

Gerda Frömel: *A Retrospective* is curated  
by Seán Kissane Curator: Exhibitions

Assisted by Seamus McCormack  
*Assistant Curator:* Exhibitions;  
Rachael Gilbourne, *Assistant Curator:*  
Exhibitions and Hugh Woods,  
*Programme Assistant:* Exhibitions.

In August 2015, the exhibition will travel to  
the F.E. McWilliam Gallery and Studio, Co.  
Down, where it will be curated by Riann  
Coulter.

A fully-illustrated catalogue accompanies  
the exhibition, with essays by Seán  
Kissane, Riann Coulter, Curator, F.E  
McWilliam Gallery and Studio; Sarah  
Kelleher, CACSSS Postgraduate Scholar,  
University College Cork; and Jason Ellis,  
Sculptor and conservator.

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(front cover)  
*Head*, 1969  
Marble,  
Private loan,  
Trinity College Dublin  
Art Collections

IRISH MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
GARDEN GALLERIES  
10 APRIL – 5 JULY 2015

# Gerda Frömel: A Retrospective



**Gerda Frömel** *A Retrospective* is the first contemporary survey of the artist's work. The works in the exhibition date from 1955 to 1975 and are grouped around partial reconstructions of her solo exhibitions, as well as presentations on themes such as the body, portraits, nature and architecture.

In 1948 Frömel enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts, Stuttgart and later went on to study in the Academy of Fine Arts Darmstadt and of Munich, where she studied metalwork and sculpture. While at art school, Frömel met the sculptor Werner Schürmann who she married in 1955. Following the birth of their first child Wenzel, the couple moved to Ireland in 1956 where Schürmann took up a position as a teacher of metalwork at the National College of Art, Dublin.

#### List of works

##### Ground Floor | Room 1: Early Work

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This room contains examples of Gerda Frömel's earliest work. During the early 1950s there was a building boom in post-war Germany where many buildings including churches were reconstructed. Frömel won commissions for religious objects and stained glass windows – sketches for which can be seen here. After moving to Ireland in 1956 Frömel's husband Werner Schürmann set up a bronze casting foundry at their studio, one of the only foundries in this country at the time. These bronze animals and the portrait of her son Wenzel are among the first objects she made and exhibited in Ireland.

##### Ground Floor | Room 2: First Exhibition 1964

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This room is a partial reconstruction of Frömel's first solo exhibition in 1964 at the Dawson Gallery, Dublin. Using archive materials and installation photographs, these works have been gathered together from public and private collections. She exhibited bronze objects and drawings. Some appear abstract, but all reference the human figure and the natural world. The influence of Alberto Giacometti is strong in some works, but here Frömel is aligning herself to a post-

war aesthetic that rejected abstraction and chose to represent and reconstruct the body after its destruction during the Second World War.

##### Ground Floor | Room 3: Second Exhibition 1967

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This room is a partial reconstruction of Frömel's second exhibition in 1967 at the Dawson Gallery. These works show a transition from cast bronze to carved marble. Not all sculptors have the skill in both techniques, so here we see Frömel's technical virtuosity. The motif of the circle visible in all of these works is the moon or another celestial body floating over the land which is represented by a simple curved line. In the drawings we see the moon in the sky, while in the 'Ponds' we see it reflected in water.

##### First Floor | Room 4: Architectural Commissions

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Frömel won a number of significant commissions to create works on a public scale the most important being 'Sails' for the Carroll's Factory in Dundalk. Other works are Setanta for the Setanta Centre on Nassau St, Dublin; works for Trinity College, Dublin; Galway Institute of Technology; and ACC Bank. Usually constructed in steel, her public works may appear abstract but continue to reference the body and the natural world. The large 'Blade' in this room was made for the Carroll's Factory, the form is both a weapon and a translation of the form of the human body.

##### First Floor | Room 5: Heads

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This room is a partial reconstruction of Frömel's 1970 solo exhibition at the Dawson Gallery. We see another distinct shift in her practice from the early bronzes and the marble 'Discs'. The head can be thought of as a container for the mind and imagination. It also references the Celtic and Germanic head cults – something that unites her origins and adopted home. These are archetypal or symbolic rather than portraits, and she uses a variety of materials from green alabaster, Connemara marble and Portuguese rose marble in these works.

##### First Floor | Room 6: The Night Sky

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Frömel was fascinated by the night sky and astronomy. Many of these works reference the path of the planets or their moons – the mobiles in the centre of the room directly. These are late works in her career, from the early 1970s, and there is a wide variety of media: bronze, marble, aluminium; and techniques: casting, carving and welding. The scale of her work has also shifted to larger production.

##### First Floor | Room 7: Eve

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In the 1970s Frömel created a wide series of female figures with the title 'Eve' and 'Ondine'. Both titles suggest sorrow. After the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Eve was cursed by God saying 'In pain you will bring forth children'. Ondine was a water sprite who married a human man but when he left her she lost her children. Here Frömel seems to return to her own life story and the tragic drowning of her two-year old daughter many years before.

**In August 1975, the life of this extraordinary woman and talented artist was cut short when she accidentally drowned at the age of 44. The news of her untimely death was greeted with shock by the artistic community. At the Irish Exhibition of Living Art that year, a special display was made of her work and the catalogue included a tribute to her. A year later a substantial retrospective of Frömel's work was held at the Municipal Gallery. After 1976 her work continued to be championed by writers like Dorothy Walker, and while it was included in *Rosc 1980* was rarely exhibited subsequently. Thankfully her work remains in numerous public collections. IMMA has been fortunate in recent years to receive works by Frömel from the Carroll's Collection and the Bank of Ireland and now has the most substantial public holding of her work. They have been included in recent landmark exhibitions such as *The Moderns* (2010-2011) ensuring that her work continues to be considered within the canon of Irish and international Modernism.**

##### Talks & Events Programme

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**What is Sculpture ...? | Sinead Hogan**  
**Saturday 9 May 2015 12noon**  
**- 1pm, Lecture Room, IMMA**

In conjunction with the exhibitions, *Klara Black* and *Gerda Frömel* at IMMA, Sinead Hogan (Lecturer, IADT) presents *What is Sculpture...?* This talk considers new definitions of sculpture throughout art history and explores how contemporary forms of 'expanded sculpture', demands the viewer to question the very object-nature of art.

**Artist's Response | Eilís O'Connell**  
**Friday 15 May 2015, 1.15-2pm, Garden Galleries, IMMA**

Eilís O'Connell is one of Ireland's most respected artists and sculptors. She explores ideas of scale, abstraction, minimalism and organic geometric forms in response to Frömel's sculptural practice and commissions.

**Closing Conversation | Frances Morris**  
**Post War Art and Existentialism**  
**Sunday 5 July 3-4pm, Lecture Room, IMMA**

To mark the final day of the Frömel exhibition at IMMA, renowned art historian and curator Frances Morris (Head of Collections, Tate Modern, UK) reflects on her extensive research on post war art and examines how this time of vast turmoil and vigorous creativity continues to influence artistic practice of the last decades in conversation with Seán Kissane (IMMA).

**For a full programme of events, free tickets and to listen to recordings of past talks on the IMMA Soundcloud Channel, visit [www.imma.ie](http://www.imma.ie). For further information contact : Sophie Byrne, Assistant Curator, Talks Programme, IMMA, email: [sophie.byrne@imma.ie](mailto:sophie.byrne@imma.ie) or phone +353 (1) 6239913.**