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# Recycled, broken, deposited: interpreting hidden decorated stones at the Neolithic tomb of Millin Bay, Northern Ireland

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## Résumé

The Neolithic site of Millin Bay in Northern Ireland, dated c. 3600-3300 BC, was excavated in the early 1950s, revealing an unusual long cist-like structure containing 16 burials and 64 stones with decoration associated with the Irish megalithic art tradition, which regularly features abstract carved motifs (concentric circles, spirals, meandering lines, etc.). Several of these stones display evidence of intentional breakage, as well as several episodes of art-making, including superimposition, suggesting that the decorated stones had a complex biography before subsequent use in the buried architecture of the tomb. What happened to these stones before they were eventually deposited underground and used as structural components in the monument?

This paper will present the results of a recent recording and analysis of the decorated stones from Millin Bay. Using photographic techniques and 3D structure-from-motion photogrammetry, we examine technical signatures in the making of the art as well as overlapping art indicating sequences of art production, together with evidence of intentional breakage and other alterations of the stones. This examination allows us to infer the multiple stages and ‘chains of practices’ involved in the production, use and reuse of Millin Bay stones as ritual artefacts.

Here we approach megalithic art not as a spatially and temporarily fixed assemblage of structural stones but as a series of individual artefacts that were moved, transformed, decorated, reworked, sometimes broken, and eventually brought together and (re)used as structural elements to create the architectural setting of burials.

This paper will consider Millin Bay in its broader context, with reference to wider evidence of reworked and displaced megalithic art in Ireland and Europe, and will discuss the reuse of megalithic art as representing a specialised form of prehistoric monumental construction and funerary ritual.

**Mots-Clés:** Megalithic art, passage tomb, kist, reuse, Neolithic, Ireland

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