



# F.E. McWILLIAM GALLERY & STUDIO

Frederick Edward McWilliam was one of the foremost sculptors working in Britain in the 20th Century. He was born in Banbridge on 30th April 1909. His father, Dr. William McWilliam, was a local GP whose practice was situated on Newry Street. Today, a blue plaque marks his birthplace.

After McWilliam's death on 13th May 1992, his estate gifted the contents of his studio, originally situated in Holland Park, London, and a number of sculptures to Banbridge District Council. After several years of research, a suitable site was found and funding secured in order to commence work on a purpose built gallery, sculpture garden and replica of McWilliam's studio. Designed by Kennedy Fitzgerald and Associates, Belfast, the Gallery opened in 2008 and features a permanent display of McWilliam's work, temporary exhibitions

of Irish and international art, a craft shop, Visitor Information Point and award winning café, Quails at the Gallery.

The F.E. McWilliam Gallery is an ACE accredited museum and has a climate controlled exhibition space. The Gallery hosts four significant exhibitions per year as well as seasonal displays in the Sculpture Garden. A varied programme of events, talks and workshops accompanies each exhibition.

Founded in 2011, the Friends of the F.E. McWilliam Gallery aim to support and assist the Gallery and to promote its use and enjoyment by the public. Friends benefit from:

- An annual programme of events and outings
- Specialised talks
- Discounts on catalogues, gift shop and lectures

For further information on the Friends please contact [friendsfemcwilliam@gmail.com](mailto:friendsfemcwilliam@gmail.com)

**F.E. McWILLIAM  
GALLERY & STUDIO**

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**Quails**  
at the gallery

T: +44 (0)28 40629667

**FREE ADMISSION**

Gallery opening hours:  
Mon - Sat 10.00am - 5.00pm  
Sun (June-Aug) 1.00pm - 5.00pm  
(Open on Bank Holidays)

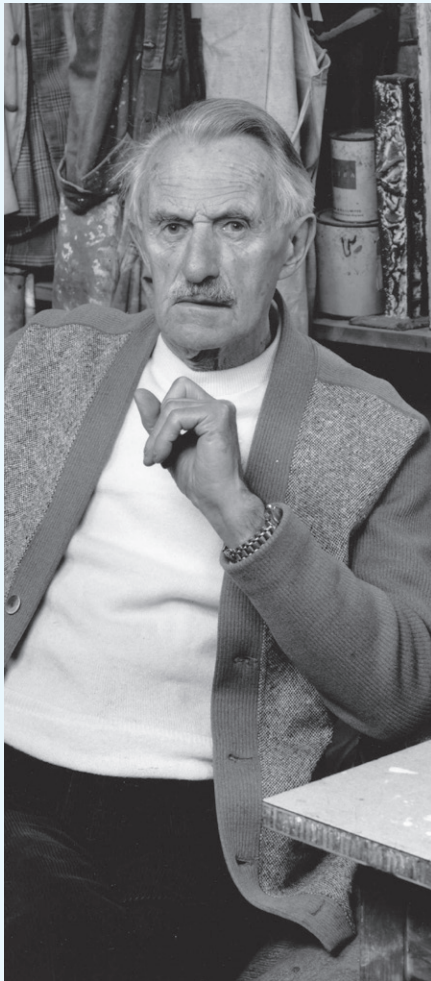
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F.E. McWILLIAM GALLERY & STUDIO



FREDERICK EDWARD  
McWILLIAM 1909-1992



‘Mac’, as he was known, recalled his childhood in Banbridge with affection.

*“I think I was lucky born where I was in a country town; Banbridge made most of the things it needed . . . and of course Banbridge was a linen town – the mill dams gave us swimming pools and in summer, blue fields, when the flax was in flower, and white fields when the linen was spread out to bleach. Magical intrusions in the normal patchwork of green.”*

F.E. McWilliam, 1981.

F.E. McWilliam attended the preparatory department of Banbridge Academy, before going to Campbell College, Belfast. He pursued his interest in drawing by enrolling at the Belfast College of Art for a brief period (1926–1928). In 1928 he enrolled at The Slade School of Fine Art, London, with the intention of becoming a painter. However, under the influence of A.H. Gerrard, Head of Sculpture at the Slade, and of Henry Moore, whom he met there in his second year, McWilliam turned to sculpture.

He and his wife Beth, whom he married in 1932, rented a cottage in Chartridge, Buckinghamshire, which they shared with Henry Moore, who had already built up



a considerable reputation as a sculptor. It was in Chartridge that McWilliam began to carve in earnest using cherry wood and sycamore from the surrounding orchards and woods. His early pieces were semi-abstract, but after a visit to the International Surrealist Exhibition in London (1936) his work changed direction, taking on a more Surreal aspect. However, he was never a fully Surrealist artist -

*‘What appealed to me in Surrealism was that it made for freedom of thinking – I should put it this way, I was for Surrealism but not with it.’*

In 1937 a trip to Hoptonwood Quarry, Derbyshire, with A.H. Gerrard and Henry Moore resulted in McWilliam producing several significant sculptures from the irregularly shaped stones he found there, including Mandible (1938), Eye, Nose and

Cheek (1939) ❶, Profile (1939–40) and Woman with Folded Arms (1939).

In March 1939 McWilliam had his first one-man show at the London Gallery, Cork Street, London. On the outbreak of the Second World War, six months later, he joined the RAF, serving in England and later in India (1944–1946). In India McWilliam taught at an art school in New Delhi. He also visited Hindu temples in Northern India and in Orissa. The influence of Indian sculpture can be seen in works such as Father and Daughter (1949) and the later work Miss Orissa (1981).



On his return from India in 1946 McWilliam began to experiment in a wide variety of media - wood, stone, clay, bronze and



concrete. He also taught art for a year at the Chelsea School of Art, before being invited by A.H. Gerrard to teach sculpture at The Slade, a post he held until 1968. In 1949 he and his family made what was to be their final move, to a house and studio in Holland Park, London, upon which our own replica studio is modelled. During the 1950s, McWilliam’s work progressed into more abstract, large bronze works. Eve and Patriarch (both 1953) epitomize this period. Many public commissions came throughout the 1950s and 60s, culminating in his major commission, Princess Macha (1957) ❷, for Altnagelvin Hospital, Derry. Macha, a tall, elegant figure influenced by Irish

myth, marked the beginning of McWilliam’s re-engagement with his Irish origins.

Having grown up in Northern Ireland and seen sectarian violence first-hand in the riots in Banbridge in the 1920s, McWilliam had an everlasting revulsion against intolerance and religious bigotry. However, with many friends and family still living in Northern Ireland, the ‘troubles’ were never far away. On 4 March 1972 a bomb exploded without warning among the diners at a place McWilliam knew well – The Abercorn Tea-Rooms in Belfast, killing 2 women and injuring some 130 people. McWilliam, who never before had used his art for direct comment, was moved by this atrocity to produce a series of bronzes, known collectively as Women of Belfast (1972-73) ❸. This series, which has both local and universal relevance, is now recognized as one of the most powerful artistic responses to the conflict in Northern Ireland.

McWilliam died in London on 13th May 1992. His work is held in the collections of the Tate, MOMA, IMMA and the Ulster Museum, amongst others worldwide. In September 2008 the F.E. McWilliam Gallery & Studio was opened by Banbridge District Council to celebrate the life and work of this internationally renowned sculptor.

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| 1909 | Born in Newry Street, Banbridge.  |
| 1926 | Attended Belfast College of Art.  |
| 1928 | Left Ireland to attend the Slade School of Fine Art, London.  |
| 1931 | Awarded the Robert Ross Leaving Scholarship - travelled to Paris where he visited the studio of sculptor Constantin Brancusi.   |
| 1932 | Married fellow student Elizabeth Marion (Beth) Crowther. Moved to Chartridge, Buckinghamshire to a rented cottage shared with Henry Moore. Begins to carve in cherrywood. |
| 1937 | Birth of daughter Sarah. Visited Hopton Wood quarry, Derbyshire with A.H. Gerrard and Henry Moore. Began association with the British Surrealist Group.                   |
| 1939 | Birth of daughter Bridget. First one-man exhibition, of sculpture and drawings, at the London Gallery, Cork Street, London.   |
| 1940 | Joined the Royal Air Force. Served four years in England, interpreting aerial reconnaissance photographs.   |
| 1944 | Served in New Dehli and Bengal, India. Taught at the Hindu Art School, New Dehli.   |
| 1946 | Taught at Chelsea School of Art.  |
| 1947 | Invited by A.H. Gerrard to teach sculpture at the Slade.  |
| 1951 | Commissioned to create a large figurative work, The Four Seasons, for the country pavilion at the Festival of Britain.  |
| 1957 | Commissioned to sculpt the monumental work Princess Macha for Altnagelvin Hospital, Derry.  |
| 1964 | Awarded an honorary D.Litt from Queen's University, Belfast.  |
| 1966 | Appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE).   |
| 1971 | Won the Gold Medal for Sculpture at the Oireachtas Exhibition, Dublin.  |
| 1972 | Produced the Women of Belfast series of sculptures in response to the Abercorn Tea-Rooms bombing, Belfast.  |
| 1981 | Large retrospective exhibition organised by Arts Council of Northern Ireland held at the Ulster Museum before travelling to Dublin and Cork.                              |
| 1989 | Second retrospective at the Tate Gallery to celebrate his 80th birthday.  |
| 1992 | Died on 13 May.   |
| 2008 | F.E. McWilliam at Banbridge, curated by Dr Denise Ferran, opens at F.E. McWilliam Gallery & Studio.   |