

## CONOR McFEELY

**Born in Derry 1958. Lives and works in Derry.**

**Education: Kingston Polytechnic.**

**His solo exhibitions include: *Ink Mathematics* at the Mappin Gallery, Sheffield 2000; *Popular Mechanics* at The Old Museum, Belfast and at the Context Gallery, Derry 1998-99; *Disclaimer* at Orchard Gallery, Derry 1997; and *Ventilator* at Context Gallery, Derry 1995. McFeely has participated in several group exhibitions, including *Small Steps* at the Ellipse Art Gallery, Washington, Context Gallery, Derry, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin and *The British Art Show 5*, touring Edinburgh, Southampton, Cardiff and Birmingham.**

According to his own account, many of Conor McFeely's works are attempts to rationalise the incomprehensible. McFeely asks what attracts people to certain kinds of action and makes them refrain from other acts. Ultimately his themes are rooted in the relationships between the individual and society.

In his recent works McFeely has particularly dealt with issues of free will, choice and responsibility. He is interested in the extent to which an individual's actions are independent of society and culture, and on the other hand, how great a portion of behaviour is predetermined. He recognises the effects of cultural background in his own work, but does not want to give it greater weight than his own personal experience.

In McFeely's works, unresolved matters are often connected with the shadow side of life, with forbidden or despised acts or inclinations. *Disclaimer* (1997) is linked with themes of dependency, *Proof* (1998) with stealing, and *Ink Mathematics* (2000) with arson. Even though his works have a moral dimension, McFeely does not want to issue ready-made pronouncements, but to give viewers room. The sparseness and honesty of his works are liberating.

The concepts of the true and the genuine are also central to McFeely's way of working. *Beyond the Wub* (2002), which takes its name from a science fiction novel by Philip K. Dick, is about cause and effect, and about predetermination, which McFeely investigated in his earlier works. The majority of Dick's works use the methods of science fiction to deal with psychosis and mental imbalance. Science-fiction literature frequently describes conduct that has the mark of psychotic or schizophrenic behaviour: a loss of grip on reality.

Like *Ink Mathematics*, *Beyond the Wub* contains texts lit with ultraviolet light. The installation also includes other objects and materials. Even though certain parallels seem odd to the viewer, and make the atmosphere unreal, all the elements have their own carefully considered place in the whole. Alongside the aesthetic dimension, the materials that McFeely uses always carry their own message: the connection between form and content is crucial. He uses everyday objects and materials in his installations, while also borrowing ingredients from the world of art. Literature and art history are not only important starting points in terms of content, but very often also constitute a physical component of the works.

**Mia Tykkyläinen**

*Translation Michael Garner*