

Kite Design Studios

It's hard to believe the Tall Ships are upon us once more. When it was first announced, July 2011 seemed to be such a long way off. Maybe time has speeded up after all. Conspiracy theories aside, no doubt most people will be making a trip into the City to catch a glimpse of the spectacle on the quayside. While you are there I can't urge you enough to leave the quays and explore the fantastic regeneration that is ongoing in the area now known as The Viking Triangle.

Last week saw the opening of the Bishops Palace Museum and the reopening of the historic Reginald's Tower. They are well worth a visit along with the other marvellous addition, Kite Design Studios, located near Christchurch Cathedral. This is a Waterford based arts and design collective comprising five individual businesses creating new and exciting quality products. It is an eclectic group of jewellery, print, glass and fashion designers working out of an open plan space with a smaller retail shop attached. It's a lovely place to explore as visitors can watch the designers as they work. These days it is very rare to have an opportunity of buying a piece of art and being able to speak directly to the artist. It also opens up the possibility for discussion on bespoke and custom made items.

The designers in residence are Ken and Claire Coleman from Stradbally Jewellery. They produce handmade silver jewellery and, as the name suggests, they live in Stradbally which they claim has hugely inspired their work. The Irish Handmade Glass Company is a glass blowing and cutting studio formed by four former Waterford Crystal master craftsmen. They are producing a range of clear and coloured crystal.

Unique skills

Sean Egan of Sean Egan Art Glass is also ex Waterford Crystal, but has brought his unique skills of engraving to his own business. Sean has been commissioned by the US Ambassador to create a 10th Anniversary piece this year to commemorate 9/11. The studios also house the official glass memorial piece by Sean Egan of the original 9/11 Twin Towers Commemorative sculpture which is on open display. Anne McDonnell-Murphy produces fine art prints and her signature is the creation of complex black and white images. Watching Anne at work is a feast for the eyes as pools of drizzling ink worked with her hands, magically transform into wonderful images. Finally Bonzie Designs is an independent Irish Design Label with a romantic vintage appeal.

Bonzie Designs has already made an impact nationally and internationally winning both devoted customers and a slew of awards.

Female Excellence in Business 2010, Excellence in the Arts 2011 and voted among the Crafts Council Top New Products of 2011 and Ireland's Top Designer- People's Choice 2011. Bonzie Designs is best known for whimsical fascinators, wraps, shrugs, bags and corsetry and just a stroll by the window of the Kite Design Studio will create a desire to go in and see more.

Sadly, however, Bonzie Designs is the only one that has to date really made the most of the window space, which is a great shame for passers by, particularly out of hours. There is a large window space on one side that has been used to great effect by Bonzie in one corner, but then there is nothing else to see and gives the impression of a shop almost ready to open but not quite there yet. This great window is largely unused but for a useful and tasteful explanation display about where the name came from. Then as you walk on and come across the windows of the retail space they appear to be too cluttered as is the retail space itself. These are the teething problems of all new businesses and ventures that eventually get ironed out, but in the meantime don't let it put you off going inside.

Kite Brooch

Talking of the name, in my ignorance I was also unaware of the significance of the chosen name, "Kite Design Studios". I originally thought it was chosen for aspiration; the idea of flying as high as a kite and why not. In fact it has so much more depth and resonance for both the area and the work. The name is taken from the Waterford Kite Brooch, which was found in a pit in Peter Street in 1989. It is believed to be one of Ireland's finest pieces of late eleventh to early twelfth century secular metalwork. To date there have only been fourteen Kite shaped brooches found in Ireland and the Waterford Kite Brooch is among the finest. It is made from several materials including silver, gold filigree, glass studs and amethyst coloured cabochon. According to the information cabochon means a stone that is polished without being cut into facets. Originally the brooch would have been made and used to close a cloak. It is a tiny but beautiful piece of work that would come from around

the same period as the Tara Brooch and has evidence of a mix of traditional Irish and Viking craftwork. According to one source it is "a remarkable and well-preserved find from the excavations of Waterford city centre between 1986 and 1992 and bears testimony to the wealth and sophistication of the city's inhabitants. It was found in a pit in Peter Street having presumably been lost. Secular metalwork was not as highly valued as church so when jewellery went out of fashion it was simply melted down and the materials reused. To date it is the sole really ornate piece of Irish jewellery to survive from this period and has many traits in common with contemporary ecclesiastical metalwork, e.g. St. Patrick's bellshrine."

If you are in the City over the weekend you will find Kite Design Studios at 11 Henrietta Street, opposite Christ Church Cathedral. It is open Monday to Saturday and is another testament to the super talent that exists in Waterford and the great things that are happening despite the incessant talk of downturn and recession.