

Dorothy Cross

Red Road, 2021

hand-carved Damascus Rose

Courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London and Kerlin Gallery, Dublin

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Presentation at the 25th Biennale of Sydney was made possible with generous support from Culture Ireland

Education Resource (7-12)



Red Road 2021

Image courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London

Overview



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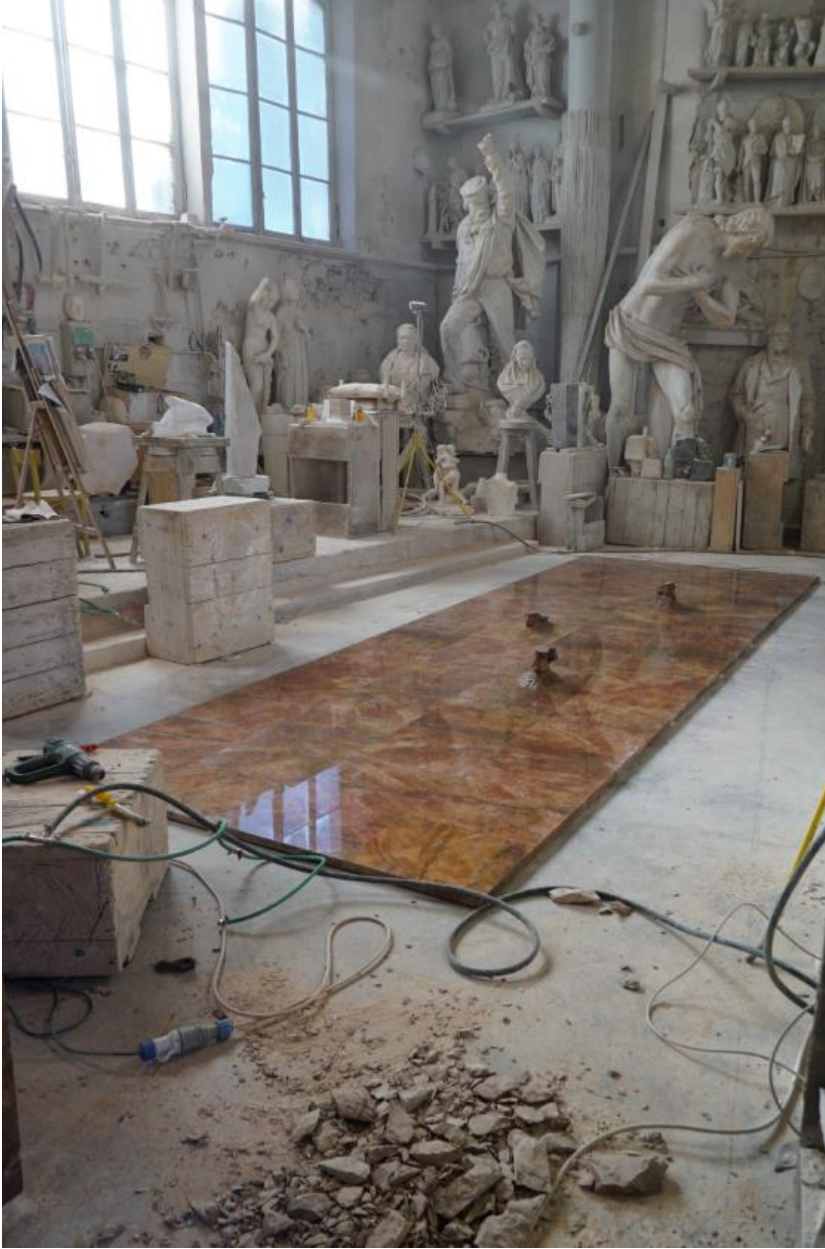
Dorothy Cross is an Irish artist renowned for her investigation into the collision between the human and natural worlds. Her practice is deeply rooted in materiality, often treating organic objects, such as shark skins, udders, and marble, with equal reverence to examine history, biology, and time.

In *Red Road*, Dorothy Cross presents a six-meter floor installation of polished red slabs of stone. While the form is minimalist and rigid, the material — Damascus Rose marble — betrays this hardness with a flesh-like hue that imbues the work with a startling delicacy.

The stillness of the stone is disrupted by carved human feet, suggesting a ghostly presence moving across the plane. By carving these prints into a surface mimicking the glow of skin, Cross creates a tactile paradox: the work feels as fragile as a body yet is composed of immovable stone.

The work's power lies in its provenance. Quarried in Syria, the marble physically embeds a geopolitical crisis into the gallery floor. The title alludes to the biblical *Road to Damascus*, the site of St. Paul's miraculous restoration of sight. Cross juxtaposes this ancient enlightenment with the modern horror of the Syrian war, forcing the viewer to contemplate the reality of forced migration.





In the studio
Red Road, 2021, Damascus Rose marble
Image courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London

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Discussion Questions

Cross mixes deep **geological** time (ancient stone) with a specific human **moment** (a refugee crisis) to create a **sense of memory**.

Notice that we only see feet, there are no legs, torsos, or faces.

How does the **absence** of the rest of the body **affect** the **mood** of the work?

Does it feel like a **presence** (someone is here) or an **absence** (someone is gone)?

Cross' practice relies on **provenance**, meaning the specific place a **material** comes from is just as important as the sculpture itself. The marble is *Damascus Rose*, quarried in Syria.

How does this material provenance **transform** the artwork from a **representation** of **migration** into a literal piece of the **displaced land**?

Does the stone **carry** the trauma of its origin?

Would the **meaning** collapse if she used Italian marble?

Practical Activities

Activity 1

Take 60 seconds to make a loose, gestural sketch of the sculpture's basic shape. Now, engage your imagination. What if Dorothy Cross hadn't used Syrian Marble? Re-imagine this exact sculpture made of a completely different material. Choose one: clear glass, rough concrete, or soft velvet.

Annotate your sketch with arrows pointing to specific parts, describing how this new material would look.

Would the glass feet look fragile and ghostly? Would the velvet feel suffocating or comforting?

Write 2–3 sentences underneath explaining how this change affects the viewer. Does a concrete road make the work feel more urban and harsher? Does glass make the refugees seem invisible?

Use this to prove that the material is just as important as the shape.

Activity 2

For this drawing exercise, you are going to ignore the whole picture and focus on the tension in the details.

Use your thumb and forefinger on each hand to create a square viewfinder or camera



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frame.

Hold it up to your eye and zoom in on one specific point where a carved foot meets the flat stone surface.

Draw only what is inside your frame. Do not draw the whole foot, just that intersection. Focus heavily on your shading (chiaroscuro). Where is the shadow falling? Use your pencil to show the contrast between the perfectly smooth, polished floor and the rough, organic texture of the toes.

Ask yourself as you draw: Does the foot look like it is sinking into mud, or emerging out of water? Try to capture that movement in your lines



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Image courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London

