

There, Not There

Felicity Clear, Elizabeth Magill, Mark McGreevy, Paul Nugent & Orla Whelan

25 July – 27 September 2008

Crawford Art Gallery



Introduction

The use of photography as inspiration for painting has a distinguished history in European art. Many painters in the nineteenth century, not least Ingres, Manet and Renoir, used photography as a starting point for their work, while the use of the camera obscura extends back to the time of Vermeer and even earlier. In spite of this, the use of photographs is still questioned, in terms of its relationship to perceived 'traditional' values in art. On first seeing an exhibition of photographs, the artist Paul Delaroche is famously said to have exclaimed '*From today, painting is dead.*' In reality, over a century and a half later, nothing could be further from the truth. However in one sense Delaroche was correct, as is demonstrated in this exhibition *There, Not There*, curated by Dawn Williams.

These five contemporary painters have emerged as amongst the most interesting artists of their generation. They paint with the consciousness and knowledge of the existence of photography, but they are far from being in thrall to the photographic image. They use such

images as simply an additional useful tool in the complex business of creating works of art. In some cases, it is even hard to discern any influence of photography in their work: the reason being these artists regard images created by the camera with skepticism and caution, believing little and resisting, in their work, attempts to re-tell that which has already been adeptly, if superficially, captured by a lens.

The paintings they create are far more about the interior life of the imagination, about the inherent qualities of paint and canvas, about questioning the process of the creation of images, and also, implicitly, the creation of cultural values. The paintings they create are in themselves beautiful and captivating works of art, but they also reveal a keen questioning of the very idea of making art, a quality that brings them to life, in this exhibition, in a wonderful way.

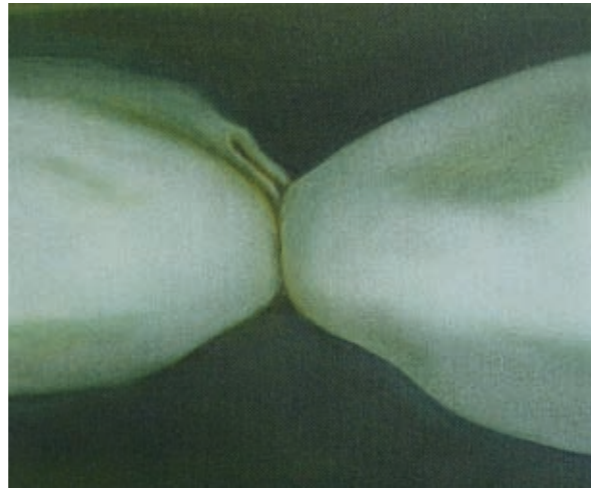
Peter Murray
Director

Image: *Rarely Farmed Things* — Mark McGreevy
2007, Oil on canvas, 190 x 230cm Courtesy of the Artist and The Third Space Gallery, Belfast

There, Not There

There, Not There features the work of five contemporary Irish painters – Felicity Clear, Elizabeth Magill, Mark McGreevy, Paul Nugent and Orla Whelan, who explore within their individual practice the boundaries between memory, perception and time.

Each artist plays with the properties of paint, photographic references and personal experience to interrogate the blur between the natural and the fabricated image, and the real and the perceived, and question how the memory processes what is real and what is imagined. Many of the paintings offer a subtle lie or an exaggerated



truth, and the substance of the paint is used to articulate the concerns of each artist. Felicity Clear uses light, thinly applied, acrylic paint to create heavy, unsettlingly unpopulated urban landscapes, while Paul Nugent's traditional technique of oil painting and glazes conveys layered meanings of subjectivity and experience. In the paintings of Elizabeth Magill, the paint activates palpably familiar yet strangely foreboding landscapes. Mark McGreevy luxuriates in the rich fluidity of the medium, creating distorted realities whilst Orla Whelan denies such privileges to the oil paint in her paintings forcing the luscious energy of the flesh to be a static skin.



How the mind processes vision is dependent upon a subjective amalgamation of the past and present – sometimes what we perceive to be real is different to what we have viewed and experienced. In merging the image of a photograph with the images from the cognitive and the imaginary, the paintings in this exhibition present a shared sense of memory as if the images created by the artists could belong to the viewer's own experience or dream.

Dawn Williams, *Curator*



Left: *Tongues* [Detail] – Orla Whelan
2008, Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Artist

Centre: *Citadel 1* [Detail] – Felicity Clear
2008, Graphite and acrylic on paper, 180 x 280cm
Courtesy of the Artist and the Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

Right: *Red Generator* – Elizabeth Magill
2008, Oil on canvas, 153 x 183cm. Private collection

Felicity Clear

Felicity Clear's interests lie in the subtle and the strange; exaggerating truths in urban development whilst questioning reactions and relationships with the changing environment. Drawn from photographic references and architectural plans, Clear deviates from the real starting point of urban landscape to explore how space is negotiated or in many cases, not negotiated, with the human form creating a slippage between the architect's imagination and the empty unease of the built environment.

Sometimes stripping the form of the commercial or domestic highrise to its skeletal construction e.g *Macken Street 2* (2008), Clear draws parallels between the fragility of construction, imitate a house of cards, and the human form. Clear's paradox of using light materials in her work – paper and watercolour paints - to create the heavy, unhomey spaces further exaggerates the uncertainty between the imaginative future vision of urban living and the past realities of such failings.



Solo exhibitions include *The LAB*, Dublin (2008), Galway Arts Centre (2008), Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray (2008) and the Rubicon Gallery, Dublin (2005). Group exhibitions include *10,000 to 50*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2008); Drawing Symposium at the National Gallery of Ireland (2008), *Éigse*, Carlow, Selected by Anna O'Sullivan *Seconds*, (2006); *the imperfect artwork*, Wexford Arts Centre, (2006), *Painting*, Rubicon Gallery, Dublin (2006); *Art Futures* Contemporary Art Society, London (2002).

Above: ***Untitled (Yellow)*** [Detail]
2008, Graphite and Acrylic on Paper, 100 x 107cm
Courtesy of the Artist and the Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

Right: ***Paradox Of Unintended Consequences***
2008, Graphite and Acrylic on Paper, 180 x 310cm
Courtesy of the Artist and the Rubicon Gallery, Dublin



Elizabeth Magill

Swathed in warm blue and lilac skies the copse of trees in *Blue Constrictor* (2006) belie the bleakness of the scraggy woodland and the implied suffocating and constricting properties that exist in this strangely familiar landscape where one can only look to the glistening stars above for a potential exit strategy. *Lodge (1)* offers a safe place to rest beneath the stars. Immediately, the white cottage motif is recognisable within the Irish landscape yet the qualities of 'home' are stripped and a stark loneliness or 'otherness' becomes apparent.

Investigating the properties of paint and integrating photographic materials, Elizabeth Magill often references familiar landscapes of her own upbringing in Northern Ireland and other personal and resonant locations mixed with perhaps, an Utopian idyll. Yet through Magill's unequivocal technical skill in her application of paint - from finely detailed birds to unravelling orange ribbons of paint winding through the skeletal trees - she creates harmonious yet hauntingly unsettled landscapes where the



eye clashes with the changing dimensionality of the trees and landscape, creating ambiguous fractures within the paintings. Magill tests one's memory systems and makes one doubt; then encourages one to remember but regret a lost time. The paradoxical landscapes are somewhere we have encountered, but nowhere we can identify for sure.

Elizabeth Magill has exhibited extensively nationally and internationally including solo shows *Chronicle of Orange* Wilkinson Gallery (2008), *Aborescence* Kerlin Gallery (2006), *Recent Paintings (2004/5)* Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, Milton Keynes Gallery and *BALTIC*, Gateshead. *Known Unknowns*, curated by Jonathan Watkins, Gallery LOOP, Korea (2009), 'Paragon Press' Project, Venice (2008),

Above: *Heartland* [Detail]
2006/7, Oil on canvas, 153 x 183cm Courtesy of the Artist

Right: *Chronicle of Orange*
2008, Oil on canvas, 153 x 183cm
Courtesy of the Artist and The Wilkinson Gallery, London



Mark McGreevy

Mark McGreevy's paintings offer a window into another world of distorted realities and imaginary disparities yet imply that a reality of hedonistic angst could be just a fleeting moment away. Working mostly on large-scale canvas or paper, creating landscapes which are manically detailed and wildly expressive, play is important in Mark McGreevy's practice – 'the act of making an image is relative to the rituals of a constructed narrative, similar to a child who uses objects or the self during play to create ownership of certain experiences'.

McGreevy's paintings are automatic responses to a collected archive of personal and found imagery drawn from personal experiences, the media and the everyday. Often worked up from drawings, they offer a quizzical and intimate overview of the layers of images and spaces, whether tangible or abstract which McGreevy encounters. Each motif within the paintings battles against another for dominance reflecting the memory's hierarchical system of image selection, thus questioning



how we quantify the value of our experiences and the resulting images we draw upon from our memory.

Recent exhibitions include *Annual Exhibition*, Invited Artist, RHA Gallagher Gallery, Dublin (2008); *A Gap in the Bright*, Millennium Court Art Centre, Portadown (2008); *Resolutions*, Katzen Art Centre, Washington DC (2007); *Double Image*, Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast (2007) and *Yo Sweden*, The Third Space Gallery, Belfast (2006). *Process Room*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2005). Mark McGreevy was a Nominated Artist, Jerwood Painting Prize (2006) and was short-listed for the AIB Emerging Artist Prize(2004).

Above: **Studio 3** [Detail]
2008, Oil on paper. Courtesy of the Artist

Right: **Yo Sweden – Mark McGreevy**
2006, Oil on canvas, 275 x 390cm
Courtesy of the Artist and The Third Space Gallery, Belfast



Orla Whelan

Orla Whelan's work is based on the principle that looking is a durational process – one that takes time to allow the real and the imaginative to become visible, touching upon a sense of connection and reflection for the viewer.

Fascinated 'with the gap between the experience of life and the description of it', she investigates sensory and physical subjectivity. The nature of subjectivity is reflected in Whelan's working process, which is an intuitive one. When an idea emerges, she takes a series of photographs of the source material or idea, and uses the images to 'work up' or concentrate the form.

Unlike Mark McGreevy and Elizabeth Magill who extend and push the materiality of oil paint, Whelan enforces limitations on the inherent possibilities of the medium. In *Kissy Kissy* (2008) colour and paint are used sparingly against the white form of the body to produce an uneasy flatness and a 'static energy' within the merging and morphing forms, denying the inherent visceral and lusciousness of the flesh; the skin bares



all yet reveals little physical intimacy. The paintings which Orla Whelan creates impart dualistic responses of engagement and alienation where moments of connection appear and recede into the opaque dark background of memory itself.

Orla Whelan's exhibitions include *At the Heart of Chance, Draíocht*, Blanchardstown (Nov 2008); *Trapezium*, New work by Jeco Sword (Clodagh Emoe, Janine Davidson, Orla Whelan and Sinead O Reilly) *The LAB*, Dublin (2008); *Art of the State*, new work from OPW Collection, Touring Exhibition (2008); *Outside, The Return*, Goethe Institut, Dublin, (2007); *We Live to See Each Other, This is Not a Shop* (2007); *The BiG Store*, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin (2007); *Painting Show*, The Ashford Gallery, RHA, Dublin (2005); *ev+a 2003*, Limerick City Gallery of Art

Above: *Love Triangle* [Detail]

2008, Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Artist

Right: *Kissy Kissy*

2008, Oil on canvas, 160 x 130cm. Courtesy of the Artist



Paul Nugent

A photographic negative reference is the starting point for Paul Nugent's paintings. In each painting the colour tone shifts, creating different authenticity and emotive focus allowing the painting to take on its own life and meaning, leaving the photographic reference and its reality behind. In *Night Music* (2007) Nugent references elements from a church altar in the Hôpital Salpêtrière in Paris, a building that was an asylum for the insane, and where Jean-Martin Charcot photographed patients suffering from hysteria. The monochromatic imagery suggests a time and a place in the past of grandeur, yet resonates hauntingly in the present.

The Untitled Series (2008) is a significant departure in Nugent's work, embracing a saturated colour palette which although it contemporises the church interior, it creates, as Nugent suggests, a feeling of 'the slow erosion of history, place and Christian symbolism moving between my personal experience and collective memory'. The series of colour tonal variations and the



setting of the altar of St. Martin de Porres generates an unsettling blurring between the tradition of contemplative feeling and a sense of sentimental memory.

Recent exhibitions include *Church Interiors*, Kerava Art Museum, Finland (2009); *Vigil*, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin (2007); *Other Visions*, Purdy Hicks Gallery, London (2006); and *Tír na nÓg*, Irish Museum of Modern Art (2004); *Views from an Island: Contemporary Art from Ireland*, Shanghai Gallery of Modern Art and the Millenium Monument Museum, Beijing (2004); *Eurojets Futures 02*, RHA Gallagher Gallery (2002).

Above: *Night Music* [Detail]
2008, Oil on canvas, 122 x 170cm. Private Collection

Right: *Untitled 2*
2008, Oil on canvas, 80 x 120cm.
Courtesy of the Artist and The Third Space Gallery, Belfast



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