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Michael Craig Martin: Biographical Entry

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FRONTISPIECE

Edward Ambrose, *Psyche discovering Cupid* (detail), 1840, marble, Crawford Art Gallery, Cork [see 33]

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Oliver Sheppard, *The Death of Cúchulainn* (detail), 1911-12, bronze, General Post Office, Dublin [see 356]

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Sculpture studio, Dublin Metropolitan School of Art (detail), c. 1912-14, Oliver Sheppard Collection, National Irish Visual Arts Library [see 403]

CRAIG-MARTIN, MICHAEL (b. 1941) (see also AAI v). A key figure in accounts of conceptual art, Michael Craig-Martin has pushed at the boundaries of art, exploring through his practice understandings of representation, material culture, and the relationship between art and architecture. His 2001 solo show, *Landscapes*, at DHG, transformed the space with colour-saturated walls: three of which were painted bright magenta and one green. Onto these walls were painted an electric fan, a bucket of water, a bulb and a pitchfork – so large that their forms were truncated by the interior architecture of the gallery. Also shown was a black and white film, *Film* (1962), shot in Connemara when Craig-Martin was an art student. The film pointed to the variety of art forms that Craig-Martin had explored before the development of his renowned wall works, with which he is most readily identified.

Craig-Martin, describing the impulse behind his first wall drawings in 1978 at the Rowan Gallery, London, stated: 'I made immense images on the wall to emphasize the experience of presence with the minimum of materiality. I think of them as immaterial sculpture' (*Michael Craig-Martin*, 2000, 115). Playful in tone, deceptively simple in form, the four 'monumental drawings', as Richard Cork described them (*Michael Craig-Martin*, p. 73), established Craig-Martin's trademark pristine pop aesthetic that owed much to his study of art and a range of influences: from the legacy of Josef Albers's curriculum at Yale University and Duchamp's propositions on ready-mades, to his contemporary exposure to the work of Robert Morris and the writings of John Cage. In turn, Craig-Martin was to influence a generation of British artists who went on to achieve much success in the 1990s through his teaching role at Goldsmiths College London (1974–88), a professorship there (1994–2000), his active role as a Trustee of the Tate (1989–99) and his curation of *Drawing the Line*, 1995, at the South Bank Centre, London.

Craig-Martin was born in Dublin, though his family lived in London. The family relocated to Washington in 1945 and his childhood and art education were in the US. He later returned to visit Ireland as a teenager on holidays with his parents. Following his studies, English Literature and History, at Fordham University, he attended Yale University School of Art and Architecture, graduating in 1963 with a BA and in 1966 with an MA. Living in Britain from 1966 led to his first solo show at the Rowan Gallery, London, 1969, and participation in a number of key group shows, including *The New Art*, 1972, at the Hayward Gallery, London. His first solo show in Ireland was in 1977 at the Oliver Dowling Gallery, Dublin.

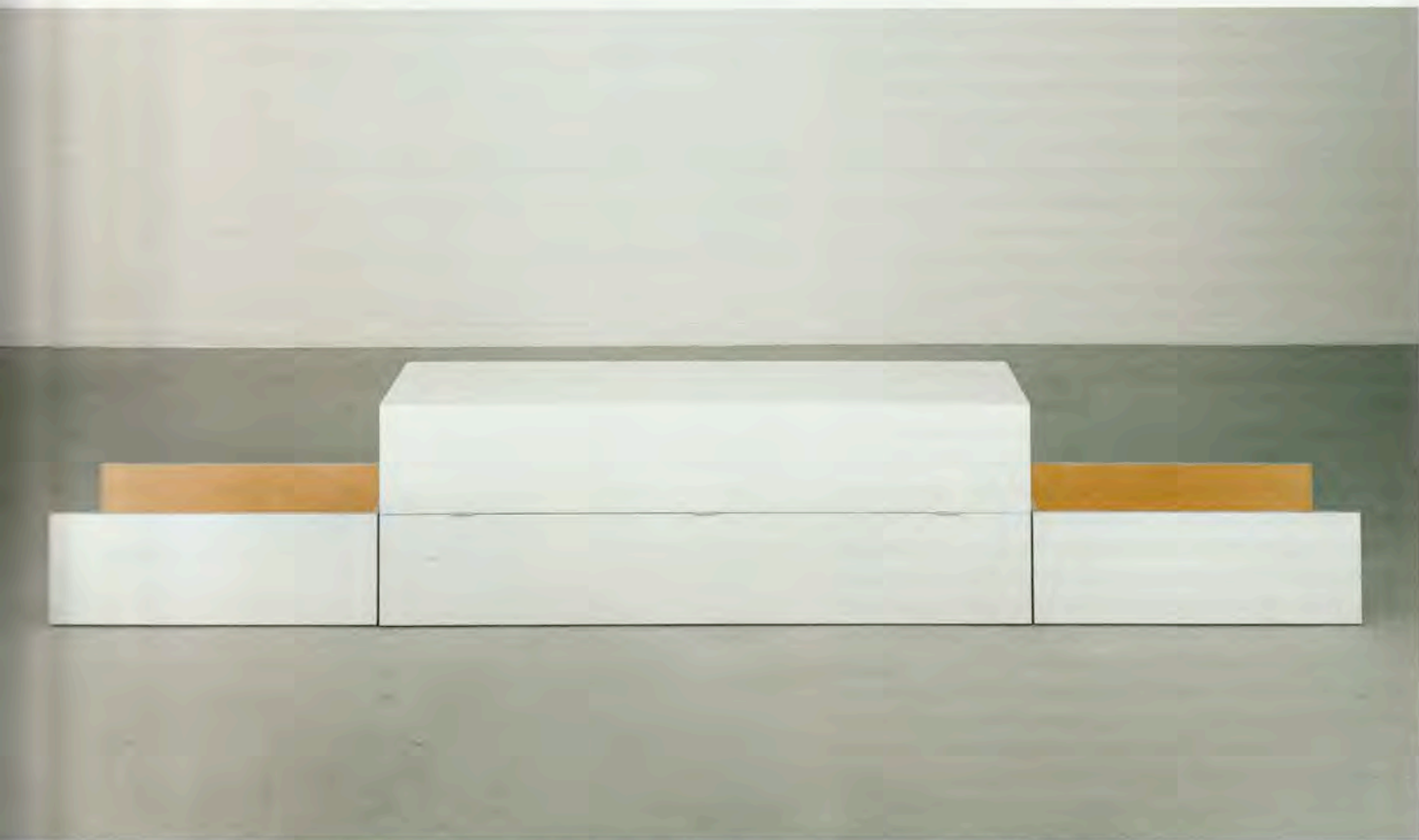
His early practice set out his abiding central artistic concerns, which Teresa Millet defined as 'the basic principles of the nature of art, representationalism, the author and the role of the viewer' (*Michael Craig-Martin*, 2000, 113). Also at the core of his practice was the idiom of everyday objects, from early variations on the quotidian form of a generic box to the later graphically linear renderings of commonplace utensils. He sustained a light touch, with humour gently guiding the viewer to consider philosophical questions about their relationship to the material world and the place of art in many of his works. For example, of his 1973 installation, *An Oak Tree* – a half-filled glass of water on a shelf, accompanied by a text statement on the nature of transubstantiation – Craig-Martin

remarked that '[h]umour undermines pomposity' (*Michael Craig-Martin*, 2000, 116).

The early period of his practice was marked by an investigative series of sculptural works, alternately adapting and appropriating forms of the ready-made. In the late 1960s his formal play on the deceptive nature of perception led to a series of boxes: some with inverted lids, all presented in a variety of subversions on this generic functional form [82]. These were initially exhibited with viewers free to touch them in a gesture indicative of Craig-Martin's desire to present art as fundamentally accessible to all.



81. Trevor Coe for the Monument for the Unknown Prisoner completed 1952, walnut, collection, from Potterton, 'Sculpture of Concavity', Yearbook (2000)



Michael Craig-Martin,
Conviction (1972),
 painted plywood

Conviction (1972) also involved viewer interaction, with wall-mounted mirrors accompanied by text statement literally and visually orienting the viewer in the work. A series of neon works in the mid-1970s was followed by canvases in the late 1970s which sought to challenge conventions of passive spectatorship and active authorship in art with painted copies of found artworks occupying a small corner of an empty canvas, drawing attention to the space of representation. The *Venetian Blind* series, 1980s–90s, heralded a return to the ready-made – in this case a resistance to art as instant revelation described by Richard Cork as ‘most uncompromising manifestation of Michael Craig-Martin’s involvement with the readymade’ (*Michael Craig-Martin*, 2006, p. 91). In the 1980s Craig-Martin used painted steel to compose lines of 3D relief wallworks, hovering between image and object, a thing and its representation. Further experimentations with 2D and 3D illusions integrated elements of ready-mades as part of a representational mode, such as in *Emergency* (1987). A pail, steel and aluminium, turned the ‘real’ into ‘representation’ in a coolly beautiful elaboration of Duchamp’s observations on art and authorship.

Site-specificity emerged as a significant component of Craig-Martin’s practice in the 1978 Rowan Gallery exhibition. Using black tape directly on white walls, his initiation of a reductive linear language in large drawings of a hammer and a sandal, among other artefacts of everyday life, resulted in what he called ‘sculpture without mass’ (*Michael Craig-Martin*, 2006, p. 73). As

a series of overlapping forms, the drawings beguiled any easy reading of the images. In 1993, in *Accommodating* at the British School in Rome, the architectural scale hinted at in earlier works became the cornerstone of the work’s immersive effect, with discreetly executed linear depictions of objects scattered across the walls of the room, leading Craig-Martin to remark that ‘entering the room was like entering a painting, and for me like entering the world of painting’ (*Michael Craig-Martin*, 2006, 135).

The same year, at Claudine Papillon Gallerie, Paris, he extended the use of colour to dramatic effect with oversized everyday objects floating in brightly painted monochrome backgrounds as the interior walls, columns and corridors became canvases for his painted installations. By the late 1990s he was using computers to scan, store and alter the relative scale of object drawings and also to compose more complex compositions with objects overlapping in a play on scale and legibility.

A 1999 exhibition at MoMA, *Modernstarts: Things*, incorporated objects from the museum collection in the fold of his garishly painted installation. A decisive statement on the role of context to produce cultural values for art, utensils and things, the MoMA show was one manifestation of the numerous references littered through Craig-Martin’s oeuvre. Familiar objects and images of art history floated through his earlier wallworks – Magritte’s pipe, Duchamp’s bottle-rack – and later reconfigurations of iconic works by Velázquez and Seurat led to innovations in his pictorial language.

Awarded a CBE in 2001, with works in numerous public collections across Europe, Britain, Australia and the United States, Craig-Martin's engagement with site-specificity has extended in the twenty-first century to collaborations with architects, such as in the Library of the British Council, Berlin and the Laban Dance Centre, London. A major retrospective of his work was held at IMMA in 2006. NIAMH ANN KELLY

SELECTED READING IVAM Centre del Carme, *Michael Craig-Martin*, Institut València d'Art Modern, Valencia, 2000; Richard Cork, *Michael Craig-Martin*, London/Dublin, 2006; IMMA Series *Interviews Michael Craig-Martin*, Milan, 2006.

CRAMILLION, BARTHOLOMEW (alternatively Barthelemij; Bartholomé) (fl. 1744–?1784). Cramillion, unlike the majority of peregrinating stuccodores of the period, was a Walloon and probably came from the province of Liège in eastern Belgium. A marriage recorded between Bartholomé Cramillion and Jeanne Ledent in 1784 in the province of Liège (Luik) is likely him (he is the only Bartholomé among Cramillions in the marriage register, 1694–1794).

There is no record of Cramillion before his arrival in Ireland, when he was paid £56. 17s. 6d. by Nathaniel Clements (1705–77), Ranger of the Phoenix Park, on 17 May 1754, for stuccoing a ceiling in his newly built lodge (later Áras an Uachtaráin) [83]. It was the first rococo ceiling in Ireland, and the most sophisticated example of the type in these islands. His modelling of the rocaille ornament suggests a familiarity with the work of the Wessobrunn school of stuccodores. The decoration consists of four popular scenes from Aesop's fables, derived from prints after paintings by the Flemish artist Frans Snyders (1579–1657), and enclosed within a curvilinear rococo border.

The stuccodore is next recorded working in the chapel of the Lying-in-Hospital (later the Rotunda Hospital) in Dublin, where he signed a contract on 1 August 1755 with Dr. Bartholomew Mosse (1712–59), the founder of the hospital, to execute the ceiling decoration 'pursuant to a draft made by the same Cramillion'. Undertaken at a cost of 300 guineas, excluding labour and materials, the work was to be finished in thirteen months. The chapel, located on the first floor, is a cube-shaped interior rising through two floors, with a gallery running round three sides. A coved ceiling above a deep cornice is broken in the middle of the four sides by a lunette, each enclosing an almost life-size personification of the theological virtues, Faith [84], Hope, with the commanding figure of Charity dominating the most prominent position in the chapel over the altarpiece.

Springing from the cornices on either side of the lunettes, andraped angel terms suspend wreaths over the Virtues, while the fourth lunette, which contains the organ, is flanked by two angel terms, one blowing a trumpet and the other pointing to the Ten Commandments. The eye is drawn repeatedly to the animated gestures of the angel terms as they direct the viewer's attention to the Ten Commandments, the cardinal virtues, but especially that of Charity, depicted as a distressed mother nursing her infants. This object of compassion was a timely reminder to the congregation to respond generously to the pressing needs of the new maternity hospital.



83. Bartholomew Cramillion, Aesop's fables, documented 1754, Phoenix Lodge, Áras an Uachtaráin