



Mick O'Shea  
*Verge 1*, 1999

Patinated copper, wood, glass

In some respects Mick O'Shea leads a double life, balancing his work as an instrument technician in the Chemistry Department, UCC, with his work as an artist and director of the Cork Artists Collective, based in Library House, on the grounds of St Fin Barre's Cathedral. This verge (or ceremonial staff, carried by a vergier before a religious dignitary in a procession) is one of a series of four made for an exhibition in the Cathedral. *Verge 1* is composed of a weighty and commanding shaft, directly appropriated from a pick-axe, alluding to the medieval origins of the verge, used at times to keep back animals or an overzealous crowd, or even to discipline unruly choristers. The head of O'Shea's verge is lit up by an assortment of neon bulbs, some of which enclose religious crosses, bulbs that, the artist maintains, bring to mind the burning lights of grottoes across Ireland, and are very much a part of his childhood visual vocabulary. O'Shea's main concerns in *Verge 1* are to refocus the viewers' attention on the original purpose of the object and to explore the transformative power of decoration, by which the verge, for example, becomes associated with authority and ceremony and thus imbued with emblematic and mystical meanings. O'Shea's current work continues this notion of transformation, as he explores the translation of sound to image.

Text written by Nora Hickey following an interview with the artist.

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