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Furniture designer and maker Sasha Sykes shows off her new work

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Carol O'Callaghan

Carol O'Callaghan takes a look at exciting new work from furniture designer and maker, Sasha Sykes.



One summer, about two years ago, a newsfeed on Facebook caught my attention. It came from furniture designer and maker Sasha Sykes who was developing a new body of work for an exhibition and needed birds' nests that had, of course, been abandoned by their builders.

I knew I had several around the garden but only one that I could get at easily from a step ladder.

Gently I coaxed it from where it was segued between my roof and guttering by clever avian architects, and just in the nick of time – as the following weekend it was scheduled for discarding in a spurt of heavy duty, outdoor maintenance.

Reverently lifting this cosy, but surprisingly strong arrangement of sticks and sheep's wool into a box, cuddling it up in layers of protective bubble wrap, I left it on my doorstep over night, ready to be sealed for despatch to the post office.

Silly me. Next morning the box had been over-turned and the contents shredded by hooligan magpies.



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Since then I've been waiting to see how this project manifested for a designer maker who is noted for her resin-based furniture pieces which are filled with items gathered from the countryside around her County Carlow home.

It seems the response to her Facebook call was huge, among the responders were seasoned caliologists – birds' nest enthusiasts – who have since supplied her with 100 examples, from enormous woody mansions once built and inhabited by pigeons – to delicate shelters made from fluff and moss.

A selection is now showing at the Oliver Sears Gallery in Dublin, alongside the work of ceramicist Sara Flynn in an exhibition entitled Caliology and Lineage which runs until January 21.

Encased in hand-cast resin blocks, the nests are testament to the development of Sasha's craft and the advancement of her technique in working with resins and in how she fabricates.

But what is particularly evident with this body of work is how she uses her skills and signature resin materials to present an idea, in contrast to previous work which was informed by the need for function.

While developing this new work, opportunities opened up for all sorts of conversations. She cites one in particular with a caliologist who considered that maybe man learning to fly led to people being less fascinated by birds flying.

And there's certainly something in this exhibition to fascinate, to ponder and to revive interest in a subject that was once so popular.

Embarking on a new project this year which harks back to her furniture-making, Sasha will incorporate a study of the ascendancy class of 18th century Irish society, building on an earlier body of work entitled, 'Family Silver' which encapsulated everyday silver items like biscuit cutters and cutlery from as early as the 1820s which were uncovered in her family home at Lisnavagh House in County Carlow.

Sara Flynn's offering of open-necked ceramic vessels sits in aesthetic contrast to Sasha's sealed objects. But while this is not a collaborative show, there is a sense that both makers have something significant in common.

Each has evolved her technique to achieve physical resolutions of concepts that result in a confident and mesmerising exhibition, with each showing their most current and technically-evolved pieces.



Representing the Lineage aspect of the exhibition, Sara's choice of title is a reflection of many years of development and making, including successes and failures, the latter some might consider a bad thing, but which she sees as the process and advancement of manipulating clay into beautifully executed art objects, with the aesthetic of functional vessels.

Like her clay technique, glazing techniques are also a continuous subject for exploration with Sara readily admitting it is the glaze she applies that can make or break a piece.

The finished products now sell to collectors in the UK, America and Europe, while Sara is, from this month, back in her studio and workshop near Leap in rural County Cork, unleashing her creativity on a new batch of clay for another exhibition next December.

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KEYWORDS [▶ furniture designer and maker, Sasha Sykes, exhibition](#)

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