

Into the Light

The Arts Council – 60 Years of Supporting the Arts

EXHIBITIONS CORK | DUBLIN | LIMERICK | SLIGO

4 DECEMBER 2012 – 23 FEBRUARY 2013

Stephen Brandes, Cecily Brennan, Gemma Browne, Gerard Byrne, Michael Coleman, Diana Copperwhite, Margaret Corcoran, Gary Coyle, Dorothy Cross, Paul Doran, Brendan Earley, John Gerrard, Siobhán Hapaska, Martin Healy, Mark Joyce, Caoimhe Kilfeather, Nevan Lehart, Elizabeth Magill, Fergus Martin, Beatrice McMahon, Eoghan McTigue, Julie Merriman, Tom Molloy, Sinead Ni Mhaonaigh, Isabel Nolan, Mairead O'hEocha, Niamh O'Malley, Paul Seawright, David Timmons and Mark Clare

Crawford Art Gallery is delighted to present *Into the Light: The Arts Council – 60 Years of Supporting the Arts* which pays tribute to a distinctive national collection that has been active for sixty years tracking contemporary visual arts developments as they emerged. *Into the Light* is a series of exhibitions of works from the Arts Council Collection developed in partnership with the Crawford Art Gallery, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Limerick City Art Gallery and The Model, Sligo. Each gallery was invited to select works from the Arts Council Collection to create an exhibition which reflects their own particular interests and ethos.

This exhibition draws from the Arts Council's recent acquisitions, presenting works produced since 2000. The exhibition takes as its starting point the idea of memory and residue, as something that lingers, or endures; something that is left over from the past which remains present. Each of the works on show display some aspect of, or reference to the past, be it material: as with Caoimhe Kilfeather's *But a Hercules* (2010) sculpture carved out of coal; or subjective: as with the works of Elizabeth Magill or Brendan Earley which are informed by memory.

A working title for the exhibition was 'Legacy Systems [Residuum Unknown]'. The term 'legacy system' comes from the field of computer technology and refers to a method or function which is no longer in widespread use, or which has been supplanted by an updated version. In *Portrait to Smile Once a Year* (2006), John Gerrard employs digital imaging technologies, while Gerard Byrne's installation *1984 and Beyond* (2006) reflects on the 'of-their-time' ideas about the future, discussed by a group of science fiction writers in the 1960s. A number of artists in the exhibition including Stephen Brandes and Diana Copperwhite investigate and renew the legacies of figurative drawing and painting in their work, whilst Niamh O'Malley's *Talbot St. Vignette* (2006) explores the character of time in both moving image and painted still.

The term 'residuum unknown' – which refers to the idea of untapped possibility – relates to another key consideration at play in the exhibition: the question of how contemporary works of art can remain pertinent and resonant once they become part of a collection. Put another way, how can a collection preserve contemporary works of art and keep them from becoming antiquated? Does the 'quality' of a contemporary artwork stay present and reveal a greater potential through the passing of time? As Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith comments in the exhibition catalogue "obsolescence does not, of course, necessarily entail eradication, and the works chosen tend to suggest the continuing productivity of the past and the (re)generative potential of its traces".

Lower Gallery

Brendan Earley's ongoing fascination with the modernist tradition is apparent in *Chalet* (2004). Earley has made a body of drawings using markers, which run out during the making of the images of buildings that he had remembered from childhood. These drawings were inspired by Brian O'Doherty who told Earley that "remembering a building is a way of inhabiting it". *Chalet* is considered from a nostalgic perspective: Lough Key, Co. Roscommon being a place of Earley's childhood holidays, and in the wider context the drawings evoke the longing expressed for the modernist project.

Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh *Forestall* (2006) continues her exploration of liminal spaces – that is, the intervening spaces between objects and forms, whether in space or time. The imagery appears to be in motion and at the same time stationary. Ní Mhaonaigh's work is pared-down in its aesthetic placing emphasis on the exploration of painting as a philosophical and performative endeavour.

Elizabeth Magill often combines references to traditional European landscape painting, including Turner and the misty panoramas of the Romantic landscapes, with other personal and resonant locations. In two works from the series *Parlous Land* (2006), the landscapes appear paradoxical; seeming to be somewhere we have encountered but nowhere we can identify for certain – fluctuating between emerging and vanishing.

Cecily Brennan's video work *Hero's Engine* (2005) presents a scientific examination of action and reaction, cause and effect, as a metaphor for the fragility of the human body.

But a Hercules (2010) by **Caoimhe Kilfeather** is a mesmeric sculpture of carved and polished coal, which seems to belie its weight by effortlessly 'floating' on the wall. Kilfeather works intuitively with industrial material to produce unexpected forms from this familiar organic matter. In re-presenting coal as a sculptural form, she calls into question our perceived and accepted ideas of art and beauty. She has created a work that references the heroic physical strengths of the Roman gods of the past and the fragility of man's future relationship with the earth.

Simulator (2006) by **Siobhán Hapaska** is from a body of work called *Cease Firing on All Fronts* (2006) where the artist addressed cultural, political and ecological concerns.

In *1984 and Beyond* (2006), **Gerard Byrne** explores the forgotten possibilities and unrealised potential of a future once envisaged from the past. In July and August 1963, *Playboy* magazine published '1984 and Beyond', a two-part round-table discussion about the future with 12 science-fiction writers. Among the authors involved were Arthur C Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury and Robert Heinlein. Presented against the backdrop of the Cuban missile crisis and civil rights marches, the twelve writers are almost comically optimistic about life as it might be lived within a generation.

Niamh O'Malley's work *Talbot Street Vignette* (2006) is concerned with issues of visibility. She investigates the construction and representation of time through both the moving image and painted still. Her works often consist of highly seductive surfaces that collapse on close viewing into simple constructions: a slide or a video projected onto a painting. She examines the slippage between a moment and an image.

Nevan Lehart makes irreverent social commentaries in his work, often politically charged and full of humour but his wit and irony is always matched with a serious investigation into the history of art and a questioning of contemporary art's position within the 'real world'. The two works shown here are from a series called *Goya's Gaia* (2010) which depicts Gaia – the great mother of all and personification of Earth in ancient Greek mythology – photocopying her 'rear' or the Antarctic accompanied by another image of earth digging a hole large enough for her to disappear into. In referencing Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, Lehart could be commenting on the Spanish artist's subversive imagery of *Saturn devouring his son* – Saturn's wife being Gaia.

Meanwhile, **Paul Seawright** addresses the earth's shifting relationships between rural and urban living in *Untitled (Man Sleeping)* (2005). With the collapse of sustainable rural economies in many countries on the African continent, more and more people flood the infrastructure and spaces of cities. Seawright captures life on the edge of the cities where a new immigrant to the city sleeps in a decaying and unattended printing office.

Tom Molloy's practice is often concerned with the examination of power in both a political and historical context with a focus on the United States of America. *Behind Every Great Man* (2006) is a commentary on the role of women in society. The work consists of cross-stitched portraits of all of the First Ladies of the United States. He said he chose the series to be embroidered as a reference to feminism. In an attempt at irony, he hired a female artist friend to sew them. She insisted on being paid minimum wage.

Fergus Martin's *Double* (2003) is primarily concerned with visual experience and how energy and form meet to effect our visual landscape and at times frustrate the viewer's perceptual gaze.

Gemma Browne's portraits *Lily White* (2006) gaze out to the viewer, recalling Manet's *Olympia* (1863) and conjuring up a world of youthful, endless possibility, optimism and 'blue-sky' thinking. However, there is an edge of knowingness and confidence in the portraits that suggest these girls or young women understand, and are able to manipulate, contemporary culture's notions of youth.

Rosa 6 (2006) is a simple, yet engaging painting which investigates the conceptual underpinnings of mark-making and colour. The work continues **Mark Joyce's** engagement with early modernist aesthetics and his journey towards an essential, 'pure' colour. Joyce is interested in colour, and light and how to represent its spatial dimension in a two-dimensional medium.

In her art, **Dorothy Cross** amalgamates found and constructed objects which invariably have the effect of reinvigorating the lives of everyday things, sometimes humorous and sometimes disturbing. In *Family* (2005) Cross has created a family of spider crabs with the dominant male sporting a phallus on its crustacean shell back. Cross subverts the usually lofty material of cast bronze and presents an ego-centric crab, commenting perhaps on historic and current social structures in society.

Upper Gallery

Eoghan McTigue's work investigates urban space and in particular sites designed for the dissemination of public information. *Empty Sign TU* (2002) is a photograph – printed to scale – of a standard institutional notice board stripped bare of the collaged layers of posters and information, revealing the residues and marks of use recording its scars and histories. Within a gallery context, the work belies its utilitarian context and plays with perception, resembling a formal abstract painting. The work raises important questions regarding the interplay of pictorial and contextual elements leading the viewer to question what lies beneath accepted displays or structures and the marks of histories that lie therein.

Isabel Nolan's work often addresses issues of intimacy and distance, isolation and connectedness. Nolan has stated that her drawing 'is a great way of catching a thought' In the animated video *Quiet Please* (2005) she draws on a 'shadowy phenomenon' which appears during the night and asks a fundamental question of existence: "Do you think you are free?" Her work moves from extremely personal images to the natural world, observed and imagined and at times abstracted.

Genesis 28:12 (2006) by **Martin Healy** takes as its starting point the scripture in the Bible where Jacob 'had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it'. Also, perhaps a starting point for Led Zeppelin's iconic song *Stairway to Heaven* – the much debated song that some believe reveals the sound of demonic forces when played in reverse. Healy's exploration of the relationship between the myth of hidden and popular culture is linked to the use (or abuse) of consumer technology which has had a long history especially in Hollywood science fiction cinema.

In a world that is becoming increasingly defined by technology, **Paul Doran** is interested in the handmade and how human existence can be communicated through the handmade in a more meaningful way. His paintings are organic in application and explore the idea that a painting can be put together in various ways to create something that appears complete but still asks questions of the viewer.

Mairead O'Eocha paints small landscapes that are coloured predominately in shades of grey, green and blue and rooted in a painterly tradition of modest and sensitive observation. Yet her paintings are unmistakably contemporary and more often than not depict Irish edgelands, those curious but unremarkable places where cities and towns merge with the natural landscape. *Fir Tree and Dump* (2010) is neither approving or critical and the work centres on the overlooked parts of Ireland where a sense of belonging and permanence is being slowly eroded and replaced with a mood of transience and uncertainty.

Bed and Breakfast (2005) by **Stephen Brandes** emerges from his family's history, and a perpetually developing fictional world. His influences range from American underground comics to interwar poster design combined with a 'barbed magic' prevalent in many Eastern European art forms – the latter echoing his family's origins. He has offered that "imagination helps marry the fantastical with the worldly – often the best comic moments occur when the mundane is juxtaposed with the irrational".

Gary Coyle's work focuses on his passion for his surroundings and the people who inhabit the spaces alongside him. In *Scene of the Crime, Wicklow Forest* (2006) Coyle shows drawing's capacity, as Pdraic E Moore has argued, to go beyond the power of the photographic image by using "the confluence of traditional technical approaches with contemporary and at times disturbing subject matter". Coyle works, erases and reworks the drawing which attempts to forbid the viewer from entering the image.

Michael Coleman's unpredictability could be said to be a hallmark of his career. He has remarked "If I were to say what the paintings are about, I would say about nature. The finished work is always a surprise." His fusion of figuration and abstraction is an attempt to convey "the everyday experiences of my life."

The works of **Margaret Corcoran, John Gerrard** and **Diana Copperwhite** reference the history of portraiture through photography, digital media and oil painting respectively. Corcoran's work has consistently reflected on the history of representation, particularly with regard to women as looked at and looking. The artist comments that one night, calling into her local Spar shop it occurred to her that it was staffed 'by a wonderful group of people who all seemed to be Chinese'. Echoing the work of Manet, *Ada* (2006) stares out of the canvas which disturbs the viewer's habitual sense of superiority yet the work looks to the changing face of commodification of working practices within Ireland.

John Gerrard's *Portrait – To Smile Once a Year (Mary)* (2006) consists of a real time portrait of a woman, Mary, who smiles once a year. Where much of art has to do with the mnemonic, Gerrard creates an art of a yet to be thought of memory, locating the present in the future. The portrait gathers a passing smile at a moment designated by the sitter but when it will happen is not revealed and is perhaps the antidote to Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*.

Diana Copperwhite works from 'composites of photos, montages, surreal colours, not from any one subject but from everything: she has commented 'my painting are spliced reality: past, present and future all at once'. Her practice focuses on how people process information and looks at the mechanisms of how we formulate what is real and imagined realities.

The history and meaning of mark-marking in visual language is a key concern of **Julie Merriman's** work. In *Disruption Rowlandwerft IV* (2010), Merriman explores her interest in naval architecture and cartography and its relationship with the shifting motion of the sea through the medium of drawing. Often using materials such as carbon paper and type-writer ribbon, the process is central to her work which in turn is an open-ended enquiry.

Screening Room (Second Floor)

Audience (2006) by **Beatrice McMahon** portrays a pianist's attempt to play Ravel is somewhat obstructed or compromised by the fact that a live slobbering snail has been placed on each of the piano's keys. McMahon mostly uses video and drawings to articulate her preoccupation with the division between fiction and reality, arranging connections from the everyday world that normally wouldn't be seen together.

In referencing the past to create new visual imagery the works in the exhibition look to the future and offer up questions about collecting and collections which are, by their nature, slow evolving and complex systems. How can a collection preserve contemporary works of art but keep them from becoming antiquated? Does the 'quality' of a contemporary work stay present and reveal a 'residuum unknown' – a greater possibility or unreachd potential through the passing of time? *Into the Light* at Crawford Art Gallery celebrates the richness of contemporary art practice in Ireland and aims to promote consideration and discussion around the value and complexities of collecting and preserving contemporary art for future generations.

Education

Guided Tours for Schools and Groups
contact the Education Team:
emmaklemencic@crawfordartgallery.ie

Gallery open daily:

10am – 5pm, Thursday 8pm
(Closed Sundays)

Free admission

Wheelchair access

**Crawford Art Gallery,
Emmet Place,
Cork,
Ireland**



Bailiúchán an Chomhairle Ealaíon
Arts Council Collection



The Model

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