Kathleen Standen details the importance of the Irish landscape on her ceramic works.

“How did you make these holes?” “Is this piece solid?” “Are the colours painted on?”

The visitors of all ages and genders scrutinised, touched, and picked up my ceramics, and then asked me questions. This came as no surprise as my work frequently provokes this reaction when viewed for the first time, and the visitors to Art in Clay 2012, Hatfield, were no exception – except the weather was atrocious, so it could be argued that only the ‘die-hard enthusiasts’ ventured out that weekend. And so I answered their questions about the how? what? and why?, which concern the science of materials. But of course, it is only part of the story: ideas, imagination, and aesthetics are also integral to my work, and sometimes I am asked questions about these too.

A STUDIO IN IRELAND  My ceramics were made in South West Ireland, where I cycled and walked the undulating roads and boreens, armed with camera and sketchbook, and collected words and images. I collected images of the postcard pretty: dramatic cliffs with surging foam and soaring screeching seagulls; sheltered bays with still water and bobbing sailboats; pink thrift and yellow lichen clinging to twisted, crumbling rocks. Back in my studio, I used these images to explore pattern and colour using pencil, charcoal, ink and pastels, and this formed the basis for clay colour tests using blends of body stains and oxides. So the colours were not painted on, and instead my forms were made with coloured clay.

But a perusal of my image collection also describes an alternative narrative: I photographed rows of unfinished dwellings scarring the countryside, inhabited only by gorse and buddleia bushes and other hardy residents. On the pier in Union Hall, a fishing community just two miles from our small farm, I photographed huge piles of green and blue nets together with bright orange and yellow buoys; lines of floats made from sections of recycled tyres; massive metal dredging plates, piled high and used to weigh down the nets. These...
Ideas, imagination, and aesthetics are integral to my work
Future Exhibitions


**Book**

Kathleen Standen’s book *Additions to Clay Bodies*, published by A&C Black, will be out early next year.

**Kathleen Standen**

lives and works in South West Ireland where she makes sculptural ceramics influenced by this picturesque, coastal location.

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**Shoreline**, porcelain clay body, organic additions, 2011, H21cm. Photographed in Union Hall, County Cork, Ireland.

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slabs of metal are the ones dragged along the seabed, eliminating, in the process, the habitats of many creatures that provided food for the fish.

**COASTAL IDEAS** The forms I created were based on machinery used in the fishing industry such as winches, pulleys, buoys, and floats. All work starts off in a plaster mould, which conveys some quality of this original function. But the colours and textures spoke of the unspoilt environment: soft blues and greys, shades of turquoise and aquamarine, mirroring the colours of sky and sea. Ceramic work with titles such as Calm, Cascade, Shoreline, and Sea Foam are examples of this. These cool colours were frequently interspersed with splashes of orange, yellow, and pink, referencing fuchsia, montbretia, thrift, and other coastal flora. The Rock Pool series was made in response to this.

Crumbling and twisted sedimentary rocks, smooth weathered pebbles, cavities left by burrowing creatures – all of these inspired the textures that were created in my work. I add organic material of all shapes and sizes, which burn out in the firing, leaving holes in my clay forms. Horizon and Wave included small porcelain vessels, nestling on ledges and crevices of the rough textured clay forms, referencing flotsam and jetsam where disparate objects are thrown together.

**IRISH ARTISTS** Other influences in my work included my father Joseph Quilty and other notable Irish artists who aimed to capture the raw beauty of the West. I chose one painting from each artist, made my own colour studies, and then embarked on a series of sculptural forms inspired by their journeys and musings, with titles such as Haze, Landfall, and Dock Pool. Again, the forms were based on the tools of trade used by the fishing community, and as a consequence, economic activity and ‘postcard pretty’ were irrevocably joined together.

**MEANDER SERIES** Environmental issues were also referenced in the installation titled Meander 1 and Meander 2. It consisted of two sets of clay pipes that seemed to emerge from the walls of the gallery and travel across the floor in a sinuous curve, ending with a large winch form containing a pool of glaze. Additions of grog and perlite enabled me to work on such large thick forms. Meander 1 was made in shades of grey and blue clay, the coastal colours typically seen on a calm, overcast day in West Cork with the threat of rain never far away. Whereas for Meander 2 white was the predominant colour, with splashes of bright green and turquoise blue introduced as glass fragments and grog, evoking memories of those special bright days with wind-whipped waves and sunbeams picking out spots of colour. The slumped pool of glaze in the end pieces reminded me of rock pools, transitory habitats that invite exploration. The utopia I have described had a dose of reality too. The pipes were made by casting three shapes of domestic waste pipe, a salutary reminder that, as we know, across Europe raw sewage and unspoilt coastlines are unhappy bedfellows!