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Image on Front Cover:

Martin Healy
Ganzfeld Study III
160 x 122 cms
2007

Image on Back Cover:

Trevor Mc Enea
Skinhead
44 x 60 cms
1984

Dimensions in centimetres, unframed,
height preceding width.

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Venues

Ards Arts Centre
Newtownards, Co. Down

September 2015

Omagh Library
Omagh, Co. Tyrone

October 2015

Luan Gallery
Athlone, Co. Westmeath

November 2015

Bray Institute of Further Education
Bray, Co. Wicklow

December 2015



ARLENE FOSTER, MLA
Minister of Finance
and Personnel
Northern Ireland Executive

Foreword

Since 1997, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) in Northern Ireland and the Office of Public Works (OPW) in the Republic of Ireland have been collaborating on touring exhibitions that bring together works of art from the collections of both governments. The exhibitions are an excellent example of a successful cultural partnership that has given thousands of visitors an important opportunity to view the work of hundreds of artists in arts centres, libraries, colleges, heritage properties and public buildings in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

This year, DFP and OPW are delighted to partner with Belfast School of Art, Ulster University in the creation of our joint exhibition. The eleven undergraduate students selected to participate in the young curators' project, led by their Course Director, were given access to both public collections to curate the exhibition. Over a number of months, the student group has undertaken art viewings and engaged in discussion and research to bring together an exciting exhibition.



SIMON HARRIS, TD
Minister of State at the
Department of Public
Expenditure and Reform
with responsibility for
Office of Public Works

The purpose of this year's curatorial project was to engage a younger audience with both Government Departments' collections. It is evident from the openness and honesty of their responses in the catalogue that it has proven to be a most valuable experience for them. We are grateful for all their hard work and hope that visitors to the exhibition will gain from their insights as they view the artworks in the different venues.

The exhibition opens in Newtownards Arts Centre in September, then travels to Omagh Library in October, on to the Luan Gallery, Athlone in November and finally to Bray Institute of Further Education in December.

We wish to acknowledge the participation of Belfast School of Art, Ulster University and all those involved in the various venues hosting this year's exhibition.

We would also like to thank all of the artists whose works feature in this exhibition. Their creative practices provided the rich source material for the students' curatorial journey from which *Construct* has emerged.

Enjoy the exhibition.

Con
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KIT

Construct

construct /build/make/create

construct /idea/theory/concept

When we talk of 'construction' we can do so in a number of ways. Taken from the English dictionary, Construct, in its verb form: 'to build or make, or 'to form an idea or theory by bringing together various conceptual elements. To talk of construction is to talk of building, making, putting together, creating. Construction often suggests more the artificial than the natural - concrete buildings, cityscapes, machines. But if to construct is to create, and if to create is essentially to be, then how much of what we are is constructed? Are we products of construction? There must be a starting point for all things, tangible or otherwise; our thoughts, emotions, actions. If we are built, created, made - then how? When you think a thought - why do you think it? Where does it come from? Are we sprung from our surroundings, or do our surroundings spring from us? Construct, in its noun form: 'an idea or theory containing various conceptual elements, typically one considered to be subjective and not based on empirical evidence, e.g. 'history is largely an ideological construct.' Ideas, evolved and developed from information passed from one mind to another, constructed from one thread of thought to the next. Carried from human to human, changed as with time.

To recognise ourselves as constructs is to question ourselves as constructs.

But if so, how are we constructed?

ALEXANDRA THOMAS

Introduction

Construct is an exhibition curated by a group of eleven undergraduate students from Belfast School of Art, Ulster University. Each student is specialising in one of the following discipline areas: Animation, Architecture, Interactive Multimedia Design, Fine Art Painting, Fine Art Print, Graphic Design and Sculpture. This multidisciplinary group worked with the curatorial teams in the Department of Finance and Personnel, Belfast and the Office of Public Works, Dublin to select artworks from their respective public art collections. This exhibition is a culmination of connections and constructed discourses between peoples, people and artworks, and between the artworks themselves.

The student group was given freedom to develop the exhibition theme, select artworks, and inform the catalogue design and its content. They worked with the curators and staff in each of the two government's departments to understand more thoroughly the role of public art collections and gain a richer understanding of contemporary curatorial practices. To support these activities the group met regularly with myself, outside of scheduled university classes, to research, learn and develop their focus for the exhibition in an informed manner. Feargal O'Malley, Curator at Ulster University kindly met with the group and made a presentation detailing his and others curatorial approaches in a wide variety of contexts and places. The unique opportunity afforded to this group by DFP and OPW was reciprocated by the students' passion and commitment. They worked collaboratively and respectfully as a team: each demonstrating openness to others perspectives and all showed a strong willingness to learn new skills.

While student engagement with public bodies is nothing new within Higher Education, this project presented an opportunity to innovate a new approach to the delivery of writing and critical analysis skills, in a format that was inclusive and equitable for all involved. The project encouraged and supported the students to become active agents in their learning experience. The changing Higher Education landscape has seen the evolution of learning and teaching activities, where the learning spaces created for students need not be bound by physical or time constraints. How Higher Education institutions shape, re-shape, use and re-use spaces/collaborations can be transformative to learning. Technological advancements have made possible hybrid models of interactive learning: promoting access, cooperation, sustainability and global awareness. This hybrid integration of physical and digital worlds to engage peoples is reflected within many of our cultural institutions: public and private. How audiences can view and experience public art collections and exhibitions within our cultural institutions regionally, nationally and globally, grows ever more accessible through innovative frameworks of engagement. For this student group, the construction of discourses among peers, within disciplines and across contexts is vitally important for their future. Especially when we consider the importance of collaboration, partnership and interdisciplinarity to address the complexity of issues within our global society grows ever more pressing.

The exhibition theme, *Construct*, was not immediately evident; it was near the end of the process when its presence as the key thread binding all the activities, discourses and artworks was recognised by the group. Indeed, *Construct* suggests a process in motion, an action on-going. From the outset the group had been very mindful that this exhibition would be informed in some way, by how they viewed their position within today's society. Their selection of works was informed by how the artists had responded to their times, interests, passions and place; how the artists both past and present had made sense of their worlds; developing an understanding of the diversity between artists, artworks and audiences; and how all of these elements are collated and constructed into a cohesive discourse as an exhibition.

Solitude - Spectate - Narrative - Now. Within each of these sub-headings the group selected a number of works that they considered represented aspects or interpretations of each word and which they could relate to personally.

Solitude opens with the majestic bird of prey in Martin Healy's *Ganzfeld Study III*. It replaces the human as subject of a ganzfeld experiment; infamous tests for scientific proof of telepathy or clairvoyance. The bird has its flight and sense of sight restricted and like Lisa Dunne's figure is isolated in its surroundings, turned away from the audience's gaze, transfixed elsewhere. The solitude of place and space for reflective thought emanates in the works of Trevor McElnea, Elaine Byrne and Patricia Burns. While the averted gaze of Hugh Watt's, James Healy's and Lawson Burch's figures present pensive, intricate and hidden dialogues. Comghall Casey's *Container #2 1999* is both quiet in its solitude and loudly confident in its meticulous composition. However, the works selected in *Spectate* prompt us to question our role as spectators; are we participant, voyeur, confidant, subordinate, co-conspirator or an apparent fragile constructed line. The strength of *Narrative* as part of our society's constructs helps us make sense of the world and of who we are as individuals, as communities and as a race. The works in this section invite discussion; question our assumptions; present new perspectives. While the works in *Now* prompt and prod at the reality of the present. Shane O'Connor's *Something to Hide Behind* is strongly placed in the present with the use of colour, and line unmistakably digital in character. Survival through evolution and/or reinvention is humorously presented in Alan Phelan's *Cockatoo*. Memory and contemplation are subtly suggested in Barbara Freeman's *Study for Boulez 3* and Jim Allen's *Charles Street South*. The fragility of life, coupled with the unceasing cycle it maintains is suggested in *Transition* by Margaret Arthur and *Burning of the Whins* by Ros Harvey. Nothing is forever yet there may forever be something.

The artists and artworks have constructed the discourses evident throughout *Construct*. The curators have invited or constructed new parameters for conversations among the artworks and audience. The experience of building *Construct* has been revealing and engaging for all involved.

LOUISE O'BOYLE

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Solitude

“Isolation is a way to know ourselves”

Franz Kafka (German author 1883-1924)

Solitude may be the loneliness to one, sanctuary to another. At once quiet and thoughtful, empty and isolated. Thoughts are free to wonder in solitude: unbound, unattached and unaffected. Above all, in solitude the single constant relationship we each have is with ourselves. Together, the following artworks attempt to explore this relationship, each, in their own way bringing into question how much of ourselves we discover while alone.

ALEXANDRA THOMAS

Ganzfeld Study III

Martin Healy

Lambda c-print

160 x 122 cms

2007

Born in London, Martin Healy graduated from the Crawford College of Art in 2000 and has since exhibited throughout Ireland and internationally. *Ganzfeld Study III*, one of a series of three, was originally shown in Healy's solo exhibition, *I want to believe* held at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin in 2007.

Healy's work has been described as a form of 'artistic anthropology,' exploring the existence of superstition and aspects of the primitive in the human psyche, questioning how such aspects manifest in modern society. In *Ganzfeld Study III*, Healy explores these ideas through the image and symbolism associated with the bird of prey. In this photograph, a lone hawk stands tall against a deep black background. On its head it wears a hood, worn by such birds when acclimatising to humans and the human world, and on its feet strips of brown leather used to tether the bird. Despite these human imposed restrictions however, the bird stands tall, erect, its beak high in the air. Its power is startling against the darkness, which is at once absorbing and empty. So deep is the black that it becomes reflective, you may see yourself mirrored beside the bird. Whether or not Healy's intention, one questions how much of ourselves we are meant to see in the stance of the bird. The bird of prey is historically a strong, powerful symbol. With its sharp beak it is hailed as dangerous, fierce, calculating. Feathers speckled black, bright blue tipped beak, the bird stands alone, solitary but commanding of our attention in its solitude.

ALEXANDRA THOMAS



Lagan

Trevor McElnea

Acrylic on board

49 x 75 cms

1984

This painting entitled *Lagan* was created by Trevor McElnea. He is well-known for his paintings of Belfast, including some of the city's iconic sites such as the Albert Bridge, Botanic Gardens and the Gasworks. McElnea's *Lagan* is set in East Belfast, with the Harland and Wolfe cranes visible in the distance. The hyper-realism of the image heightens the feeling of desolation I feel as a viewer, as the River Lagan makes me feel quite physically isolated from the city in the distance and society overall. The colour scheme utilised also provokes a forlorn feeling and I am reminded of how the colour blue has been utilised by artists to convey a lonely feeling, such as Picasso's blue period. Overall I feel McElnea has produced a landscape painting that encourages the viewer to respond emotionally to this painting.

CATHERINE MAGENNIS



Untitled

Lisa Dunne

Graphite on paper

215 X 100 cms

2011

I was immediately drawn to this piece when I saw it. For me, the simplicity of the graphite echoes Dunne's exploration of cultural isolation throughout her work. Although a figurative portrait, the young man's face is not exposed. Thus, the viewer is unsure of his true identity. The piece responds to the exhibition's theme, misconception of identities and the individual's struggle to find their true selves. As a viewer, this piece evokes certain emotions for me and how I interpret the subject is feeling: loneliness, isolation and despair. The large scale of the drawing, I suggest further emphasises these feelings and forces me to consider the construction of my interpretation.

JESSICA McAFEE



Morning No. 2

Patricia Burns

Oil on canvas

180 x 180 cms

2014

Patricia Burns is interested in the hidden narrative in overlooked or changing parts of landscapes. *Morning No. 2* is a response to Burns' repeated commute over the past twelve years from Dublin to Cork. A journey she makes several times a month to visit her mother in Dublin.

"It became my landscape... all that I had to look at for those hours. Sometimes I would linger longer in Dublin and travel back down very early for work when the road was almost empty. This is where the painting and its title come from."

Burns' use of light is an overwhelming feature in the painting. The painting instantly captivates the viewer with its great sense of nostalgia. The contrasting colours, I feel make the painting seem almost dreamlike. The painting reflects Burns' own feelings of displacement throughout her life. Burns emigrated in the 1980s before returning to her hometown of Dublin in the 1990s. However, due to the costly housing market in Dublin, she was forced to move to Cork. As a group we felt somewhat connected to Burns' painting and its theme of displacement and movement specifically intrigued us. As humans we are often searching for a sense of belonging, a place that is our home - it is our human instinct to do so. Fascinated by the idea of feeling displaced in our own lives, we felt Burns' painting would fit seamlessly into the exhibition.

JESSICA McAFEE



Portrait of a Woman with a Red Blanket

Hugh Watt

Oil on canvas

110.5 x 62 cms

1991

Hugh Watt's oil painting, *Portrait of a Woman with a Red Blanket* depicts a seated female figure. Her head is slightly bowed and looks almost pensive, lost deep in thought. Her lap appears to be covered with a blanket and this itself seems to take on a life of its own, with personality and spirit. The blanket is fluid in lines of colour and texture, which convey a sense of motion and possibly also the emotions of the figure it caresses. It also suggests comfort and security, a barrier to protect that which it engulfs. The colour red can represent love, passion, romance and sexuality - emotions that are unclear to us as the viewers from the figure's stance and facial features. This painting suggests conflict, be that of emotions, thoughts or interaction with the audience. As a group we related to this myriad of sentiments, as we constantly struggle with finding our own position and place in the world.

CHRISTOPHER KENNEDY



Hanni's Shirt

Elaine Byrne

Giclée print

65 x 95.5 cms

2011

The nature of subtle communication and solitude is not unknown to artist Elaine Byrne. With this photograph she displays a haunted atmosphere, carefully constructed from the nostalgic, somewhat eerie subject matter of an old shirt, battered through wear, hung on crumbling walls. The image is taken in an abandoned cottage in County Limerick, owned by a settled Irish traveller, Hanni Harty, and abandoned since her death in 1994. The space displays a contrast between passed life that is now lost and a solitary present.

RACHEL BURLEIGH



Sophie VII

James Hanley RHA

Graphite and coloured pencil on paper

49 x 75 cms

2009

Dublin-based artist James Hanley has completed many official formal portraits, but this piece we have chosen is from the life room: the practice of drawing from a living model. The economical use of colour constructs the female form from the whiteness of the paper, drawing out beauty from nothing. This life drawing is interesting because there is an air of simplicity and yet the construction of the lines does not lend itself to the general softness you may see in other life drawings. With all the ease of a life drawing, Hanley manages to create a carefulness in the edges of the body, suggesting a sculpture of a drawing. The restful pose and facial expression of the woman add to the solitude of the scene, and we are presented with an image of both relaxation and tension, somehow equally natural and constructed.

BETHANY MILLICAN



Container #2

Comhghall Casey

Oil on canvas

49 x 47 cms

1999

Comhghall Casey was born in Omagh, Co. Tyrone and graduated from the Belfast School of Art in 1998. Now based in Dublin, Casey has exhibited throughout the UK and in 2014 was shortlisted for the Hennessy Portrait Prize.

Casey's work is recognised for its accuracy and precision. He explores methods of pure representation in both still life and portraiture. *Container #2* shows a simple composition: a small cup sits against a flat monochrome background, casting a slight shadow. The detail of the object is immense, from the small reflections to the subtle appearance of a bend in the metal. Although simple, the composition is thoughtful, quiet. This sense of thoughtfulness asks the viewer to stop and contemplate the image. I consider that the solitary cup echoes the sparseness of a head without worry, a somewhat desolate landscape without noise, interruptions or disturbances. Despite the muted colour palette, Casey's technical ability allows the object to stand on its own, creating a complex scene without the assistance of other objects, or brighter colours.

ALEXANDRA THOMAS



Fodder

Lawson Burch

Acrylic on board

29 x 29 cms

1985

This painting entitled *Fodder* was created by Belfast born artist Lawson Burch. Burch flourished as an artist during the Troubles, as he began to create paintings of citizens in Belfast caught up in the Northern Irish conflict, and secured his first solo exhibition in 1974. *Fodder* is a nostalgic painting. It depicts a farmer in rural Ireland transporting hay for livestock during the evening, as in the background the house lights appear to be on. The figure of the farmer is weighed down by the hard toil of his day and the centrality of his placing in the artwork focuses our gaze primarily on him. The atmosphere is pensive, lonely and solitary.

CATHERINE MAGENNIS



Spe
ctate

Spectate

To spectate is to watch, view or observe what is in front of us. As human beings, however, aspects such as our experiences, opinions, feelings and character can never be deduced purely on the basis of our outward appearance. In modern society we have an often-undeserved over-confidence in our ability to judge and successfully determine a person's character from the physical evidence we see in front of us. We buy into the logic introduced to us by fairy tales that beauty is a sign of intelligence and kindness, and ugliness is a sign of ignorance and cruelty. We willingly recognise and praise the beauty that we see on the surface, but often don't make the time to recognise the beauty that goes deeper than skin and bones. The evolution of social media has only increased our role as spectators; the lives of others are presented to us in a way that both enlightens and mystifies. While we think we are accessing an insight into the worlds of others, we are only presented with the aspects that they wish us to see. We consider that the following artworks represent the concept that we are all outsiders looking in, and while we may only watch others in an attempt to better understand them, our own character is also exposed.

ALEXANDRA THOMAS

Desire is ...

Kathryn Maguire

Vinyl acrylic mirror

246 x 124.5 cms

2010

Born in 1971 in Ireland, Kathryn Maguire lives and works in Dublin. She obtained a BA Hons in Fine Art Sculpture at Cork College of Art and Design, and then a Masters Degree in the National College of Art & Design. Maguire's practice involves text, sculpture, video, and installation work. Maguire states that she has used text and signage as a means to highlight historical writings in public spaces, making diverse cultural references that link the historical with contemporary.

Desire is ... is perhaps one of the more ambitious components of the Construct exhibition, as it is a piece that engages a 21st century audience. In a modern world where the concept of body image is a substrate of daily life, Maguire audaciously puts us in the hot seat asking a plethora of questions in the process. It is common practice when we go to any exhibition that we attempt to identify with the artwork on display, *Desire is ...* turns this construct around and makes the artworks potential audience its own subject matter. It could be deemed somewhat ironic that we as an audience find it harder to identify with ourselves than perhaps a portrait or a still life. Maguire removes the comfort and escapism of traditional art practice and creates a more fulfilling and enriching experience for the audience. The text within the artwork comes from the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza further demonstrating the eclectic nature of Maguire's practice.

DANIEL NEWCOMBE



Tuscan Dancers

Rosaleen Sanderson

Oil on canvas

100 x 90 cms

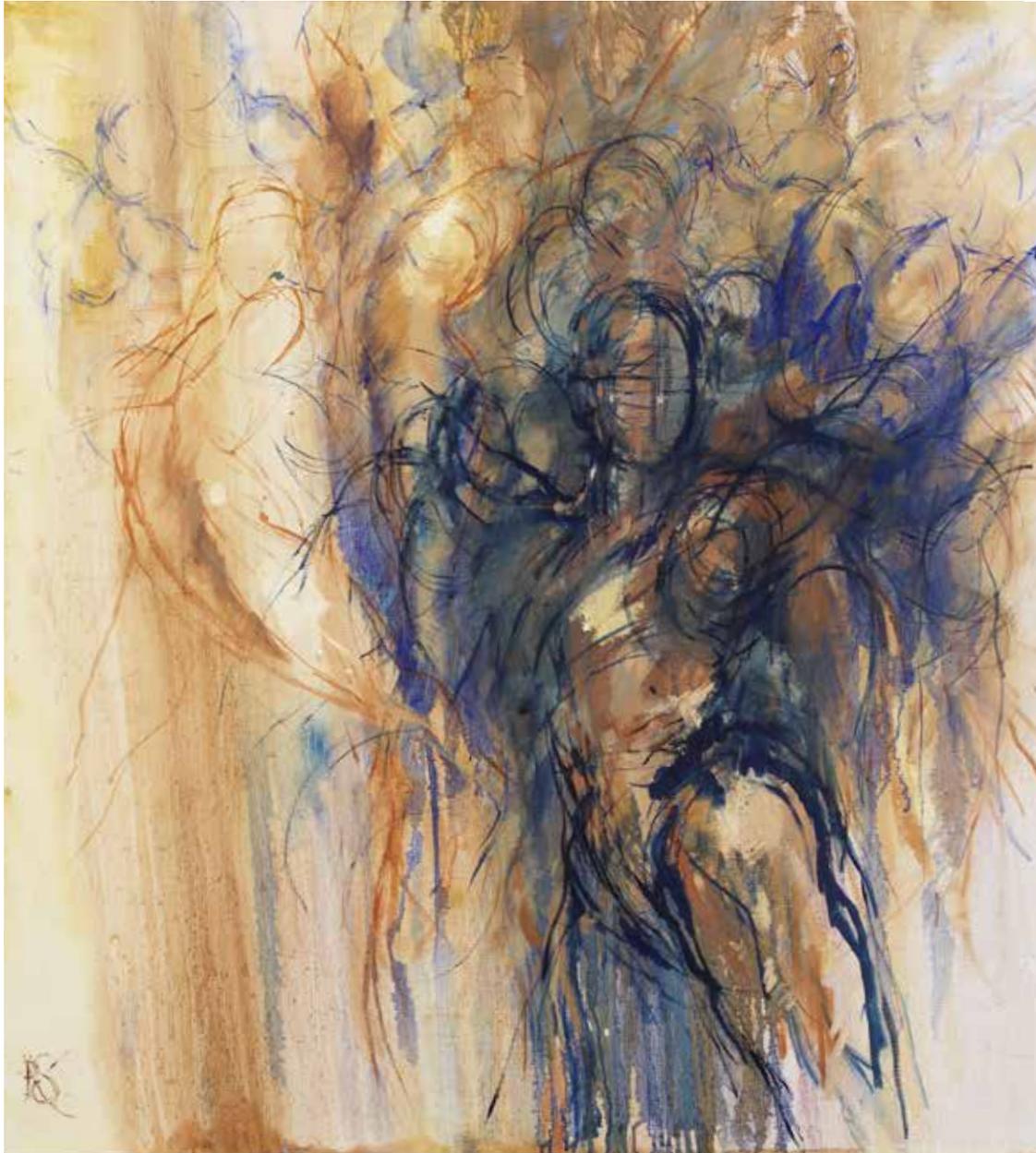
1998

Rosaleen Sanderson is based in County Down where she is a full-time painter. She exhibits her work throughout Britain and Ireland, Europe, Canada, U.S.A., and Australia. The title of this work, *Tuscan Dancers* references the working drawings of Italian Renaissance artists, which are one of her main sources of inspiration. Sanderson's focus and interest lies within the linear analysis and forensic observation of the human figure. *Tuscan Dancers* features an earthy colour palette of umber and sienna and nods to the methods of Italian artists with the use of linear brush strokes and lines. The piece not only shows off the subject matter, but demonstrates how art history is still relevant today and how the techniques used can provide a modern twist to paintings.

“Around the time of this painting, I was observing dancers rehearsing. The concept of the painting emerged from a page in my sketchbook. Rather than creating an image of dancers, I explored the dynamic lines created by the dancers' bodies as they moved; hence the importance of line in the painting.” (Rosaleen Sanderson)

What seems like chaos is simply capturing a moment. *Tuscan Dancers* displays not only movement but an atmosphere; how an array of emotions have come together in one figure with the use of delicate and bold line work. Much like how in life we come across a wide spread of people, personalities and situations, together they form who we are.

CASSIE GALLOWAY



The Past is the Present

Cilla Patton

Oil on canvas

152 x 122 cms

1997

Cilla Patton's painting titled *The Past is the Present* is a very personal painting that was painted in her final year of Art College and it signifies a time where she was overwhelmed by the death of her younger sister. She channelled this emotion into her painting by using symbolic imagery. The woman holding the photograph was inspired by the mothers of 'the Disappeared' and the little girl is a memory of her sister standing in her doorway at dawn to waken her. The horse in the background is also of big importance as horses have always been a part of the artists' life and often appear in her dreams where they represent psychic energy. In this artwork, it would seem to me that the horse in the background might bring the artist to where her sister is.

Through life our identities change as we become mothers, fathers, sisters or brothers. If however, a tragedy happens and we lose someone, does that mean we lose our identities? Has our identity now become forever altered and what does it mean as we move forward? Our identity as we understand it, clarifies to us who we are and Patton's painting represents this beautifully - she will always be a sister.

CHRISTOPHER KENNEDY



Hallelujah

Colm Mac Athlaoich

Oil on canvas

119.5 x 99.5 cms

2011

Colm Mac Athlaoich is an Irish born artist based in Dublin, working primarily in illustration, painting and print. This painting entitled *Hallelujah*, is of George Frederick Handel, a German born Baroque composer, who came to Dublin in 1741 having been invited by the third Duke of Devonshire to give concerts for the benefit of local hospitals. In this time, Handel took a break from composing after not having great success with his compositions. However, during his visit to Dublin, he composed his famous Oratorio 'Messiah' (more famous for its Hallelujah chorus) which was performed for the first time at the new Music Hall on Fishamble Street in 1742. Handel spoke highly of the Dublin audiences and praised the standards of the singers and musicians who performed his music. Hallelujah is now one of the most famous choruses in the world.

In the painting, Handel's face is darkly opaque and also looks quite like a photographic negative, which makes the painting more eye-catching and interesting. It stands out against the painting's background and also the other colours in the composition as the colour palette is mostly dominated by the orange and pale tones. The fact that the painting is of a portrait with an obscured face is also really intriguing as portraits focus mostly of the facial features.

CHRISTOPHER KENNEDY



Skinhead

Trevor McElnea

Acrylic on board

44 x 60 cms

1984

Trevor McElnea works and lives in County Armagh. His paintings feature an array of Northern Irish, and particularly, Belfast settings - familiar streets, everyday moments. In our group, we began our selection process with an indefinite idea of 'identity' in our minds, and this stemmed out into the different types of identities we have - such as cultural and national. McElnea's impressionistic style paintings give a strong sense of place, and they capture a moment of time in that place. What drew us to this piece was the playfulness of the scene - there is potential energy depicted here. The balance of the figure - the 'skinhead' - walking along the wall by the railway tracks gives a sense of the present. It is not possible to see the person's face, making us feel like we are peering at a scene that belongs entirely to someone else - a fragile moment at which we can only observe.

BETHANY MILLICAN



Book

Ian Joyce

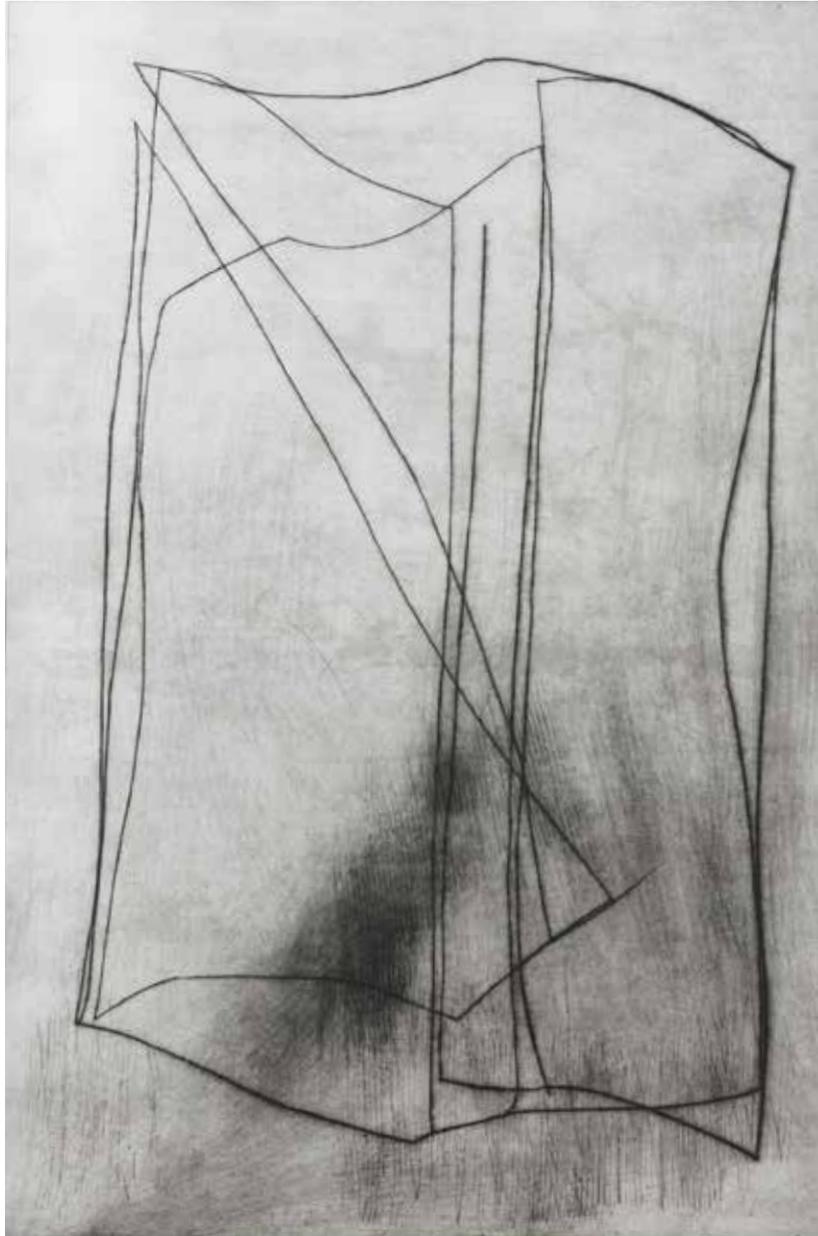
Print-drypoint

90 x 60 cms

1992

Ian Joyce, was born in Dublin and grew up in County Cork. He studied at University College, Dublin, Freie Universität and Hochschule der Künste, Berlin. In 1998 he moved from Belfast to Donegal where he founded Cló (Cló Ceardlann na gCnoc Teoranta) an artist-led initiative and workshop with Oona Hyland. He has exhibited his work widely internationally and has been awarded many public art commissions, including *Watershed* for the Clinton International Peace Centre in Enniskillen and *Tsunami* for the Letterkenny Institute of Technology. Joyce's piece within the exhibition is entitled *Book*. A dry point etching, which creates a basic form consisting of one disjointed line. The simplicity of form created and the apparent fragile, delicate line clearly demonstrates the artist's respect and mastery of the technical processes he employs in his work; an approach which is clearly echoed throughout all artworks. During the selection process, the young curators' team had an array of interpretations as to the significance of the piece, sparking conversation and intrigue respectively.

DANIEL NEWCOMBE



N
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A T I V E

Narrative

Stories can be found everywhere. Every object, every picture can form a narrative. Sometimes we read stories in things that were never created with that intention. It is the human ability to look further and to imagine. Art invites our personal interpretations, and so each piece may have a multitude of narratives existing within it - whether the piece is abstract or representational, two-dimensional or three-dimensional. Artists construct narratives through any form they choose and the audience explores the works along their own paths of interpretation. The following artworks may be very different from each other, but each holds a narrative. We, as the audience, may not be the storytellers, but we certainly can have our own interpretations.

BETHANY MILLICAN

Horse & Harness

Leanne McDonagh

Lambda c-print

59 x 83.5 cms

2014

Horse & Harness is a contemporary photograph, which as a group we all found really attractive. The contemporary use of colour and layering of imagery gives the work a unique sense of movement and life, drawing the audience into the scene.

McDonagh's work is informed by her experiences as a member of the Traveller community and is driven by a passion to represent or re-present that community in the face of society's misconceptions and prejudices about them. However, as she states 'I don't want to become someone that solely represents my community... I have created artwork in the past that's purely about myself, or concepts that relate to more universal themes.'

In my opinion, the way McDonagh has edited the photograph means that although the image is a clear reference to Traveller life and its traditions, it is given a contemporary edge. Whether intentional or not, it suggests to us as the audience that the Traveller lifestyle has a place in modern society. In the context of the exhibition, I see this as a piece with a social and moral purpose, in that it provides the viewer with a rare insight into the construct of an often misjudged way of life, with the vibrant colour palette in my mind representing a community that is itself full of colour and character.

AINE CURLEY



You Stand Reborn Before Us All

Kelly Power

Oil on canvas

82 x 52 cms

2009

Kelly Power created this artwork whilst a student at the Limerick School of Art & Design. After graduating in 2009 it was this piece, *You Stand Reborn Before Us All* that she won the Freyer Award at the RDS Student Art Awards. As a team of curators, we were all very interested in this piece because of the realistic style that she paints in. Power is known to sometimes portray a dark element in her work. This artwork has references to suicide and she acknowledges that as a result controversy is often inevitable, 'I'm not going to say that it's what the viewer imagines it to be, but it is supposed to make a statement. A lot of my work tends to have that ability to make viewers uneasy.' The deeper narrative to this work is emphasised in the dark brown and black colours that create the background. How the character is suspended on the surface creates an unsettling thought for the viewer as to what is happening to the subject. Power states, 'It's of importance to place emphasis on the imagination or fictional identity of my practice.' She does not reveal any specific story behind the image. However this work is a statement that has the ability to leave the audience feeling uneasy and questioning what it is they are seeing.

AYNSLEY LONGRIDGE



Stone Sphere

Michelle Byrne

Limestone

26 x 26 x 26 cms

2013

Michelle Byrne is a sculptor living in County Carlow. She studied at Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, graduating in 1992. Byrne's work has featured in many exhibitions in Ireland, France and the UK. She has also completed a number of private and public commissions, which have included a tower made from limestone for the Carlow Redevelopment Group measured three metres in height and *Journey* another limestone sculpture for a school in Kilkenny. This artwork, *Stone Sphere* was a maquette (model) for the large stone sculpture Ballygarvan Sphere situated in Ballygarvan National School in County Cork.

The lines carved across the surface make it unique and more intriguing compared to a perfectly smooth sphere. What really makes us - what are our 'lines', our traits, backgrounds, personalities, flaws, talents, appearance? Without these 'lines' we wouldn't be different or special, it is these that 'construct' us.

WENDY WALKER



Armour

Andrew Clancy

Mixed media

55.5 x 60 x 27 cms

2010

Award winning artist Andrew Clancy is renowned for his intriguing sculptures and his piece *Armour* did not fail to intrigue us. Besides being a striking mixed media sculpture, the process behind the piece is fascinating. For me, the story behind it represents the imaginative thought processes that run through the creative minds of artists.

In conversation with the artist, he stated: “One morning I was cycling to the studio when I spotted a six inch wavin pipe in a ditch. I took it into the studio and heated it up with a blow torch. As it turned out the plastic was very malleable when heated but retained its strength when it cooled. I realised when I opened out a six inch wavin pipe the resulting sheet was pretty much the width of my torso. So it wasn’t much of a leap to go from there to making the armour. Pressing hot plastic onto my body was quite unpleasant, but effective. I made the armour to fit me and I also made it practical, as it is wearable and it articulates fully. Once I had it made, I realised it was in itself a very striking object. In my experience, people often lie as to the genesis of their ideas for artwork. Mostly I think they come from happy accidents or generally just messing about with different processes and materials. So, it was at that point that I started approaching the armour as a sculpture rather than an experiment. I firmed up the structure so it could free stand and tidied up the joints and fittings; although the black plastic had a certain appeal it didn’t really do the object justice. I thought about the finish for quite a while before deciding on the tweed. The tweed transformed the piece into something other than a suit of armour, in effect tailor made into a sculpture.”

JESSICA McAFEE



Tumbledown: Still Life with Greengages

Richard J. Croft

Oil on canvas

102 x 102 cms

2002

Richard J. Croft constructs a still life portraying greengages. He has carefully situated the greengages at a variety of distances from each other. By paying attention to the spacing, he is constructing different relationships. When we first came in contact with this painting, the group viewed the greengages as individual fruits actively working their way up the canvas, the shadows lifting the fruits and emphasising a busy atmosphere. The bright yellow and green tones give each greengage a personal touch. However they still coincide largely, working together that suggests a communal feeling. I was impressed by his focus on a solitary composition that has been carefully constructed to emphasise a tumbling mass that has a sense of togetherness.

RACHEL BURLEIGH



Out of the Shadows

Colin M. Corkey

Oil on board

78.5 X 91 cms

1994

Colin M. Corkey is a renowned Belfast born artist whose work is predominantly concerned with landscape. He draws inspiration from the dramatic wildlife of the North West and in his later compositions explores the use of organic objects such as river silt and clay. He has exhibited extensively, including at St Columb's Cathedral, as part of the UK City of Culture 2013. *Out of the Shadows* is a contemporary take on Irish landscape painting. When looking at this piece, it induces the feeling that most fields are lifeless with only few areas showing vibrancy. The shape has a loneliness about it as the fields are isolated from each other by thick black textured lines. However, the way Corkey has coloured each field differently suggests the character in each field. Towards the bottom and sides of the artwork we begin to lose structure and fall into a muddy pool of dark tones, implying that what is at the centre of these fields is most important. Corkey states, "while my paintings are deeply grounded in personal experience, memory and the Irish landscape, sources of inspiration frequently originate from the work of writers such as Beckett, Allingham, Kennelly, Burnside or Fiacc." (Island Arts Centre)

AYNSLEY LONGRIDGE



Daily Care

Atsushi Kaga

Acrylic on canvas

140 x 100 cms

2013

Atsushi Kaga is a Japanese born artist, currently based in New York. He studied at the Crawford College of Art and National College of Art and Design (NCAD). His illustrative work depicts several recurring characters and this selected artwork shows Usacchi, the bunny, one of his anthropomorphic animals. Kaga uses his characters to construct the human identity, portraying the fears and worries of everyday life through introspective, cartoonish creatures. There is an absurdity, and a melancholy, but most strikingly, there is a very present narrative. I was instantly drawn to this work, as I saw myself in it. Despite the great air of fiction with this image of a bunny standing upright and wearing a jumper, there is a real sense of truth, as if the artist himself lives within this character, in this painting. Perhaps that is what all art is - taking parts of ourselves and putting them into a form, whether it's a piece of music, a poem or a painting? And then maybe someone else will see himself or herself in it too, and through the construction of such a narrative, we connect.

BETHANY MILLICAN



An Arrangement of Skin

Palimpsest/Rianú Project: (Brian Fay, Nuala Ní Fhlathúin, Mary A Fitzgerald, Claire Halpin, Colin Martin, Aoife McGarrigle, Eoin MacLochlainn, Kate Murphy)

Giclée print

100 x 71 cm

2013

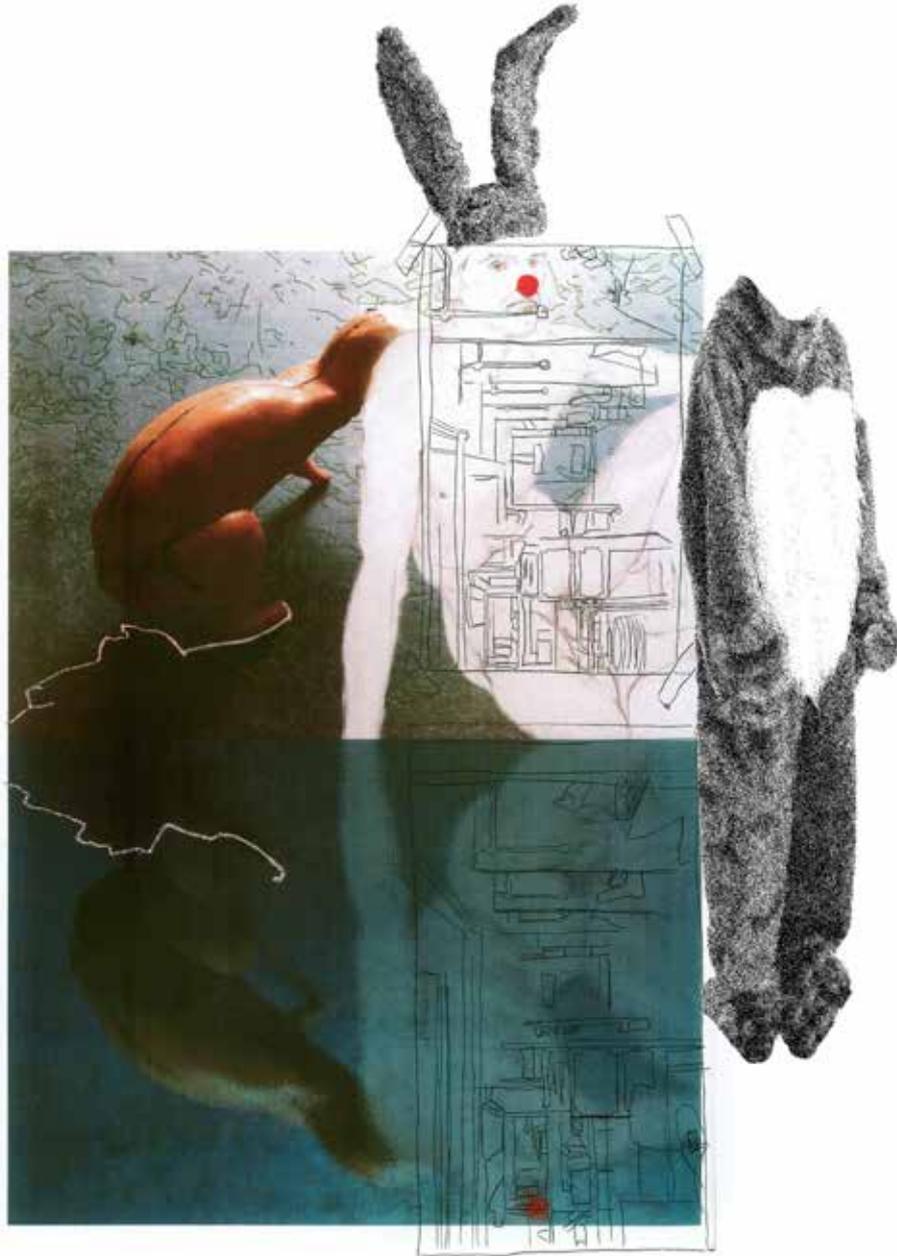
An Arrangement of Skin is from the *Palimpsest/Rianú* project created in late 2014. It was a collaborative art project where eight artists together produced eight works of art. Each piece starts off with an artist producing an initial image and then passing it to the next artist for them to create their work on. As the process continues the image becomes more manipulated resulting in a complex, layered piece of art.

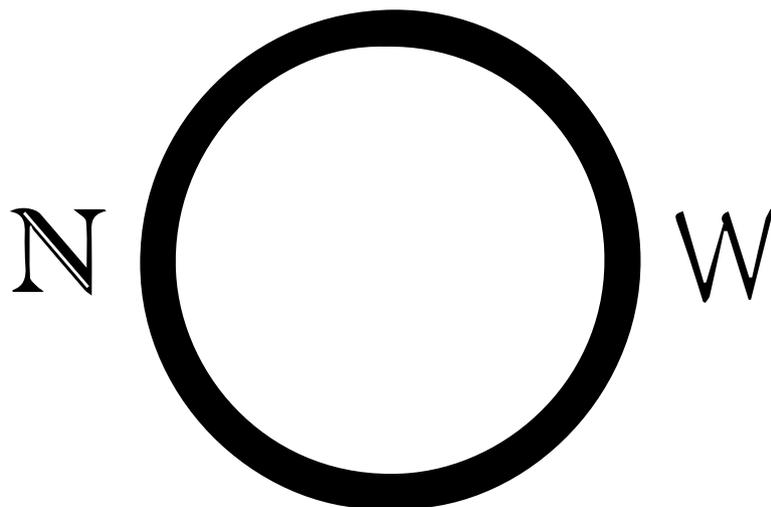
According to the OPW exhibition press release “*Palimpsest/Rianú* refers to the original palimpsests - ancient manuscript pages which were erased so that they could be reused and overwritten - and Rianú, the Irish word for tracing. There is a trace of each of the eight artist’s hand left in all of the final works”.

In the original exhibition, how we deal with the ‘other’ in our lives is clearly evident. *An Arrangement of Skin* shows a sense of community. In this particular work, the theme of reflection is evident, as is the notion of space. The figure with a clown nose is staring into his own reflection, the formal pose once serious has become something more comical due to the addition of red nose and bunny ears. The multiple layered images cause us to question how we see and are seen in and by the world around us.

“On my way home tonight I saw a stag party of men dressed up in animal costumes. It made me think of taxidermy and what an odd concept that is. I have put rabbit ears on the figure and a rabbit suit is suspended beside him. (The taxidermy insert looked like a rabbit to me).” (Aoife McGarrigle)

CASSIE GALLOWAY





Now

At the present moment or time.

This simply speaks of works that have been created now or in the present day. When we look at the words 'Now' and 'Art' we think of contemporary works and contemporary practices. Some of the works fit this immediate description and showcase artistic practices within the last decade. However the selection of work in this sub-group is not only about when the artworks were made, but their relevance to present times. They hold and provoke discussions about their subject matter, composition, form, medium and scale. For us as a group, the process of curating the exhibition was an iterative process and the construction of these dialogues continues and is ever changing.

CASSIE GALLOWAY

Something to Hide Behind

Shane O'Connor

Giclée print

70 x 90 cm

2008

Originally from Galway, Shane O'Connor is a Dublin-based artist with a Masters in Print from Dublin's National College of Art and Design. O'Connor now works and exhibits under the moniker Sketchy Inc., creating vibrant, detailed prints of cityscapes throughout Dublin and Galway.

Acquired from the RDS Student Show in 2008, *Something to Hide Behind* is in keeping with the vivid, digital style used by Sketchy Inc. The scene shows a dishevelled bedroom; there is an unmade bed, piles of books or DVDs, a television set. The deliberate inaccuracies of the piece - the shaky lines, the perspective slightly off - lend to its authenticity. A print is often used to create exact imitations or copies of an image but the jaggedness of this image suggests inaccuracy, a term not normally associated with digital printing. The overall effect is rough but perceptive. Although without an inhabitant, there are subtleties that suggest the room has only just been vacated; the unmade bed just left, the television still on. The room appears to be its owner's sanctuary. The contemporary use of colour and choice of medium also lend to its authenticity, particularly in the varying shades of pink used in contrast against the grey floorboards and the visibly digitalised lines.

ALEXANDRA THOMAS



Study for Boulez 3

Barbara Freeman

Mixed media on paper

76 X 96 cms

1995

Barbara Freeman was born in London and studied at St. Martin's College of Art, Camberwell College of Art, and at postgraduate level at University of Leeds. She has lived and worked in Belfast for the past nineteen years.

Freeman's work *Study for Boulez 3* is a mixed media painting on paper. The imagery is abstract and reticulated. I want to be perplexed and intrigued when engaging with an artwork and I feel this work does just that.

“During this time I looked to contemporary music as a guide to composition. My aim was not to describe the music by some sort of colour/form analogy, but to work using the same kinds of compositional strategies. The music has a similar function to story or subject matter - it starts the whole process in motion and is a constant point of reference. But the content, the meaning, the significance that occurs between the painting and the viewer. This study shares some of the working processes of the composer Pierre Boulez” (Barbara Freeman)

DANIEL NEWCOMBE



Cockatoo

Alan Phelan

Marble and rubber glove

Variable

2013

Alan Phelan's sculpture *Cockatoo* is crafted from smooth marble and whilst on its own it could have been considered elegant, for me the addition of a banal, household rubber glove elevates this piece into the realms of the quirky and comical. I see it as a piece that is full of contrasts and contradictions; the luxurious quality of marble against the cheap domesticity of generic rubber. *Cockatoo* was first created for the 2012 exhibition *Cutting a Door* curated by Robert O'Connor for the Eastlink Gallery in Shanghai, China. It formed part of an installation of seven carved marble animals, entitled *The Seven Oracles*, a title derived from the fad of 'psychic' animals predicting the scores of football matches (*Cockatoo* began life as *Mani the Parakeet*). The animals were shown on a large vinyl photo of broken glass with the graphic from another work, a painting by Phelan inspired by Hungarian Italian abstract pieces he saw on his travels. The installation was created for a trilogy of exhibitions entitled *Fragile Absolutes*, which contained Phelan's reactions to Slavoj Žižek's turn of the millennium book *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?*

Cockatoo next appeared in the 2013 *Handjob* exhibition in the Oonagh Young Gallery, Dublin. The concept for the exhibition came when Phelan broke his thumb and decided to focus on hands for his next project.

I think that *Cockatoo* effectively embodies the mixture of elements, maybe not considered complimentary, to construct a finished work. You could say that the most obvious example of this is human nature and how our physical being is constructed from a set, reliable combination of elements, like the marble body of the *Cockatoo*, yet our character and our personality - the less tangible and definable part of us - is unpredictable and random, like the rubber glove that, in my eyes, makes the *Cockatoo* that much more interesting.

AINE CURLEY



Charles Street South

James Allen

Screenprint

66 x 79 cms

1986

Born in Lurgan, County Armagh, James Allen established the Belfast Print Workshop in 1977, and while also an accomplished painter, is principally a printmaker. The *Charles Street South* print that we have selected for the exhibition depicts a row of terraced houses, a fairly banal and ordinary subject matter - yet in the context of the exhibition I feel it takes on a new significance, representing an undeniably important aspect of the construct of everyday urban life in Belfast during the 1980's. Taking a general view, one could say that the houses are part of the construct of an urban cityscape, yet I believe it goes deeper; the generic terraced homes depicted in this print would have provided the backdrop to the events of the everyday lives of everyday people. Allen's use of light, delicate colours in my mind lends the print a sense of nostalgia, a sense of its subject matter being almost a memory.

AINE CURLEY



Transition

Margaret Arthur

Intaglio etching on card, No:1/10

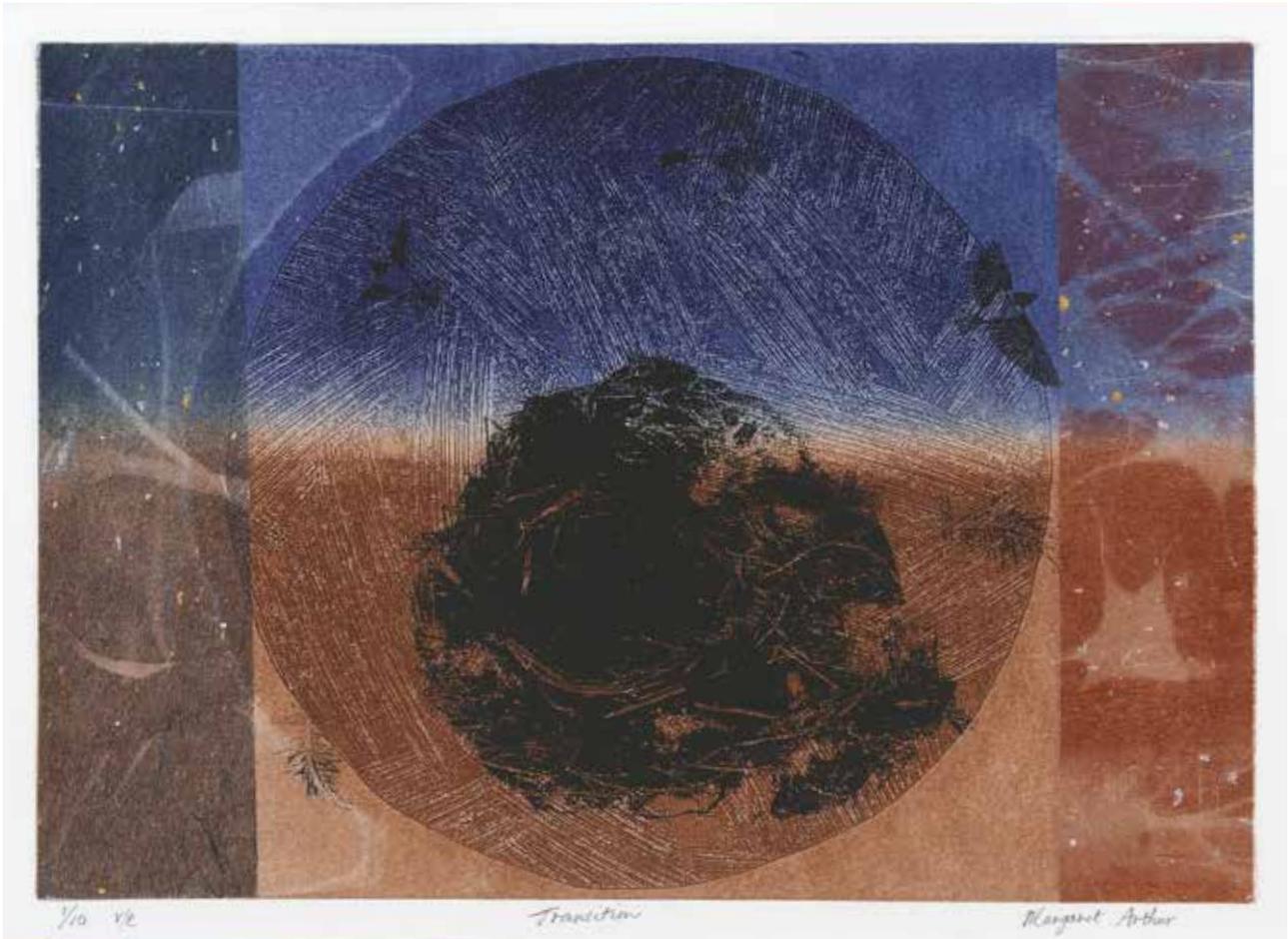
31.5 x 43 cms

2003

Margaret Arthur was born in Derry and now lives and works in Bangor, County Down. Co-founder of the Seacourt Print Workshop, Arthur works chiefly in the medium of printmaking. Her technique involves the layering of images to create compositions that symbolically and narratively explore themes such as the nature of relationships and the passage of time.

It seems to me that *Transition* is an exploration of life: the central image of a bird's nest, enclosed in a circle with birds emerging from its edges brings to mind the creation of life; being born and nurtured. The circle, with resemblance to either a rising moon or a setting sun, implies a sense of perpetuity; the phrase, 'the circle of life' could be a source of inspiration here. The faint presence of images taken from microscopic cells hide within the borders and the soft, muted tones create an organic, natural sense. Arthur has chosen an intricate printing technique and the appearance of the etching marks gives the print a worn, timeless finish; and effect that alludes to the passing of time.

ALEXANDRA THOMAS



Burning the Whins

Ros Harvey

Mixed media on paper

67 x 47 cms

1998

Ros Harvey is a painter and print maker working in Ballagh Studios, Donegal. Most of her work derives from the natural elements; containing themes of earth, wind, fire and water. The *Burning the Whins* series was a project started in the late 1990's when Harvey would observe the view from her studio window and paint the scenes of burning whins on the rocky outcrop. The elements of fire and smoke, their manipulation through the branches and twigs, the ascending colours moving into fierce bursts of red, oranges and yellow, capturing a temporary moment. Harvey considered a challenge. I feel this has been successfully achieved in this composition as we can clearly visualise the movement of the smoke and flames.

“Burning the whins, or gorse, is an emotive subject in Ireland at present, with EU environmentalists introducing new regulations every few years. At first burning was officially banned if the whins were still growing in the soil. Then they could be burnt if bulldozed out and piled up first. Now the regulations stipulate a ‘burning season’. My local farmer was very careful to carry out his clearing in the Autumn, when wildlife had completed its cycle. The bushes regrew within two years.” (Ros Harvey)

The whins symbolise not only a deconstruction of part of a natural world but show the misunderstandings between farmers and bureaucracy, an aspect of the farming community trying to deconstruct a problem but whose way is blocked or affected by external forces. This discourse concerning perceptions of preservation and pest is reminiscent of how in human life there is preservation and deconstruction of identity in order to create self.

CASSIE GALLOWAY



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Young Curators' Personal Responses

http://www.re-enactonline.com/?page_id=1074

Please scan the QR Code for further information on the group's activities when working on this project.





Rachel Burleigh

This project was essentially a journey that involved a broad range of ideas at the beginning and narrowing these ideas down as we worked through the process, finding our similar trait as a group. As our project commenced, we developed and identified a strong sense of youth in society, following this path in the attempt to find a more accurate conclusion. I enjoyed choosing our works of art and the compromise it involved. However the greatest part of the journey was during the aftermath of choosing the art, when we discovered a burning theme that linked the works altogether: construct.



Aine Curley

Art curation is not something I ever contemplated a great deal, yet with my limited knowledge of it I felt confident that it would be relatively straight-forward, logical; an exercise involving a lot of pointing at pieces and saying 'I like that one, let's stick it in the show'. The Young Curators project effectively crushed all of these preconceptions and proved that putting together an exhibition, like any creative practice, involves a lot of dedication, effort, and occasional disagreements with peers (one particular painting of pigs was a notable point of contention). Yet this project has exposed me to a practice that is so different from creating my own artwork, but no less important; it has helped me to find and develop my own unique voice, and it has shown me that the practice of choosing pieces must be free from the confines of personal taste, but rather involve a concept and a message that link the works in a way that might not always be obvious. Through this project, I think I have somewhat perfected the art of compromise, actually listening to my team members, and knowing how to use different people's skills to the team's advantage. I think that we can all be proud of the final selection of work and the catalogue we have put together, and this experience is one that I never thought I would have, but am so glad I did.

Cassie Galloway



When I decided to get involved with the project, I had no idea what to expect. I knew I had an interest in writing and taking on challenges. To look back now and see how far we as a group have come since our first meeting is rewarding. Knowing that I was part of this curating process and I was able to express opinions on our chosen theme has been a worthwhile experience.

Through the project, I have been able to learn the fundamentals of working in a group and was able to talk to curators and artists. I gained an understanding of not just the curating process but art practices and how art is formed. The knowledge I have gained in the last year will greatly benefit me in the years to come.

Catherine Magennis



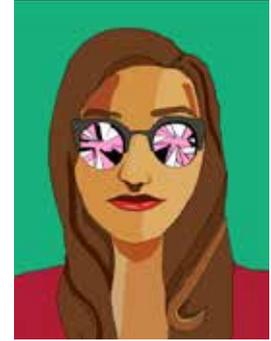
I found the project very interesting. The concept of a variety of young people from different backgrounds, with different artistic tastes and opinions, piecing together an art exhibition is intriguing. The preparation for the exhibition allowed me to develop my skills in working as part of a team and my communication skills. I feel it also improved my academic writing. I predominantly enjoyed selecting the artwork to be included in the exhibition and then conducting research into the selected pieces.



Christopher Kennedy

This project has been a wonderful experience and it has helped me gain a wider understanding of curatorship. Before, I thought a curator was just someone who installed artwork into a gallery space but now I know that it involves a lot of work, thinking, rethinking and that it is a lot more complex than I thought it could be. However I have also learned how rewarding it is when everything fits together. Working as a group was also interesting as we all had so many different views and interests, which fitted perfectly with our chosen theme as the subject matter can mean different things to different people.

In the end, with our team work and our individual interests, the chosen artworks were completely different yet worked together perfectly with our theme to produce a finished and diverse exhibition.



Aynsley Longridge

Being a part of the Young Curators project, for me was a totally new experience. It really opened my eyes to the work and thought processes behind every exhibition. I feel very privileged that I got the chance to take part in this unique opportunity. My highlight of the process was getting to visit the Office of Public Works in Dublin and the Northern Ireland Office at Stormont. We looked through their collections and began the first step of deciding what work we would like to display in our exhibition. It was hard at first to get out of the habit of wanting to select works that were more suited to my own interests rather than what was best for the theme, but with the help of all the creative minds in the industry who guided us, I have now developed curating skills that I can carry with me in future opportunities.



Jessica McAfee

The Young Curators Project has been extremely beneficial to me and I have really enjoyed the unique experience. Despite being a little unsure of what I was getting myself into, I was fortunate enough to be chosen to be part of a great team. At first I was a little apprehensive about the project. Although our lecturer Louise O'Boyle had explained to us how unique the opportunity was, I don't think I had grasped this until our first meeting. Slowly but surely my apprehension quickly changed to excitement. The project has been a learning process from start to finish. Throughout the experience I have gained a greater understanding of art and the creative industry. Regardless of having visited many art exhibitions throughout my lifetime, I had no idea just how much work goes on behind the scenes. The help from both the OPW and the DFP has been valuable throughout the project. Being able to talk to experienced curators was very useful. They answered our many questions and gave great curating advice. I realised that being a curator is not plain sailing; we tackled many obstacles during the course of the project. Firstly, coming up with the exhibition's theme took time and many discussions.

Secondly, narrowing down thousands of pieces of art to our final collection was particularly tricky. However, as time went on our team was a bit more cut-throat when it came to making decisions. The project certainly promoted teamwork and lots of discipline. Our team was very diverse which meant we each had different opinions and ideas of how the exhibition was meant to look. In spite of this, we all overcame our differences and worked really well together, learning from each other throughout the project. Louise O'Boyle has also been a huge help throughout the whole project. As a group of students we all had different schedules and somehow Louise was able to pull us all together, sometimes giving us the big push that we needed. For me, contacting the artists was the best part of the project; it was intriguing to hear what their thoughts were on their artwork and if there was a story behind it. Being part of the curators' project has changed my perspective on art. A lot of people think art is just a painting of a pretty landscape or a portrait drawing that looks exactly like a photograph. However art is more than that, it's about the stories, thoughts or processes that are revealed behind the piece of art that makes it worthy to be called art. This project has shown me that there is always a deeper meaning or a funny story behind a piece of art. It has been such a privilege to be involved in this project. Not only has the experience taught me many skills, it has also given me many memories that I will never forget.



Bethany Millican

Curating has been very cool because you get to look at lots and lots of art. Doing it as part of a team means that you also get to talk about the art. We sat down and discussed pieces of work, making cases for their relevance and meaning. I liked being able to do that, and listening to how the other young curators think. I love to look at art, talk about art and think about art. And anyone else who likes doing those too would most likely love curating!



Daniel Newcombe

I was drawn to this project the very instant it was mentioned. The concept of being part of a young team given the freedom to construct an exhibition from two vast collections is an extreme privilege. The opportunity to work within a specialist field of the arts sector was something I wanted to grasp with both hands! As a student specialising in painting I am frequently asked, 'What career can you do with that degree?' I think perhaps one of the most wonderful aspects of this project is being able to work closely with professionals and to see the real breadth of career paths available throughout the sector. That realisation is a valuable one any young artist can be glad of.



Alexandra Thomas

When given the opportunity to be a part of the project I was eager and enthusiastic. With my passion in the visual arts, I have an avid interest in the history of art and the role of curation, criticism and the public within the art world. This project gave me the opportunity to discover more about and be actively involved with all of these aspects. Working with the collections of the DFP in Northern Ireland and the OPW in the South, and with their respective art directors and managers, I have gained a deeper understanding of how art can function in the working world.

Through the work that has gone into the curation of *Construct* and the showcasing of a diverse range of works from both collections, we hope to aid our viewers in questioning the very nature of being human.



Wendy Walker

Being part of the young curators programme has allowed me to explore the world of what it is like to be a curator and the logistics of it all, never really appreciating the work, time and effort that goes on behind the scenes when it comes to a gallery exhibition before now. It has given me the opportunity to meet and talk to curators, travel, see thousands of pieces of art work that I may have never seen and research some of them. It has forced me to think deeper and more about the world of art and given me a whole new appreciation for art, gaining invaluable knowledge that is going to help me through my degree and beyond.

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Acknowledgements

Photography

DFP: Conor Tilson
OPW: Davey Moor
Doug Wheller (page 41)

Exhibitions organised by

DFP: Eilis Hegarty, James Taylor
OPW: Jacque Moore, Marian O'Brien, Linda Connolly

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Thanks

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Con
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