

Exit Cork 06

Joanna Spitzner's reviews of degree shows at The Crawford College of Art and Design

Miriam Cantry

Our sense of image as singular and as representation has changed through culture and its technologies. In the 1920s and 30s, Siegfried Kracauer wrote of the experience of distraction in his thinking of mass culture. Instead of contemplation, or depth, one is responding to surface experience. He is writing about film, and of montage, and of the fragmentation of daily life. Cantry's work is surface and fragment as whole, evoking both the filmic and the digital. Her composite images, made of many small photographs, become time and space flattened into pattern, repetition and texture. In some, the same image is repeated. In another, we see domestic space—the floor--from above, brought near and close through tiny shifts in angles. Two others show a journey, one the streets at night, one the repetition of walking, looking down at the right and left foot. These are the more successful utilizations of multiplicity, in which there is a sense of unfolding, of difference and similarity. Although some collages are quite large, one cannot become absorbed in them, their flatness pushes you back and you are forced to think about these mass ornaments.

Aislinn Celisse

The everyday is both the most common experience and the most difficult to examine without transforming it into something else. Through ten clusters of photographs, and some detritus, Celisse shows us fragments of a day. The subject of the photographs may be the mundane: coffee cups, a pile of cigarette ends, a stack of folded towels, but they are framed carefully. Objects predominate in this series rather than events, environments, or people. The photographs themselves are fairly conventional, framed to emphasize the formal aspects of found arrangements, and most are fairly tightly shot, mid to close up, abstracting the objects portrayed. The same images are put into different relationships through placement in small series. The most successful of these is "Work" in which a repetition of color and black and white subtly shifts from sameness to a different yet related image, from folded towels to a glimpse of a washing machine, a small shift in time. In another, four photographs, snapshot-like-- a plate of beans and toast, tea cups, the mail, sausage and chips--are behind the actual objects on pedestals (sans the sausage plate). It questions the preservation of small details, of the readymade and the real. (A trash can filled with hair and soggy cigarette ends seemed to have received contributions during the private view, further blurring art and life). The viewer is surrounded by the things of daily life. Despite the repetition, the sense time and experience of it escapes.

Aine Cronin

Henry Moore wrote of the need for a sculpture to have "a pent-up energy, an

intense life of its own, independent of the object it may represent." I mention Moore because one of the sculptures in this room utilizes that Moore hole, the carved interior space. Otherwise the comparison is one that only reveals the lack of spatial sensitivity or energy in this work. In her statement, the artist writes trees inspire her, but I think it is dead wood that is the source of her inspiration. Her carved sculptures still retain the sense of a log, lying on its side, surrounding them are pieces made with wood chips (chewed up logs) providing volume in muslin skins. All the work is a variation on the tapered form--the cone, claw, slug or dunce cap. There are limitations to this form, and I am drawn to smaller details, like a spiral knot sewn into the cloth, the labial hole in another, the grape-like cluster of balls in yet another. They are the only forms of life in the room.

Kim Curtis

This room evoke a certain kind of early-mid modernism that still has a relation to the world but is starting abstract it to see its forms; it disconnects form from its context, yet still hasn't let go of its referent. Perhaps it is the sepia tone to the photographs on its walls, their Edward Weston-like framing, and the Arp and Brancusi-like sculpture on pedestals that occupy the room. There are connections between these avenues of inquiry of image and object, but a full dialogue doesn't seem to be taking place, tentativeness prevails. The sculptures seem to be more about experimentation with materials, smooth surfaces in doughnut shapes. The photographs have an odd framing, some seem out of focus and lack tonal exploration. In her statement, the artist says her work is based on abstract forms, particularly curves, but this doesn't seem like enough to make a body of work.

Mary Donnelly

Donnelly's work recalls Marc Chagall; it has that sense of time over space, of sweetness and mourning. This is the world of childhood, observed with a touch of remembrance. It is a world of warm colors, of animals and children, of floating. All the techniques of painting are utilized--staining, loose brushstrokes, encaustic, scumbling--in dialogue with figural elements. There is a lightness of touch in the handing of the paint, a looseness that sits in between the lines drawn by child and that of an adult holding on to that innocence. This expressionism is ghostlike and dreamlike. The strongest sense of childhood comes through the sense of time in these works, of small moments that seem to last forever; of an identity forming in the world, emerging through fields of color and attempts to grasp surroundings.

Siobhan Grace

There is an informal quality to Grace's work, an immediacy of paint on slightly irregularly cut paper. There is a sense of colorful building blocks, of finger painting, of play in these abstract compositions. But there is also something architectural, an arch, a plane and a balance so that the shapes are held in tension rather than tumble off the edge. The use

of color, and the freshness of construction are energetic, yet it doesn't hold my attention for too long. It is like candy, pleasant, spontaneous, but gone too fast.

Dylan Hodd

Welcome to my world. Hodd's world is one of video blue landscape, of houses that are alive, occasional strange creatures, and surreal World War II battles. There is a sense of surrealism here, but filtered through Stephen Spielberg and George Lucas. The visual play in the work evokes Magritte, while the distorted renaissance landscape is Dali-esque, but Hodd doesn't have the same finesse with paint of these artists. The colors are saturated, straight out of the tube, intensely blue, green and orange and awkwardly applied to the surface. It is not the painting that matters, but the fantasy. In his statement, the artist says that the process of painting is what produces the strangeness and exaggerations. I wonder if this is true. The artist certainly has imagination, but this work fails as painting. The screen seems to be the more appropriate space.

Catriona Leahy

This work is pure technique in search of a form. It is rooted in experimentation with layering of textures using a tasteful palette: reds, oranges and browns, turquoise and black. In ten etchings and five ceramic wall pieces there is a sense of working the surface, but no sense of wholeness or interplay among its elements. It as if they are cut out from some larger piece, and I am reminded of Jacques Villeglé's cut out street posters, but these works lack the sense of readymade, or any referent whatsoever. The etchings have a distinct sense of layering, with darker shades settling toward the bottom, as if underwater sediment. This is even more muddled in the ceramic fragments, splayed pieces arranged on the wall, overly worked and encrusted. There is too much and not enough. Like art in hotels one only has a pleasant awareness of some colored, textured thing over there, but not requiring any real thought.

Paula Lowry

Philology is the study of language, particularly its historical development and often involving the reclamation of meaning. This area of study was a foundation of the modern university in the era of nationalism and romanticism; the connection of language to the land and to culture was important to a sense of national identity. When I first see Lowry's work, I see landscape drawings, and a video overlaid with music. I read her statement and become worried, as it translates a list of Gaelic words--Turas (Journey); Teanga (Language); Tuiscint (Understanding)--and then speaks of historical traditions, particularly Irish music, as a living culture tied to a sense of identity. (Did I mention that philology and romanticism were big in Germany?) But then I look more carefully at the drawings, and I see that these are not romantic drawings. What we see is land, but land marked by culture, not myth. The presence of people, whether flying over and looking down, hanging the wash, or connected through telephone wires, is integrated into the landscape, which in the larger drawings appear as a soft-edged strip within white space, either emerging or receding. Not being Irish (did I mention I'm an American of German

ancestry?), I saw nothing particularly Irish about the scenes before me, the limited tonal range of the drawings flattened the space into patterns. I do see an artist on a journey to understand her culture, and this should not be dismissed. Unfortunately, she has chosen to show a real journey she has taken to Inis Oírr in the Aran Islands, and the video is just like a vacation video: shaky camera, zooming into anything of interest and back out again, all with traditional Irish music as the soundtrack. It is forcing connections, whereas the drawings offer the possibility of contemplating culture and place. The Welsh critic Raymond Williams offers another view of language and culture as living and ordinary; and in his book "The Country and the City" he demythologizes the country as a site of inherent culture and the city as that place that historicizes it. If Lowry can keep to this path, it will be a worthwhile journey.

Antonia O'Keefe

In her statement, O'Keefe says simply that "through layering the identity of each painting emerges." Each of her small paintings does contain its own history, a coming into being. Their thick surfaces and occasional child-like scratching are reminiscent of Jean DuBuffet, but less brutish, more refined and skillful. This work is about the internal dialogue of painting, of subjectivity made present on the surface. What lies underneath is still opaque, and the sense of emergence, of coming out of a process, a personal history, a past, embeddedness, appears yet is not fully accessible. The figures that do appear, a snail, a car, an organic machine, scribbles are a playful unconscious. The unconscious can only slip through, and we are left with the act of interpretation. The subject must speak for us to do so.

Sinead Ni Ris

Ris is wide awake and noticing the world, seeing metaphors for vision around her: the play of light and shadow, of small distortions and interferences, of veils, screens and reflections. There are sixty-eight Polaroids arranged in groups all over the walls, punctuated by eleven mid-sized black and white photographs, moments for pause as one travels across. There is an intensity of sight and of looking, and what is seen is not an image but the material of vision. The small photographs seem like a private detective's report following a thought through the world, a thorough investigation of pictorial language developed through both painting and photography. The larger photographs refer to specific moments such as rain on the car window, a walk in the woods, waking up, a window in Crawford at 7 pm. It is this act of looking and its mediation through the conventions of art, of transparency, translucency, shapes hard and diffuse that calls us all to start noticing.

Mark Whalen

The series of fourteen small, square paintings by Whalen are cinematography—writing with light. Their subject is the urban environment, some hint at suburban edges, as still life. There is a minimized human presence, like crime scene photographs. In the street scenes, interiors, and sky barely framed by architecture, the shadows are painted thinly and cut through the thicker, applied light. There is a rhythm of the cast shadow on the street, of intense warm light in the interior, or diffuse light of cloud and sky. Their composition has an Edward Hopper-like geometric structure, hard-edged shapes, and sense of stillness. But the framing and light are photography, a moment captured. There are very competent paintings, and in some ways an obvious pathway as well: a sense of time extended through the act of painting; an act of looking at realism comprised of the interplay of color created in small, square brushstrokes.