



Art Gallery

In -Stream

March 7 – April 2, 2016

The Ulster University Art Gallery at the Belfast School of Art and QSS Gallery and Studios presents 'In-Stream'. This thematic group exhibition held simultaneously in two venues across the city showcases a diverse selection of contemporary artists practicing within the expanded field of painting. This Murmuration of artists has been selected through QSS open submission process. Exhibiting artists include Majella Clancy, David Fox, Andrew Glenn, Anthony Kelly, Julie Lovett, Kevin Miller and Joan Stack.

This thematic group exhibition is concerned with challenging expectations regarding painting and highlighting the many multi-faceted studio practices and methodologies contemporary artists explore, in pushing at the boundaries of pictorial representation, sequencing, site-specificity, materiality and the notion of the painting as a medium specific practice.

In an essay accompanying the exhibition, Geraldine Boyle observes: "To view the exhibition in its entirety therefore requires an enforced break or a jump cut in time. Painting as an idea has been described in similar terms: that in its "communicative and temporal contingencies, [it] always possess a delay, a gap between its implicit and actual address". A disruption in viewing leaves the exhibition running in the background of thought until completion, during which time the contemplative space of the gallery has been exchanged for the mutable public environment of the city centre".

The temporal disruption between Studio - Gallery - City - Gallery is not necessarily bound to or determined by circular closure of both exhibition spaces.

Anthony Kelly and his long-term collaborator David Stalling will present an improvised sound performance using self-made electronic instruments as a part of the Ulster University Festival of Art and Design on Thursday the 10th of March 12 – 1pm at the Glass Box at the Ulster University Belfast Campus. For more details, visit www.ulster.ac.uk/festivalartdes



Art Gallery

In -Stream

March 7 – April 2, 2016

A murmuration of starlings is a natural spectacle that by a zooming out in perspective transforms a mass of individual birds, wheeling and circling to their own sets of co-ordinates into one organism made up of particles moving in perfect unison. As the flock undulates individuals come into focus again as one by one they fly off at tangents and the spectacle rhythmically diffuses. The exhibiting artists having individually gravitated towards QSS gallery, via their open submission policy, are described by curator Feargal O'Malley (Ulster University Art Gallery) as a murmuration. They were chosen for this group exhibition, which takes place simultaneously at QSS and the Ulster University Art Gallery at the Belfast Campus, because of a synchronicity between their combined though distinct artistic practices and how these relate to a contemporary idea of painting: as an expanding field.

By 'expanding field' the curator makes reference to an idea of painting that is not defined by medium-specificity, as it was in Clement Greenberg's modernist formulation, but turns also to materiality and process.¹ The artists represented use sound, sculpture, installation, photography and paint. For some, work developed through a painting practice has naturally taken on 3-dimensional form and elements like sound may dovetail with the sensory and the integral properties of media: surface, colour, tone, form. Current developments in technology and synthesis of digital imagery create alternative ways of seeing by instigating new conversations and materials for artistic practice. Likewise, photography, a ubiquitous feature of contemporary life, and a major challenge to painting in the 19th century as a rival pictorial system, features in several of the artists' practices, literally underlying the painted surface or informing its composition.

The exhibition is installed playfully between the two galleries which present disparate contexts. At QSS, located near the offices and corporations that lead up towards leafy though pockmarked Botanic, the double gallery space is open and immediately accessible from the street, faced by a glass door and with a window punctuating the facade. It is set beneath a complex of artist studios accessed by a separate entrance. The university meanwhile, adjoins the Cathedral Quarter and is bounded by heavy arterial roads, and beyond that a collage of piecemeal development and the docks. Its gallery is located mid-way down the atrial space of the Belfast School of Art building, like an enclosed street. On the day I visit, it is populated by industrious students on display behind glass walls and a pervading calm, in contrast to the silenced image of demolition directly outside. The gallery itself is playful with its mass of deep blue painted pipes that cover the ceiling, part of the bared infrastructure of the building.

One aspect of the curatorial intent of this exhibition is to retain the dynamic of how the works functioned in the studio space, before being removed and “stabilised” by the gallery. According to art critic Brian O’ Doherty artworks in the studio have “an alertness, no matter how casually thrown around” because during that time they are “aesthetically unstable”.ⁱⁱ As in the studio where a work is pragmatically placed alongside often incidental contextualising objects, the works by different artists in the exhibition set up echoes, allusions and juxtapositions, leaving them open to layers of interpretation and ongoing connections. In one instance a series of works starts in one space and is concluded in another.

To view the exhibition in its entirety therefore requires an enforced break or a jump cut in time. Painting as an idea has been described in similar terms: that in its “communicative and temporal contingencies, [it] always possess a delay, a gap between its implicit and actual address”.ⁱⁱⁱ A disruption in viewing leaves the exhibition running in the background of thought until completion, during which time the contemplative space of the gallery has been exchanged for the mutable public environment of the city centre.

The galleries are located at either extreme of the city’s shopping district. Movement through the connecting commercial streets assail the walker with fragmentary images, encounters and patterned movement of people in crowds. Smells, sounds – wheezing of buses, cries of gulls, bird chatter, snippets of conversation – and a range of stimuli are filtered and retained as impressions. It is easy to overlook the detail. Within the city streets or the art gallery there are layers and frameworks for interpretation, formed by each individual’s experiences and background, and confirmed through repetition.

One such layer is the adaptive aspect of nature in the city throughout the year and over time. Every place whether rural or urban is animated by the natural and manmade polyrhythms of both small and grandiose events recurring daily, seasonally or at other intervals. By chance, last winter, I picked up a book entitled *Urban Flora of Belfast* which details the results of a survey conducted in 1997 by the Belfast Field Naturalist’s Club to record rare or unusual plants in urban areas.^{iv} These unofficial flowers and herbs include natives, garden escapees, naturalised and alien plants. Some radiate out from the direction of the city’s port, indicating their global roots. The study uses the grid structure of the 1994 Ordnance Survey map of Belfast to carve up the pre Good Friday Agreement city along floral lines; its objective is to create a baseline for future study.

In squares G7 and G8, the respective grid locations for the two galleries, a rich swathe of Wall Lettuce, several species of Ferns, Opium Poppies, Heart’s Tongue, Tall Rocket (which forms tumbleweed) Oxford Ragwort, Hedge Mustard, Marsh Woundwort, Common Hemp-nettle and Scarlet Pimpernel, amongst other unusual flora, were recorded at mainly vacant or derelict plots. What the survey also reveals is the rhythm of renewal of the city at that time. Belfast in the mid-90s was changing, with large scale urban redevelopment, particularly along the industrial sites of the river Lagan. At that time plants had begun to form distinct ecosystems in disused plots, but redevelopment would inevitably render these tiny opportunistic landscapes obsolete or at least shift them along.

There is manmade rhythm in the highly visible development and renewal of places. Between QSS and the Art School a number of sites for development are in progress including the new university campus in York Street. The clanging scraping of diggers and the metallic hammering of pneumatic drills can be heard funnelled down the corridors between buildings before being seen, and there is at present a symmetry between demolition and clearance in the vicinity of these two places. Who knows what ecosystems are in flux. It is however the “repetitions and regularities that become tracks to negotiate urban life”^v; the near invisible processes of maintenance and city administration, transport systems, working times, and leisure days that dictate the ebb and flow of people, and how they operate and transform space.

Disruption however small can draw attention to the normal flows of things and reveal its workings. Last spring-summer grassy meadows sprang up along central reservations on roads in the city and in empty plots lining arterial routes. Every crack in the pavement or wall seemed stuffed with flowering plants. I presumed these observations were skewed because having skimmed the survey book I thought I was simply looking for the first time and therefore noticing more. What was apparent was a change in the sensory perception of certain streets: a light perfume, softer sound, more human scale and at eye height, low lying canopies of overgrown shrubs and bushes. It turned out that smaller budgets to services had indeed reduced maintenance of these green edge spaces leaving them unkempt, and the city felt different as a result. The unusual event within a normative realm seems more “enchanted”,^{vi} whether it’s the accumulative effects of an administrative change wrought in the urban fabric or the spectacular sight of a murmuration of starlings at dusk at the city’s Albert Bridge.

As with the streets of the city the studio is processual and driven by rhythms, like the changing light as the day goes on and how it plays on surfaces or alters the perception of colour. Many of the practices informing the works in this exhibition concentrate on found objects and images, everyday experiences and scenes, mundanity, sensory fragments or the juxtaposition of unlike things; the sorts of imagery that flit in and out while walking through the streets. They involve a close reading of space and environment. The gap in between viewing is important – it confirms and creates spaces for new ways of seeing, tangential and associative thinking. By the time the second gallery is reached the mind will have wandered twice as far.

Geraldine Boyle, Curator, Writer
February 2016

ⁱ Hearn, M., *Review: Painting in Time, 2015*. Available from: <http://thisistomorrow.info/articles/painting-in-time>

ⁱⁱ O’Doherty, B., *Studio and Cube: On the relationship between where art is made and where art is displayed*, New York: Buell Center, 2007

ⁱⁱⁱ Ryan, D., “On Painting”, *Art Monthly*, No. 355, 2012

^{iv} Beesley, S. & Wilde, J., *Urban Flora of Belfast*, Belfast: QUB, 1997

^v Edensor, T., "Commuter" in *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, Eds. Cresswell, T. & Merriman, P., Surrey: Ashgate, 2011

^{vi} Ibid.

University campus in York Street. The changing scenery of lights and the metallic hammering of pneumatic drills can be heard hunched down the corridors between buildings before being seen, and there is at present a symmetry between demolition and clearance in the vicinity of these two places. Who knows what ecosystems are in flux, it is however the "restitutions and regularities that become tracks to negotiate urban life"; the near invisible processes of maintenance and city administration, transport systems, working times, and leisure days that dictate the ebb and flow of people, and how they operate and transition spaces.

Disruption however small can draw attention to the normal flows of things and reveal its workings. Last spring-summer grassy meadows sprung up along central restitutions on roads in the city and in empty plots lining arterial routes. Every crack in the pavement or well seemed filled with flowering plants. I presumed these observations were skewed because having skimmed the survey book I thought I was simply looking for the first time and therefore holding more. What was apparent was a change in the sensory perception of certain streets: a light perfume, softer sound, more human scale and at eye height, low lying canopies of overgrown shrubs and bushes. It turned out that smaller budgets for services had indeed reduced maintenance of those green edge spaces leaving them unkempt, and the city felt different as a result. The unusual event within a normative realm seems more "extracted", whether it, the accumulative effect of an administrative change wrought in the urban fabric or the spectacular sight of a munition of storage at dusk at the city's Albert Bridge.

As with the speed of the city the studio is processual and driven by rhythm, like the changing light as the day goes on and how it plays on surfaces or alters the perception of colour. Many of the artists infusing the works in this exhibition concentrate on found objects and images, everyday experiences and scenes, mundanely sensory fragments or the juxtaposition of unlike things. The sort of imagery that fit in and out while walking through the streets. They involve a close reading of space and environment. The gap in between viewing is important - it confirms and creates spaces for new ways of seeing, tangential and associative thinking. By the time the second gallery is reached the mind will have wandered twice as far.

Gradine Davis, Curator, Winter
February 2018

¹ Heath, M., Review: *Painting is Just 2017*. Available from: <http://www.independent.co.uk>
² Roberts, B., *Ships and Cities: On the relationship between where art is made and where it is displayed*, New York: East River, 2013
³ Ryan, G., "On Painting", *Art Monthly*, No. 352, 2012
⁴ *Review 2: A White, Urban Field of Beasts*, *Artforum*, July, 2017