



Her oeuvre, comprising portraits, landscape, still lifes and subject pictures, is not large, reflecting her commitments to family, her directorship of the Harry Clarke Studio from 1931, and her deliberate methodology, evidenced in numerous preparatory sketches and studies. Her drawings reveal an accomplished draughtsmanship and a sensitive study of light and shadow, as seen in *A Girl's Head* (1909, NGI). As a portraitist, her perceptive characterizations invariably elicited good critical comment, for example, *Dom Justin McCarthy* (1931, Mount St Joseph's, Roscrea), and among her best are those of family and close friends, such as *Dermod O'Brien, PRHA* (1934, Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society). Clarke's subject pictures, such as *Mary and Brigid* (1917, Mount Saint Vincent University, Nova Scotia, Canada), and especially those of the 1920s, among them *Bath Time at the Crèche* (c. 1925, NGI) and *Strindbergian* [63], gave scope to her original expression, and tested the conventions of the Irish academic tradition. CARLA BRIGGS

SELECTED READING Carla Briggs, 'Margaret Clarke', *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*, Bd 19 (Munich 1998); Ingrid Jenkner, 'Allegory, Portrait, or Genre? "Mary and Brigid" by Margaret Clarke', *IAR Yearbook*, XIV (1999), 148–51; Hilary Pyle, 'Darling Margaret: A look at Orpen's Favourite Pupil', *IAR* (Spring 2007), 86–91; Carla Briggs, 'Margaret Clarke's history paintings', in O'Connor, 2010.

COLEMAN, JAMES (b. 1941), artist. Born in Co. Roscommon, in Ballaghaderreen, James Coleman studied at the École des Beaux Arts, Paris (1960), the Central School of Art and

Design, London (1961–63), NCAD, Dublin (1963/64) and UCD, where he won the Purser Griffith Travelling Scholarship in European Art. He moved to Milan in 1964, where he studied at the Accademia delle Belle Arti di Brera (1964–67) and had his first professional solo exhibition in 1970. He is a highly influential figure among artists in Ireland and is critically acclaimed internationally.

Coleman lived in Milan until the early 1980s but also spent time in Ireland, especially in County Clare, and is now based in Ireland. A seminal early work, *Slide Piece* (1972–73) [64], in which the same slide image of a Milan street is described in minute detail, from different points of view, by a single narrator, set out his continuing concerns with language, perception and understanding, exploring the gaps between seeing, knowing and believing. Coleman was, and is, conscious of the unreliability of single agreed notions of reality and his determined use of new technologies of the time took his practice, at that point in the early 1970s, and for some time after that, beyond the normalizing conventions of art production. One could say that forms of art production had to catch up with Coleman's ideas and demands.

In a conversation with philosopher Richard Kearney in *Aspects Magazine* (Autumn 1982), at the time when his work was beginning to attract significant international attention, Coleman stated that '... in the work, "So different ... and yet" [479], narration is proposed as a form for reading and conceiving a presented reality, not for establishing a structure on which to establish a true reality ... narration is not intended to produce truth, though it may propose a form for conceiving or locating it'. This statement clearly positions Coleman's art as something made as a result of experience and not as a means to describe it. His work is demanding, certainly, but also empowering for the viewer/reader who engages fully to generate meaning, value and his/her own 'truth'.

Coleman moved quickly, from the very beginning of his career, to using mixed and multi-media. Over the decades, since the 1960s, the artist has used and experimented with a range of contemporary time/lens-based media (see 'New Media Art'). In each period, the available technological resources of the moment were used to create projection pieces, firstly, with basic tape/slide projection and voice-over, then video monitors and projection, and latterly with computer-controlled digital projection technologies. In projected pieces, the artist also pays considerable attention to the actuality of the space in which the public encounters his works and where the experience and the meaning are made. The scale, the lighting, the wall/floor coverings, the seating or absence of seating, and many other aspects of the space, are all addressed in finalizing a particular piece. This approach, which, in effect, includes the viewers'/readers' sense of their own presence and position in space, related to the vision and sound of the projected imagery, means that Coleman's work also has the properties of sculpture, defined to include the expanded field of media and location which developed in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Box (ahhareturnabout) [228, 325], first shown in *Rosc '77* (see 'Rosc Exhibitions') in Dublin, is a projected film work of staccato black and white clips from the Dempsey versus

63. Margaret Clarke, *Strindbergian*, 1927, oil on canvas, 127.5 x 102 cm, National Museums Northern Ireland, Collection Ulster Museum



64. James Coleman, *Slide Piece*, 1972–73, projected images with synchronized audio narration, 35 mm slides, colour

Tunney World Boxing Championship of 1927, with an oppressive soundtrack of a fighter's inner voice, which is full of doubt. In an exhibition in the DHG, Dublin, in 1982, *Box* was shown at the bottom of a narrow spiral staircase, viewable by one person at a time, making it impossible not to be fully engaged in such a claustrophobic setting, where inner and outer, actual and re-presented realities merged.

Coleman's work operates between language and the visual and often deploys and, at the same time, fragments modes of narrative meaning in historical and 'modern' myth, but also in forms of popular culture, including comic storyboards and detective fictions. In *Seeing for Oneself* (1987/88), a multiple slide projection with synchronized audio narration, a historical murder mystery provides the basic format on which are then constructed other layers of possible readings and meanings.

While it can be hard to discern specific references to an Irish context, especially in later works, or any direct engagement with the unavoidable politics of the 'Troubles' over the last forty years, *Strongbow* (1978) [65] is probably the work that most clearly

examines, not the phenomena of the 'modern' Troubles, but the underlying issues of division and duality in Ireland (see 'The Troubles and Irish Art'). *Strongbow* was the name given to the Norman knight Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare, the Earl of Pembroke, who became Lord of Leinster in 1170. In the work's first iteration, which was acquired by IMMA in 1991, a fibreglass cast of *Strongbow's* sarcophagus, which is housed in Dublin, was lit dramatically by a single theatrical spotlight in a confined, blacked-out room while, on a video monitor, to one side, a pair of hands, coloured orange and green, would reach a crescendo of clapping, stop and start again. The sound in that confined space became physical, the viewer unavoidably aware of his/her own body negotiating space, image and sound in three dimensions. The artist completely reconfigured the piece for inclusion in the survey exhibition *Shifting Ground* at IMMA in 2000 – an exploration of Irish art over five decades. The fibreglass cast was shown in a much larger, more brightly lit space in the museum which was shared with boxes and packing from items of digital equipment and some builder's scaffolding.

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65. James Coleman, *Strongbow*, 1978–2000, video installation, resin case, plaster cast mould Sony Art Couture monitor, polystyrene packing, scaffold tower, packing material, Irish Museum of Modern Art



In relation to politics and political engagement, the writer Jean Fisher made a fundamental point about Coleman's practice in *Aspects Magazine* (Autumn 1982) and in the catalogue for the DHG and Ulster Museum exhibitions in the same year – that Coleman's art is, in fact, political, 'not in a conventional sense,

but in the sense that it challenges the very basis of ideology'. The work is, therefore, fundamentally, rather than superficially, political because of the ways in which it 'challenges any system of predetermined meanings' and asks us to consider the reliability of any such system: how is it constructed and by whom? That

66. Michael Coleman, *Through Black*, 1979, compressed charcoal on paper with hand stitching, 150 x 173 cm, Irish Museum of Modern Art

question takes time and effort to experience in the form Coleman's work takes and may account for the fact that, although highly regarded, critically, and very influential, he has a low public profile – a condition he seems to prefer.

Coleman has had many one-person exhibitions and created new projects in a range of important galleries and museums in Ireland, Britain, the Continent and the USA. His works are in all the key international collections; his early work *Strongbow* was one of the first major acquisitions for the IMMA collection when the museum opened in 1991. This was followed up in 2004 when the Museum acquired three significant works, *Background* (1991–94), *INITIALS* (1993/94) and *Lapsus Exposure* (1992–94) – through the CNCI's Heritage Fund.

In the spring of 2009 six major artworks covering the period from 1980 to 2002 were shown simultaneously in IMMA, the RHA (qv) and in the Project Arts Centre in Dublin, providing a unique opportunity for people to experience a spectrum of challenging works by one of Ireland's leading contemporary artists. In 2012 the largest representation of Coleman's work to date was offered when the Reina Sofia Gallery in Madrid showed eighteen works in a major retrospective. DECLAN MCGONAGLE

SELECTED READING Fisher, 1983; Jean Fisher, Benjamin Buchloh and Lynne Cooke, *James Coleman: Projected Images 1972–1994*, exh. cat. Dia Art Foundation, New York and Kunstmuseum, Lucerne (New York 1995); George Baker (ed.), *James Coleman: October Files 5* (Cambridge, MA and London 2003); Jacques Rancière, Jean Fisher, Luke Gibbons, Dorothea von Hantlemann, *James Coleman*, exh. cat. IMMA; Project Arts Centre; RHA (Dublin 2009); Rachel Haidu, Rebecca Coman, Michael Newman, Georges Didi-Huberman, Benjamin Buchloh, *James Coleman*, exh. cat. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, Reina Sofia (Madrid 2012).

COLEMAN, MICHAEL (b. 1951) [66], painter. Having studied at the School of Art, Limerick, Dubliner Michael Coleman came to prominence early in his career when he won the Carroll's Open Award at the IELA (qv) in 1977 and by winning the Premier Award at the same event for the next two years. He was awarded the prize for painting at *EV+A* in Limerick (1979/80).

Following these successes, Coleman moved to Vienna where he lived for some years, but he has been based in Dublin since the late 1980s and has exhibited in Dublin, Vienna, Munich, London and New York. His 1994 exhibition of the 'Hoey's Court' paintings at the RHA Gallagher Gallery was well received, drawing particularly favourable comment from the critic Dorothy Walker (Walker, 1997, p. 161).

Coleman's art is marked by frequent changes of approach, but the innate desire to experiment with ground (whether canvas or paper, or a mixture of other materials, such as velvet and leather) pigment and the tools for applying it, remains a constant through all the phases of his practice. This has led him to make large charcoal drawings, to stitch paper and canvas, to leave gaping spaces that reveal underlying layers or empty space, as in *Verge* (1991, IMMA collection), or to aggressively knife his surfaces, spilling out the history of what might be deemed to be



the canvas's private domain. Although his work since 2000 has moved in the direction of figuration, with paintings of Dublin streets and interiors, Coleman is committed to formalism. His early canvases play with the richness of colour and texture which can be achieved through laying down dense layers of paint, in which each surface is altered and enlivened by the one beneath.

Aidan Dunne, writing of Coleman's 1986 paintings simply entitled, for example, *Blue Greens* and *Red Blues*, advised that an investment of time was required to reveal the complexity in these superficially monochrome works, saying:

[Their] monochromatic skin, tonally varied, is generally fissured to reveal underpainting in different colours. The layering and duration of underpainting is vital to the final image, which comprises not only the exterior layer but the entire weight of the pitted, lumpy, discontinuous surface. (Dunne, 1990, p. 106)

Coleman's work can be seen in the collections of IMMA, HL, OPW, NSPG, AC/ACE, TCD, UCD, CIAS, and in many corporate collections. CATHERINE MARSHALL

SELECTED READING Dorothy Walker, Dennis O'Driscoll and Ciarán MacGonigal, *Michael Coleman: The Hoey's Court Paintings*, exh. cat. RHA Gallagher Gallery (Kinsale 1994); Walker, 1997.