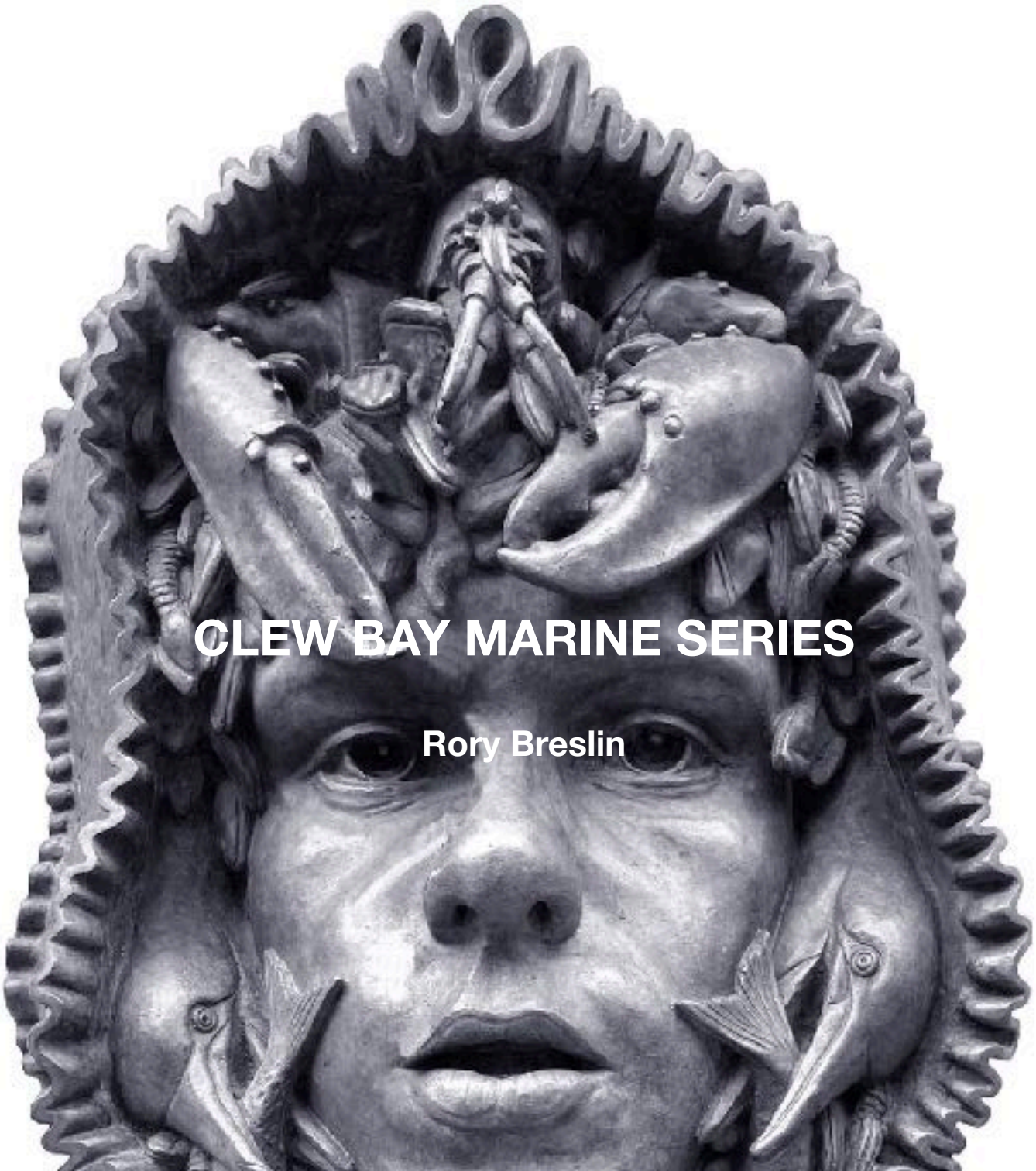


CLEW BAY MARINE SERIES

Rory Breslin

Front, October Marine Mask. Inside, September Marine Mask







Clew Bay Marine Series

Following on from the land-based Clew Bay Series, the Marine Series aspires to illustrate just a fraction of the aquatic life around the Irish Coast. Often overlooked and under-utilised, the myriad of species of Irish maritime fish, shellfish, molluscs and 'seaweeds' that inhabit our coast are wondrous in their diversification and their life cycles. Buoyed by the salt water, the assortment of shapes and entities have freer reign unfettered by gravity like their land based cousins.

This series, in terms of time and seascape, chronicles and celebrates the emergence of a small selection of native maritime species as they appear, disappear or reproduce by month in the Mayo bay area, in what could be called 'sculptural seascapes'. Though recorded around Clew Bay, this life is not particular to the area, most of it is native throughout the coastline, some here for thousands of years, some recent 'blow-in's' that the warming of the seas has facilitated. The juxtaposed iconography in the bronze sculpture of the faces of the youths and the maritime life, intertwined and symbiotic, portray the enormous importance of our relationship with our seas and its life-forms. This is underscored in the text by references to local and historical lore and also the reputed medicinal benefits of some of the species.

Rhythmically framing the countenance of a native to the area, the rendition of the maritime life in these bronze masks is modelled with a baroque vitality; it is rich and dense, and is a mimetic and uplifting tribute to the beauty and tenacity of life off our coasts.







Clockwise from top left...

Seahorse plastercast

Sea Bass clay precast

Furbelows holdfast precast

Langoustine mould











From the top...

Clay mask

Rubber and plaster mould

Wax positive

Reverse of mask with runner 'sprews'

Methodology

Included in this booklet are images of the sculpture at different stages of development prior to bronze casting. The pieces are originally made in clay, then rubber and plaster moulds are taken from which a final foundry-ready wax positive is re-worked and sprewed with wax 'runners' to enable an even flow of the molten bronze in the next stage of the process. Once the casting and finishing process is complete, the works are patinated a lustrous and iridescent silver, which unfortunately cannot be picked up by print or screen, and seven layers of renaissance wax are applied to preserve the luminosity of the bronze surface.

Cognisant of the transition of the year, scores of samples of the maritime life were collected daily along the coasts and by boat. Photographs, drawings and plaster casts of the species were realised when they appeared, due to their ephemeral nature and to enable their size, shape and texture to be captured and worked in clay at a time when they were not necessarily in season.

Specifications

The sculptural works average 55 cm high by 35 cm wide without their bases and weigh on average 25 kg each. If being viewed on a screen, this PDF is best read in the two page option.

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April

Clockwise from left...

Wax

Spider Crab

Bronze detail

Wax detail

Carrageen Moss









A great spiralling shoal of Sea Bass, king of the mullets, envelops the mask redolent of a Bedouin's keffiyeh. Crowned by the Spider Crab, *Maja brachydactyla*. the shoal encapsulates the sleeping tranquil face of the young woman, whose cheeks bear the prints of gulls. Driving through the shoal from the rear the tremulous sounding Northern Diver pushes through the Carragen Moss, *Chondrus crispus*, healer of colds, bronchitis and chronic coughs. An arc of the long-living Whelks at the base of the sculpture frames the lower section of the mask and is interspaced with the whelk's egg casings and Turban Snail shells.





Clockwise from left...

Puffin

Lesser Spotted Dogfish

Wax detail

Bronze Mask

Wax Mask









May

Eyes fixed and stoic in countenance, the girl's forehead has a layered diadem of Cluisíns or Black Scallop shells, notable from ancient times for having played a prominent part in man’s religious, artistic and architectural development. Hemming in these seashells and running bilaterally down to the base of the mask is the knobbly Rock Wrack, *Fucus vesiculosus*, the original source of iodine.

This wrack on its descent envelops its cousin, the Horned Wrack, *Fucus Ceranoides* on the cheeks of the young face while below the chin it safely nestles a pair of the rare Short-snouted Seahorses and a pair of Clams, the former symbols of good fortune and protection and the latter associated with the goddess Aphrodite.

Above the forehead two mottled muscular Spotted Dogfish arch downwards, sentinels of the overall aspect of the work. These cat-eyed sharks cushion the apex of the piece, the Clare Island Puffin.



June

Crowned by a vigorous phalanx of European Sea Bream, summer visitors considered sacred to Aphrodite, that swim through the upper current curved fingers of *Lamanaria Digitata* which veil-like stretches to its holdfast at the base of the sculpture.

In the safety of this kelp and in a fashion reminiscent of Esher, a troupe of Dublin Bay Prawns march, clock and counter from either temple of the enthusiastic visage. *Nephrops norvegicus* which the French call langoustine translates to ‘lobsterette’ as it resembles a small lobster. Sometimes this rather pretty looking crustacean is also referred to as demoiselles de Cherbourg.

Interspersed between the oarweed and the crustaceans from the bottom up are an array of shell fish; Limpets, that kept Ernest Shackleton and his men alive on Elephant Island; Whelks and other marine gastropods that end under the Giltheads in a diadem of Augur Shells, named after the shell's resemblance to boring drill bits or screws.







Clockwise from above...

Langoustine

Bronze Mask

Bronze detail

Sea Bream

Clay in progress



July







A great dusk-hunting Thornback Ray glides forward, its wings elegantly up-curved. Running externally underneath this Raja and flowing to a bow at the base of the work, the intertidal Bladderwrack, used as fertiliser of potato 'lazy beds' and in folklore for protection against mental derangement; encapsulates the remainder of the marine iconography.

From the top the blind and regimental razor fish are arranged like strata in formation to the lower jawline. Below these and foraging in the Wrack, two shore crabs at odds with each other on either side of the seaweed and Dead Man's fingers, *Codium Fragile*, that curl up below the chin.

Perwinkles, an ancient human food source, adorn the seaweed while the inquisitive and open-mouthed youths countenance is decorated with the spiralling curls of the Lugworms castings.

But while he passed before a plashy place,
A lug-worm with its grey and muddy mouth
Sang that somewhere to north or west or south
There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race
Under the golden or the silver skies

—W.B. Yeats

Clockwise from right...

Wax Mask

Bronze detail

Clay detail

Thornback Ray

Razor fish











August

The bell of an over-arching metamorphic Compass Jellyfish encompasses the whole top of the work, broken only by the tenacity of the Herring Gull that bursts through with its catch. Now much maligned, the gull was connected to the Irish god of the sea and the afterlife, Manannan Mac Lir. The trailing lappets or tentacles from the Scyphozoan envelop the sculptures other features. On either side, stretching from the hood are the ambiguous furbelows or are they the jellyfish's oral arms.
Sardines, unlike their unfortunate fellow in the gull's beak, successful in their evasion of the airborne predator and of the athletic mackerel on the outside right, swim out on either side of the girl's cheeks and down to the gathering of Sea Potatoes under the chin. These sand-burrowing heart urchins were traditionally known as 'Virgin Mary' shells because the distinct patterns on the test were thought to resemble an apparition of the Virgin Mary.

Clockwise from right...

Clay mask

Clay detail

Clay side view

Herring Gull

Compass Jellyfish

Bronze Mask



















Clockwise from above....

Native Oyster

Bronze detail

Salmon

Bronze detail

Furbelows

Bronze mask

September

With an abundance of energy a great Atlantic Salmon arcs around the upper aspect of the sculpture. The sagacious fish of Irish legend that ate the nine hazelnuts from the well of wisdom cuts through the oscillating kelp. This muscular and regal fish curves downwards mouth agape in search of prey. The furbelows the salmon swims through encapsulates the full work on either side, from the textured blades at the top to the frills and ruffles, designed to dissipate wave energy, at the base.

From the forehead down, a clique of native oysters nestle between the countenance and the fish above. *Ostrea edulis,* an ancient human food source, fifty to sixty of which were reportedly eaten a day by Giacomo Casanova.

The fish-nurturing Egg Wrack, feamainn bhuí, adorns the cheeks and a flowing shoal of sprat swims downwards from the cheeks of the adolescent eventually separating the kelps two holdfasts





October

A great shawl of oscillating Furbelows encapsulates the mask, its holdfast or 'Sea Hedgehog' set firmly under the chin. Within the frills and ruffles of this Kelp, emerges *Homarus gammarus*, the European lobster. This crustacean presides over a panoply of Goose Barnacles, whose legend, propagated in Cambrensis's *Topographia Hiberniae,* that the Barnacle Goose and the Goose Barnacle “fruit” were intertwined, the former springing from the latter.

In a flurry of activity below and diving through the Barnacles on either side, two Northern Gannets plunge to capture the startled herrings, the silver of the sea, the fish so economically fundamental in European history that they prompted the founding of many cities, including Amsterdam and Copenhagen.







Clockwise from above...

Northern Gannet

Goose Barnacles

Bronze Mask

Clay detail

Clay detail

Lobster







Clockwise from left...

Mermaids purse

Wax Mask

Clay, side view

Brown Crab

Bronze detail

Sea Urchin

Entada Gigas





A small shoal of juvenile Red Gurnards, the grunting fish, cascade from the upper central aspect of the sculpture with brown crabs like protective sentinels on either side of the fish. Eaten by hominoids since the cave dwelling Neanderthals, the goddess Hera placed the pagurus amongst the stars as the constellation Cancer. The fish and the crabs are tethered to a coif of sequentially patterned Mussels or Diúilicín, the makers of 'sea silk' much coveted by Roman and Greek emperors.

The mussels are overlapped on either side of the youth's cheeks by Serrated Wrack, rich in minerals and known for its potential anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Two large sea urchins are partially enveloped by the wrack which also cups on either side the great sea bean, the *Entada Gigas*, deposited at Dooagh in Achill Island from the tropics of South America by the Gulf Stream and its continuation, the North Atlantic Drift.

Below the urchins and the wrack, two curved Mermaids Purses, incubators of sharks, skates, and chimaeras, frame the lower section of the mask. The ever-bobbing common Sandpiper leaves its prints and its exploratory beak holes in the cheeks of the sedate and peaceful youth.





November





December

From it's hemispheric sanctuary of five King Scallops: badges of the pilgrims to the shrine at Santiago de Compostela, the Octopus Vulgaris emerges. This colour-changing heartfelt Cephalopod gracefully extends its tenacious tentacles and swathes the full inner section of the mask. These frontal suction cupped arms encapsulate, at the temples, the self-replicating Common Starfish, *Asterias Rubens*; and on either cheekbone the feisty, red eyed Green Velvet crab and at the lower section, the chin-strap of decapodic Prawns... in a crescent that frames the stoic and indomitable youth.

The rear tentacles of the octopus overreach the King Scallops to cradle limpet adorned kelp and arc downwards to the necklace of Clusíns at the base of the work.











Clockwise from above...

Bronze Mask

Clay, side view

Prawn

Kink Scallop

Wax Mask

Octopus

January





Clockwise from left

Bronze mask

Mermaid's Purse

Sea Bass

Clay, side view

Sugar Kelp

Clay, side view

Redolent of a Mesopotamian headless, great straps of Sugar Kelp, *Laminaria Saccharina*, shroud the downcast face of the youth. Adorned with Cockles, an ancient food found in shellfish middens throughout Europe and Queens scallops attached by their byssus which shade the upper countenance of the mask.

Further textured fronds of the Kelp encapsulate the face from either side and below. A pair of Sea Bass, Prospero's reconciliation offering after years of conflict, arc inwards below the chin to the Periwinkles and a necklace of the Mermaid's Purses of the Lesser Spotted Dogfish.
The skins surface is adorned with the Periwinkles cousin, *Littorina obtusata* and the footprints by the of the Giolla Brighde or Oystercatcher, servant of St Brigid.













Clockwise from left...

Clay, side view

Kemps Ridley turtle

Bladderwrack

Bronze mask

Clay, side view

Hermit crab

February



Shells open, a diadem of Clams curves across the forehead of the engaged youth. These thick trough shells, unfairly labelled 'an bia bocht' or poor man's food have a history that date to the Cambrian Period. Peppered within the crown the apertures of the many whorled and carnivorous Auger Shell. This crown is broken only by the iodine rich Toothed Wrack that permeates through it to float above on the upper section of the sculpture.

Buoyed within the upper wrack one of three Kemps Ridley Turtles that align with its siblings at the peripheries of the work infer a circular movement around the mask giving a feeling of weightless 'flow'. A rare and unfortunate visitor to Irish shores, this endangered and smallest of turtles inevitably succumbs to cold stunning.

A hermit crab, *Pagurus bernhardus*, nestles below the chin of the free-flowing and thalasso therapeutic Bladderwrack that flows from the bottom upwards on either side of the cheeks.







March

Clockwise from left...

Bronze mask

Moon jellyfish

Barnacle Goose

Wax, side view

Thongweed

Wax, side view

Evoking an ancient Egyptian headdress, the hood of a Moon jellyfish cloaks the upper section of the sculpture like a great mantle, with its ringed gametes and canals etched subtly into the surface of the bronze. First described by Aristotle in his *Historia Animalium,* these 'immortals' derive their name from their round curve bell and their ability to glow. This medusae with its aquatic and waving tentacles obscures the gaze of the adolescent below.

Below on either side of the work two frilled and textured straps of *Saccorhiza polyschides* enclose the face of the work. Hemmed in by these bands of Kelp and below the chin, a collar necklace of horse mussels, *modiolus modiolus*, regimentally emerges. The byssal threads of the mussel were reputedly woven into Jason's golden fleece. On one of these shells grip a sole and almost imperceptible Acorn Barnacle.

Strands of thongweed or sea spaghetti emerge like clasps from the bi-valves and the algae along the chin and cheek, the latter imprinted by the footprints of the winter visitor, the Goose Barnacle, whose flesh Pope Innocent III explicitly prohibited the eating of during Lent.















