

The stuff of life

ARTIST PROFILE

**ABIGAIL McLENNAN:
FLOWERS AND MOLECULES**

Rebecca Hossack Art Gallery at
Charlotte Street
28 Charlotte Street, London
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All true artists live inside their heads. But juggling being a commercial success with producing work that satisfies the artistic drive can end up with all the balls tumbling to the floor.

Glasgow-based Abigail McLellan has always been an artist with a strong sense of purpose. Her paintings and, more recently, her sculptures have a very strong decorative element and people are initially drawn to them for that reason.

In her paintings, the layers of acrylic colour are astringent and beguiling. Her subject matter, be it person or plant, is primal and honest. Although she returns again and again to the same themes, her

work seems to be getting stronger. Therein lies an extraordinary triumph of the creative mind over bodily weakness. For nine years ago, at the age of 30, McLellan was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Unfortunately, in her case the disease has proved particularly aggressive and she is now in a wheelchair, with her speech the latest function to be affected.

Despite her nervous system being battered by the disease, her creative mind is undimmed and still firing on all cylinders. With the help of her partner, painter Alasdair Wallace, with whom she

attended Glasgow School of Art in the 1980s, McLellan works every day in her studio at the WASPS artists' community in Dennistoun, Glasgow.

It is a minefield of visual stimulation, with piles of 1970s' craft magazines, swathes of brightly coloured fabric and a row of unfinished canvases revealing her fascination with flowers – or “blobs on sticks”, as Wallace jokingly refers to them.

A variety of sculptures sit on a shelf. McLellan has long been fascinated by sea fans – brightly coloured coral that waves with the tides underwater yet stiffens

Jan Patience discovers a triumph of creativity over physical disability

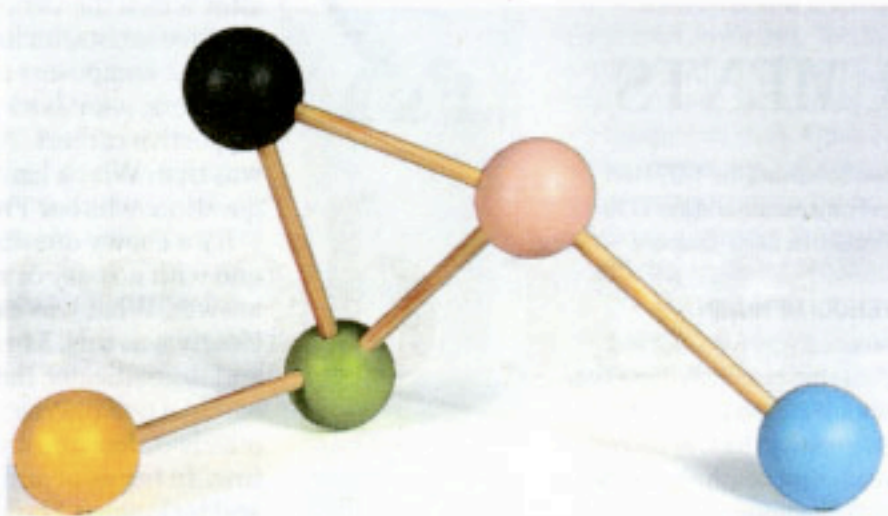
when removed from the ocean. Having worked on the models for these sea fans for a while, she recently reached the stage when she had them cast in bronze or made into stunningly delicate glass pieces.

Alongside these, in complete contrast, are a couple of her ‘molecule’ sculptures, simple yet arresting wooden sticks and brightly painted balls. According to McLellan, her sculptural work relates directly to her paintings and vice versa.

As her ability to do finely detailed work has diminished, she seems to have delved deeper into the primal make-up of the plant life that sustains our planet. It is quite simply the stuff of life and, ironically, as her own body turns in on itself, McLellan's mind is like these sea fans underwater – flexible and beautiful.

If an artist's role in life is to help us to understand the intricate complexities of what it is to be human, then Abigail McLellan's work, which on first glance seems simplistic, gets straight to the point.

Stand in front of a piece of her art for long enough and your mind starts to reassemble itself. You find yourself thinking clearly. Tell the artist this and she laughs. “That's not how I feel when I'm doing it,” she replies slowly. “Anything but!” ■



One of Abigail McLellan's “molecule” sculptures