Have you always been interested in fine art, specifically sculpture?

I'm not sure what fine art is really. Like any creative kid I was passionate about drawing and painting. I liked making sculptures in school. I guess I have made stuff on and off for years. But honestly I feel like I am only at the start of a great voyage.



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6) What is your background in the creative arts?

I tried art college but couldn't handle the bullshit that went with it. So I left Ireland to find something new. I was very inspired by the anti-GMO and organic movement in Europe. When I returned home I studied horticulture, permaculture and natural building. The latter blew my mind: I volunteered wherever I could and learned how to build houses out of clay, sand and straw. I think that it was then that my obsession with clay was awoken. A few years later I enrolled for a ceramics course...

7) What inspired your current featured sculptures?

Being a foreigner is a primary influence. I find myself making different figures that reflect this not quite fitting in. They are solitary at times but they're also communicative. They are mostly female but some are gender neutral. Some are African; some are alien; some are hipsters; some are masked Pussy Riot-like...

People, of course, see completely different things in them to me. And I am not going to tell anyone what to make of them.

8) Is there a reason why almost all of your sculptures don't have eyes?

To quote Oscar Wilde: "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors".

9) Which materials do you work with?

I use grogged earthenware and the alchemy of the kiln.

10) Take us through a typical creation of one of your pieces, from start to finish.

I usually make a group at a time based on sketches from, among other things, the characters that I see on the train that I take into Woodstock. I sculpt until I am happy with the overall shape and texture. Once they're dried I fire them in the kiln. Then I consider how to colour them and, once the glazing is done, I fire them again at a higher temperature.

11) Are you working on any new projects or have any ideas in the pipeline?

Yes, I'm working on increasing the size of my pieces.

12) Where can we see more of your work?

My website is: www.grainnemchugh.com There's also a list of galleries there.

I'm also a tweeter: www.twitter.com/grainnemchugh.

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