

ART FIRST is pleased to present a two-person dialogue between the award-winning mid-career artists Christopher Cook, Reader in Painting at Plymouth University, and Donald Teskey, RHA, Dublin.

**Christopher Cook's** series of luminous black and white graphites, suspended in oil on paper convey an edgy ambiguity within supposedly familiar 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch, Italian and Spanish still life tableaux, filled with rich detail and alluring imaginative fantasy.

Gill Perry wrote of these as:

*..... a meditation on the potential sensuality of inanimate objects and commodities, yet also what they might signify in a contemporary political and economic context. Cook draws on his accumulated knowledge of the still life genre as viable material to be appropriated, hence tulips, flowers and ripe fruit lurk in the shadows, but as we scour the busy surfaces for visual clues, all is not what it seems. Devoid of their original rich colour, they are often then re-combined with motifs from modern geo-politics, such as drones, refugee camps, and pylons.*

*..... Minutely observed details, scavenged and re-imagined, are evident in the use of varying shades of grey, sometimes merging into ominous, darker tones. The absence of rich colour, which helped to define the sensuality and affluence of the seventeenth century works, can provoke surprise..... Any hint of the 'Golden Age' is quickly undermined. Similarly, the exotic tulips arranged in a crowded vase of cultivated flowers in Figure 8 Wire, are positioned next to an encroaching fence of barbed wire. As the arabesque shapes of the wire echo those of the tulip flowers, we are caught in a visual conundrum. What is the relationship between the various motifs, rendered in the same black-grey palette? Tulips and modern internment camps or the policing of national borders might seem at first sight to have little in common.*

Cook recently won first prize at 'New Light' (Bowes Museum and tour) with one of the preliminary works from this group. His work is held in collections including the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum New York, Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge and the Yale Centre for British Art.

**Donald Teskey** regularly takes up residencies in Co Mayo where the elemental clash of sea and stone on the western sea board have become a leitmotif of his art. It is work from this dynamic *West Coast* series which has entered the collections of IMMA, Dublin – shown recently in their *Coast-lines* exhibition - The National Gallery, Dublin and the Limerick City Gallery of Art. We present a group of oils on paper from the coastal series, alongside Teskey's ravishing, fresh-from-the-studio *River Bank* oils on canvas, not seen before in London.

*Irish art critic AIDAN DUNNE wrote of Teskey "...he ventured to the coast; not Dublin but the Southwest and, in time, North Mayo, when he went to paint at Ballycastle on a Ballinglen residency. The coast, and in particular the endless, driving energy of the tides, seemed to license him to use paint with a freedom and confidence that have led him from strength to strength."*

Teskey comments that *"åin June last year I began a number of paintings focusing mainly on the shapes and textures of the riverbank near my studio. I've lived near the Dodder for a good part of my life and have made paintings exploring the Dodder valley at several points throughout my career"*.

We are also offering studies on paper and small panel paintings. Visit our website [www.artfirst.co.uk](http://www.artfirst.co.uk) for further information.