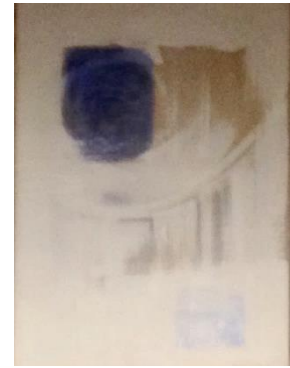


**Artist** Deborah Brown  
**Title** *White on Canvas with Blue* (1962, ref. no. 206/14/62)  
**Medium** oil on canvas  
**Notes** Donated in 2017 by the Estate of Professor Anne Crookshank FTCD



b. 1927, Belfast

Deborah Brown is a painter and sculptor from Cavehill near Belfast in the North of Ireland. As a child, she enjoyed being outdoors and riding horses around the fields near her home. She also spent many summers at the family's country house in Cushendun, County Antrim. These landscapes would inspire much of her early work and, later, the green hills and rocky coastline would become reduced to their essential forms in her abstract paintings. At school, Brown was encouraged by her teachers to pursue art. The landscapist James Humbert Craig was a friend of her father's and she regularly called to his home to watch him work. Brown states that it was Craig who explained that an artist must paint what they see rather than what they know, advice which proved invaluable in her training.

Taking still-life classes as a teenager developed Brown's skills in observation, a technique she honed at the Belfast College of Art (1946-7) and took to an even further degree at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, where she studied for two years under Seán Keating and Maurice MacGonigal. Whilst in Dublin, Brown visited the galleries and attended the Irish Exhibition of Living Art which reflected the talents of her contemporaries. Up to this point, her education had been focused on the realistic representation of forms and she admits that she was unsure about the meaning of abstract art. Moving to Paris in the 1950s was a formative, liberating experience for the young artist who had thus far worked only in landscape and still-life. Here she came into contact with the work of Picasso, Matisse and Giacometti and soaked up the vibrant arts and culture of the city. Brown described this period as eye-opening, crediting the experience as having prompted her understanding of 'what painting was about.'

In the 1960s, she travelled to Italy where she was particularly influenced by the work of Lucio Fontana and his famous sliced canvases - Brown would adopt a similar technique in her own painting, cutting holes into her canvas and building up the space with papier maché to create a dynamic, physical presence in her work. From the 1950s onwards the artist worked mainly from her Belfast studio becoming a well-known figure in the local arts scene and socialising with writers, curators and artists such as Basil Blackshaw, Anne Crookshank, T.P. Flanagan, and John Hewitt who was instrumental in bringing her work to the major galleries in

Belfast. Mary O'Malley, the founder of the Lyric Theatre, was a particularly important figure in Brown's life, as it was through O'Malley that the artist began designing sets and making props, a vital period in her development as a sculptor.

Brown is perhaps best known for her use of fibreglass, first as additional elements incorporated into her paintings and later as sculptures in themselves, such as the acclaimed 'Barbed Wire' series. This unusual material struck audiences and brought her considerable attention. However, the artist modestly explains her choice as having been based on the relative cheapness of fibreglass, furthermore there was no need to cast it as with bronze sculpture, so it could be made quickly. Brown was given a retrospective in 1982 at the Ulster Museum, Belfast and, subsequently, at Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane. In 1993, she was commissioned to make a sculpture in bronze by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland; the result was the much loved *Sheep on the Road*, situated at the Waterfront Hall in her native city of Belfast. Brown's work is represented in the collections of the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), the Ulster Museum and Radió Teilifís Éireann.

Information in this article, including quotes from the artist, has been sourced from "Deborah Brown : A life in the round" an interview between Brown and Brian McAvera, published in the Irish Arts Review (2002-), Vol. 28, No. 3 (Autumn 2011), pp 68-75. Further information has been sourced from [www.culturenorthernireland.org/article/1144/deborah-brown](http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article/1144/deborah-brown) and [www.oxfordartonline.com](http://www.oxfordartonline.com)

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