Tír na nÓg
Younger Irish Artists from the IMMA Collection

Irish Museum of Modern Art

cover image
Grace Weir
Dust defying gravity, 2003
16 mm film transferred to DVD
Dimensions variable
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Purchased, 2004
Tír na nÓg in ancient Ireland was the land of the ever young. Of course that does not mean those who are chronologically young, quite the contrary, it means those who never grow old no matter how many years they have lived for. Artists who constantly engage with new challenges and new issues in their work, irrespective of their age are as close as most of us ever come to that fairytale situation. Much of the work in this show draws on new media, DVD, video, and installation to call attention to new aspects of earlier experience or to throw fresh light on recurring issues, in the process confirming the youthful vision of its makers.

Since 2000 the IMMA Collection has acquired a strong body of work by Irish artists or by artists whose work practice is largely based in this country. This exhibition will draw on some of that material, most of which will be shown on this occasion for the first time at IMMA. Fergus Martin and Anthony Hobbs are both well established in their separate fields but the collaboration represented in *Frieze* is a new process for them, where painter and photographer work inseparably to produce a twenty first century version of the medieval fresco. While using the presence of the painter as its central motif *Frieze* breaks with tradition by not being a painting, but it does dissolve the architecture in much the same way as the great fresco cycles of the past. The sequence of photographs plays with abstract concepts that have been at the heart of art in the West for many years: progression and recession in relation to the planar surface of the work; nuances of light and shadow on the figure; the business of looking itself. The two *Cardinal* paintings by Paul Nugent offer another approach to surface planes, in this case the physical ground of the painting becomes
a vehicle for an investigation into the planes of memory. The shadowy figures of the two prelates hover below the surface of the painting as they also do in the history of art and in Western European culture. The physical qualities of oil paint become the subject of Paul Doran’s work so that it is fair to ask if Melt is a piece of sculpture or a painting. Sculptural concerns, this time with the relationship between positive and negative, provide energy and tension in John Graham’s carborundum prints. The surface seems to be bored through by his bold, abstract mark-making.

Clare Langan’s Trilogy also incorporates the human figure, isolated beings in strange, mysterious and often disturbing worlds created by the artist’s innovative use of coloured lenses and her feeling for the sublime. Dust defying gravity by Grace Weir echoes the sense of time passing that is evident in Langan’s Trilogy, but this time the sands of time are themselves the focus of the artist’s scrutiny. Each dust molecule sketches a metaphoric dance to the music of time in contrast to the scientific instruments that surround it. Time and the changes it brings are alluded to again in New sexual lifestyles by Gerard Byrne. Made in 2003 this witty conceptual piece, comprising a series of DVDs and photographs, looks at attitudes to life and sexuality, contrasting contemporary views with those that pertained in the freedom-loving sixties when its glass-box architectural setting was built. The DVD was filmed in the restored house in the Devil’s Glen in Co. Wicklow, designed as a summer house for Sir Basil Goulding by the architect Ronnie Tallon. The house, a classic of Irish Modernism, is open to the most inspiring landscape and the transparency of the space it represents is echoed in the set of photographs of windows that accompany the DVDs. The artwork plays on the link between sexuality, the lush natural world visible through the glass walls and issues of privacy and voyeurism. Modern lifestyles are parodied in the work of David Timmons. There is no estrangement between you
and the machine, is an mdf structure, painted to a seamless, high gloss finish with car paint to evoke the salesroom rather than the gallery. Timmons is fascinated by the gulf between the perfect object, and the often sordid but creative process out of which it emerges. By accompanying his paintings/ sculptures with titles that evoke evangelical or advertising slogans he queries the positioning of the artwork in contemporary life.

In keeping with his other work, all is not what it seems to be in Paddy Jolley’s From the Burn series, 2001–2002. In his still from the short film Burn, which he made in collaboration with the artist Reynold Reynolds, a figure in a living room seems unaware of the fire that is consuming both her and the room in which she stands, making us as viewers question our own perception. Do you know what you saw? by Andrew Vickery, an English artist who has been working in Ireland for some years now, presents memories of Wagner’s opera Parsifal, which the artist saw in Bayreuth, through a combination of painting and slide projection. By painting his recollections of the journey and then turning them into slides which are projected from behind onto the stage of a little model theatre the artist creates a space for the viewer’s personal memories of childhood, of miniature theatres and the creative space between the painted image and the photographic representation of it. Vickery’s question is relevant also for Hannah Starkey’s Untitled–August 1999. This large work baffles notions of photography as factual record since Starkey works like a theatre director, setting up a tableau, that looks both ordinary or mysterious, and pregnant with possibility at the same time. Alice Maher makes a similar reference to the fantasy world of childhood through her sculpture The axe (and the waving girl), where her Swiftian shifts in scale between the doll-like small female figure and the overblown axe evoke fairytales, recalling not just moments of pleasure but also the fear of danger. Ombre V is an earlier work by the same artist, this time dealing with a massively enlarged female figure seen mysteriously from behind and enveloped in her long hair. When it was executed in 1997 during her residency at the Artists’ Work Programme at IMMA, it marked a new shift in the artist’s practice and a new emphasis on drawing. Another drawing in this exhibition is a remarkable portrait drawing of a fellow artist, Corban Walker by Nick Miller. Miller experiments with ways of overcoming the distance between himself and the subject of his work, whether that be another person, the landscape or inanimate objects. The degree to which he achieves his aim in Corban is immediately evident in the manner in which the face appears to thrust itself out of its paper ground and into our space.

Stephen Brandes is another English born artist who has based his work practice in Ireland. Like Andrew Vickery’s Do you know what you saw? Brandes’ painting Chandelier also refers to a journey, in a playful and surreal manner in which real memory and fantasy are interlinked. The work issues from a group of paintings responding to a journey that Brandes made to his grandmother’s old home in Romania and her journey from there to England in 1910. Brandes’ personal experience is intertwined with his grandmother’s accounts of her very different one. In Chandelier the artist uses an off-cut of vinyl flooring as a ground for his painting which is hugely informed by his love of children’s book illustrations and Eastern European animation.

The plight of refugees and economic migrants is foregrounded by Phil Collins in his photographs and his recent video work How to make a refugee. The work is particularly relevant in Ireland, given the country’s long experience of emigration and the new experience for the Irish of migrants coming here in search of the assistance that Irish people sought abroad in times past. Collins manages to express the complex emotions and experiences of being a refugee in an unsympathetic environment without sentimentality. Alpha and Omega, a sculptural
installation by Janet Mullarney, also makes reference to other cultures. The little bronze cows were inspired by a memory of an early morning vision of a cow, bedecked with its ritual ribbon, emerging from the river Ganges. The quiet presence of these little figures invites contemplation and restoration. Janet Mullarney’s art generally references cultural and religious practices, from Ireland to Mexico and India. This is also true of Abigail O’Brien. In 1996 the Museum bought *The Last Supper*, her graduation piece from the National College of Art and Design. Following on from that and other works relating to the seven sacraments O’Brien recently photographed an ancient pre-Christian rite in rural Ireland that is still practised today. The currency of ongoing practices such as dressing old hawthorn bushes with rags in the modern world invites speculation about progress.

The complexity of personal identity lies at the heart of Isabel Nolan’s *Sloganeering 1-4*. This witty DVD installation reminds us of the confusions and difficulties that surround us and our sense of self in a world where the clichés of advertising logos and mass communication often override more personal statements. The seriousness of the central issue is balanced by the humour of its presentation.

It has been our intention in this exhibition to bring together some of the varied responses to artmaking and the concerns that stimulate it that are represented in recent additions to the Museum’s young, but growing collection. While the Collection is not limited to Irish art and most exhibitions drawn from it reflect its international interests, we feel that it is timely to put on show some of the richness and range of invention of a new generation of artists based in this country.

Catherine Marshall
Senior Curator: Head of Collections
Gerard Byrne
New sexual lifestyles, 2003 (detail)
3 channel DVD, 54mins, seven photographs
Dimensions variable
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Purchased, 2004

Grace Weir
Dust defying gravity, 2003
16 mm film transferred to DVD
Dimensions variable
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Purchased, 2004
Paddy Jolley
*From the Burn series, 2001-2*
C-Type print, ed. 2/5
102 x 102 cm
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Purchased, 2004
Andrew Vickery
Do you know what you saw?, 2004 (detail)
Mixed media and slide projection
120cm x 85cm x 50cm (theatre)
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Purchased, 2004
Hannah Starkey
Untitled—August 1999, 1999
C-type print, 122 x 152 cm
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Donated by George and Maura McClelland, 2004
Alice Maher
*The axe (and the waving girl)*, 2003
Painted bronze
Axe: 295 x 74 x 13 cm
Girl: 42 x 18 x 11 cm
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Purchased, 2004

Abigail O'Brien
*Red ribbon*, 2003
Lambdachrome print mounted on acrylic, A/P
120 x 120 cm
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Purchased, 2004
Phil Collins
*How to make a refugee*, 2000
DVD, ed. 2/3, 11 mins
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Purchased, 2004
list of works in the exhibition

**Stephen Brandes**  
*Chandelier*, 2004

**Gerard Byrne**  
*New sexual lifestyles*, 2003

**Phil Collins**  
*How to make a refugee*, 2000

**Oliver Comerford**  
*Out here III*, 2003

**Maud Cotter**  
*One way of containing air*, 1998

**Paul Doran**  
*Melt*, 2002

**John Graham**  
*Untitled*, 2000  
*Untitled*, 1999

**Paddy Jolley**  
*From the Burn series*, 2001-2

**Clare Langan**  
*Forty below XII*, 1999  
*Too dark for night*, 2001  
*Glass hour*, 2002

**Alice Maher**  
*Ombre V*, 1997  
*The axe (and the waving girl)*, 2003

**Martin & Hobbs**  
*Frieze*, 2003

**Caroline McCarthy**  
*The luncheon*, 2002

**Nick Miller**  
*Corban*, 1996

**Janet Mullarney**  
*Alpha and Omega*, 2003

**Isabel Nolan**  
*Sloganeering 1-4*, 2001

**Paul Nugent**  
*Cardinal 1*, 1997  
*Cardinal 6*, 1997

**Abigail O’Brien**  
*Red ribbon*, 2003

**Hannah Starkey**  
*Untitled—August 1999*, 1999

**David Timmons**  
*There is no estrangement between you and the machine*, 2003

**Andrew Vickery**  
*Do you know what you saw?*, 2004

**Grace Weir**  
*Six cherry blossom petals, falling*, 2001  
*Dust defying gravity*, 2003

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Janet Mullarney  
*Alpha and Omega*, 2003  
Plexiglass shelves, led lights, bronze  
90 x 15 x 19 cm each  
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art  
Purchased, 2004