

GROUP OF POTS John ffrench (Born 1919)

John ffrench helped to shape the field of design in Ireland and was honoured by the Crafts Council of Ireland in 2007 with a lifetime achievement award. ffrench was born in Dublin to Irish and Italian parents. He lived in Castlefrench in Galway as a child and cites the colourful imagery of



birds and symbols from his home as a constant inspiration in his work. He studied in Dublin and Italy. When he returned from Italy the loose, playful style that he had developed was in total contrast to the dun coloured pots being produced in Ireland and England at the time. ffrench worked with fellow ceramicist Peter Brennan in Kilkenny, where his pots were hand built and had a Mediterranean feel. Bright colours and playful patterns were constant features. Travelling and living in India informed both his design and work ethic. In 1962, he founded Arklow Studio Pottery and also worked with Kilkenny Design Workshops as part of an initiative to advance design for industry. Currently, ffrench divides his time between studios in America and Galway.

This *Group of Pots* shows the unique characteristics of ffrench's style. They are hand built rather than thrown, they are irregular and brightly coloured. We see the influences of Matisse and Miro in the colour and design.

Pattern is important, showing influences from India, from the modernist style he encountered in Italy, ancient Ogham script and his childhood home. Fifty years on, the eclectic group of pots look as fresh and cheerful as ever.

DISCUSSION

- In the area of design there is an expression that “form follows function”, what do you think this means?
- Does John ffrench work primarily with form or with function?
- If you could own one of these pieces, would you use it as a vase or food dish or would you keep it as something beautiful and interesting to look at?
- Colour is very important in the work of John ffrench, which colours and types of pattern are used here?
- Can you find design elements that run through this work, such as shapes, form, textures, patterns etc...
- John ffrench travelled a great deal and he trained and worked in Florence and India. Are there elements in his work that seem inspired by foreign lands? What are they?
- These are very individual pieces, but can you see any elements in these designs that seem typical of his style? What are they?

- Do you think it is important to have attractive as well as functional design in your life or does it matter? For example, how would it affect your bedroom, if only one of these aspects was used?



- Do the pots look built by hand or thrown on the wheel? How can you tell?
- Hand built pots are built from the base up, do you think John ffrench followed a design plan for the pots or do you think he started at the base and the pot grew and changed as it was being built. Why do you think so?
- Some of the work of John ffrench is very sculptural, where can you see that in this group?

IN THE GALLERY

Find as many different styles as you can. Try to find pots that you could put into pairs. Do any of the designs seem very Irish to you? do some seem definitely to have a foreign influence? Which ones?

HANDS ON

Paint a picture of your dinner table as you see it when sitting down for dinner. Try to remember the shapes, colours and designs of your plate, bowls, cutlery etc...

Using air drying or ceramic clay, make some 'pinch pots' by pressing your thumbs into rolled up balls of clay and then squeezing the clay between fingers and thumbs as you 'pinch' the clay all the way around. Decorate the pots by pressing objects into the clay, adding clay, scratching the surface or any other way. When clay is dry or fired, paint on colours and patterns that will be fun to live with.

Have a look at works by Matisse or Juan Miro in an art book and create a hand built pot inspired by the forms or colours you see, allow your design to evolve as your pot grows.