

**POWERS, MARY FARL** (1948–92) [391, 395], printmaker. Mary Farl Powers was one of the most important printmakers in Ireland in the second half of the twentieth century (see ‘Printmaking’). Born in Minnesota, into a fourth-generation American family with Irish and German ancestry, she came to Ireland in 1951 with her family. Although the family moved back and forth a number of times before finally settling again in America, Powers chose to remain in Ireland from 1975 until her untimely death from cancer.

Powers attended the DLCAD and won the Navan Carpets scholarship to NCAD, where she studied for four years. She joined the Graphic Studio in Mount Street in 1973, soon becoming its third director. Her greatest legacy, apart from her considerable and innovative artwork, was her organization of the Graphic Studio. She wrote happily to her sister Katherine that she was called ‘Mrs Thatcher’ because of the notices she put up insisting that users of the studios should observe the rules governing the use of the equipment, hygiene and safety, but her colleagues were particularly grateful for her professionalism in the establishment and management of the Graphic Studio Gallery, the first institution for this purpose in Ireland. Painters who wandered into the Graphic Studio hoping to capture some of their ideas in print, such as Maria Simonds-Gooding (qv), found Powers endlessly generous and helpful as well as inspirational. She was a tireless advocate of the professionalization of printmaking, evident in her catalogue essay to the first exhibition of the National Council for Educational Awards Printmaking Competition (1991), for which she was the adjudicator.

Primarily an etcher, she also made lithographs, woodblock prints and cast-paper works, good examples of which were donated to IMMA by her family following a major retrospective of her work there in 1995. In 1980 she was invited to become Printmaker-in-Residence with the ACNI in Belfast, and in the following year she became a founding member of Aosdána (qv), later acting as one of its Toscairí. Her artwork was informed by her feminism, and her prints, especially those she made for a group exhibition *The Male Nude*, a rare theme for Ireland in 1975, are both playful and satiric. Other work was more serious in tone, such as her art made in relation to pregnancy, in an Ireland where women’s right to birth control was hotly contested and anti-abortion legislation was written into the Constitution (see ‘Women and the Visual Arts’).

John Kelly (qv), whom she succeeded as director of the Graphic Studio, said ‘Mary Farl Powers never took an ordinary image. She always had a fantastic reason for making an image and the image gained from her intelligent approach. It set her aside. You’d see a real character behind the image. She had a very high technique, very high finish.’ (Ryan, p. 71) Much of her later work had to do with the cycles of life, birth and decay, the erosion of materiality, graphically expressed through her medium. Powers’s facility was not confined to printmaking. She produced highly innovative free-standing sculptures made from cast paper.

Her work was exhibited widely in solo shows in Ireland and in print shows in China, Europe, India, Mexico and the USA, winning the Gold Medal at the Listowel Graphics Exhibition in 1975. The Arts Council (qv) commemorates Mary Farl Powers through a biennial award in her name to a practising printmaker.

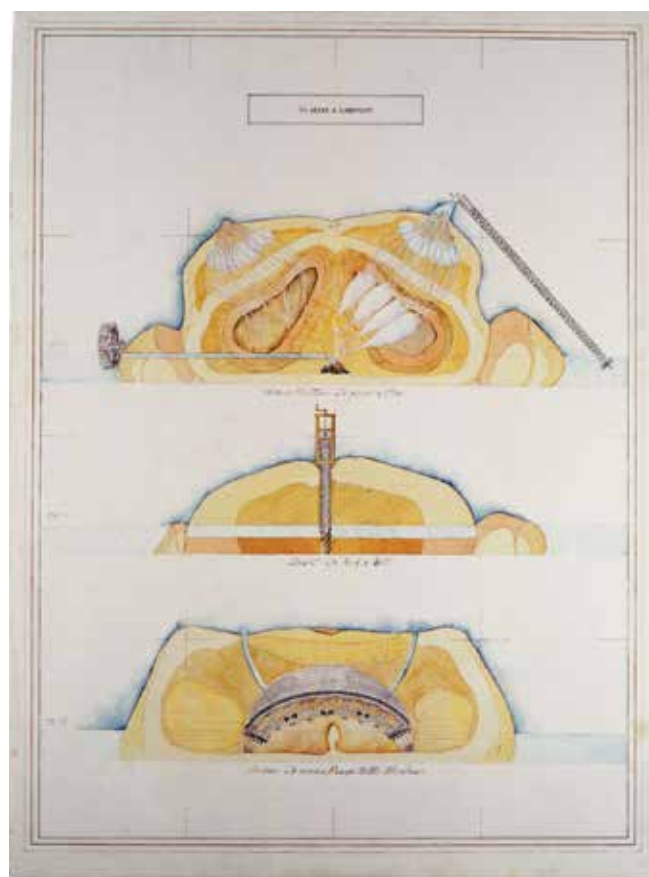
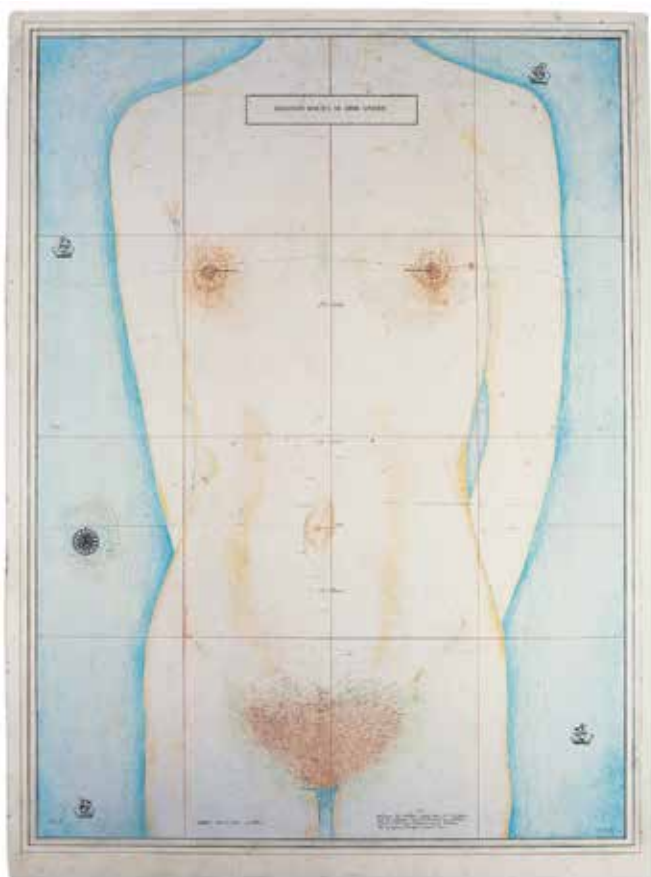
Powers’s work can be seen in the AC/ACE, the OPW, in schools, hospitals and public buildings all over Ireland, as well as in IMMA, which has some fifty of her prints and cast-paper sculptures. CATHERINE MARSHALL

SELECTED READING Muldoon, 1994; Aidan Dunne and Katherine A. Powers, *Mary Farl Powers*, exh. cat. IMMA (Dublin 1995); Katherine A. Powers, ‘Mary Farl Powers (1948–1992): American Person, Irish Artist’, in Kreilkamp and Curtin, 1999; Ryan, 2006; Lalor, 2011.

**PRENDERGAST, KATHY** (b. 1958) (qv AAI III), artist. Addressing themes that are profound and deeply rooted in human experience, much of Kathy Prendergast’s work continues the long-established European tradition of *memento mori*, a meditation on life and death. Using materials such as chalk, hair, fabric and maps, in which are embedded both personal lives and collective histories, Prendergast’s art, whether in watercolour, pencil or mixed media, is generally spare and attenuated. She avoids the rich chromatic scale of oil paint; almost all her paintings are done in watercolour, lightly tinted, or almost monochrome, while her best-known work to date, the ‘City Drawings’ [81], are created with the simplest of materials, pencil on paper. However, there is also a rare quality of beauty in Prendergast’s art, expressed in fine draughtsmanship and craftsmanship that has a universal appeal.



391. Mary Farl Powers, *Waterfall*, 1977, colour etching, edn 22/45, 48 x 40 cm, Irish Museum of Modern Art



Born in Dublin, Kathy Prendergast studied art at NCAD between 1976 and 1980 obtaining a Diploma in Fine Art. She then trained as a video cameraman with RTÉ, the Irish state broadcasting service, for a year and a half, before returning to NCAD where she was awarded a degree in 1983. That same year, Prendergast moved to London, enrolling in an MA course in sculpture at the RCA, from which she graduated in 1986. Even as a student, Prendergast was recognized as an artist of exceptional talent. Her degree show at NCAD, comprising a series of eleven drawings, 'Body Maps' [43, 392], was shown at Temple Bar Galleries and acquired by art collector Vincent Ferguson, who later donated it to IMMA. While clearly inspired by the frequent association of women and the land in Irish literature, 'Body Maps' challenges Romantic treatments of the nude in the landscape, combining as it does elements of engineering diagrams, admiralty charts, and detailed drawings of the female body (see 'The Body'). Associated with the drawings, a life-size painted sculpture of a woman on a bed, *Seabed* (1980), was painted with the contour lines and colours used in Ordnance Survey map-making. Since mapping is frequently linked to military conquest and individual maps in the series contain words such as 'alter' and 'control', 'Body Maps' can be read as a reference to the dual colonization of the body and the landscape. From the outset, the style of Prendergast's drawings has been characterized by a precise, meticulous finish and an avoidance of sentimentality. However, these characteristics are of secondary importance in works such as 'Body

Maps', where her achievement is to examine concepts of sexuality, identity, and the exploitative relationship of mankind and the earth.

Shortly after graduating, Prendergast was selected to represent Ireland at the 1985 Paris Biennale. The work shown in France consisted of large plaster columns, inscribed with symbols, and inspired by Egyptian architecture. Another early sculpture, *Waiting* (1980, HL), made of translucent fibre-glass resin, parquet flooring and dress-making patterns, represented women in 1950s' ball-gowns seated at a dance. Confirming the artist's growing reputation, by winning her an IELA Carroll's Award in 1980, this work was acquired by the HL while the artist was still a student. With its sense of incompleteness and memorializing, *Waiting* shows the direction in which Prendergast's work would evolve. Rooted in family history and everyday experience, with the human presence suggested by clothing, while the people themselves are only partially portrayed, the theme is one to which Prendergast has returned in more recent years.

Prendergast's work has often involved the creation of sets, or series, of detailed drawings and watercolours. She also makes individual three-dimensional sculptures, a pattern of working that has continued through her career. Her use of cloth or hair, materials that have strong personal associations, imbues her art with meaning and an emotional range that is intense and captivating. Dramatic contrasts in scale, where a human hand is depicted in a two-metre-high drawing (*Hand Drawing*, 1989, CAG), or an entire city mapped in a drawing barely thirty

392. Kathy Prendergast, *Enclosed Worlds*, 2/11 and *To alter a landscape*, 6/11 from the 'Body Maps' series, 1983, both watercolour and ink on paper, 76 x 57 cm, Irish Museum of Modern Art (see [43])

centimetres high, enhance this sense of 'otherness'. Prendergast's approach to making art has been consistent, with the theme of map-making reappearing in different bodies of work, extending over three decades. In 1990 she made *Land*, a large tent-like sculpture of canvas, on which she painted the contour lines of an Ordnance Survey map. This led to the 'City Drawings', begun in 1992, in which she set out to chart the capital cities of the world in a series of austere drawings that pared down streets and an urban infrastructure to an attenuated skeletal framework. These drawings (qv), executed with pencil on plain white A4 sheets of paper, started out as maps, but during the course of their making became transmuted, so as to resemble illustrations from a textbook on anatomy, or microscopic life forms. Devoid of notation, text or marks of identification, they present an overview of human society across the globe that is quasi anthropological. However, it is clear that the task Prendergast set herself, of mapping every capital city in the world, was, and is, unattainable, as new nations emerge, and political centres are subsumed within shifting boundaries. Part of the meaning of the work, its conceptual basis, lies in the acceptance that there can be no successful conclusion to the task.

In 1995 Prendergast was selected to represent Ireland at the 46th Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art. Among the works shown at the Nuova Icona Gallery on the Guidecca, which served as the Irish national pavilion, were the first seventy drawings of the 'City Drawings' series, along with *Two Hundred Words for Lonely* (1992, private collection), a faded child's pillow inscribed with the word 'lonely', translated into two hundred languages. Simple in concept, and straightforward in its use of everyday materials, *Two Hundred Words for Lonely* has nonetheless an extraordinary power as a work of art. At Venice, Prendergast was awarded the Premio Duemila, the prize for the most outstanding young artist at the Biennale. In 1995 the drawings were acquired for the IMMA collection in an arrangement whereby the museum accepted batches of the drawings as the artist completed them. One hundred of the 'City Drawings' drawings were exhibited at the Tate Gallery, London in 1997, and another group of them at the Drawing Center in New York two years later. Also shown at Venice was *Grave Blanket (Version 1)* (1995), a child's blanket interwoven with the small white marble chips used to decorate graves. Later related works, such as *The End and the Beginning I* (1997), in which wisps of human hair had been patiently threaded into a baby's bonnet, and *Prayer Gloves* (1998), gloves that can be worn only when the wearer's hands are joined together, suggest long timeframes and the repetition of human rituals.

In contrast to Prendergast's unmistakable autograph presence in the 'City Drawings', her next project was researched and produced using a computer and printer. In 1999 she produced a new series of maps, plotted and drafted digitally, then colour-printed, using iris laser printers, on to large sheets of paper. In these works, entitled *Lost* [133], Prendergast created a map of North America, in which only those places that had the name 'Lost', such as Lost Canyon, or Lost Creek, were marked. The frequency with which such names occur is remarkable, with the pattern of distribution reflecting the pathways of settlers spreading across the continent. In a related work, *From Abandon to*

*Worry, an Emotional Gazetteer of North America* (2003), the artist collated thousands of names that carry a similar import, while in *Between Love and Paradise I* (2002), a more optimistic view of the world is revealed in selecting place-names of North America in which the word 'love' and 'paradise' appear.

More recent works by Prendergast include a series of painted or enamelled bronze sculptures, that continue the theme of extracting from everyday domestic items a sense of finality and of human fragility and fragmentation based on old family photographs and the residues of familial celebration.

Through her art, Prendergast emphasizes truths that can be learned from an intense examination of how human societies create images of self. Her works, charged with emotional intensity, are reflective meditations on life and death and on the importance of families. Prendergast is a member of Aosdána (qv) and her work is in the collections of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, the Cheekwood Museum of Art Collection, Nashville, Tennessee, the Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, the Tate Gallery, London, IMMA, HL and CAG. She was the artist selected by IMMA for a one-person exhibition, *The End and the Beginning*, to mark the end of the old and the launch of the new millennium in 1999. However, in spite of international recognition, Prendergast refuses to respond to pressure to produce work in large quantities or more speedily. Her output therefore, has not been substantial in quantitative terms. After a gap of some years between 2007 and 2009, in two exhibitions entitled *The Grey Before Dawn*, she showed new work at the Kerlin Gallery in Dublin. PETER MURRAY

SELECTED READING O'Regan, 1991; Conor Joyce, *Kathy Prendergast*, exh. cat. DHG (Dublin 1990); John McBratney, 'Something More Exciting than Ordinary Living', *IAR Yearbook*, XIII (1997), 180–87; Brenda McParland and Francis McKee, *Kathy Prendergast: The End and the Beginning*, exh. cat. IMMA (Dublin 1999); Sherlock, 2001.

**PRINTMAKING** (see AAI II, 'The Print'). A small number of artists dominate the history of fine art printmaking in the first half of the twentieth century in Ireland. In contrast to international experience, it is not possible to identify any specific group promoting and supporting printmaking in Ireland until the foundation of the Graphic Studio in Dublin in 1960. Apart from a small number of artists who collaborated as illustrators with the Cuala and Dolmen presses, for the majority of Irish artists, printmaking was not a primary means of expression. As a result, it has tended to be a postscript in the history of Irish art.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence in Britain and continental Europe of the Etching Revival, a specific movement to promote the art of the painter engraver and the creative possibilities of intaglio processes. In 1880 William Booth Pearsall (1845–1913), a keen amateur artist, was the first in Ireland to produce etchings following the principles of the Etching Revival, by working directly from nature on to the etching plate. Other Irish artists began to make prints after training and living on the Continent, including Joseph Malachy Kavanagh (1856–1918), who produced etchings of Belgian and French subjects in a realist manner (see 'Realism'). Roderic