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IMMA would like to thank Lennon for his dedication and commitment to the project.

Have a question about an artwork? Want to know more? Ask any member of our Visitor Engagement Team, easily identifiable through their blue lanyards.

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Exhibition kindly supported by:



Front Cover:

Folded/Unfolded, 1972.
Project Arts Centre,
Dublin

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IMMA – IRISH MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
EAST WING GALLERIES

13 OCTOBER 2017 – 16 SEPTEMBER 2018

Lennon: *Porous Plane*



A curatorial approach we use to explore works in the IMMA Collection is to invite artists to place their early work among their current practice – ‘Then and Now’. *Porous Plane* follows a similar approach, including a range of work by artist Lennon from the 1970s to the present day such as *Folded/Unfolded* (1972-2017), made especially for the IMMA Galleries, and a recent *AI¹³* painting. Lennon was born in 1947. His art, which he titles ‘*Porous Plane*’, began in the 1970s with the *Folded/Unfolded* paintings. Lennon has continued to explore innovative forms of painting, most recently, *AI¹³*, *Denier7s*, *Autochthones* and the ongoing *Arbitrary Colour Collections*. He lives and works in Dublin.

Self-making in a Post-Colonial Culture
by Lennon

Reality doesn't conform to language: where language fails may be better expressed in the silent wilderness of eyes in the field of ideas that is known as visual art. When writing these texts, I would observe my mind in an effort to compose itself amid a wild mixture of mesmerising thoughts and systems of language. All of it concentrated on the subject and the purpose behind this effort which is to honour the individuals who suffered and were killed in the Holocaust (a crime also against the single unit of all law, the individual human being); to affirm, to express, to say ‘yes to life’ again, by addressing the individual viewer as the sole subject of this art.

The *AI¹³* paintings have no verticals: the viewer is the vertical who completes the painting.

In the summer of 1959 I saw a photograph in a book in Webb's on Eden Quay in Dublin. It was a picture of a pile of spectacles in a German concentration camp. This photograph stopped me in a way that was new to me and I kept going back to see if what I thought I saw was really there. I had a lot of sympathy for people who wore glasses and especially children with ill-fitting or cheap wire rimmed ones: they had an attitude of vulnerability about them, and here was a mini-mountain of them... taken away, but for what? That ‘for what’ became the

background against which I went on to create a moral position, on and from which I could make judgements and decisions.

I understood that ethics and aesthetics are the same thing, that it was a cultural problem that lay behind the creation of Nazism and the Fascist way of seeing. I began learning about the scientific revolution and its implications for the authorities in our society, and most wonderfully, Darwin's theory of evolution that suited my love of making as a way of seeing to find out and by evolving means of creativity.

Knowledge of the outer world known to us by science and the individual's private inner world of feelings and emotions, are mutually exclusive. When confused, these two together create delusions of power and the terrible consequences that we know too well.

I set out to make this distinction (between outer and inner worlds) as clear as possible for the first one-person exhibition of my art at an exhibition called *Folded/Unfolded* in the Project Arts Centre, Dublin, in 1972. This was the first public exhibition of things made in the aesthetic of *Porous Plane* and the beginning of a meaningful ethics in the field of art. It has been linked to the painting of the *Support and Surface* movement that emerged from the student uprising in Paris in 1968.

For the exhibition, I had been experimenting with ways of making paintings by pouring paint into canvases and shaping them by handling and folding them in ordinary everyday ways that most people do. I decided to exaggerate and make a large version of these ideas; the resulting paradoxical thing that emerged was *Folded/Unfolded*. Making it was a simple strategy of separating out facts from feelings, choosing ‘givens’: the canvas for the outer world of facts, and poured paint (added to it in a mixed complex of colour) for the inner emotional world of feelings. The support would be a conventional wall, a temporary arrangement.

From the initial shock of the discovery of the Holocaust at the age of 12, I had to *not forget* that I was fortunate not to have been there, and above all to know that these events—the industrialised murder of 6 million people—

were lived and experienced in the life of each individual, one at a time. This fact made it imperative for me to distance my art from the conventional art and culture that retained the illusionistic qualities and values that underpin the culture that preys on our human frailties. I invented a new constrained relationship to traditional painting.

A copy of something made to look like another thing can never be the same as the original, the prototype. Things however, which do not look alike but which are unique in their own ways can be very *similar* (in their uniqueness for a start), especially when separated by place of origin and time.

The wire-mesh volumised paintings (*Denier7s*) that I make align with a cave painting that I saw in Peche Merle in France. Its rubbing, touching, mark-making gestures and stencilled impressions, caress the ever-changing surface of the rock ground/body. These gestures are evocative stand-ins as well as a means of separating out for pleasure and contemplation the otherwise overwhelming forces that exist deep inside us in the privacy of one's inner life. The bulges and crevasses of the rock body might stand-in for the first body in the beginnings of life: the composite body of mother/child and its desire to go on replicating. It is the earliest example in art for the *AI¹³* composite paintings, their synthesis of gesture, brushstroke and the ground on which its trace weaves. As a series they embody a new dynamic form of composition that seem to invoke physical muscular memory, impulsive in their natural actions, with the appearance of planes pulsating and changing.



Denier7: For MM, 2014 and *Cuevas Manos*, Santa Cruz, Argentina, circa 10,000 BP

My experience in a lifetime of art-making is one of intense activity followed by long pauses and stoppages, lots of moving about and making my hands, arms and body exhort form, shape and colour in a vigorous activity. Then long, timeless pauses of motionless gazing, observing those strange after-image and after-actions, re-enacting what has just happened and beginning the process of making judgement on how to continue, all the while watching the paint drying and hoping it will still look as good as it did in the tin. It is this motionless latter part that is asked of you the viewer, in that special space and time of art: the *stopping part*. To stand still and to observe your own inner responses in your own unique individual dimensions and private inner feelings of which you are the sole authority.

Lennon

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