

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by: **DR MICHAEL B. MURPHY**, Vice-Chancellor of the University, President, University College Cork on 2 December 2009 in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Arts, honoris causa, on **DOROTHY CROSS**

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

Universities confer doctorates regularly on those who have written books, but rarely are recipients themselves the subjects of books. It is my privilege, Chancellor, to present to you, Dorothy Cross, one of Ireland's leading artists with a long established and extensive international reputation.



In the book simply entitled *Dorothy Cross* published in 2005 and edited by Sean Kissane, the creative work of Dorothy Cross was described by Enrique Juncosa, Director of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, as "a poetic amalgamation of found and constructed objects, sometimes humorous, sometimes disturbing, always intellectually stimulating and physically arresting". Since the mid-eighties, working in a variety of media including sculpture, photography, video and installation, Cross has conducted witty and inventive investigations of contemporary sexual mores and politics. During the nineties, she produced two extended series of sculptural works, using cured cowhide and stuffed snakes respectively, which drew on these animals' rich store of symbolic associations across cultures, to investigate the construction of sexuality and subjectivity. More recently, she devoted increasing amounts of time to the development of large-scale public events and projects, most memorably the award-winning "Ghostship" in which a disused light ship was illuminated through use of luminous paint, in Scotman's Bay, off Dublin's Dún Laoghaire Harbour.

Dorothy Cross was born in Cork in 1956, the youngest of three children of Fergus and Dorothy Cross. One of her siblings Tom, now Professor of Zoology at University College Cork, and seated behind me on the podium, had many influences on Dorothy, not least in his role of coach at the Sunday's Well Swimming Club in Cork. Under his tutelage, Dorothy became under-15 All Ireland Champion at the 100 metres breaststroke at the age of 12 and won national titles annually for the next five years, swimming on many occasions for the Irish national team. Their sister Jane, equally successful as a young swimmer, was a member of the ladies relay team which set a new world record at the World Masters Championships in Canada in 1985.

The relationship between Dorothy and the aquatic world, established biologically in utero, deepened in her teenage years as a competitive swimmer, profoundly influenced her artistic creativity in mid-life, and is reflected today in her choice of seaside living in Connemara and her love of scuba diving. Perhaps it was never more truly manifest than in that wonderful Wellcome trust funded film "Medusae", co-created with Tom both in Valentia, south west Ireland and during visits to the rich waters off the coast of Queensland in 2001 and 2002.

She began her formal art training at the Crawford Municipal School of Art in Cork in 1973 before undertaking degree studies at Leicester Polytechnic, England, from 1974 to 1977. She

completed formal training at the San Francisco Art Institute, where she was awarded a Masters degree in Fine Arts in 1982.

Dorothy Cross' solo exhibition career began at the Triskel Arts Centre in Cork in 1983 but her outstanding innovative creations quickly brought her to national and international attention. Her first major, solo installation, 'Ebb', at the Douglas Hyde Gallery in Dublin, in 1988, was followed, in 1991, by 'Powerhouse', at the ICA in Philadelphia, and "Parthenon" in 1993 at the Camden Arts Centre in London. In the late nineties she mounted exhibitions frequently in Dublin (at the Kerlin Gallery) as well as at the Frith Street Gallery in London, and in New York, San Antonio, Los Angeles, Zagreb and San Francisco.

Her work has been featured in a multitude of Group Exhibitions in New York, Chicago, Sydney, Taipei, Copenhagen, Berlin, Bologna and Bergen, to name but a few, and she has represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale in 1992 and the Istanbul biennial in 1997. Her creations hang permanently throughout the world, from IMMA in Dublin, to the Goldman Sachs collection in London, and in private collections throughout Europe and the United States of America. Virgin Shroud (created in 1993), encompassing a veil made from a cow skin with the udders forming a crown, hangs in the Tate Modern in London.

Dorothy Cross has been honoured by many: by the Arts Council in Ireland, by the Gulbechian Foundation, by the Wellcome Trust, and the by the Arts Council of Great Britain. Early in her career she was the recipient of two awards in New York - the Pollock-Krasner Award in 1990 and the 1988 PSI Studio Scholarship. She is a member of Aosdana.

Enrique Juncosa critiqued her work at length in the monograph accompanying the major retrospective on her work in this building in 2005. I quote from his writing: "The work of Dorothy Cross... cannot be described as a linear progression of formal refinements but as a series of interrelated works. She uses media in a variety of formats, scales and modes of presentation. Certain elements remain constant throughout her artistic output, that bring to mind subjects such as surrealism, eroticism, feminism and psychoanalysis..."

The sea, seen as an outward manifestation of our sub-conscious, forms the backdrop for many of her works; as do various aquatic creatures such as sharks, whales and jellyfish. The transformation of these symbolically rich creatures is typical of her work, offering simultaneous, often conflicting readings. Cross's work seems to analyse emotions like desire, while urging the viewer to question appearances, stereotypes and the social conventions and superstitions that one associates with them. Her works are not destructive or nihilistic, but rather show a wish to seek out the very essence of things, while analysing along the way the manner in which we perceive them".

Dorothy Cross has composed opera and created opera sets; as her Aosdana biography states, her work moves from opera to object in a territory between idea and nature. I have the honour of presenting her, a member of the Irish artistic pantheon, for the award of Doctor of Arts (honoris causa) by the National University of Ireland.

*PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:*

*Praesento vobis, hanc meam filiam, quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse quae admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Artibus, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.*