

CATHY CARMAN ANDREW KEARNEY

JOHN KINDNESS GRACE WEIR MICHAEL VERDON

STOKENS

Handwritten signatures and names in white ink on a dark blue background, including names like Cathy, Andrew, John, Grace, Michael, and Verdon.

IMOGEN STUART SONJA LANDWEER



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Introduction

Tokens

TOKENS is the fifth in a series of exhibitions designed specially by the Arts Council for touring to second-level schools. The exhibitions form part of a comprehensive programme of activity deriving from the Arts Council's policy in the area of education. An important element of that policy and programme is the creation of opportunities whereby artists can make work for young people and young audiences can see and enjoy the work of our contemporary artists.

Eight sculptors were invited to contribute to the TOKENS exhibition. The letter of commission asked each sculptor "to make a piece which would be your token handed to a young person (to young people generally) as they pass into adulthood. While deliberately redolent of the tribal rituals of other cultures or other times whereby specific ceremonies of initiation or rights of passage were organised, we feel that the concept of the exhibition relates directly to its audience of thirteen to eighteen year olds and to contemporary experiences and expectations of adolescence/young adulthood."

What is clear from the exhibition is that our culture's icons and symbols are poised at some intersection between the enduring beliefs of Christianity and of classical mythology, on the one hand, and the more contemporary understandings which the sciences - physical, social and medical - have revealed to us in our present age. In the range of iconography employed, and of materials used to make the work included in the exhibition TOKENS reflects this cultural tension which its audience, the youngest of whom will celebrate their 21st birthdays in the year 2000, must accommodate as they forge their adult identity.

The Arts Council is especially proud of the series of exhibitions of which TOKENS is the latest and it is grateful to the artists for the quality of their commitment to the policy which underpins the present show.

If you are a student, teacher, parent or an interested member of the public with views on TOKENS, please write to the Arts Council. If your response relates to any particular piece in the show, we will forward it to the relevant artist.



Adrian Munnelly
Director
The Arts Council
(September 1993)



1. All You Need is Love (cast bronze)

1. Cathy Carman

Cathy Carman was born in Portlaoise in 1952, She studied at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, Dun Laoghaire School of Art and Chiswick Art School, London. She now lives and works in Dublin. She has had several solo exhibitions and has had her work exhibited in many group exhibitions. She has also received a number of awards and commissions and her work is represented in various public collections.



All You Need is Love

The main research I did for this piece was to talk and listen to my son and his friends, all of whom are doing the Leaving Cert, even as I write. Over a regular period of Friday nights around the fire during the winter it became clear to me that the great experience of change in their lives was from the isolation and loneliness of adolescence to a more mature attitude, sharing their feelings with each other and being open about themselves. Consistently the same point was raised; that of the loneliness of those school years, and the recent liberation they had discovered in sharing their feelings.

I have tried to make a piece that celebrates this feeling of togetherness, sharing, and intimacy.

But I wanted to do it in a language that was shared by them, and people of my generation. Because so many of these young people are enchanted by the Sixties, from Hendrix to the Doors, to the bric-a-brac of jewellery etc, and because I actually went through the Sixties in my teens, the innocent language of those days seemed to be the common language in which to make the piece of sculpture.

So I have used this common language of images to make this piece of which I hope speaks directly to their experience of intimacy and sharing, to their transition from the isolation of adolescence to the wider confidence of sharing with others, by making a piece/a token, which says...

'All you need is love.'

Cathy Carman



2. Mercury's Doc (cast cobalt)

2. Andrew Kearney

Andrew Keamey was born in 1961. He graduated in Fine Art from Limerick School of Art and Design in 1985. In 1991 he completed a one year Master of Arts Course in sculpture in Chelsea College of Art and Design in London. He is currently based in London. Since 1984 he has exhibited in group exhibitions in Ireland and England. He has also had a number of solo exhibitions and received a number of awards.

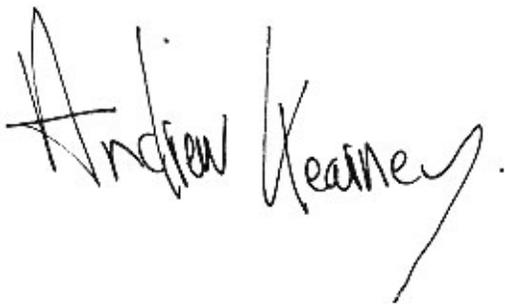


Mercury's Doc

The first stage of making this piece was the taking of a plaster cast of a Doc Martens boot in the Dublin Arts Foundry. The cast was used to mould a wax replica of the Doc, which was then coated in a hard ceramic shell at the Howemedica factory in Limerick. This was then brought to a very high heat, and, when the wax melted away it left a cavity into which molten cobalt was poured. When the cobalt hardened the shell was broken away, leaving a metal Doc.

Dr Martens developed the shoe which carries his name in Germany, just after the Second World War. He hoped that its air-cushion sole would be of some help to people who had been injured, or who were handicapped. Soon afterwards it became very popular as a working man's shoe and part of youth culture when the former inmates of English reform schools took this piece of their uniform along with the regulation close cropped 'skinhead' haircuts, and made them an important part of their own everyday fashion. What had been a symbol of their repression became a sign of their freedom. Since then the Doc has become an important symbol for young people throughout the western world where it has crossed the boundaries between the sexes and between the different social classes.

I am interested in old Roman myths and I like the story of Mercury who, with wings on his shoes, had the freedom to act as a messenger of the Gods. I made wings for the Doc by taking their form from small cabbage leaves, and casting them in the same way as the boot.





3. *Winged Sneaker* (see text for materials)

3. John Kindness

John Kindness was born in Belfast in 1951. He now lives and works in Dublin. Since 1985 his work has been included in many major group exhibitions and he has had several solo exhibitions in Ireland and abroad. He has received a number of awards and commissions and his work is represented in collections in Ireland, Britain and America. He has also been involved in a number of projects which have sought to bring art out of the gallery and into public spaces.



Winged Sneaker

The hero in classical mythology often embarked on an adventure under the guidance of a helper from the supernatural world. These helpers, guides or teachers still occur today in modern myths such as "Star Wars" or "Ninja Turtles". In fact they are to be found in folklore and mythology all over the world and in all periods in human history.

The great psychologist Carl Jung realised that if myths and stories had the same basic framework wherever and whenever they appeared, then they must spring naturally from our own inner selves, from our own subconscious. So it is from that subconscious that we get the call to adventure and, from the same source that we can get the help we need to make the journey. In the days before psychoanalysis however, people needed symbols, stories and ceremonies to help them release their inner potential. Ceremonies of initiation were very important in bringing young people into the adult world. The time when we leave our childhood behind but haven't yet established our adult identity can be very confusing and traumatic. In the Christian West we are without any such rituals and rites of passage so young people often invent their own, daring each other to do dangerous or forbidden things. These can often be destructive to the individual and to society.

My TOKEN - a winged shoe suggests the Greek god Hermes (called Mercury by the Romans). Joseph Campbell, a disciple of Jung describes him thus: "Hermes was the master of the ancient mysteries of initiation and represented that coming down of divine wisdom into the world..."

The motif on the front of the shoe depicts a winged figure merging with an ordinary human, suggesting supernatural assistance.

The shoe type of course is based on a modern running shoe and not an ancient sandal. This suggests that the myth is still relevant to us today.

The surface of the shoe is covered with eggshell, a substance which protects the embryo; this can act as a symbol for the protection of the undeveloped personality.

Materials: the work is constructed in steel reinforced Hydrocal (a very tough plaster) and is covered in hen and emu egg shells. The wings were sawn off an ornamental brass duck and embedded in the plaster.

John Kindness



4. *Dambaii Alla* (welded steel and feathers)

4. Padraic O'Flaithearta

Rugadh Padraic O Flaithearta i 1962 i gCill Rónáin ar Inis Mar, Arainn. Sa bhliain 1987 bhain sé amach céim i ndealbhóireacht agus críadóireacht sa Crawford College of Art and Design i gCorcaigh. Chaith se bliain mar iarchéimí ansin sula ndeachaigh se ag obair i Glasgow Sculpture Studios in Albain. Tá cónaí air anois i nGlaschú agus ó 1987 anonn tá a shaothar Ie feiceáil i dtaispeántais in Eirinn agus in Albain agus bhí roinnt taispeántas aonair aige freisin sa treimhse sin.



Damhán Alia

The materials used for the Damhan Alia are not important, for it is the Damhan Alia itself that was the starting point, not the materials or the fabrication.

The reason I have nominated the Damhan Alia as my TOKEN is that it displays great perseverance and determination, characteristics that we all need daily as we go through life. Also, the Damhan Alia (and Damhan Alias in general) have been on this planet for a lot longer than we have in our present form, watching our evolution and our life journeys. They have displayed great tenacity in the process and, I hope, offer us an example that's well worth watching.

In all cultures of the world there are accounts of initiations, ceremonies of courage and knowledge that mark our journeys into adulthood and the new and the unknown. However, any stage in life can be such a passage of learning and it should be remembered that life's journey for all of us is often a series of initiations and ceremonies as we move through and on...

'Mar a duirt Damhan Alia Ie Míoltaigín tráth!' (As the spider said to the little fly)

Padraic O'Flaithearta



5. Lovers (cast bronze)

5. Imogen Stuart

Imogen Stuart was born in Berlin in 1927. She studied sculpture under Professor Hikberger in Bavaria/row. 1945 to 1950 and moved to Ireland a year later. She now lives and works in Sandycove, Co. Dublin. She works mainly on commissions and her sculptures can be seen in churches and public buildings all over Ireland. Since 1949 she has exhibited in several major group exhibitions and had her first solo exhibition in 1992. Her work is represented in several collections and she is an elected member of the Royal Hibernian Academy and Aosdána.



Lovers

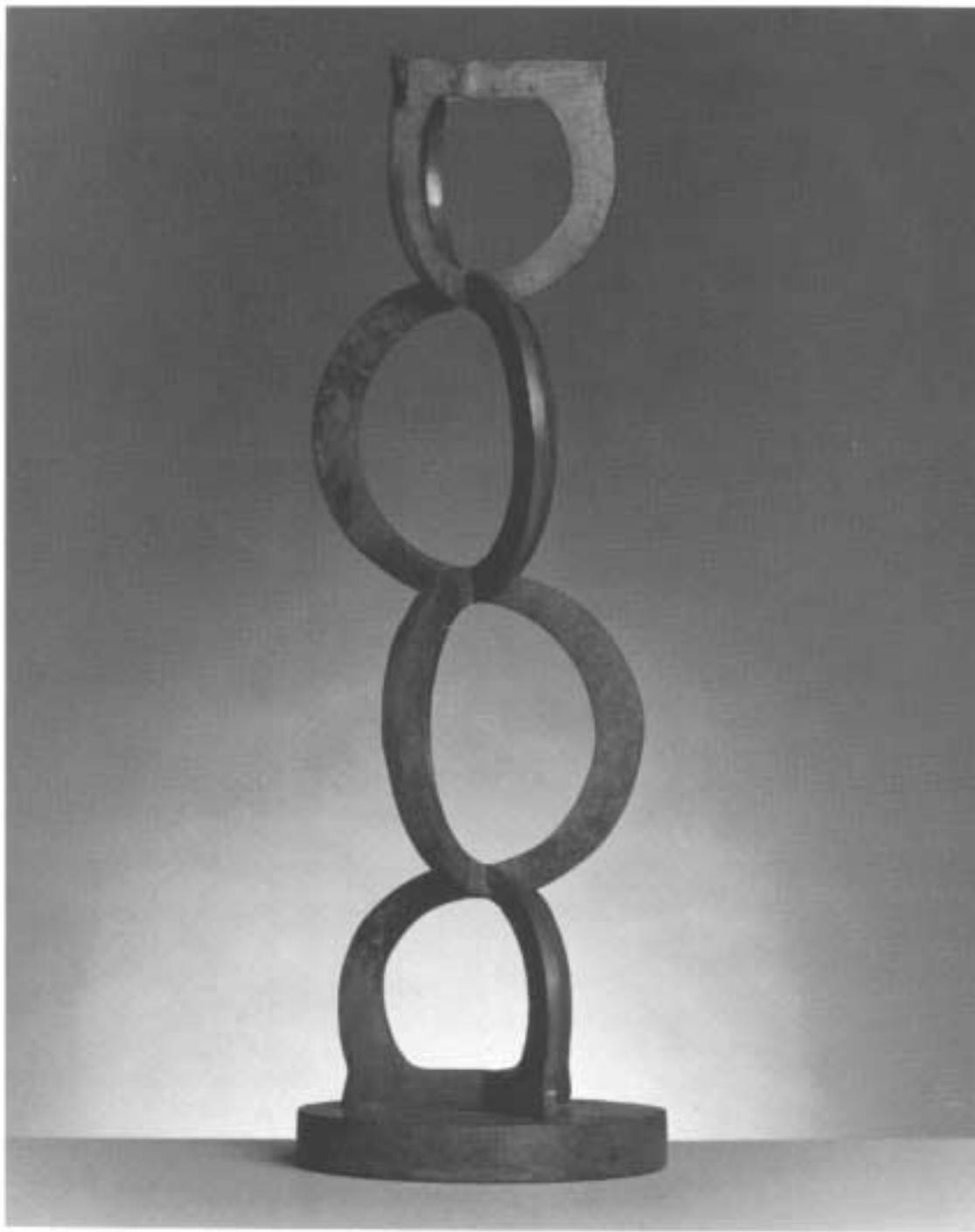
I first carved these two hands in Yew wood. Yew is, at the best of times, very hard. This piece was so knotted, wild and treacherously grown that I could only use small chisels which makes it difficult to work whilst retaining the overall form. I was at times so frustrated that I did many other sculptures in between before I finally finished the piece and got it cast in bronze. The bronze surface shows clearly that I carved it first in wood and not modelled it in clay.

I was trained as a sculptor. In the German language you have beside the work "Bildhauer" (the exact translation would be: the hewer of pictures) a word for a person who models in clay or wax. A word which is considered slightly derogatory. Of course, throughout my working life I have modelled in clay. These hands are not a pair of clasped hands or praying hands like the famous Albrecht Durer ones. These belong to two persons - rather like a pair of lovers in an embrace. This piece of sculpture is not only a sign and symbol of affection, which the word "Token" means to me, but of affection or love per se - a memorial to friendship.

I have used hands a lot in my work. In various positions, materials and sizes - expressing many different ideas. I have carved several sets of Stations of the Cross in wood where I expressed the Passion of Christ almost entirely through the image of hands. I have made an arch, carved in traversing stone for the Market Square in Cavan. The Arch is built up of three hands which I call "The Arch of Peace", being situated so near the Border with Northern Ireland. I also carved in granite two cupped hands which look like a heart and serve as a holy waterfont. I made a silver brooch in the shape of a heart - made up of two hands.

The human face, as the carrier of an expression, has lost, to me, a certain degree its meaning. This expression from the Gothic period onwards, has, in our derivative age, been overused. Hands are for me a much better vehicle for expressing emotions and ideas.

Imogen Stuart



6. *Trinity* (cast bronze)

6. Michael Verdon

Michael was born in Dublin in 1951. He studied sculpture in the National College of Art and Design, Dublin and the Dublin Art Foundry. He participated in the Arklow Sculpture Symposium in 1983 and has exhibited regularly in group exhibitions nationally. His work is represented in various collections and he has received a number of commissions, bursaries and awards.



Trinity

This piece of sculpture entitled 'Trinity' consists of a column of which the top two sections mirror the bottom two sections and three wave-like sections that intersect to produce the form that one sees. This piece means a lot to me as it is the first symmetrical sculpture I have made. It refers to the spiritual life as a struggle for balance and harmony in all things.

The wave-like sections remind me of light wave patterns, spirals. It has been said that if we could understand the world, we could understand the mind of God. The piece is my celebration of the mind of God such as I understand it to be. It is my token of understanding.

Michael Verdon



7. Cycle (cast aluminium found objects and resin)

7. Grace Weir

Grace Weir was born in Dublin in 1962. She graduated in ceramics from the National College of Art and Design in 1984 and completed additional courses in bronze casting 3 years later. She now lives and works in Dublin. Since 1985 she has exhibited in many group exhibitions and has had a number of solo exhibitions. She has also received a number of commissions and her work is represented in several public and private collections.



Cycle

I wanted to make a piece that would be whole in itself and yet indicate a sense of being a section of something larger for TOKENS because, I think that it is when you are becoming an adult that you first start to realise your own individuality and by doing that, the part you want to play in life.

I chose a section of a spiral as a shape to indicate this and, because the spiral appears everywhere from Newgrange stonemarkings to shells, from the path of stars to whirlpools and DNA, our own genetic structure.

In addition, I integrated found cogs into the piece to give it this sense of part structure, of being a functional element in a greater whole. And I also used the cogs because they look like the stars and suggest the usefulness of dreaming.

grace weir



8. Token (slate, clay and gold leaf)

8. Sonja Landweer

Sonja Landweer was born in Amsterdam in 1933. She studied for a year developing her own techniques in the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. She moved to Ireland in 1964 and worked for Kilkenny Design Workshops as artist in residence for a year. She is currently living and working in Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny, Since 1958 her work has been widely exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in Ireland and abroad. She is represented in many private and public collections throughout the world. She has been a member of Aosdana since 1981.



Token

A token for me, means something "special", but not necessarily precious. More in the realm of something that has a personal significance for the one receiving, or finding it, and owning it.

In early childhood, Tokens usually are - or can be - things one finds in nature: a beautiful stone; a perfectly round pebble or one with special markings or just smooth from endlessly being "ground" with other pebbles through the force of water; a shell; a fiery coloured and veined autumn leaf; an unusually shaped piece of driftwood; a beautiful seedpod or a birds skull - there are endless possibilities that one's mind can give special meaning to. One can treasure such things as special objects, although they may appear meaningless to someone else. Yet out of similar experiences most of us can identify how a simple found object can conjure up associations to a particular place, or a particular time.

All of us can remember things.

Then there are other kinds of "Tokens". The ones that memorise certain events. Like baptism, first communion, confirmation, engagement, marriage. All of them distinct points in everyone's life. Momentos that again signify something special for the one owning them.

From there I began to think how these specific events are celebrated. Particularly the transition from childhood into adulthood. What "rituals" go with that - and how different these can be. What is meaningful to a person passing from childhood into adulthood through certain rituals in remote tribes that exist today. And vice versa.

It made me think how, at this point, when one changes from child into adult in so-called primitive societies, that the sexes are carefully kept separate, sometimes for quite a period of time - to be prepared for this transition.

It made me think how, in our own society, this important point of transition is almost ignored... the changes that one experiences - the way that processes in the

body change - are experienced almost in secret, very much in private. The unease that these changes can bring about are outwardly bluffed away, by ganging together, meeting at discos, and doing all sorts of things in order not to show - or notice - what's going on inside. Feeling uneasily how one is no longer a child, not yet a woman or man, but becoming either one or the other, whether one wants to or not. It is an unavoidable step in one's development.

Each one of us experience this change - either consciously or not so consciously - in a personal and individual way. Choices have to be faced, decisions made that can be far-reaching for the direction life takes, when one leaves school.

In our society there seems a tendency to wish to become androgynous, as one was, in a way, in early childhood. Hairstyles and fashions all point that way: being neither female nor male, but just human, with equal rights. Perhaps that is a very important development? That many of us refuse to be cast into stereotyped roles, but want to become individual and able to relate to "the opposite sex" freed from primarily being cast into male or female roles?

Maybe that is one of the most important things that is happening to all of us in this century: to realise that each of us potentially has - or should have - the same possibilities for development? Regardless of one's sex.

What have all these thoughts to do with the "Token" I have tried to make?

My ideas went to the symbolism a tree holds first of all; representing the various stages of life - The Tree of Life; the genealogy that was expressed through it; The Family Tree and all the traditional thoughts this image can invoke. I discarded this idea.

Then I turned to the "found-object with-personal-special-meaning". I went several times to a slate quarry to look for special pieces of slate, and started doing things with them. I took some and altered them marginally by taking away and adding (goldleaf) to them. You wouldn't believe, if you saw them, that it took days and days of cutting, sanding and polishing! I grouped and arranged several in a (to me) special and meaningful way.

To me, the space between things can be as important as the thing itself. Therefore I often work in small groups, like a family of objects. Where the inter-relationship - the spacing, placing, of them - is all important to me.

Similarly I feel that the most important things in our lives originate from a source within ourselves that is not visible outwardly.

I had to abandon the idea of a group of related pieces because there would have been more than one, within the finished piece. It became too complicated.

I found one piece in the slate quarry that looked like a miniature replica (to me) of the Skellig Michael Island, the island, off the Kerry coast, where very early Christian monks went. It is amazing to think that

they could land and live there! Even today it is sometimes impossible to get there.

I felt like just taking this stone - this miniature replica - and mounting it as a token of a chosen life that, in all its outward scarcity was perhaps inwardly was much richer than most of us experience today.

I discarded this idea too. This miniature of Skellig Michael might be meaningless -just a piece of Stone - to others, I thought. And without further context it looked lost on its own.

All along I had to keep in mind, that whatever I made had to be durable and able to be fastened securely to its display base. Because some of you (out of curiosity) might be tempted to handle, and possibly damage, the end result.

I started to work with solid lumps of clay. Combining them with slate. They represented to me a kind of mini-monument or mini-token. I wanted them to look like a natural-found object - as I spoke about at the beginning of all this. I disguised the clay in paint after firing. Then I realised I had ended up with more than one thing again: clay incorporating slate.

So then, I tried to make pieces only in clay. Three dimensional. And pieces only in slate. Flat. In fact for those slate pieces I used slates that fell off the roof.

And now I cannot make up my mind which one it is to be...

A clay piece?

Or a slate piece? There are several. In both materials.

For many years I made only very thin-walled bowls. These heavy solid clay pieces needed a new firing procedure. Several exploded in the kiln. Despite careful drying and slow firing.

The flat slate pieces look a bit (to me) like I remember of drawings of angels that my daughter did between three and five years of age. What does an angel look like? I have never met anyone that has seen one. Yet I know that I have been in situations where I felt guarded by something that I could not define. I believe there are many people who have experienced similar moments - where they felt protected by an unseen power, or energy, a Guardian Angel! May each one of you have one around when you are in need of one!

I think that each one of us can become "tuned-in" to that source within ourselves, from where all creative energies take their beginning. And that is within that same space that our Guardian Angel - this invisible power - resides.

I have tried to let you share in part of the process of making this token. It has left me with quite a few tokens, each of which could lead to further ideas, that in turn could spark off a host of others. One growing out of the other and sprouting more...

Souja Landweer.

Other exhibitions in this series:

The School Show

Twenty paintings by twenty Irish artists specially commissioned by the Arts Council to make a picture about their memories of our attitudes to school and education. Artists include Robert Ballagh and Brian Bourke.

Heroes

Sixteen paintings by Irish artists on the theme of heroes and heroism. Artists include Louis Le Brocqy and Martin Gale.

Heads

This is an exhibition of seven sculptures. The artists were asked to make a head and the range of idioms was very broad. Artists include Vivienne Roche and Marjorie Fitzgibbon.

A Special Place

Twelve Irish artists were asked to explore landscape and places of special importance or significance for them. Artists include Barrie Cooke and Tony O'Malley.

These exhibitions, like Tokens, tour schools in five different counties each year, offering schools the opportunity of having works by contemporary Irish artists exhibited in their special places.

