

## Christine Borland

'What makes for the fullness and perfection of life, for beauty and happiness, is good. What makes for death, disease, imperfection, suffering, is bad.'<sup>1</sup>

20th November 1999 - 23rd January 2000

*"The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science."*

Albert Einstein, 1931

Christine Borland's work deals with issues of mortality and individuality, considering how and if identity is construed from our biological make-up. Increasingly object-based, Borland's most recent works have been beautiful and unsettling collisions of a traditional craft - the making and decoration of bone china - with contemporary issues of genetic patterning and mortality. Previous works have explored how meaning is invested in and lost from objects, including human remains, while maintaining a fascination with the areas where art and science meet.

Working in the context of Dundee's growing international reputation as a locus of innovative research in the life sciences, **Borland's new work has developed out of her relationship in recent months with researchers in the field of human genetics.** Using a variety of materials currently employed in DNA research, the work employs the strong visual qualities of these substances to explore the serendipity of nature itself.

*"Obliquely related to the gels in which DNA is examined are thoughts of **jelly fish**. These creatures which have long been a source of fascination, have no bone structure, muscles or brains and reproduce asexually. Pliny the Elder studied the bioluminescent jellyfish in the Bay of Naples in the 1st Century AD, whose DNA has recently revolutionised bio-technology. The isolated Green Fluorescent protein can be spliced to any protein, essentially painting it day-glo green under the microscope."*

CB, July 1999

The exhibition's starting point was a blood sample given as part of a routine a screening procedure for congenital abnormalities during the artist's pregnancy. Encompassing significant and emotive issues such as the ownership of genes and the drive to eradicate abnormalities, the exhibition brings together representations of a number of life forms, connected through their unnerving formal similarities. Including some of the tools of genetic research used to visualise identity and difference, a key concept for the exhibition is that of the family tree and the transference of information and 'characteristics' through its system.

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<sup>1</sup> Unaccredited quotation found on the cover of a book entitled '*Health and Illness*' by Sander L. Gilman (London, 1995)

*"A starting point for any investigation of congenital abnormalities is the exploration of the family tree. A crucial point of reference is an **actual tree**, which grows in front of the Department of Medical Genetics in Glasgow. This small tree has been grown from the seed of the tree under which Hippocrates taught medicine in Greece in the 5th century BC."*

Exploiting the stunning visual appearance of the most fundamental living forms, the atmospheric installation creates an environment in which life literally appears suspended. Connecting contemporary technological innovation with much earlier means of visual analysis, the exhibition prompts consideration of our responses to difference and its significance in human identity.

### Background

*"Moving between the mundane and the freakish, the classified and the unclassifiable, the typical and the singular, the living and the dead, Borland continues to explore the fragile yet resilient nature of our humanity."*

Greg Hilty  
'Christine Borland'  
FRAC, Languedoc Roussillon, 1997

Christine Borland (b. 1965) is one of the most prominent of a generation of artists from Scotland to exhibit to great acclaim internationally. Since her first major solo project at Tramway, Glasgow in 1994, 'From Life', Borland's innovative and varied work has been seen world-wide. In 1997 she participated in the Sculpture Projects in Münster and was short-listed for the Turner Prize. In 1999 De Appel, Amsterdam, the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich and the Fundação Serralves, Oporto presented a major exhibition of her work of the past 10 years.