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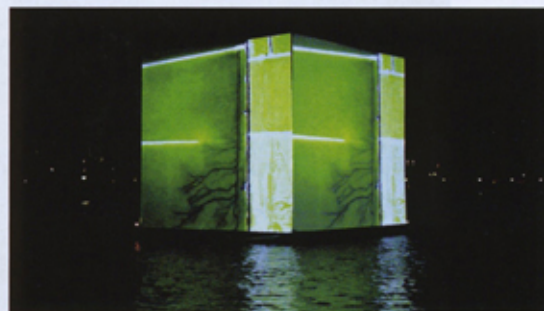
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ON HIS NEW DESIGN MUSEUM



GREEN SHOOTS

IRISH ART CONSULTANT AND INTERIOR DESIGNER CLAIRE MCGOVERN HAS BROUGHT HER UNIQUE BRAND OF ENVIRONMENTALLY AWARE *GESAMTKUNSTWERK* OR "TOTAL DESIGN" TO BEAR ON PROJECTS FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO NEW YORK.

WORDS HELEN O'CONNELL

Claire McGovern of McGovern Design House credits her father, Sean McGovern, for igniting her initial interest in design by stylishly making his mark on their various childhood homesteads. She went on to work in his architectural firm, Sean McGovern & Associates, while studying for a Masters in Arts History and Administration at UCD and set off to San Francisco when her visa came through. Starting out working in a downtown art gallery and design firm, she jumped at the chance to begin her own independent venture once the opportunity arose. With the help of local artists and friends, McGovern took the plunge and opened her own art and design gallery in San Francisco's hip Mission district in 2002 – when she found the ideal space after the dot-com bust of 2001.

Having worked in an art gallery that tended to promote the more elitist aspects of the art world, McGovern was determined to "produce and direct a venue for the arts that offered a holistic representation of fine art, sculpture, photography, installation, video, furniture and interiors", heralding a "complete departure from the classic paradigm of the white walled gallery cube". The concept of *gesamtkunstwerk* or "total design" was of paramount importance in order to "break down preconceived notions that divide artistic disciplines and blur the boundaries between art and craft". The gallery tended to exhibit artists she found thought-provoking and often mocked social and political conventions, such as Merikay MacKenna's fake taxidermal heads fabricated under the motto "How to get a head without hunting", Ian Sheldon's minimalist landscapes that blur the boundaries with abstract art and Charles Linder's abstract metal canvases created by gunfire. As it had always been a dream to open and direct a gallery, McGovern found that "the high of curating and producing exhibitions and art events that are well received is hard to equal".

The transition from art gallery to interior design was always going to be a natural if not inevitable one for McGovern given that her career seeks to unify these intrinsically linked aspects of our visual environment. She established McGovern Design House, her art and



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT "Dream Machine" by Charles Gatewood featuring the iconic invention with WS Burroughs and Brion Gysin, London 1972; "Spiritus Mundi" eco-art installation, Copenhagen Climate Conference for Millennium Arts. On two sides of the cube is a photograph by David Maisel from the "Terminal Mirage" series; art consultant and interior designer Claire McGovern.



design gallery, in San Francisco in 2002 having previously worked as an art consultant, project manager and designer for a successful San Francisco boutique design firm, working on hotels, restaurants and spas throughout Northern California for prominent commercial and private clientele.

Equipped with practical and formal training in both fields, McGovern tends to approach design with a strong contemporary artistic sensibility. "Interior design and art consulting have always gone hand in hand for me and clients welcome the combination of both skills in one consultant," she explains. Since setting up Design House, her design projects have ranged from private Californian residences to offices and bars, as well as a spell working in Silicon Valley in partnership with *Sunset Magazine* on their prestigious "Ideas Houses". In 2007, McGovern set up a New York office and her business has continued to adapt to an increased demand for art advisory services and site-specific curatorial installations.

McGovern is appalled by the idea of artwork chosen to match interiors or artwork's importance being demoted to a last-minute addition. "I have always encouraged clients to select art for art's sake and prioritise its role and placement within an interior," she says.

In 2005, McGovern curated an exhibition entitled *Spiritus Mundi* in conjunction with the San Francisco International Arts Festival, which "sought to investigate and highlight the synthesis between nature and creativity". It was to lay the foundation for a new-found interest in environmental and ecologically minded art, that led her to launch an art advisory service in New York in 2008 called *Spiritus Mundi* specialising in the promotion and placement of eco-art.

Although she left San Francisco – which is such a leader in international standards of sustainability and where environmental awareness is now almost taken for granted – McGovern is more dedicated than ever to the role of eco-art in public and private spaces as an essential means of shedding light upon our increasingly challenged relationship with the environment. The eco-art service has worked on a recent installation for the Robert F Kennedy Waterkeeper Alliance and presented a virtual exhibition at the Copenhagen Climate Conference. May 2010 will bring a large-scale installation to San Francisco's Union Square. McGovern explains her motivation. "Art that embraces or reflects upon themes of nature has an invaluable capacity to reconnect us to the natural world, a connection that is becoming more and more compromised by the way in which our civilisation is evolving, as by 2050 reputedly over 70 per cent of the world's population will be urban." We hope that McGovern's vision can help lead to a deeper appreciation of our precious natural resources and their conservation.

McGovern Design House, New York; www.mcgoverndesignhouse.com



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT An art and interior installation for a client's loft apartment in Tribeca, New York City. The work shown is "Fragile" by eco-artist Eve Mosher; an interior design of a private residence in Silicon Valley, California. Artwork is by "Storm Chaser" painter Ian Sheldon; "Yellow Strip," oil on canvas, by Ian Sheldon.