

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. 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 Massachusetts in America and Galway, Ireland.

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, from ancient Ogham scripts and his childhood home. Fifty years on, this eclectic group of pots look as fresh and cheerful as ever.

DISCUSSION

- What words can you think of to describe these pieces by John ffrench? What is the first word to come into your head?
- Pots and bowls usually have a job or function, what are some of these functions? What do you think these pots are for?
- Do you think the function is what the artist was most interested in? What else was he interested in?
- Do you think these pots are artworks? Do you think they have the elements that make up an artwork? What do you think these are?
- When you make or 'throw' pots on a wheel, the pots are smooth and even all over, when you build clay pots by hand they are more uneven and roughly finished. Which way do you think was used to make these pots?
- Why do you think John ffrench liked to have his pots rough and uneven?

- Do you think the artist had fun making the pots? Why do you think this?
- Would you like to have some of these pieces in your house?
- Would it make breakfast more fun if you got to eat from one of these bowls?



- Describe the plate or bowl that you use usually at home.

- Choose one of these pots and pretend you are on the phone to your friend. Tell your friend all about the pot.

IN THE GALLERY

Do you see patterns that he uses again and again? What are they?

Do any of the patterns remind you of designs you see in nature, do other patterns remind you of anything else?

HANDS ON

Pinch pots.

Get some clay about the size of your fist and roll it into a ball shape. Hold it with both your hands in front of you. Press both thumbs into the centre of the clay and squeeze the clay gently between the thumbs and the next finger on both hands,. Squeeze gently as you work your way all around the pot. You will notice that your pot gets thinner and bigger as you go around so be sure not to let it get too floppy.

Make three pots like this and decorate them.

On the first one, find objects that you can press into the clay to make marks. The end of your pencil, a match stick, crumpled up paper all are good.

For the second one stick pieces of clay on to your pinch pot, dots, swirled 'snakes' of clay, spikes.

On the third one use both these styles or come up with your own designs.

Decide on the look you want for your pot and chose colours and a pattern, use whatever type of colouring material – glazes or paint – is suitable for your clay.